

History Highlights of the Lake Champlain Yacht Club, Inc. 1887-2024

Highlights from a history of the Lake Champlain Yacht Club originally compiled by Past Commodore Colonel John A. Williams; with contributions by Past Commodores Dale Hyerstay and Bern Collins; revised in 2011 and updated through 2024 by Bern Collins, LCYC Historian.

The Lake Champlain Yacht Club, organized on May 16, 1887, grew out of the Sharpie Yacht Club of Burlington, which had been organized in 1886, “to encourage the introduction and development of yachting on Lake Champlain.” W.H.H. Murray introduced the Sharpie type yacht and was one of the Club’s original members. The Club incorporated on November 16, 1892.

Unique in the Club’s history is the Ladies Cup, presented to the Regatta Committee in 1888, as “a perpetual challenge trophy for the ships of the Lake Champlain Yacht Club fleet.” On the front of this sterling silver punch bowl, known as one of the oldest challenge cups in New England, is a hand-engraved inscription: Presented by the Ladies Yacht Club – Burlington, Vermont.

The first clubhouse, built in 1887 for about \$5,000, located at the foot of College Street, Burlington, burned on November 15, 1901. The second clubhouse, completed June 15, 1903, for about \$4,000, was gutted by fire on July 1, 1911. It was repaired temporarily for the season, in time for the August 1911 regatta, and eventually replaced by a third structure in 1913, in the same location for about \$10,000. This clubhouse remained in use until 1936, and was admired for its “inviting porches and spacious interiors.” Members enjoyed clambakes, smokers, dances, and regattas that brightened Vermont’s summers for many seasons. After the supporting crib was declared “unsafe” and “too expensive to fix,” members decided to look for another more permanent location. The deteriorating clubhouse was sold to a ferry company and restored for use as a ferry station.

In 1911, Milo C. Reynolds was elected secretary, and in 1916, treasurer; he held these offices until 1961. He kept meticulous records and in a 1950 newspaper interview recalled the early days “when 150 to 200 visiting boats would come for the season, attracted by the Club. They came from Albany, Long Island, New York City, New Jersey points and other distant places. All visiting yachtsmen received full privileges of the Club.” In its early days, its governing organization included a commodore, vice commodore, rear commodore, secretary, treasurer, president, first and second vice presidents, an executive committee of thirty members, a regatta committee of six, two house committees of six and seven and a membership committee of ten. The Club provided a dock master and restaurant service under a steward. The peak membership was 334 in 1922, with a low point of 142 in 1933. In 1917-1918, thirty-three club members served in World War I.

Eight motorboat races and three sailboat races were scheduled for the regatta in August 1912. During the peak years of membership, however, it was reported that “Motor Boats Have Largely Supplanted Sailing Yachts on the Lake,” with the 1928 [Ladies Cup] Annual Regatta Programme listing only power boats competing in all twelve races. This pattern of mixed regatta events was maintained until the close of the Club’s first half century when the power boat, Eva May, was the last winner of the Ladies Cup in 1938.

After the clubhouse at the foot of College Street was abandoned in 1936, members voted to move the Club to a new location on leased land, renovate and enlarge a cottage near the Allenwood Inn owned by E.P. Woodbury in Shelburne Bay, across from the Shelburne Shipyard. The Club celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1937, with a moonlight cruise on the Ticonderoga, with fireworks, and dancing. This would be

LCYC's last celebration for many years as the members began to encounter difficulties beyond their control. Several members left in 1936 to form the Malletts Bay Boat Club in Colchester. Local lore about the reason for their departure—that the “highfalutin’ social atmosphere” at LCYC was the cause—has been disputed by the Chittenden County Historical Society, which states that a more likely reason was the exposed mooring field at the new location in Shelburne Bay. During the waning years of the Great Depression, the Board of Governors was unable to raise the funds to provide adequate mooring protection or reach a financial agreement with Woodbury. On June 25, 1940, it was decided the organization would be continued without a clubhouse and the secretary was instructed to send membership cards to all members who had paid dues in 1939.

In April 1941, Commodore George Hagar (who remained as a caretaker commodore until 1948) appointed a committee to dispose of all the furniture and other personal property belonging to the Club. The only remaining asset was the sterling silver Ladies Cup. There were no governing board meetings from October 1941 to August 1947; however, the incorporation of the Club was maintained by Milo Reynolds, who paid the State of Vermont \$94.33 from his own funds (later reimbursed through contributions, averaging three dollars, from twenty-eight members). It was because of Milo that the Lake Champlain Yacht Club remained in good legal standing. When he reported that the Legislature had passed a law in 1947 no longer requiring non-profits to pay a corporate tax, he stated his hope that one day the Club would get a new start with its old corporate name under which to operate.

