Mattapoisett Yacht Club - 1901 to 2001

1. 1869 - 1900 Yachting Before MYC

Although Mattapoisett's beautiful harbor had seen boating activity of many types for all of its recorded history, the record of " yachting" for pleasure seems to have started with the arrival of summer residents in 1869. By then the whaling industry was in decline (the last whaler, the Wanderer was built in 1878), but there was an active fishing industry, and coastal shipping carried cargo to and from the town docks.

Yacht racing in the area started fifteen years earlier when the New York Yacht Club cruised as far east as New Bedford and held a regatta in Buzzard's Bay in 1856. The New Bedford Yacht Club was formed in 1877 and several Mattapoisett sailors were members. John Rhodes of Mattapoisett was its second commodore.

The first regatta in Mattapoisett was held in 1878. This was a three day event, with cash prizes. Most yachts at this time were large catboats. Annual catboat regattas were held in town until 1893. The first "yacht" built in Mattapoisett was a 26 foot catboat, Glimpse, built for Edward Atkinson by Alonzo Jenney in 1879. It won its class in the 1882 regatta. That same year, Malcolm Forbes, of Naushon, won the largest (30 to 40 foot) class.

The Beverly Yacht Club was formed in 1895 at Wings Neck on the Cape. Most Mattapoisett sailors shifted their memberships there. From 1899 to 1909, the Beverly Yacht Club held its annual regatta at Mattapoisett. At the first of these, there were 40 entries - 23 catboats and 17 sloops. This marked the first appearance of the classic Herreshoff 15-footer, with three of them racing as a one-design class. The overall length of an H-15 is 24 ft 9 in! The sloops, of course, were jib and mainsail rigs - sleek and fast - a revolutionary departure from the catboat.

The most spectacular class in these regattas was the Buzzards Bay Thirty-footers, designed and built by N.G. Herreshoff. Thirteen of these were built. They were forty-six and a half feet over all, with almost 11 foot beam. In 1902, ten of them raced in Mattapoisett. One, the Gamecock, was owned by Louis Bacon of Mattapoisett. The fleet rarely gathered in such numbers, but a survey in 1954 showed that 7 of the 13 boats were still in commission.

The annual Mattapoisett regatta drew lots of attention to racing, but it was only an annual event. Travel to other towns for weekly racing was difficult, but it was done. In 1900, it was decided to organize a club to hold local races.

2. 1901 - 1920 A New Yacht Club

A group of Mattapoisett residents, who were Beverly Yacht Club members, formed a club to build a new one-design class for purely local racing. Those who had larger boats continued also to race with Beverly, and the Beverly Regatta continued at Mattapoisett.

Theophilus Parsons was elected the first commodore, Rogers Barstow the vice-commodore and J. Lewis Stackpole, Jr. the Secretary /Treasurer. B.B. Crowninshield of Boston was contracted to design a class of " skipjack knockabouts" for the club. Nine of the boats were built in Mattapoisett in early 1901 for races starting in that year. The

boats, sometimes called the Rainbow Class because of their varied hull colors, were 18 feet long and carried a jib and gaff-rigged mainsail. They had no ballast, low freeboard and rather flat bottoms and sides. In the brisk winds and the chop of Mattapoisett, they were described as sporty.

Races were held on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, with ladies races on Saturday mornings. Winners in 1901 were Owlet (T.Parsons) on Tues. and Sat. and All Blue (R.L. Barstow) on Sunday. The popular races were held off Barstow wharf at the foot of North Street.

After two good seasons of racing, many of the boats were sold to members of the Apponagansett Boat Club in Padanaram. Races for the class continued there, in the more protected confines north of the Padanaram bridge, for almost 20 years. At Mattapoisett, the preference moved on to a new style of 15-foot (waterline) sloop. These sleek boats were also gaff rigged, and they could carry a spinnaker. Fifteens by W. Starling Burgess were raced in 1903 and 4. Fifteens by Herreshoff (H-15s) then began to take preference in the Bay and they participated in sporadic racing in Mattapoisett for the next several years.

For several years, beginning in 1902, Marion held an annual Water Carnival in August. A wide variety of water-related events spanned several days. The New Bedford Times reported that on the final evening, sailboats anchored along three miles of shoreline and raised lighted lanterns in their rigging. The Mattapoisett Yacht Club was included in that display.

