

RYC ROOTS

A Historical Perspective of the Racine Yacht Club Through Time.

Chapter 3 • June 2015

Racine Yacht Club: The First Half Century, Part 1

Much of this material is excerpted from the 51st anniversary brochure published in 1967, edited by Cliff Haas for the RYC 51st Anniversary Club.

"Our many thanks to all who have put forth an effort to further the Racine Yacht Club, in its endeavors throughout the years. We are proud to be a part of such an organization."

- Clifford E. Haas (Editor)

In Retrospect, 1967...

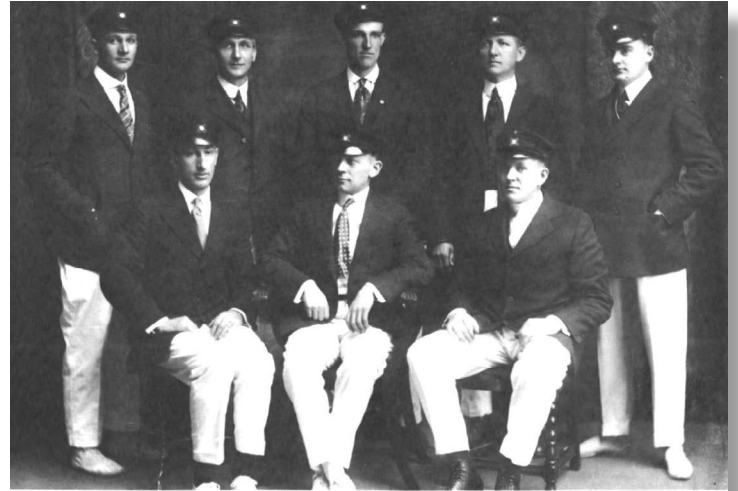
By Dr. David H. Aldrich, Commodore

Over the past 50 years, the Racine Yacht Club has had an enviable position in yachting on Lake Michigan. From very humble beginnings, the Club has grown and kept pace with boating on the lake. Our plans are to continue this growth and make our facilities better and more convenient for all those who sail out of or into Racine harbor. Many years ago, several Racine men envisioned an organization to govern pleasure boating, both power and sail, on the lake, and to form the Lake Michigan Yachting Association. As we all have seen, the LMYA has prospered, and now enjoys a prominent position. We are proud that it was at our Club that it got its start.

Recent years, about 20 of which I am personally acquainted, have seen a fantastic increase in the enjoyment of the waters off Racine. There was a time when there were but four or five boats at their moorings in the harbor, and possibly that many more "up the river." Last year (1967, ed.), the mooring basin was filled with about 35 sailboats, and about 30 more day-sailors rested in our front yard. Up the river, the banks were solid with boats tied up to the sheet piling, plus

the slips at the "Western Marina" and "Palmer Johnson's." An informal group of four sail boaters decided in 1959 to race their boats against each other every week just for fun. The idea was infectious, and in seven short years, the "Wednesday Niters" fleet has grown to over sixty boats. The original four, Gary Knop, Warren Beres, Don Lange, and I am happy to say, me. Power boaters have been equally active. Many have gone on lengthy cruises covering the entire extent of the lake; shorter trips to Milwaukee and Kenosha particularly have been very popular and, just recently, power boat contests have been initiated. Much credit must go to Andy Vassh and his leadership of the Power Squadron, which has been giving courses in navigation and boat handling at the Club for several years.

