

RYC ROOTS



A Historical Perspective of the Racine Yacht Club Through Time.

Chapter 11 • February 2016

The RYC Mast and Other Things

The Racine Yacht Club is home to many objects. Some we walk by every day and, because they have been there for so long, we either never see them or we take them for granted.

The Mast...

Our Yacht Club mast has been a fixture for years but it was not always like we see it today. It isn't known exactly when our first mast appeared but it seems there was one in front of the Club building as early as the 1920s.



The flagpole in front of the Club, ca. 1937. It is uncertain if the tabernacle it is mounted in or the flagpole itself form any part of our present mast. *RYC archives*

The mast, in 1937, was fairly short and had no yardarm or gaff; it isn't known if this was the same one as the original, though. In 1947 it was rebuilt by Ferd "Red" Nymphius, the legendary Wisconsin boat builder, who added the yardarm and raised it to its present height of some 60 feet by adding a topmast. It has been said that the topmast came off the lake schooner *J V Taylor*. The *Taylor* was laid up near the Mead Street (now Marquette Street)



The RYC mast. *Paul Tobias photo*
Inset: The *J V Taylor*. *Courtesy of Frank Catrine*



Bill Richter lowering the mast in its tabernacle. The date is uncertain. *Courtesy of Arlene Richter Whitt*

bridge about 1915 and dismantled in the 1930s. True or not, it's a good story. Our mast was, and still is, mounted in a tabernacle which allows it to pivot when it is necessary to raise or lower it. It was moved by crane from its location near the old clubhouse to the new building in 1972 and was repaired and refurbished in 1991. Plaques on the mast commemorate Gene Hardy, the only Junior RYC member to lose his life in WWII; Kai Kasabian, who passed in 2008 from Mesothelioma, a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos which probably occurred, in Kai's case, while

he was in the Navy in the 1950s; and Jacob Alexander Meinert, who was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2010.



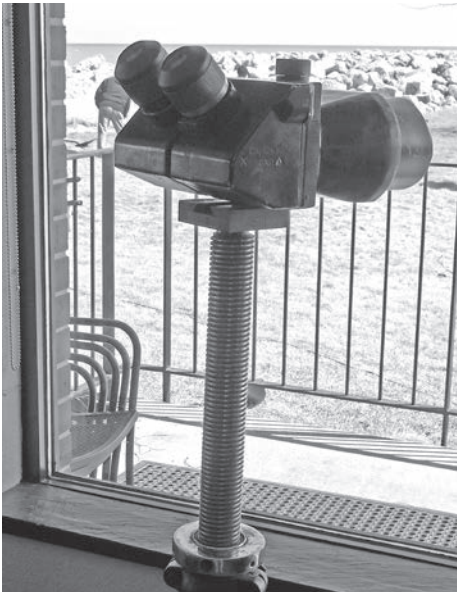
The plaque on the mast commemorating Gene Hardy. *Steve Wheeler photo*



Our anchor. *Steve Wheeler photo*

The Anchor in our Yard...

Our anchor is an antique "kedge" or "fisherman" type anchor. It isn't known when it actually appeared at the Club or where it came from, although it is possible it was salvaged from a lake schooner. It has been at the Club since at least the early 1940s and possibly before. Generations of kids (including me) have played on it and (also including me) have smashed their fingers while swinging the ring back and forth.



German WWII 10 x 80 binoculars. The set on the left was made by Emil Busch AG, Rathenow, Germany. The optics have been completely cleaned but no other work was done. The paint is not original. The binocular set on the right, also WWII vintage, was made by Jos. Schneider and Co., Bad Krueznach, Germany and have been completely refurbished.
Steve Wheeler photos

The "RYC" sign on our present building.
Steve Wheeler photo

The Binoculars in the Club Bar...

These fixtures that have been around for a long time, probably since the mid to late 1940s. They are German military pieces and the type was used extensively by German forces in WWII. Who originally acquired them and when they actually appeared at the Club are both unknown, although it is suspected that they were brought home by somebody who may have fought in Europe. One set was completely refurbished in 2013; the other had its lenses cleaned that same year. They both have 10 x 80 optics and are fully functional. They are worth looking through.

The Lighted RYC Sign...

The blue neon "RYC" sign on the east side of the clubhouse was installed on the roof of the old Yacht Club building sometime between 1933 and 1937. It was moved to the present Club building in 1972 when the old building was demolished. If you haven't looked at the Club from the east, you might

not even know the sign is there. The difference in some of the letters may be due to a long forgotten repair.