The Beverly Yacht Club annual regatta in Mattapoisett continued until 1909. In 1907, for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of the town of Mattapoisett, the regatta was featured at the finale of a week of events. There were motor-boat races, and 9 classes of sailboats. Unfortunately, the day brought fog, rain and very little wind, so little is remembered about the racing. The last Beverly regatta in Mattapoisett in 1909 included 31 boats, of which only 2 were catboats. The change of style was essentially complete. Twelve of the 29 sloops were H-15 's.

By 1914, J. Lewis Stackpole, Jr. had acquired an H-15, and he revived regular, twice weekly racing among 6 boats in that class. By the way, the Cape Cod Canal had opened that year, and Nye's Ledge got a bell buoy the next year. After three years of racing, the class disbanded and the club went inactive with the first World War.

It should be noted that the class racing covered above represented the small boat end of the scale, if a 21 foot H-15 can be called small. For example, in 1892, J. L. Stackpole Sr. was sailing a 48 foot sloop, in 1902, Louis Bacon raced a 46 foot Buzzards Bay 30, and in 1901, Theophilus Parsons had a 69 foot schooner that sometimes served as committee boat.

3. 1922 - 1941 Between the Wars ; The '38 Hurricane

In 1922, Spencer Borden of Fall River and a New York Yacht Club member moved to Mattapoisett into the Barstow house at the foot of North Street. With a family of active sailors, he took the lead in reactivating small boat racing by the club. His daughter, Joan, served as commodore in 1922. In that year, both Beverly and New Bedford Yacht Clubs were racing mostly H-15's and a new smaller class of Herreshoff H-12's. Beverly already had 16 H-12's. In the period between the wars, one-design

class racing reached a temporary peak at Mattapoisett. The German dinghies, Cape Cod Baby Knockabouts, Herreshoff Fish boats and H-12's all made their appearances.

In 1922, in Mattapoisett , racing revived with a mixed, handicapped fleet including catboats, knockabouts, Herreshoff Fish boats (21 feet overall), and various Fifteens. Racing was conducted from Barstow wharf. By 1925, there was a clear desire for one-design racing in something sufficiently inexpensive to attract a large group of purchasers. A fleet of twelve 14-foot sailing dinghies was ordered from Germany, at a price of $110 each, in time for the 1926 season. Their sails were brightly colored, and each had a shear plank painted to match the sail. They also were " tender" and tended to dump their crews in the harbor quite regularly.

Led by the popularity of the German dinghies, racing revived with a flourish. Mrs. Francis Curtis offered the use of Barnard's wharf at the foot of Ship Street, and a flagpole and floats were acquired. Racing included both the dinghies and a mixed class of 15's for the next two years. In 1927, the Cape Cod Baby Knockabouts appeared as a separate class, and the Herreshoff Fish Boats split off as a class of their own. In 1928, the German dinghies were turned over for junior racing. There were about 10 Baby Knockabouts racing, and 9 Fish boats.

In 1928, Reginald Bird of Boston was elected Commodore, and the club held the first of three annual Mattapoisett Regattas, with fleets invited from all around the Bay. Headquarters for the regatta were at the Bird residence, the Battelle Mansion on Ned's Point Road. Seventy boats in eight classes were entered the first year.The largest class, with 23 entries, was the Herreshoff-12 class though there were as yet none resident in Mattapoisett harbor. By 1930, in the third regatta, only six classes, with 58 entries, were present. The stock market crash of 1929 had its impact. In 1931 there was just not enough enthusiasm to do the extensive planning required for a major regatta.

Significantly, among the 27 Herreshoff-12's in the 1930 regatta was the first one in Mattapoisett, the Minnow of Anne and Edward F. R. Wood Jr. The 12's predated the Fish boats which were an enlarged version of the same design, and had been so popular in Mattapoisett. However the Fish boats had never taken hold at other harbors around the Bay. The 12's, meanwhile, had been racing since 1915 in Marion and served as a training boat for children throughout the Bay.