At its August 26, 1947 meeting, held in Milo's Church Street office, members decided to decline an offer to reestablish LCYC at the Allenwood Inn property on Shelburne Bay; among other obstacles, the owner insisted that it be known as the “Allenwood Yacht Club.” No further meetings were held until February 1955, although the 1939 membership remained intact until 1961 due to the abatement of dues.

When the Board of Governors met again in February 1955, for the “Annual Meeting” at Milo's office, there was a renewed interest in boating activities. Later that year the Burlington-Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce sponsored the first annual Marina Center Regatta, or Waterama, which included the resumption of the Ladies Cup Race, courtesy of the Lake Champlain Yacht Club. Milo appeared on WCAX-TV to present the Cup to the winning skipper, Paul Raine, who was a LCYC member, a LCYC past commodore (1923), and a charter member of MBBC. On February 4, 1958, the Board resolved to investigate the “design, location and cost of a suitable structure” to reactivate the Lake Champlain Yacht Club.

1962 marks the beginning of LCYC's “modern era” when John and Ann Dinse moved from Colchester to Shelburne. After lengthy discussions and investigation of various properties in the months prior to their move, John and two other men, Bill Foster and Oscar Drumheller, led a small group in the purchase of the Club's present property on Shelburne Bay for \$20,000. They were able to secure a bank loan for half, but the remaining funds had to be raised from the individuals who were committed to reactivation. When it became apparent that these loans could not be repaid within the expected period, a Life Membership category was established in 1965 for those who agreed to forego payment. Of the five who opted for life membership, four never became active users of the Club, but they became benefactors at a crucial time for the Club.

John Dinse, elected LCYC commodore on February 7, 1961, has the distinction of having been Master of the Malletts Bay Boat Club prior to his move to Shelburne, where he, Ann, and the other families who reactivated the Club in the early 1960s set a tone that has endured: LCYC is a “working club,” whose members are willing to volunteer throughout the season for the many projects and chores required of a member-run club. All members are expected to attend Spring Workday to prepare the Club for the

boating season and Fall Workday to button it up for the winter. The workday morning's chores are followed with a traditional chili lunch.

To build a firm financial foundation, the Club's first task was to increase the membership with some activities that would attract new members. Racing, swimming and junior sailing programs were started with Frank Davis, a former Vermont State Treasurer, serving as one of the first sailing instructors. LCYC resumed sponsorship of the famed Ladies Cup Regatta in August 1962, with reciprocal memberships offered to Malletts Bay Boat Club skippers, who could then qualify to win the Ladies Cup as LCYC members (this category was later dropped). New by-laws were drafted; floating docks were built at the Shelburne Shipyard by Club members; a "dock boy" was hired at a salary of \$300 for the season; and a boat to be used as a launch was donated by two businessmen. On November 7, 1962, the Army Corps of Engineers approved the special anchorage. A new clubhouse was completed in August 1963, built for about \$15,000 by Warren Austin III, the grandson of United Nations Ambassador Austin and son of Warren R. Austin, Jr. (commodore 1933-35).

In 1971, the Club purchased a new launch, a black Del Quay doubleender, made in England, with a one-cylinder Sabb diesel engine with reversible pitch propeller. It was named Milo C. Reynolds in honor of the man who, as secretary and treasurer, kept the LCYC in "good legal standing" during its dormant years. Affectionately known as The Milo, its engine was replaced in 1982, and again in 2020. A second launch was purchased in 1983, a 9 passenger launch named the Nautilus, after four-time winner of the Ladies Cup 1889-1892. During the 2015-16 winter, eighteen LCYC volunteers worked to rebuild and repower the Nautilus with an ELCO electric motor. At its August 2019 meeting, the Board approved naming the sister boat to the Nautilus, purchased in November 2018 as a back-up launch, the "Bern," in honor of Bernadine Collins, LCYC's first woman commodore (1988-89). At its May 2020 meeting the Board modified Bern to "Bern C," to avoid any confusion with the slogan, Feeling The Bern, used by Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders when he twice ran for president. Bern Collins was also the first woman awarded LCYC's Yachtsman of the Year trophy in 1985.

