

The Narrasketuck Story

Like many other good things, the Narrasketuck Yacht Club is the result of a dissatisfaction — the dissatisfaction of a group of vigorous young Amityville sailors who wanted something better for themselves — namely, more opportunities for racing than were then, in the early '30's, available to them. This desire translated itself into a plan for action one day in 1932 when, at an informal get-together in Bill Hudson's garage, the idea of a new sailing club was first seriously discussed. The purpose of the club, as later written into the Certificate of Incorporation, would be "to encourage its members in becoming proficient in the personal management, control and handling of their yachts, and to provide sociability and recreation among its members".

That initial discussion, and the many which followed over the ensuing months, led to the first official meeting of the yet-unnamed yacht club on August 17th, 1933. Held in Gorty Baldwin's boat house at 9:15 P.M., there were fifteen enthusiastic members-to-be in attendance. The first recorded item of business was the submission of a list of nominees for office by the Club's first Nominating Committee. The slate — Arthur K. Robbins for Commodore, C. Gorton Baldwin for Vice Commodore, Mervin O. Hudson, Jr., for Rear Commodore and Horace C. Ruggles for Secretary-Treasurer, was unanimously elected and the young club was formally launched. The question of where to meet was solved by the Vice Commodore, who offered his boat house as a club house. Of course, no self-respecting organization could be without a Constitution and By-laws, so a committee was duly appointed to prepare a draft of these. Overshadowing these minor parliamentary matters, however, was the all-important question of what to call the new club. The name "Hippocampus" (in Greek mythology, a fabulous sea monster with the head and forequarters of a horse and the face of a dolphin) was suggested by one of the more erudite of the group. This was "politely" rejected by his fellows. Prudently leaving the delicate matter of a name until the next meeting, the new officers collected twenty-five cents from each member, and adjourned the meeting at 10 P.M. So, in 45 short minutes, were the actions taken which marked our humble beginnings. How fortunate we are not to be members of the HYC!

At the second meeting of the Club, the name Narrasketuck, taken from one of the streams which flow through Amityville into the Bay, was submitted and accepted. A burgee was adopted, the first of three designs, so that it might be available for use on the Club's first planned event, a cruise to Bellport. It had a red border surrounding a pine tree. A second design had a red arrow through the letter N, but this was soon replaced by the present configuration, displaying a red Indian head on a white field with three blue stars in the corners. Apparently no one stayed home from the Bellport cruise, for the old minutes show that small boats were scheduled to leave early, with accommodations to be provided for all. We find that during the second meeting another twenty-five cents was collected from each member present, with a notation that "two

were already in arrears. ("Twas ever thus! saith the Treasurer.) A "Fleet Cook" was appointed, but this office seems to have been lost through the years (officially, that is).

In the Fall of 1933, at the first Annual Meeting, dues were officially set at \$2.50 a year, with members encouraged to pay in advance. This was not entirely successful, as we find check marks in the old minutes indicating that the twenty-five cent collections were made at each meeting far into 1934. The meetings continued to be held in Baldwin's boat house which, by this time, had been provided with a stove and lights — with electricity coming from a neighbor's house for \$1.00 per month. At this writing, this boat house still stands adjacent to the boat yard on Carman Creek at Merrick Road.

In 1934, the Constitution was amended to provide for a Rear Commodore. The idea of a Club yearbook was first broached in 1935, and four have subsequently been published (1936, 1950, 1956 and 1963). The Junior program was also originated in 1935. A year later, the limited facilities of the volunteered club house brought the members to consider plans for more permanent facilities. Island One, in the Amityville River, was investigated and later purchased for the building of a future club house.

The Club continued to grow, and by 1938 had 84 regular members and \$500.00 in the bank. The acquisition of the island still did not provide a meeting place, however, and meetings continued to be held in various homes and boat houses. Louden's Hotel was once considered for use as a temporary club house, as well as the Gilbert Rod and Gun Club. Neither made the grade, however, the Gun Club flunking out because no (ugh) women were allowed on Saturdays and Sundays.