In 1930, also, most of the Mattapoisett fleet of Fish boats was converted to marconi rig. While the 12's were sailed primarily within the harbor, the powerful and very sturdy Fish boats frequently raced well into Buzzard's Bay - to West Island or Bow Bells. An annual event was an all day race around the Bay.They raced with a crew of 3 or 4, and used a spinnaker.About 40 Fish boats were built but, as mentioned, the only fleet in Buzzard's Bay was in Mattapoisett.

During the 30's, the H-12 class slowly grew while the Fish class and the Knockabouts slowly diminished in popularity. The 12's were less exciting to sail than the their larger cousins, but the opportunity to race with boats from other harbors worked in their favor. About 50 12's have been owned or chartered in Mattapoisett over years. In 1939, a spinnaker was added to the boat and it was no longer just the boat for the youth.

In 1937, J. Lewis Stackpole resumed the lead as Commodore. By this time, he

was one of the grand old men of sailboat racing, having raced for over 40 years, including frequent competition within the New York Yacht Club. His boat at the time was the Ten Metre, Astra, and he had raced in catboats, a Mattapoisett skipjack, 15's, a Sonder, the 21' Restricted Class and others. Commodore and Mrs. Stackpole, for about 10 years gave an annual tea for the Club at their home on the Sands, west of the town docks.

On September 21, 1938, the southern New England coast was hit by the worst hurricane in the memory of anyone living. The loss of life and property in Mattapoisett was severe as the area was so unprepared. The harbor was emptied of boats by the storm, with a great many of them destroyed on the rocks and piers of the shoreline. Heroic tales are told of attempts to save some of the larger yachts. Mr. Stackpole's Astra was wrecked on Goodspeed's Island, Wm. Mason Smith's 53 foot schooner, Clione, ended up, repairable, in the marsh in front of the Town Hall. The storm essentially finished the Fish boats, the Baby Knockabouts and the German dinghies as racing classes in the harbor.

Despite the hurricane and the destruction of many H-12's on that day, the class of H-12's was rebuilt quickly and resumed racing in 1939. In addition, Mr. Stackpole acquired the six-metre, Dovekie, and raced Thomas Whitney's six-metre, Surprise, -an impressive addition to the harbor.

Entry into WW-II ended yacht racing for the duration though the harbor remained active with visiting PT Boats and the sights of convoys gathering in the Bay prior to their dangerous crossing of the Atlantic. The hurricane of Sept 14, 1944 was less severe, and better prepared for than the 1938 storm, but still the damage to beach homes and yachts was significant. Among those lost was Mr. Stackpole's Dovekie. Not to be denied his sailing, Mr. Stackpole acquired another six metre, Ava, which he sailed almost up to his death in 1953. Incidentally, in 1950, he had a near-replica of the 1901 skipjacks, Aawee, built for his grandchildren.

4. 1945 - 1986 The Beetle Cat Era

After the war, the H-12's resumed racing in a small fleet, but Herreshoff was no longer building the boats, and the price had shot up to $1200, or $100 per foot ! A less expensive boat was desired to encourage more sailors. The Beetle cat had been in production since the 20's and now was being built in So. Dartmouth by the Concordia Co. Small fleets were appearing in most harbors of the Bay. By the late 40's Beetle cats were the most numerous one-design in Mattapoisett. There were at least a dozen racing each week. The New Bedford regatta in 1950 drew 60 Beetle cats, including several from Mattapoisett.

Weekly racing for H-12's became subdivided in 1947 as the Weetamoe Yacht Club was formed to race H-12's at Crescent Beach. A separate Beetle cat fleet also raced at Pt. Connett under the Angelica Yacht Club, a charter member of the New England Beetle Cat Boat Association, formed in 1940.

In 1951, the first of another series of annual Mattapoisett Regattas was held to bring together these small fleets and draw in others from surrounding towns. The Mattapoisett Improvement Association sponsored the first regatta, but MYC joined the MIA in planning and conducting subsequent events. The largest class was the Beetle

cats, with other fleets of International 110's, Herreshoff-12's, Bullseyes (marconi rigged, fiberglass H-12's), and sailfish. A handicap class drew a wide variety of cruising and racing yachts. The prize to the winner of the handicap class was designated the Stackpole Memorial Trophy.

