

Some History of the 2nd Green Bay Yacht Club of the early 1900s

SEVERE STORM WRECKED 'BAY' CLUB REGATTA *Green Bay Press-Gazette July 18, 1934*

Scores of Craft Washed Far Inland During Heavy Squall

Imagine the feelings of farmers and fishermen who lived along the bay shore in 1909 when they awoke one fall morning after a terrific squall to find their pastures or back yards dotted with innumerable sailing craft, standing with keel imbedded in the mud or lying on their sides with sails idly flapping in the morning breeze. And some of these boats, observers recall, were as far as three-quarters of a mile from the bay!

This is just one of the salient events in the history of the old Green Bay Yacht Club which flourished from 1903 to 1911 on the bay shore near the present Bay Beach Park.

The incident just referred to was the aftermath of the greatest of all the regattas ever staged by the organization. According to Dr. R. B. Power, second commodore of the club and commodore at the time of the event described here, the local club was climaxing one of its most successful seasons by inviting the Columbia Yacht Club and the Chicago Yacht Club both of Chicago, to end its annual powerboat race along the lakes at Green Bay. This race was the greatest yachting event on the Great Lakes at that time and much to the jubilation of the local group the invitation was accepted.

Yachtsmen Given Rousing Ovation

Accordingly, the Yacht club made elaborate preparations to receive the visitors. A magnificent display of water craft from all the lake and bay cities in this section was lined up to welcome the Illinois yachtsmen. Boats of every description converged at Green Bay from Menominee, Mich., Sturgeon Bay, Manitowoc, Oshkosh, Oconto, and other port cities, and joined with the hundred or so local sloops, fishing tugs, dinghies, cat-boats, powerboats, and miscellaneous craft to literally cover the mouth of the river and the water along the bay shore.

About 14 or 16 boats survived the grueling Chicago to Green Bay test, the remainder falling out along the way and steering into port at Milwaukee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, or other lake shore cities. The survivors cruised majestically across the finish line near the still existent breakwater west of the present pavilion and were greeted by an ear-splitting din of sirens, cannon shots, rifle shots and other noise making instruments – the entire scene punctuated by hundreds of flags and brilliantly-decorated boats. The Yacht club dock and the shore line were jammed with those who craned their necks for a view of the gala scene.

Dr. Power recalls that the visitors were honored at a banquet in the club house that evening after which there was dancing and general merrymaking.

The next day a full program of aquatic entertainment, -sailboat and powerboat competition and other water events-, was scheduled. The day dawned bright and, except for a few scattered clouds which hovered above the distant horizon, the weather appeared perfect.

The craft and another huge crowd were again present in anticipation of the entertainment and the races got off to a fine start. Dr. Power, who acted as head of the racing committee started the sailboats first, and then the powerboats. The sailboats were to navigate a nine-mile triangular course and were to sail around twice. Soon after the sloops started the sky began to cloud up and by the time the first craft, -Arthur C. Neville's "Algonquin", rounded the buoy marking the end of the first lap, the sun was obliterated.

Two Chicagoans Lost Lives

Mr. Neville, worried about the impending storm, megaphoned to the officials' craft as to whether he should put in to shore or continue. The officials, believing the storm would pass over in a few minutes, signaled him to proceed. The "Algonquin" which had a considerable lead over the rest of the contestants had just rounded the first leg of the course when the storm broke.

It was a typical fall "blow". The wind velocity increased four-fold and the rain descended in torrents, scattering the spectators and power craft like a pack of scared rabbits as they scurried to shelter and safety.

But the sailing vessels were in no position to find cover. Far out on the bay, they had to choose between lowering their sails immediately to "ride out" the squall or leaving their sheets up and "running" before the terrific wind and sea to possible safety.

Some of the skippers anchored at once and braved the elements all night, coming in the next morning with clothes dripping and their bodies chilled to the bone. Almost all of the rest took a chance on being blown into shore. However, the storm had raised the water level on the south shore so greatly that the lowlands along the bay were flooded far inland. Hence, the boats flying before the storm, - unable to check themselves soon enough-, were blown far past the shoreline and deposited high and dry after the "blow" abated and the water receded.

Aside from the inconvenience and spoiling of the day's program, the squall, oddly enough, resulted in only one major casualty. Two Chicago men who were far from shore in a sailboat when the storm broke were apparently being blown along at a terrific pace when they either attempted to stop the boat by dropping the anchor or the anchor slipped overboard. At any rate, the craft nosed over when the anchor line grew taut and both men were drowned. Their bodies were discovered under the capsized boat the next day.

Had 200 Members At One Time

This was only one in a long succession of memorable events in the history of the club. Organized about 1903 by a group of local boating enthusiasts headed by Arthur C. Neville, the club grew from a small handful of members and craft to an organization which at one time included more than 200 members and 65 boats.

Only two sets of officers governed the club during its nine years existence. The first officers included Arthur Neville, commodore; Arthur Duchateau, vice commodore; Henry G. Barkhausen, rear commodore; Jesse Kerker, secretary; Fred Hurlbut, treasurer; and Jules Cauwenbergh, fleet captain. Among the other members at this time were Fred Golden, Alden Arthur, Horace Conley, Gus Walter, Jr., Fred Basche, and Capt. Schoett.

At the time of its institution and until about 1906 all of the club's boats were sailing craft. Among the larger of the sloops were the "Zazo" owned by G. A. Walter; Basche's "Alcyon"; the "Venus" owned by Capt. Schoett; the "Tomah" owned by Parker; Neville's "Algonquin"; and the "Niagara" owned jointly by Hurlbut and Henry G. Barkhausen.