In 1938, a program was started to get a building constructed on the island. A twenty-foot by thirty-foot structure was proposed at an estimated cost of \$700.00, including labor. With the limited Club budget, however, nothing definite was done, and the program was temporarily shelved. All things come to him who waits, goes the saying, and at a meeting in the spring of 1939, Ed Macy reported that his grandfather's house {located on the ocean at High Hill Beach} was going to have to be moved or destroyed because of the Jones Beach Peninsula road extension program. He would donate the house to the Club if the Club would move it. Knowing a good thing when they saw it, our astute and energetic predecessors accepted the offer, and proceeded to dismantle the structure and carry it, by boat, across the Bay to the island for reassembly.

By the end of 1939, the flooring was in and the framing complete. Progress was a little slow, but with the acquisition of various building materials from the World's Fair, and a member assessment to cover finishing the house, it was painted and a stove installed toward the end of 1941. This, however, did not end the problems — bulk heading was needed and the procedure for getting members to and from the club house proved to be troublesome. Since there was no bridge, all transportation was by means of the "shore boats" which, from all reports, were invariably on the wrong side of the creek.

The war years brought problems to the Club as it did elsewhere. An entry in the old minutes, under "Communications", states that there were "none, other than War Department Notices". Membership declined, no meetings were held in January, February or March of 1943 because of gas rationing, at least one other meeting was cancelled because of a blackout, and the April meeting was adjourned with the wistful notation "to coffee and busses - thanks".

After the war, with men returning from service, activity in the Club increased, and many joined as new members. The bulk heading around the island was sinking, and so, ignominiously, was the club house (they called it "settling"). This, coupled with the transportation dilemma to and from the island, brought a vote to sell it, including the house. In 1947, the transaction was completed, with the Club netting \$1,900.00 from the sale. This provided a nice balance in the bank — but again, no club facilities. Association with Unqua was once again discussed and turned down, mainly because the members feared the loss of the Narrasketuck identity. All possible locations in the village were investigated, but no action was taken to acquire property. Apparently, available waterfront property was as scarce then as it is now. Dues were raised to \$10.00 per year and the regular meetings were held at Jerry's (a restaurant on Sunrise Highway in Massapequa — since torn down to make way for White's), the Amityville Club and various homes.

In 1955, the Club again sought land sites — and this time, we might say "with vigor". Once more, available village waterfront properties were reviewed. The current site was chosen and a deposit put down, contingent upon satisfactory financing by the Club. The price of the land was approximately \$9,000. Financing through the usual sources proved to be difficult, as the banks and other lending institutions approached looked askance at impecunious yacht clubs wanting to borrow money from them.

The final solution was the establishment of a Holding Corporation, set up by a group of members headed by Jack Delves. Some of these men are still Club members. Four hundred shares of Holding Corporation stock were issued at \$25.00 each, and each person joining the Club during this period was requested to purchase at least one share of this stock. The \$25.00, plus the regular \$10.00 initiation fee, became such a convenient number it was later adopted as a new initiation fee and kept at the \$35.00 figure until 1962. All of the stock was eventually sold. The Club, in turn, pays the Holding Corporation \$500.00 a year, which will retire the entire indebtedness for the land in 1976. The Holding Corporation, incidentally, is an organization completely separate from the Club itself.

Then began a period of intense activity, and we who may have come after owe a great deal to the members who gave to the Club so much of their time and effort.

With the land financing provided, the first task was to dredge, piling the mud and silt on the land to provide a higher elevation and eventual settlement for a firm base. The next job was to build docks, one parallel to the creek and two perpendicular to the

first. This was accomplished during the weekends over the late Fall and early Winter months of 1956, using the rigs of Jack Ronback and Gene Wanser and manpower from the Club ranks.

The operation started with dropping the piles and planking from the trucks at the edge of the road. This necessitated carrying them to the creek across the land that had recently been filled with dredged material, with three or four men to a pile. It is told that when one of these men walked onto a particularly soft spot he would sink down, shifting the load he was carrying to the others. This increased load was more than the filled land could tolerate, so that rather quickly all hands were sinking into the ground — still supporting the pile. However, we didn't lose a man! Patience, more patience, more manpower, and a lot of hard work eventually got the job finished.