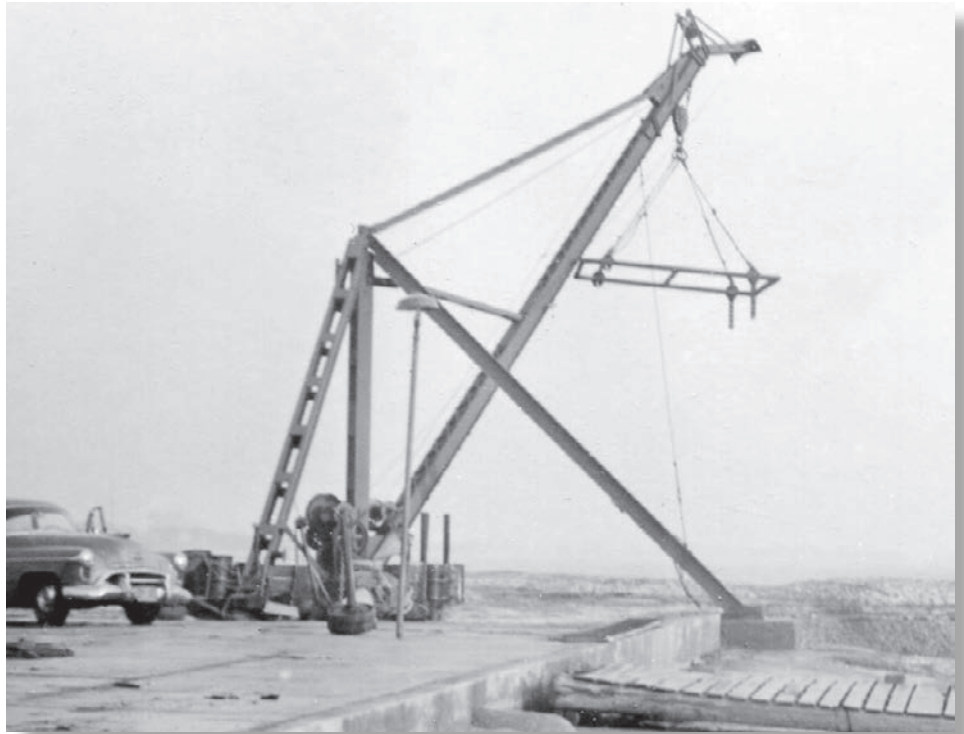


The "RYC" sign atop the old Club building ca. 1937. *RYC archives*

The Club has been host to some other things which were once taken for granted, too. These, sadly, have disappeared over the years and are probably remembered only by older members. The Club's derrick and the starting cannons (page 4) are two of them.

The Yacht Club Derrick...

The derrick, which was located next to the edge of the north pier near the present Club building, was used for launching and hauling out boats in the spring and fall. When it was actually installed at the Club is not known but we suspect it appeared in the early 1930s. One photo in the archives, not included here, has "1934" arc-welded on one of its parts. It isn't known if that was the date the derrick was made or when it was installed. There was much more water in the area then than there is now but even up into the 1980s it was still in use. Trucks hauling rip-rap out onto the pier for the harbor improvement in 1987 needed room to maneuver and that necessitated the derrick's removal. The derrick has been replaced with mobile cranes that are only brought in when needed, such as the one in the photo below.



The old Yacht Club derrick. The date is uncertain. *Courtesy of Arlene Richter Whitt*



Modern mobile crane. *Joe Fox photo*



The derrick's removal. *RYC archives*

The Starting Cannons...

The Yacht Club was home, for many years, to a pair of Winchester cannons that shot 10 gauge blanks. Used for starting and finishing races, both have disappeared and their whereabouts are unknown. They were powerful things—lots of noise and white smoke made for easily recognized signals. When the Club used Russ Johnson's power boat *Mavourneen* for a race committee boat in the 1960s, the guns were mounted on wood platforms that slid down over the boat's cockpit coaming. The recoil, over time, was enough to crack *Mavourneen's* coaming and Russ was not happy. After the cannons, shotguns firing blanks were used for a time (they were easier to carry). Those, too, were later replaced with the horn and whistle signals that are used today. If you happen to know where our starting cannons are, please let us know as they are an important part of our history.

There is one thing that our Club has that is permanent and will never be lost or moved:

The RYC mosaic...

The mosaic near the Club entrance was created by Club member Bill Blaesing, who passed away in 2013. He was an accomplished artist who was associated with the Wustum Museum and had work recognized in art circles around the United States. His daughter, Carol Zanotti, says Bill brought with him an artist's soul that lives on in the piece and thinks he may have created the mosaic in return for his membership dues one year. She noted that all his kids helped in some way, cutting, sorting, or arranging tiles. Bill's initials are in the bottom right-hand corner. Bill was a member of a number of crews and also had a Penguin, which he raced whenever he could; he was also very involved in our regattas.



A Winchester blank cannon like the ones the Club had. *Internet image*



The "RYC" mosaic near the Club entrance. *Steve Wheeler photo*



A publication of the RYC Historical Committee, a volunteer group dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of RYC's rich history. This issue was written by Steve Wheeler with help from Marsha Connet and Bill Blaesing's daughter Carol.