Although there is no longer a swimming program, the junior sailing program has continued with just a small blip in 1984, when the Board of Governors eliminated it after the incoming committee chairman stated that there was a "lack of interest." A member prevailed upon them to reconsider and agreed to find a sailing instructor and lead the program which the Board agreed to for the 1984 season. Since then it has flourished from an initial eight-week program on three levels to the current two-week sessions over an eight-week period. Beginners are introduced to the Optimist Sailing Dinghy and the more advanced sail Flying Juniors. It is open to members and non-members. The junior sailors participate in inter-club regattas with Malletts Bay Boat Club and Northern Lake George Yacht Club, and compete as well in regattas throughout the Northeast. Three perpetual Junior Sailing trophies were established in 2004. In July 2018, a new Zodiac 15-foot RIB was purchased to replace the older 2002 RIB, primarily to support the junior sailing program. Donations from Club members funded the purchase of two Optis, which were dedicated at the Ladies Cup Regatta in August 2010 to the memory of Don and Mary Rathbone, longtime members who supported youth sports activities in Chittenden County. The Landau Junior Sailing Scholarship was established in 2011, with funds donated by Steve Landau's family in his memory.

Beginning in 1978, there have been successive changes and improvements to the property. By the spring of 1979, the swimming beach had been restored; the shore side bank terraced; the parking lot and Butler Building relocated; power lines put underground; main dock sections added; and a concrete launch ramp for small boats and a dinghy rack had been built. In 1983, the clubhouse was extensively renovated with a roof extension added to the east and an addition to the south deck; concrete mooring blocks were installed in 1984. In 1993 and 1994, electrical service to the main dock was redone and upgraded, a

water line added to the docks, along with green and red lights on the north and south ends of the outer dock to mark the fairway. The Club voted to tap into the town water line, and at the end of 1994, zebra mussels were found for the first time on a few docks; these had multiplied and were found on almost all of the docks by the end of 1995. The entire dock electrical system was replaced in 2016. In April 2021, volunteers completed the South End Project, featuring a new grounds shed, trash enclosure and new fencing.

Three special events in 1987 marked the centennial of the Club's founding: a Gala Party at the Fleming Museum, a Family Day at the clubhouse, and a special speaker at the Awards Dinner. The Ladies Cup Regatta Centennial was celebrated in 1988; a Centennial Celebration Book was printed in 1989, filled with pictures of all the events, a brief history and historical photographs.

In 1996, the Board of Governors began to realize that the original clubhouse was showing signs of age and becoming too cramped for the diversity and size of the boating and social programs. In 1997, the membership voted to demolish the clubhouse and build a new one behind the 100-foot setback required by the Town of Shelburne. At the October work day the old clubhouse was stripped of its salvageable contents and the new clubhouse was built at a cost of \$230,000, completed by spring 1998. The design and construction of the new clubhouse was led by a LCYC-member architect design team; it is similar to the LCYC clubhouse which graced Burlington's waterfront from 1913 to 1936. Over two times larger than the old one, the new clubhouse was dedicated at a Gala Opening Party on May 30, 1998.

As this clubhouse reached its 20th anniversary in 2018, deferred maintenance items were addressed by member volunteers, with several renovation projects completed. Major bathroom renovations were completed at the end of the sailing season during October 2019. Due to the Covid Pandemic lockdowns which began in 2020, major capital projects scheduled for that year were put on hold.

Earlier property improvements continued with the completion of a new wheelchair accessible ramp to the docks in 2004; a water and electrical service upgrade on the docks in 2005; and two newly constructed dock sections increasing the dock space in 2006. The lakeside main dock landing was replaced with new timbers and concrete the following year, and swimmers welcomed the addition of a new swim platform in 2008. A new dinghy dock, providing eight additional slots, was added in 2018 and in 2019, a seniority-based system for assigning dinghy dock spaces was instituted.

September 2019 marked the completion of the LCYC launch ramp upgrade, designed by member Al Lewis, who obtained the required local, state, and federal permits, and after Blow and Cote excavated the site, led a group of LCYC volunteers through the lengthy construction process. After years of deterioration below the waterline, this 30-foot extension into the lake made boat launching easier and safer.

In 2010, the revetment to the junior sailing dock was replaced and the adjacent two timber retaining walls were replaced with Redi-Rock construction blocks, a textured concrete material. This was fortuitous in light of Lake Champlain flooding in the spring of 2011; on Friday, May 6, a new record was set when the level reached 103.20 feet. The Spring Workday scheduled for May 14 was held as planned, although the docks could not be attached and had to be anchored temporarily until the lake level receded.

Changes in technology resulted in the development in 2000 of the LCYC Web site, which is now used as the primary means of communication with members. Racers are able to find results within a 24 hour time frame, and there is a wide variety of links to other sources of club-related information, including a calendar of events. In 2003, a membership database was created and in 2006, a clubhouse Wi-Fi access site was installed.