The planning of the club house was started about this time. A neighbor of John Berdolt's donated his services to draw the plans. As before, the problem of financing again arose. As this dilemma grew more acute, action was made possible by a member who graciously gave a private ten-year mortgage to the Club for the club house. A building permit was then issued by the Village in January of 1957, and construction was started immediately, with most of the work again being done by the members.

The club house was opened on May 25th, 1957, after the presentation of silver trowels to those members who worked on the foundation, and a great day that was, you may be sure! Final completion of the house and its facilities was not accomplished until 1958, with the installation of flooring and numerous donations of equipment by members, such as the chandeliers, water heater, stove, cabinets and counters.

The last necessary item of construction was the bulk heading. Once again, the generosity of the membership made it possible to proceed with the plans, with ten or eleven individuals providing money for eleven-year notes totaling \$6,000. The flag pole and paving of the lot followed, and the Club was in business "for real".

And now — "To the boats, men!"

Narrasketuck sailors over the years have sailed many different types and sizes of boats, most of which have been well adapted to our shoal-water conditions. But, to paraphrase another old saying, "Boats may come and boats may go, but the W-Cat goes on forever!" Two of these are still in competition, one of which is Johnny Hearn's #29, "Yes Pop", the only boat to be owned and sailed by a single owner over the thirty-year club history. Johnny, as one of our founders, had "Yes Pop" built in Amityville in 1921, and (with time out for a little — er — fiberglassing) has been actively racing her ever since. Being sailors, all of us are proud, to see fine boats like this preserved and raced.

The W-Cats, however, are just one of a number of cat boat types built and sailed in these waters, some others being the X-Cats and V-Cats. Interestingly enough, these were not necessarily one-design boats; rather, the builder had considerable leeway in

the dimensions. Overall length for the W-Cats, for example, was sixteen to twenty-four feet, thirteen to fifteen for the X-Cats, and twenty-five to twenty-six for the V-Cats. These boats, like the Narrasketuck, have always performed well in our waters, excelling in medium to heavy winds. The weight of the earlier cotton sails used in these boats was as high as eight to ten ounces, a circumstance leading one W-Cat skipper to refer to it as a "rug"!

The Mallard was the first one-design boat raced as a single class in the newly-founded club, and the fleet grew to approximately a dozen boats before time began to take its toll of the class. These were twenty-one foot Marconi-rigged sloops having a small cabin. The records show that one of the early owners, wanting a combination overnigher and racer (and who had been also doing quite well racing) installed some of the more — uh — necessary conveniences, adding considerable weight to the boat. His winning days abruptly ceased, and re-conversion to racing configuration, true to our best traditions, took place without further ado.

In 1934, our first Narrasketuck Class boat was built and launched, followed by some 150-odd others by January 1, 1963. These boats were first raced as a class in 1936, and have been ever since. Some of the other earlier boats sailed in Club events, but which have all but disappeared from the Bay, are the R-Class sloops (twenty-six feet overall), the AA Cats (twenty-eight feet overall) and the JA Sloops (eighteen feet overall).

The Snipe was the next one-design boat to race as a Club class. This is the largest one-design class in the world today, although no longer very numerous on Great South Bay. Unlike the other class boats which have been brought in the Club by their owners, one by one, until a sufficient number of boats for a class were active, the Snipe owners joined en masse in 1940. This class raced actively until 1956.

The next one-design class in the Club was the Seaford Skiff. This 14-foot boat is by far the oldest and most unique one sailing in these waters. From 1870 on, these Skiffs were used widely by residents and visitors alike in the Great South Bay's marsh areas, which were famous for wildlife. The boats could be sailed, rowed or poled, and were ideal for many purposes. The records also indicate there was racing among the bay men owning these boats. With the increase in population in the area bringing man-made developments, the natural preserves suffered, and few skiffs seem to have been built between the years 1890 and 1944. In the latter year, Paul Ketcham found a Skiff still being sailed in Seaford which had been built in 1880. He measured this boat and, from its lines built No. 1 of the current series shortly thereafter. The class was organized in 1949 and has been active ever since. With nine new boats built over the winter of 1962-63, its popularity over the years to come seems assured.