Interest waned a little in 1905, but through the efforts of the original members, more than a hundred owners or devotees of motorboats were marshalled into the membership ranks and a new set of officers installed. The new slate included Dr. Power, commodore; Harry Golden, vice commodore; Frank E. Teetshorn, secretary; J. M. Chase, treasurer; and Jules Cauwenbergh, fleet captain.

With this enlarged membership and new blood, the club flourished. Henry Rahr had purchased a large piece of property along the bay shore and on this tract of land was a large building which he donated to the organization for use as a clubhouse. This permanent headquarters served to further strengthen the ties of the organization and soon a large dock was built. About the same time, too, the club raised \$4500 and constructed a large breakwater a few hundred feet offshore and to the right of the clubhouse to serve as a protection for the craft.

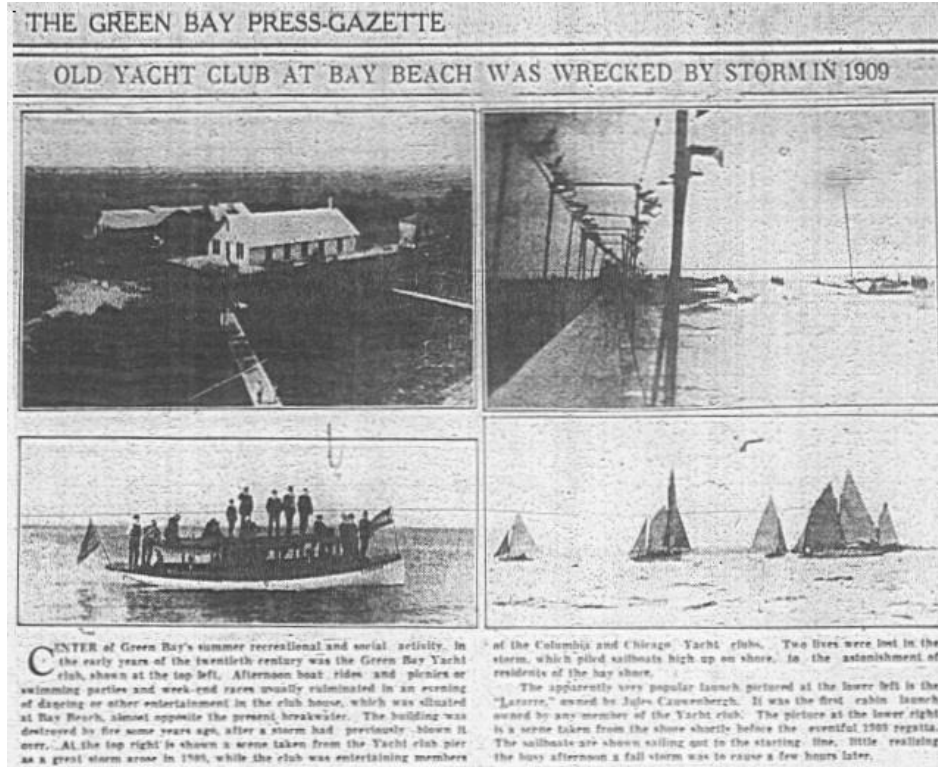
Plan to Revive Club

Several more membership drives were made from time to time, and by 1909 almost all of the professional men and business men in Green Bay and DePere belonged to the organization. As a result, the bay shore became the mecca of the entire city during the summer months, for weekly races were held among the members' vessels, and a day of picnicking, swimming, and dancing, in addition to the other entertainment offered at Bay Beach park became the usual manner in which Green Bay residents spent the weekend. Occasionally, the Oshkosh Yacht club would be invited to participate in a regatta with the local club or the Green Bay group would take their boats to Lake Winnebago. Frequently, the boat owners would gather their families and friends together after work on week day afternoons and sail or cruise out the Fox river to the clubhouse for a picnic supper and a swimming party and return home at dusk.

With the general advent of automobiles about 1909, interest in the club began to wane. Members sold their boats and purchased motor cars. As a result it became increasingly difficult to maintain the activities of the organization and a fall storm – of even greater proportions than that of 1909 – which destroyed the clubhouse in 1911 hastened the demise of the club. By 1912 the group was entirely disbanded.

Boating activity here has been almost entirely unorganized since the disappearance of the old Yacht club but an attempt is being made this year to revive the club. Some of the present boat owners and other interested persons have held several meetings to get a club started and plans have been formulated for construction of a "slip" near the mouth of the river, where smaller craft can be anchored with safety in any weather. In addition, numerous races and other water events are being projected to promote activity on the river and bay during the tercentenary observance.

Old Yacht Club At Bay Beach Was Wrecked By Storm In 1909 July 18, 1934 article



Center of Green Bay's summer recreational and social activity in the early years of the twentieth century was the Green Bay Yacht club, shown at the top left. Afternoon boat rides and picnics or swimming parties and weekend races usually culminated in an evening of dancing or other entertainment in the club house, which was situated at Bay Beach, almost opposite the present breakwater. The building was destroyed by fire some years ago, after a storm had previously blown it over. At the top right is shown a scene taken from the Yacht club pier as a great storm arose in 1909, while the club was entertaining members of the Columbia and Chicago Yacht clubs. Two lives were lost in the storm, which piled sailboats high up on shore, to the astonishment of residents of the bay shore. The apparently very popular launch pictured at the lower left is the "Lazarre" owned by Jules Cauwenbergh. It was the first cabin launch owned by any member of the Yacht club. The picture at the lower right is a scene taken from the shore shortly before the eventful 1909 regatta. The sailboats are shown sailing out to the starting line, little realizing the busy afternoon a fall storm was to cause a few hours later.