Since the beginning of the modern era, providing a venue for racing has been a priority. Commodore Dinse began the Wednesday Night Racing Series which has been through several changes over the years, but is now the most popular along with the biweekly Wednesday Night Burger Burns. In 2002, to further encourage racing, an Open Class category was established along with a scoring system for sailors not as active in the traditional classes.

In 1995, the Board of Governors approved a plan to establish a one-design fleet to foster small boat sailing and racing; the JY-15 was selected and participants enjoyed several racing seasons until 2001, when a LCYC member organized the one-design Etchells fleet to replace the JY-15. Officially recognized as the Lake Champlain Fleet 25, LCYC hosted the 2007 Etchells New England Championships with boats from eleven states and Canada; and the Etchells sailors celebrated their 10th anniversary in 2010. One-design sailors also participated in the Finn Class Eastern Championship and North American Championship regattas hosted by LCYC in July 2008.

The Regatta Committee in 2013 established a Sportboat Fleet, comprised of two Viper 640s, two J/70s, a VX One and an Open 5.0, which raced with the Etchells in the Monday Night series and as a separate class in the Wednesday Night series. In 2014, LCYC hosted its first Viper 640 Regatta, choosing the third weekend in September to take advantage of fall winds. With the help and support of the Board of Governors and LCYC volunteers, participation has grown with racers from many states and the Canadian provinces. LCYC hosted the New England Championships in 2017, with many racers returning for the 6th Viper 640 Regatta in 2019. These regattas have not resumed since the Covid Pandemic lockdown in 2020.

The Board of Governors on July 9, 2018, approved Dry Sailing Storage Rules, with twelve dedicated slots for mast-up dry sailed boats. Members without moorings have priority with an annual fee set by the Board.

The acquisition of a dedicated race committee boat and the formation of a committee composed of Principal Race Officers (PROs) led by a Chief Race Officer (Race Management Group) highlighted the 2005 season. The Board of Governors authorized the purchase of a 1989 Albin 27, which was commissioned that spring and then formally christened the J. Dinse in honor of John Dinse at the October Awards Dinner. These two initiatives—a race committee boat and a dedicated, trained committee (RMG) have elevated the level of race management at LCYC.

Two MarkSetBots, which use GPS technology, were acquired in 2022. These are controlled using App, making it possible to position marks regardless of water depth and weather conditions, wind shifts or velocity changes.

At the Commodores' Potluck dinner in 2023, Dale Hyerstay, upon his retirement from his decades long leadership of the RMG, was presented with a plaque and the "retired Dinse RC flag" which will be hung among the burgees in the clubhouse. Tumbleweed was the name of many of Dale's boats since becoming a LCYC member in 1971; in honor of his racing legacy, it was announced that the Mid-Lake Race will be renamed the "Tumbleweed Race."

Cruising received greater recognition with the addition in 2005 of a Board of Governors position responsible for cruising and boating programs. Beginning in 2006, private LCYC moorings have been installed at two popular cruising destinations, there are now three at Kingsland Bay and four at Converse Bay. The Champagne Race, also popular with both cruisers and racers, was resurrected in 2000, with the change of finish from Essex, New York to Willsboro Bay, New York. During the 2014 summer, a new tradition of Friday night pre-cruising potluck suppers became popular.

Over the years, several LCYC members have taken their boats beyond Lake Champlain to distant lakes and rivers in the United States and Canada, and some have ventured offshore to more exotic locales. In 2007, many of the colorful burgees collected on their visits to other clubs were hung in the clubhouse, with returning cruisers adding to this collection every year.

A LCYC “mug tradition” was started by Frank O’Connor, a board member in the 1970s. Pewter tankards with a Herreshoff cleat handle and enamel LCYC burgee were given to outgoing commodores until the supply ran out in the late 1980s. After finding a new supply source in 2007, Past Commodore Dale Hyerstay revived the tradition and, at the 2008 Change of Watch, the new LCYC tankards were given to past commodores who had not previously received one. The tradition has been extended to include outgoing board members in appreciation for their service.

The Board of Governors approved two new membership categories in 2004, associate and inactive; in 2005, New Member Orientation sessions were instituted. In 2010, a Finance Committee was established, composed primarily of board members, to study and advise the Board regarding financial policy, procedures, the annual budget, and long-range planning.

The 2011 season was shortened by record-breaking spring flooding that forced a full month delay in launching boats and attaching docks, and on August 29, 2011, Hurricane Irene devastated much of Vermont’s infrastructure in what meteorologists described as one of the top ten most destructive storms since 1980. Good preparations by club members, several of whom hauled their boats early, resulted in minimal damage to LCYC, although a few boats broke pennants, went aground or drifted.

