

Sandy Bay Sailing Club

Yacht Clubs

Overview & History

Also See [Archives](#), [Membership Info](#), [Officers & Staff](#) and [By-Laws/Policies](#)

Open from mid-April through mid-October, Sandy Bay Yacht Club is located north of [Boston](#) on [Cape Ann](#), at the end of T Wharf in Rockport Harbor where our current Clubhouse was built in 1930. A newspaper clipping from the May 22, 1885 "Advertiser" states:

"The Sandy Bay Yacht Club held its initial meeting for permanent organization last Monday evening. There was a good attendance, and the following gentlemen were chosen officers: Leander M. Haskins, Commodore; Howard H. Haul, Fleet Captain; Lemuel Clark, Measurer; Chas. Mills, Secretary and Treasurer. Regatta Committee - Chas. Cunningham, G.T. Margeson, Grafton Butman, Wm. Hale, H.H. Paul. A meeting will be held next Monday evening at the Club Room, Haskins' Block."

Since that time we have been actively involved in sailboat racing and training, for both juniors and adults.

Over the years both our one-design fleets and cruising boats have changed and kept up with the times. Our current one-design fleets are: Bullseyes, Club 420s, Flying Scots, Lasers, Optimists, Rhodes 19s and Stars. Racing under PHRF rules, our cruising fleet includes numerous designs from 23 to 44 feet. Along with our regular series racing, SBYC has hosted numerous one-design Championships, including District as well as National Events.

Begun in the 1930s, our Sailing Program has grown rapidly over the last several years. We now accommodate approximately 175 different kids sailing in Optimists, Club 420s and Lasers and 35 adults learning to sail in Rhodes 19s and Bullseyes. Many of our students have become accomplished sailors and racers.

Not all of our activity is sailing around the buoys, pleasure sailing or even chasing down that prized [striped bass](#). There are numerous social activities to enjoy while ashore, ranging from potluck or catered dinners to our well attended Sunday morning coffees. Juniors also have numerous social events to choose from, including cookouts and movie nights.

With thanks to James Runkle and Harry Whalen, the following history is excerpted from their book "100 Years of Sailing at Sandy Bay", published in 1985:

Cleopatra had her barge. But it was not until recent times that many pleasure sailors had their "barges" and had a need or desire to pool forces with other pleasure sailors. "Where did you get that aluminum mast? Is it strong enough?" And the next day, "Hey, someone tow me back to the dock - my aluminum mast broke!" Or to see which boat is faster - how can you race without someone to race with? How can the race be fair without rules? And so the need grows for some kind of organization.

"Summer cottages with an ocean view" were all the rage in 1885 along the North Shore of Massachusetts Bay. White-collar workers of Boston, New York and the Midwest had incomes sufficient to support their dreams of a second home by the sea. And from these they went forth to summer fun on boats, competing in local and inter-area regattas. Active fleets emerged in Marblehead, Manchester, Gloucester, Rockport and Newburyport.

In 1885 Annisquam challenged Rockport to a race around Thacher's. Annisquam must have had an organization to issue the challenge; Rockport must have had one to accept it. So we say a sailing club, from which ours is descended, existed here in 1885.

Like so many legends of the sea, the Sandy Bay Yacht Club seems just to have appeared. Marshall Swan's "TOWN ON SANDY BAY" says on page 221 that, riding on the crest of interest in yachting during the 1870s and 1880s, it was founded in 1885. There is the legend mentioned above that refers to the challenge from Annisquam. By 1887 there was a public announcement of a Regatta, "Open to all Boats entered in the Sandy Bay Yacht Club", to be sailed off Rockport Saturday, July 9th, 1887. The Second Grand Annual Regatta, "Open to all Yachts of 30 feet and under, Sailing Length" was "To be Sailed off Rockport Monday August 1st, 1887, Commencing at 1 o'clock, sharp."

The Regatta of July 9, 1887, listed two classes, with the proviso that "Two boats must compete in each class or no race. Three boats must compete or no second prize." The first class consisted of yachts measuring 20 and less than 30 feet, with the first prize the Harwood Cup valued at \$40, and a second prize of \$10. In the second class were "Yachts measuring less than 20 feet," with the first prize \$15 cash and the second \$10 (presumably also cash). The club course was about six miles, with both classes going over the course twice. There is a note that PROTESTS "must be made to the Judges within one hour after the races. Judges' decisions will be final."