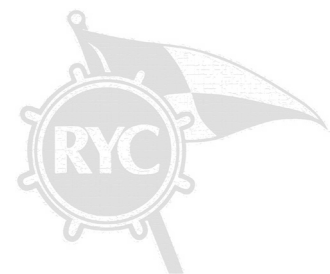
Prospects for the future look even brighter. We have always had a problem during storms with boats breaking loose from their moorings and smashing to bits on the beach. To fight this problem, the Club has had a 575-foot breakwater placed in the harbor to protect us from easterly seas. Slips are being provided for at least 20 boats on the west side



RYC's "Founding Fathers"

Back: Harold Schoeppe, Ernie Paul, Ervin Schoeppe, Hans Jensen, William Rohan
Front: Butch Panch, Fred Hermans, Ted Milke

of this breakwater. The Club yard has been resurfaced to facilitate summer parking for the day-sailors and winter storage of all boats. Minor improvements in the clubhouse will make our old building more attractive for all social activities. Advances in the enjoyment of boating, both power and sail over the last 50 years have been wonderful. The next 50 look even better. It is the wish and hope of all of us at the Racine Yacht Club that yachting will prosper, and our Club will add to everyone's enjoyment of this great sport.





Minutes from the First Meeting

Racine, January 23, 1916

The meeting of the Racine Motor Boat and Yacht Club was called to order by the temporary President, M. Draeger and after having explained the aims and objects of the Club. A motion was made and carried that we elect permanent officers, the result of the election was as follows:

Commodore, Fred Hermans;
Boatswain, F. Bohn;
Vice Commodore, M. Draeger;
Fleet Surgeon, Dr. W. Hanson;
Rear Commodore, A. Hardman;
Secretary, H. Jansen;
Fleet Captain, G. Pansch;
Treasurer, D. Chandler

On a motion the name of the club was changed to the Racine Yacht Club, the newly elected officers then took office, and Commodore Hermans appointed the following members to act as a

By-laws committee:

T. Milke
G. Baldrain
J. Rittman,
G. Forwark
W. Draeger
H. Pahl

The Commodore announced that he would appoint the Entertainment and Advertisement committee at the next meeting. The membership committee appointed was W. Draeger, G. Forwark, A. Sorenson, E. Nelson, Vigo Matson, J. Ravers, J. Rittman. It was then decided to make the initiation fee \$5.00, same to be paid within 30 days from date. The Committee on Club House appointed at the last meeting and composed of G. Pansch, W. Harding and F. Bohn reported that the Club House of the old Racine Motor Boat Club located on the

lake front can be bought for \$200.00. The report was laid over until the next meeting, on motion.

A vote of thanks was extended to the Mgr. of the Strand for allowing the Club to meet in his office. On motion it was decided that Commodore Hermans and the Secretary secure such books and stationery as will be necessary for the Club to have. The Treas. D. Chandler, then reported as having received \$17.00 as initiation fees, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned, to reconvene January 30, at 9:30. The members to be notified by the Secretary as to the place of the meeting.

– H. Jansen, Secretary

A List of Honor: Commodores Who Have Left Their Mark

1916 Fred Hermans	1934 Otto Wadewitz	1952 Milton Stoffel
1917 Ted Milke & Wm. Rohan	1935 Otto Wadewitz	1953 Milton Stoffel
1918 Wm. Rohan	1936 Otto Wadewitz	1954 Milton Stoffel
1919 Wm. Rohan	1937 Otto Wadewitz	1955 Oliver S. Anderson
1920 Harold Schoeppe	1938 A. J. Rowley	1956 James H. Dunham
1921 Ervin Schoeppe	1939 A. I. Johnson	1957 James W. Paulsen
1922 Herbert Pansch	1940 Henry Smieding	1958 Milton Stoffel
1923 E. J. Stormer	1941 Henry Smieding	1959 Milton Stoffel
1924 E. J. Stormer	1942 Henry Smieding	1960 Arthur Peterson
1925 James Keough	1943 Arthur Harris	1961 George Bohn
1926 James Keough	1944 Arthur Harris & Wm. Richter	1962 George Bohn
1927 James Keough	1945 Otto Schacht	1963 Gary Knop
1928 James Keough	1946 Henry Griswold	1964 Raymond Knapp
1929 Dr. H. V. Wiedebach	1947 Vitas Thomas	1965 Robert Tigges
1930 George Kamm	1948 Tom C. Powers	1966 James Rooney
1931 Ervin Schoeppe	1949 Fred Gunther	1967 Dr. David Aldrich
1932 Arthur Pansch	1950 Milton Stoffel	
1933 Otto Wadewitz	1951 Milton Stoffel	