In August of 1954, Hurricane Carol again disrupted the order of things in the yachting world. When the storm departed, only two boats remained afloat in the harbor. Beetle cats survived as a fleet because of sheer numbers. The H-12 fleet was further diminished and has not yet rebuilt enough to provide weekly one-design racing. Among the larger boats, major casualties included a 36' yawl and a 41' ketch both belonging to John Burr.

Though relatively few wooden Herreshoff 12's survived, a fiberglass imitation had gone into production at Edey and Duff in Mattapoisett. Called the Doughdish, this boat was demonstrated to be close enough to a match for the original to be treated as a one-design. A new H-Class Association was formed and joint racing began in 1973. The annual Championship rotates among nearby harbors, and has been held in Mattapoisett, under MYC sposorship, every five years since 1979.

In 1957, on the centennial of the incorporation of the Town of Mattapoisett, the annual Mattapoisett Regatta provided another high point in MYC history. The regatta drew 94 boats in seven classes to race in a " strong sou'wester". Commodore Richard Prouty's Heron led the handicap fleet of 9 to the finish, but lost on corrected time to W. Underwood's smaller Whisper. A fleet of 13 International 110's, almost all from other ports, were led by Geo. Whitney's Juniper. The fleet of 11 H-12's was led by two by now familiar Mattapoisett racers, E.J. Ferry in Jancap and Anne Wood Donald in Minnow. Fifty two Beetle cats, in three divisions filled the harbor. Winners in the senior division were from Wild Harbor and Wood's Hole. Mattapoisett's hey-day in Beetles came somewhat later as strong local competition honed their skills. A small group of 5 sailfish rounded out the '57 regatta.

The 1958 regatta was only slightly less successful, with no 110 fleet, but still 71 entries, including 51 Beetle cats. In 1959, MYC was officially incorporated, and the center of operations moved from Barnard's wharf to Burr Bros. Boatyard. A clubhouse there was leased from Arthur MacLean of the Mattapoisett Boat Yard in 1964.

The Mattapoisett Regatta continued as an annual event through 1972. In 1973, the Buzzard's Bay Regatta was started to replace the several local events that had been taking place. Participation in the Mattapoisett regatta, both in classes competing and in number of entries varied widely. The handicap class was as large as 16 boats. A fleet of Shields came from Marion for several years. A fleet of Corinthians, mostly local, grew to at least 11. The fleet of H-12's gradually got smaller, but Beetles numbered 20 or more, year after year. There were, in addition, on occasion, separate classes of Sailfish, Tempests, Bullseyes, Scorpions or Sunfish.

In addition to the annual regatta, special local races were held most years on both July 4 and Labor Day. These events included one or two handicap classes plus whichever one-design classes were racing weekly at that point .

Weekly races were predominantly for Beetle cats in this period with junior racing during the week and open racing on Saturdays. By 1970, a small fleet of 19-ft. Corinthians was included in highly competitive Saturday races. The fleet of Beetles turning out weekly for juniors and for open racing was consistently a dozen boats for

much of this period (1960-1972).

A strong part of what kept the Junior program and the Beetle cat fleet going was the provision of sailing training within MYC. As early as 1947, Anne Wood and other ladies of the club provided sail training sporadically to the youth. Beginning in 1959, and continuing through 1984, a series of instructors, generally college students, were hired for the summer to provide sail-training. A curriculum evolved that included knots, safety procedures, basic elements of sailing, racing and ,of course, fun and games. At least as many as 30 students received 6 hours of class time per week, on and off the water. The club subsidized the program to some extent, but parents paid a fee to cover most of the instructor costs. The training stopped after '84 when too few students were enlisted to provide enough fees to hire the instructors.