According to Swan, in August 1883 four yachts had raced around Tha(t)cher's Island. By July 1886 "The club had 35 boats with new ones to be added." And in 1887 a Sailing Dory club was formed. The ADVERTISER commented that "Few clubs along the coast can or will show a better lot of prizes than Sandy Bay has now on exhibition." Robinson's HISTORY OF MARBLEHEAD mentions a regatta in Rockport in 1885; a framed placard at the Yacht Club advertises a special regatta from Sandy Bay to Newburyport for the Cunningham Cup in 1886. Fliers similar to this have been found in Yacht Club archives announcing regattas in Rockport.

1885 is the same year they began work on the outer breakwater that was to provide a "Harbor of Refuge" large enough to contain the entire Atlantic Fleet. Some years later, Teddy Roosevelt's 'Great White Fleet' would indeed anchor there. Photographs of that time

show all the sailboats gaff rigged, with a bowsprit and a straight stem. So we have a good idea what our earlier club members' boats looked like.

Since the nineteenth century, of course, fashions have changed in hulls and rigging. As various types of racing craft have been developed, pleasure sailors of Rockport have kept up with them. The Club has provided classes to keep all the racing compatible and according to rules. And, in testimony to the interest and vigor with which Rockporters pursued their boating, we note that in 1905 the "Law and Order League" was vexed that Sunday yacht racing was increasingly common.

We have this degree of documentation as to the founding and existence of our club. But until 1930 details of sailing at Sandy Bay are incomplete and unreliable. the yacht club organization lacked formality; interest seems to have ebbed and flowed like the tide. The result is that few written records have been found, and that even the remarkable memories of our ninety-year-olds cannot be expected to stretch back farther than 1910.

We must rely on what information can be gleaned from a study of these other yachting club histories and a close examination of the old photographs of Rockport Harbor, which gives us a fair picture of racing sloops of the time. Few of these boats were exactly alike, as we would expect today of the boats in a racing "class". "Official measurers" and "handicaps" were the lingo of standard operating procedures. Just as with racing horses, racing sailboats were really the hobbies of the well-to-do. And naval architects emerged as the creators of these "rich man's toys", Herreshoff and Crowninshield being two of the famous.

In the original regattas sponsored by Sandy Bay in 1887, entries were limited to boats under 30 feet in length, usually in two or three classes. The first class included boats of 24 to 30 feet; the second, 21 to 24 feet, and the third, boats under 21 feet. When the owner of a boat found that he and his paid skipper consistently came in last, it behooved him to get a new skipper or a newly designed boat.

After 1915 boats of a given design were being built according to the same specifications, so that the results of races would be based on the skill of the skipper and crew in sailing a standardized craft over a clearly marked course and under the same prevailing conditions of wind and weather. As the Star class and Bird class proliferated in Sandy Bay, the club measurer had to concentrate only on the measurement of sails. The very early Star boats had a gaff rig, which soon gave way to a marconi, which still had a short mast and a long boom. It is generally thought that Homer Clark's 'Sans Souci' introduced the new modern design which has proved very successful through the years.

Massachusetts Bay 18-footers were the early "I" class boats. According to Myron Brown, after a substantial fleet of these boats had been commissioned at Manchester by well-to-do owners belonging to the Manchester Yacht Club, the boats took on the Manchester "I" title. Although yacht racing with paid skippers and crew seemed to be the vogue in Manchester at that time, we have no record that this substitute for horse racing occurred at Sandy Bay.

Our Sandy Bay sailors were not entirely leisure time sporting sailors, so to speak. Retired Captain Frank Pierce, for instance, Star boat skipper and noted cribbage player, had sailed

stone sloops up and down the coast carrying granite products from the Pigeon Cove quarries. Stories have been passed down of how those craft were loaded until the decks were awash, with only the bow, hatch and stern showing above water, leading to the moniker of "floating ledges". Old Salts claim that there are still piles of granite cobblestones occasionally found on the bottom along the East Coast, as all that is left of overladen stone sloops from Rockport. And, of course, there is the story of the stone sloop overdue and given up for lost after the 1898 storm in which the steamer PORTLAND went down with all hands off Race Point, when, a couple days late, she made her port: "Mighty big blow", said her skipper.