Racine Times-Call – July 3-4, 1916

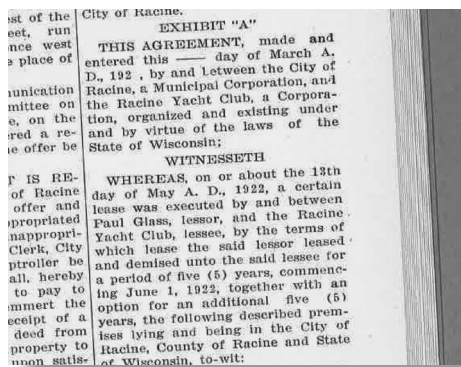
Over 10,000 people attended the regatta held off North Beach. Races were held for sailboats, motor boats, canoes and people. Milwaukee, South Shore and Kenosha Yacht Clubs won all the sailing events. Motor boat races were won by all Racine boats: *Sea Bird*, *Caille*, *Jeanette N.*, *Rosalie*, *Marlin*, *Sunbeam* and *U-39*.

Racine, August 10, 1916

Initiation fee was raised to \$10.00, dues were \$.50 per month.

Racine Times-Call – Aug. 25, 1920

On Sunday Sept. 12, 1920, the biggest Lake Regatta will be held off Racine. Over 100 boats are expected. "Racine's harbor is ideal to harbor the many boats expected." Racine boats entered are: *Diamond*, *Iroquios*, *Vera*, *Valpoise*, *Flapper* and *Ding-bat*. A carnival will be held on North Beach on Saturday evening.



Racine Yacht Club's first recorded lease on parcels from lessors Paul Glass and Margaret Kreiter.

The Wadewitz Years: 1930-1940

The Great Depression was particularly difficult for the Racine Yacht Club.

The Wadewitz brothers founded and operated the Western Publishing Company from 1910 until the late 70's. Brother Otto joined the company shortly after the founding and was by trade a machinist and mechanic. Otto Wadewitz had been the founder and active member of the Power Boat Club of Racine. He raced *Jay-Eye-See I* and *II*, both sponsored by the J.I. Case Company. His interest in speed boats waned over the years, as residents had become irritated by the noise and commotion with races held off of our beaches in — addition to the financial hardships of the Depression. He joined the Racine Yacht Club in the late 1920s and served as Commodore from 1932 until 1937. He has been recognized as a key financial benefactor to the Racine Yacht Club. It has been said that "he kept it going" during the depression years. In the early 40's, he headed to Mobile, Alabama to organize the Western Woodworking Company to produce wooden toys.

Wadewitz kept has 50' boat, *Rex*, on Lake Michigan (requisitioned by the Navy for patrol work) until 1945. Life Member Chester Krusienski and Otto piloted the *Rex* down the Mississippi in 1945. During that time, Wadewitz founded the Fairhope Yacht Club in 1942 and served as Commodore for the first three years. Otto and his wife Mary returned to Racine in 1946 for their 50th anniversary on July 28th. Within one week, Otto has succumbed to cancer and died August 6, 1946. He is memorialized at the Racine Yacht Club through the dedication of the main pier in 1955. Fairhope instituted the Wadewitz Regatta in 1946 and still runs the regatta annually.



Wadewitz on his 50' power boat, *Rex*

Racine Journal Times – September 17, 1934

Two Die in Lake Tragedy Disaster Strikes Racine Craft Headed for Regatta in Milwaukee Tragedy struck for three members on the 34 foot yacht "Spray" that set sail on a Saturday night, to enter a series of races at South Shore Yacht Club. The boat was owned by Oswald Aul and Harold Sustachek. At midnight the boat was struck by a sharp gust of wind and the boat took on a large quantity of water where the deck was scarcely a foot out of the water. The waves washed the three sailors into the water several times.