In 1949, the Lightning Class became active in the Club, followed by the Thistles in 1952. Blue Jays were first mentioned in Club records in 1954 and, by 1958, were racing in their own class. Next appeared the Penguins, followed by the Comet Class in 1962,

along with the Jet 14's and the new Rhodes 19's. The growth of the Club is evidenced by the fact that the 1962 boat roster showed approximately 150 sailboats and 40 power boats, with an average of well over one sailboat per member. Other one-design boats racing in the handicap class which have been, or still are, in the Club, are the Sneakbox, National One-Design, Sea Gull, Cape Cod, Hampton, Beverly, Mobjack, Baby 'Tuck, Marauder, Bullseye, Windmill, Cottontail, O'Day Day Sailer, Cougar, Raven, Sailfish, Duet, Super Sailfish, Wood Pussy, Celebrity, Checkmate, Sunfish, Flying Dutchman and, undoubtedly, several others which research has failed to disclose.

Of course, our boats have only been a means to an end (some say the end of our family life!) — that end being as much racing in a season as our wives, our fortunes, and our sacred consciences would permit!

The indomitable spirit of our early racing skippers is exemplified by the success of the first Club Series, held in 1933, in spite of the multiple handicaps of a limited number of boats, lack of a cannon for starting signals, and the use of birch brushes for course markers and a gasoline can for the finish line. The earlier races were started both off Nassau Shores (at the location of the present Beach Club) and, more often, off the Village dock at the foot of Richmond Avenue. The courses varied from three legs to five legs, and included at least one windward-leeward course.

Then, as now, Frostbite racing occupied a firm place in the Club's racing program. At one time, the Regatta Committee even ran a mid-winter series referred to as the "Tween Series". An entry in the February, 1937, minutes states, however, that there was "a lagging and small attendance" for these races. Whether this was attributable to ice in the Bay or ice in the glasses, research failed to show.

It is interesting to find also that, in some of the early races, winning points were awarded to the skippers rather than to the boats, with skippers trading boats for each subsequent race.

The low point of Narrasketuck's racing history was undoubtedly reached in 1944, when, faced with a very small active membership, the Club invited all local sailors, whether members or not, to take part in that season's Summer Series. In addition, in those earlier years of the Club, there appeared to be more emphasis placed upon the Invitation Regattas, in comparison to Club races, than there is nowadays. As late as 1950, for example, there were only six Club races during the Summer Series.

There has been a steady expansion in the scope of the racing programs offered to the members since that time, however, (with all credit going to the hard working Regatta Committees of those years) to the point where the 1962 schedule included no fewer than twenty-nine separate Club races, exclusive of the Invitations and Frostbites.

Since the opening of the present Club House, the regular Club races and the Invitation meets have been started in the cove off the Club property. Traffic permitting,

the Frostbite races have been started off the Club docks and have generally finished there. This latter feature has heightened immeasurably the enjoyment of the Frostbite program, providing as it does the opportunity for lots of good fellowship at the Club House between races.

So, from small and make-shift beginnings, the Club has come to provide its members with the optimum in a well-rounded racing program.

Lest we forget, the Cruising Class has always been with us, and has increased in numbers in recent years. Special events have begun to be scheduled for the cruising types — in 1962 a Class race, followed later in the season by an overnight cruise to Timber Point — and one of the Club's objectives is to improve the activities made available to this Class.

Social functions have never been the tail wagging the dog in this Club, but have nevertheless always formed a most enjoyable part of its annual programs. Aside from the opening day parties and the winter time awards events, the high points of the Club's social activities have been the various excursions across the Bay to Gilgo, Cedar and other beaches for clam-bakes and beach parties. Hemlock Heading has been a favored spot for these events in recent years. In the early days, we find that the Nassau Shores Country Club (since converted to a restaurant) seems to have been a choice location for dancing parties to the strains of one Bob Richard's Orchestra. (Remember?)