As far as a club house is concerned, Hosea Pierce says that Yacht Club members kept their boats year around in the corner of the harbor where the breakwater meets the end of Bearskin Neck, and behind "Gum Drop" or "Haystack" rock. He says a wooden staircase went down to the water's edge at the granite wall. Another legend says that the "United Nations" house at the end of Bearskin Neck was possibly the first Club House. In light of the story of the wooden stairs, this might be possible. The Historical Marker says it was a survey site for the outer breakwater. Although photographs prove that it existed by 1910, June York, 92 years of age, says she doubts it was a club house for the yacht club. We shall see later that 1931 was the critical year concerning our present club house.

Our Certificate of Incorporation is dated in 1930. Old-timers remember that the club was "re-organized" in 1931 and went into the business of a new clubhouse with a mortgage which was largely underwritten by Lindley Dean and paid off in two years by club members. The spring after the reorganization the first race was held in March, to Thacher's and back. The wind freshened so that skippers were reluctant to jibe, and one boat went skidding ashore at Pigeon Cove. A lighter side of the history of our clubhouse refers to what some of the sailors did all winter, every winter, after the building had been constructed in 1931. From that time on a devoted group of members played cribbage there until 1961, when Steward Arthur Swanson retired and the building was shut down to save fuel. After that they continued their cribbage competition in Hosea Pierce's basement on Atlantic Avenue for the next five years. And with rugged names like Hosea Pierce, Musty Somers, Fooley Davis, Polo Cooney, Spooky Grover, Fuzzy Hawley, Dyke Brown, and Duffy Blatchford on the roster, how could this yacht club fail to succeed?

Leadership of the club, again, has not been too clearly spelled out in the records. Myron Brown tells us that our first Commodore, Marion Cooney, elected in 1931, was a great promoter of boating safety. The "pun'kin seed" boats, such as the Fish and the Bird classes, supposedly stable, with a centerboard for adaptability to the shallows of the Annisquam River, for instance, and sailed at Rockport in 1930, he considered to be unsafe for our conditions on the open Atlantic, and under his leadership members approached John Alden, the prolific yacht designer of Massachusetts Bay, to draft up two rugged and seaworthy boats especially for Cape Ann Atlantic waters. These emerged as the Sandy Bay class and the Pilot class. It is said that when Bent Story was sailing his new "Sandy Bay" from the Marblehead boatyard to Rockport, by happenstance he was overtaken by John Alden in one of his schooners. After sailing a circle around the slower Story, Alden was heard to comment, "I guess I should have made the mast three feet longer".

Commodore Cooney urged that every boat be entered in every race. If an owner or a skipper had to be absent, a substitute was found to bring the boat to the starting line, which was always off Bearskin Neck. During the race, the mooring area was empty of boats. And during Marblehead Race Week, the harbor was empty for the entire week, with the "fleet" all in Marblehead for the "big" regatta of the summer.

By 1935 we know that the Sandy Bay Yacht Club had been formalized, with incorporation in 1930, Constitution and Bylaws and an energetic year of building and putting out floats etc. in 1931, and a lease taken out for the property where the Club still is today. In fact, in 1931 a daily log was kept for the entire year, with details of the rapid development of the facilities, the weather, and many seaside events, as can be read in excerpts printed in the body of this book. From 1935 onward, our Club was an organized, recognized yacht club with its own clubhouse and floats.

By 1940 we know from the records that there were 38 registered boat owners. In 1941 Rockport fishermen and yachtsmen formed a local United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. In 1976 a Boat Parade was organized in honor of the 200th anniversary of our United States of America.

But the story of the more recent years is best told through the many illustrations, lists, and descriptions of One Design boats that have made up our "fleets" over the past half century. Many Sandy Bay Yacht Clubbers will remember the names, the boats, the scenes. And they will find so much of what they know firmly rooted in the past that other photographs record. They will see the usable harbor grow and many buildings around it change; marconi replaces gaff; hull shapes change to enhance speed; even the "correct" racing attire is different. This compilation is to please you, to interest you, to inform you - and to leave a record for those in 2035 to see us and our forebears.