Two of the three sailors died that night as the wind and seas took their toll on the yacht. Irving Uhlir and Tom Graham both drowned, leaving Herman Jansen as the only survivor. Jansen clung to the mast for 14 hours until the Racine Coast Guard could get to him. The other two crew members could not hold on.



Racine Journal Times — December 6, 1937

Frostbite dinghy racing, properly named as all contestants and spectators who attended the regatta at the Racine Yacht Club will agree, made its first big time appearance in the middle west in Racine harbor Saturday afternoon when eight boats fought puffy winds and high waves for the championship of Lake Michigan.

The *Stormy*, of Chicago, piloted by Leeds Mitchell with Walter Etsbach as crew, was one of five boats to survive the buffeting of the waves and finished in first place on a point basis for the three races sailed.

Mitchell skillfully skippered his boat to first place in the first race, second in the second and first again in the final race which was two trips around the mile and one-half triangular course instead of one. His boat established best time for the course of 15 minutes and 40 seconds in the first race of the day.

Second place ended in a tie between the D218 and the D7, also known as the *Lady Eileen II*, Tempel Smith as pilot and Miss Esther Vanderlaan, the only woman entrant, as crew, manned the D218 while the *Lady Eileen II* was skippered by Hunt Schlagel with (Rocks) Ryan as crew. Both boats are from Chicago.

Racine's entrant suffered the same fate as two others, succumbing before the high waves to capsize and fill with water, both skipper Tony Herrmann and crew Albert Johnson getting a taste of Lake Michigan swimming at below freezing temperatures.

The upset came at the conclusion of the first race as the Racine craft was heading for the dock. The Racine boat finished fourth in the race to rate five points. Points were awarded on a basis of eight for first place, seven

for second, etc., as there were eight starting contestants. The *Stormy* garnered 23 points and the D218 and *Lady Eileen II* 17 each.

The A. J. Horlick trophy will be engraved with the names of the winning crew, Leeds Mitchell and Walter Etsbach, but will be kept on display at the Racine Yacht Club. Winners were awarded with gold medals.

Following the races it was decided, in conference with A. J. Horlick, that the trophy would be retired in 10 years. At that time the three skippers with the most number of wins will race for permanent possession.

No arrangements have been made as yet as to where or when the next race will be held but Racine Yacht Club officials stated that it will probably be around Thanksgiving next year. It would have been impossible to have held the race Sunday as a sheet of ice covered the harbor.

All boats in the race shipped water, three sinking and several others finishing with skippers and crews bailing water furiously.

The Coast Guard stood by with their cutter and a life boat and in addition to pulling one crew out of the water, rescued two other small sailing craft unable to maneuver against the puffy winds and waves.

In addition to the winners other results were *Bagheera*, manned by Rockwood M. Pirie and Russell Moon, 11 points; *Maruffa*, manned by Joe Haller and Charles Warner, 11 points; *Snort*, manned by Gus and Hank Larson, 14 points; *Racine*, manned by Tony Herrmann and Alfred Johnson, five points; and *Helldiver*, manned by Dave Root and Dick Eshelman, one point. All boats except the *Racine* and *Helldiver* were from Chicago. The *Helldiver* was a Michigan City, Indiana, entry.



Frostbite dinghy racing was a popular activity for decades at the Racine Yacht Club. Pictured here, frostbiting c.~1937.

Racine Journal Times — December 8, 1937

By Tex Reynolds

On the lighter side of the news locally is an echo of the "frost-bite dinghy race" held by the Racine Yacht Club last Saturday. Among the skippers who got an impromptu bath in the wintry waters was Tony Herrmann.

So Monday, when a group of his friends were in Madison, they sent a postcard. It was addressed simply to "Wet Harbor Sailor, Racine, Wis." — and was promptly delivered to Tony at the Belle City Malleable Iron Company, which indicates that postmen read the Yachting news.



A publication of the RYC Historical Committee, a volunteer group dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of RYC's rich history. This issue was compiled mostly by RYC member Charlie Manning.