Such is the story of Narrasketuck. We believe that the history of our Club — of which any chronicle such as this can be but a pale and imperfect reflection — will be of lasting encouragement to all of our members, who are united in, and by, the sport of sailing. The labors, sacrifices and successes of our founders and others over the past thirty years are obvious. With such fine traditions of fellowship and common effort to inspire us, the years ahead cannot fail to be bright for Narrasketuck.

And now as we celebrate our 75th year in 2008, it is important to note the changes made during the past thirty-five years since the above was first written. Women were beginning to be recognized as competitive sailors and a welcome addition to the social activities. Widows of deceased Regular and Senior members were finally allowed to apply as Associate Members in 1966. One of the most important changes, as far as the distaff side is concerned, was the 1975 change that eliminated Associate Membership and allowed the women to be eligible for full membership. A direct benefit of that change has been the election of four lady Commodores. Finally, in 1990, married couples were allowed to share Joint Membership. Over the years many wives have shared committee work, but now the women could head the committee and bask in the praise of a job well done (a position formerly taken by the male committee heads who allowed their wives to perform most of the duties). As our members grew older, the Board of Trustees established a new category of Senior Membership. Those voted to this level had to be 60 years old and have maintained continuous membership for 20 years.

We have seen new classes of sailboats become established. Two fleets of El Toros were built and first raced in the 1965 Frostbite Series. The first Bullshot Regatta was held in 1972 with 23 El Toros from 4 states competing. This eight foot boat with a single sail became the favorite boat for the new Winter Series that is sailed January, February, and March on the river in front of the clubhouse.

The US Mariner Class Association was founded in 1966 and has maintained our founding fathers objectives. It became a popular sailboat because it could be raced on Sundays and could be used as a family daysailer on Saturdays. This O'Day designed 19 foot boat carries a mainsail and a jib and is usually manned by two or three sailors. It has a small cabin, and a small motor can be attached to the transom to be used when day sailing. We hosted the first Mariner Class Regatta in 1967 and have hosted the Mariner National Championship 10 times with the largest Nationals attendance of 39 boats taking place in 1979.

Our sailing instruction program added a ladies training program in 1972 which became the Sailing Narrasketuck Adult Program (SNAP) in 1982. The Junior Sailing Program acquired Blue Jays in 1987 and has recently added 420s. While there are other local sailing programs for young people, Narrasketuck has retained the distinction of being the only program that teaches racing tactics.

The property ownership was finally transferred from the Holding Company, which had financed the building of the clubhouse, to the membership in 1966. Changes to the clubhouse, necessitated by a fire in 1964, were a new kitchen layout, the refurbishing of the bathrooms, the installation of wood paneling in the main room, and a roof with an upstairs porch over the front patio. Since then a second hoist was installed, the boat parking lots were blacktopped, a heating system was installed to allow winter meetings and social events, two finger piers were built, a floating dock replaced the middle finger pier, Sunfish and El Toro racks have been built, and the bulkheads are being resurfaced with recycled plastic panels. We enlarged our property by acquiring the lot to the north of us and built a garage to house the patrol boat and various racing paraphernalia. Race Committee duties are shared by each Class with the Steiger Craft serving as Committee Boat and a Whaler as a Patrol and Rescue boat. Portraits of our Past Commodores were hung on the clubhouse walls in 1978.

Our social activities continue on opening day and the winter time programs. The first Clambake that moved to the clubhouse in 1964 featured a crews' race and a skipper's race. \$1 bought all the beer, soda, and clams that you could eat. Hamburgers, hot dogs, sauerkraut, and corn were added in 1972. Various games for the young and the old continue to be highlights of the day. The first Commodores' Bash was held in 1985 and has become a favorite celebration as each new Commodore is installed. The dinner held on the Saturday evening of our Invitation Regatta is another social activity enjoyed by both home and visiting skippers, crews, and families. While the monthly LOG

continues to keep our members informed of all events, we now have a website, www.NYCsail.com that tells the world what we are all about.

Thus we continue and embellish upon the fine traditions established by our founders and succeeding members. May our years ahead continue to be bright, and may our sails be full of wind.

Compiled and submitted to the website in 2008.