Besides active Beetle racing at Mattapoisett, MYC became actively involved in the New England Beetle Cat Boat Association (NEBCBA). That organization evolved a series of championships - men's, women's, juniors (ages 13-18), mighty mites (twelve and under), and "tired fathers". Each of these is a competition among the member yacht clubs (currently 47 member clubs). Clubs take turns hosting individual championships. Mattapoisett hosted the Juniors in 1952, and has hosted eleven others since. Clubs score points for their positions in the five competitions, and those who manage to enter all five vie for the Chairman's trophy at the end of each year. The Chairman's trophy, by the way, was originated when William Potter of Mattapoisett was NEBCBA Chairman in 1962-64. The first Mattapoisett champion in NEBCBA was Dixon Yard in the '63 Tired Father's regatta. (The tired father must handle the tiller while one of his children is his crew). Mattapoisett has won every class at least once, and won the Chairman's cup seven times between 1964 and 1980. For the record, the regatta winners from MYC were:

Mitey Mites - Tom Miller '65

Juniors - Charles Pieper '64, Kathy Pieper '67, Paul Downey '80

Women's - Susan McGowan '66, '70' 71', '75

Men's - James Barnes '72

Tired Father's - Dixon Yard '63, '66, David Jenney '73, '74, '75, '76, 80, '81, '82

Prior to the Buzzard's Bay Regatta, Beetle fleets from Mattapoisett participated in the Beverly and New Bedford regattas. Typically, "Blue Boy" would tow a group of Beetles, like ducklings behind their mother to the regatta harbor. During the early years of the BBR, Mattapoisett showed up well in the Beetle cat class there too. But in the mid 80's BBR dropped Beetles and H-12's from the competition as less showed up and other fleets expanded.

From 1960 to 1975, Yacht clubs around Buzzard's Bay held team races in Beetle cats for, of course, the Beetle Bowl. Mattapoisett entered and won in 1963, and then repeated that accomplishment in seven of the next twelve years. Regular, highly competitive local racing had sharpened the skills of more than a generation of sailors who made a sizeable mark on the history of this class. As part of MYC's 100th year, the Beetle class championships will be held in Mattapoisett in August, 2001.

About the time the BBR replaced the annual Mattapoisett regatta in 1973, the nature of the sailing fleet in Mattapoisett began an accelerated shift toward more cruising boats and less small one-design types. The wider range of choices with sporty Lasers, Hobiecats, 420's and sailboards just further divided the sailers into smaller

groups. In 1975, the BBR had 28 Beetles, and MYC had 6 to 10 Beetles racing. By 1980, while BBR still had 24 Beetles and only 3 H-12's, MYC had only 3 Beetles racing weekly.
In 1985, BBR was down to 12 Beetles , and Mattapoisett had gone to a mixed small boat class, with handicaps, in order to turn out a fleet of about five boats. Weekly small-boat racing stopped at MYC in 1981.

For next five years, only special races were held on July 4 and Labor Day while the club searched for the formula to bring back some of the earlier buzz. The harbor was full of more boats than ever, but most of them were intended for cruising, not specifically for racing. In addition, the youth of the day did not look on competition as " in".

5. 1987 - 2001 Revival - Cruising Yachts also Enjoys a Good Race

In 1986, there was no racing in Mattapoisett, yet the harbor was full of boats. A rough count in late August showed 350 boats on moorings in the inner harbor, and about 240 of these were sail. Meanwhile, membership in MYC totalled 26. Clearly, the interest in yachting was here, and the great location for yachting always had been. Either the club, MYC, was a secret, or it was offering the wrong things. At the annual meeting at Commodore Anne Donald's house, in August, it was decided to try something different. Dues were lowered to $25, and an invitation to membership was composed and delivered in baggies to the cockpits of 240 of the moored boats.

By the Jan. '87 Board meeting, 49 responses had come in. Interest was shown in cruising, social activities and handicap racing. A spring kickoff dinner was attended by 53 people, including a Standard Times reporter. The reporter printed the Club's schedule for '87 and told the story of baggies-in-boats. Great publicity.

Wednesday evening handicap races were started every other week, and the racing fleet grew to 10 that summer. Membership grew to 100 by fall. That year and the next, a small capital fund was raised to dress up the clubhouse at the Boat Yard, adding a carpet and new furniture. For the 1989 season, Michael Dahill was elected Commodore, and the reins passed from small-boat sailors to those with "yachts".

The Wednesday evening races quickly became weekly. By 1992 there were an average of 16 boats on the line each week, and the following year they were divided into two divisions based on PHRF ratings. In 1989 another racing format was added with a spring " Round-the-Bay" pursuit race. There had been a fall race like this out of Wood's Hole, but the spring race provided a good tune-up for the season. This has remained an annual event, and usually draws 30-40 boats from Mattapoisett and neighboring towns.

For small boats, an annual race using the Portsmouth numbering system had been tried off and on since 1983 to provide some competition where the numbers were too few in any one-design. About 1994, this was made an official annual event by Race Committee Chairman Harvey Pentleton. By the way, the MYC 1970 yearbook shows Harvey to be Race Committee Chair, and in 2001 he still is ! Talk about faithful, valued service. Also about 1994, a pursuit race for smaller (Class B) handicap boats was instituted, and it is still held each summer.

In 1995, as a trial, the Wed. night Race Committee set a course and signalled a

start for Class C, comprised of those small boats on the Portsmouth handicap system. Up to 8 boats of several designs showed up, and since that year, the C Class has been included each Wednesday. The total of boats racing in all classes now averaged almost 30 - quite a sight east of Ned's Point at 6 P.M. each week.

There's was one more hurricane to report - hurricane Bob on Aug. 19, 1991. In some respects it was a non-event even though its severity approached that of '38 and of Carol in '54. Beach homes were washed away, but the harbor had been 80 % emptied of boats by the time Bob arrived. With better warning, better equipment and lots of practice as storms went by each year, Mattapoisett Boat Yard, Brownell Systems, using the town ramp, and private owners put hundreds of boats out of harm's way in the 36 hours before Bob peaked at about noon that day. The MYC dinner that year was held at the Clubhouse six days after the storm. About 40 boats had stayed on moorings through the storm. There were a number washed shore, and a few destroyed, but many of those pulled early were returned to the water for the balance of the season.

A milestone was reached in 1992. At the annual meeting, held at the Beverly Yacht Club clubhouse, Anne Wood Donald was recognized for her 50 years of service to the MYC. Not only had she, in her H-12, Minnow, been an active and excellent racer. She was behind the sail training program that ran for 25 years. She served as Commodore for a total of five years, and as Secretary, generally holding the club's organization and records together, for far more years than that. If J. Lewis Stackpole was the grand old man of MYC for its first 45 years, Anne was the club's mother for the next 45 years. She will not be forgotten. Each year, a trophy in her name (in the shape of an H-12 transom) is given to the club's outstanding contributer.

6. Postlude

So now a new century begins. If there is a lesson or theme in the first 100 years, it seems to be that it's people with energy and ideas that create the substance of the MYC. In 2001, those ingredients seem to be present again. The Lord gave us a great place for yachting of all sorts. Community activity makes it all the more special. A great many people, far more than have been mentioned in this brief, have contributed to creating the memories over the past 100 years. This year's celebration is in thanks to them.

Much of the material for this summary must be credited to Edward F. R. Wood Jr. and his two books, " Sailing Days at Mattapoisett",1961, and " Old Mattapoisett, a Summer Portrait",1995.

Comments, corrections and necessary additions are invited.

David S. Jenney, Scribe.

Commodores of the Mattapoisett Yacht Club

1900-1902	Theophilus Parsons
1903-1916	Unknown to date
1917-1921	Inactive
1922	Joan Borden
1923-1924	Ames Borden
1926-1927	Clayton McMichel
1928-1930	Reginald Bird
1931-1933	J. Lewis Stackpole
1934-1935	W. Mason Smith
1936	Alpheus S. Hardy
1937-1946	J. Lewis Stackpole
1947-1952	W. Mason Smith
1953-1954	Arthur Rotch
1955-1957	Richard Prouty
1958-1959	W. Furness Thompson
1960-1962	William H. Potter
1963-1964	Richard Blasdale Sr.
1965-1966	Henderson Inches
1967	R. Marcel Roy
1968-1969	Charles Pieper
1970	George Fisher
1971-1972	Peter Briggs
1973-1974	Philip McCarthy
1975	Anne Donald
1976-1977	Harvey Pentleton
1978	Anne Donald
1979-1981	David Jenney
1982-1983	Robert McGowan
1984	Keith Hiller
1985-1987	Anne Donald
1988	David Jenney
1989-1990	Michael Dahill
1991-1992	Henry (Chet) Young
1993-1994	John (Andy) Anderson
1995-1996	Edward Martens
1997-1998	William Twiss
1999-2000	Judith Jackson
2001	Francis Grenon