At the Annual Meeting on October 15, 2011, members approved a \$25.00 per member one-year assessment to fund a celebration of the club’s 125th anniversary in 2012; the Board of Governors formed an ad hoc committee to plan special events. At the January 21, 2012 Change of Watch this committee introduced the 125th Anniversary Logo and announced plans for two celebrations.

The first event was a Gala on June 9, 2012, when a record attendance of 227 members boarded the steamer Ticonderoga, preserved in all its glory at the Shelburne Museum. The celebration began with the firing of the LCYC cannon as members gathered on the bow for a brief program that included recognition of current and past members’ contributions, introduction of new members, and commemoration of the Club’s founding in 1887, and its reactivation in 1962. This memorable occasion, with dining and dancing on a beautiful June evening, was reminiscent of the moonlit cruise aboard the Ti for LCYC’s Golden Jubilee in 1937.

The second 125th Anniversary event was a revival of LCYC’s Family Day on July 22, 2012, with intergenerational members enjoying traditional Flying Junior sailboat races, activities that appealed to all ages, and the addition of a young rock band during the barbecue. Its success was notable in that the Board of Governors agreed to members’ requests to reinstate it on the LCYC calendar.

The 125th Anniversary celebration year was capped with the addition of a new Ladies Cup perpetual trophy: The Betty Sproston Little Commemorative Trophy for First Overall, made possible through her donation to mark the year with something “lasting and meaningful.” Simon Pearce engraved the 125th Logo on a custom-made glass sailboat trophy which was unveiled at the October 19th Awards Event.

In 2013, LCYC marked the 125th Anniversary of the Ladies Cup with several August weekend events, highlighted by the Ladies Cup Regatta in which fifty-three boats competed. The ornate sterling silver Ladies Cup trophy was presented at an awards ceremony, where LCYC members were joined by visiting skippers and crews in celebrating the anniversary of one of the oldest sailing events in the United States.

Several years of discussion, study, and design proposals to replace the Butler Building culminated in 2016. After the preliminary design and siting were approved by the Board of Governors in June, and with

final approval from the Shelburne Design Review Board, construction began in the fall with the goal of completion for the 2017 sailing season. Originally founded as The Sharpie Club in 1886, it was announced at the Opening Cocktail Party that the new Junior Sailing building would be named The Sharpie Building in honor of LCYC's early history. As the Butler Building was taken away, many members felt a strong sense of nostalgia. This was the only building on the LCYC property when it was purchased and reactivated in 1962, and it provided the only shelter until the first clubhouse was completed in August 1963. It will continue to provide storage and shelter in its second life at the home of a past commodore who lives across the Bay with a view of LCYC.

Bylaw changes are drafted periodically for approval by the membership at spring workday and at the fall Annual Meeting. Two significant changes were approved in 2017: 1) A harbor mooring upgrade program transferred ownership to the Club of tackle below the mooring ball with an annual replacement fee; 2) the Board of Governors may consist of nine to fourteen members, which led to a quorum change update in 2019 that stipulates a majority rather than a number. Bylaw updates in 2018 added criteria for Honorary Membership that included leadership, length of membership, and nomination requirements. The ongoing discussions regarding partnerships resulted in approval of language that encourages but does not require a partner to become a member although the requirement that only Full Members of the Club may utilize Club facilities stands. Updated Initiation Fee language requires payment of dues and initiation fees within thirty days of application acceptance. Two measures approved at the 2019 Annual Meeting were the creation of a mooring waitlist and a modification of the Associate Membership category."

Since its founding in 1887, the Club has experienced significant historical events, including two world wars, economic depression, periods of dormancy, and then reactivation in 1962. The Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 presented members with significant new challenges during a national lockdown at the beginning of the season. In response, a Covid Task Force committee was formed to advise the Board, following Vermont State required protocols: these included masks, contact tracing, social distancing, increased cleaning requirements, and limits on size of events. All meetings were held virtually on Zoom.

As vaccines and booster shots became available at the end of 2020 and early 2021, restrictions began to ease, and 2022 featured a return to a more regular season of racing, junior sailing, and the return of some social events. The cupola and roof replacement, major capital projects which were put on hold, were completed in 2021.

With the end of Covid restrictions, the speaker series resumed at a potluck dessert on July 15, 2023, with a celebration of the 25th Anniversary of LCYC's clubhouse, which had been dedicated on May 30, 1998, at a Gala Opening Cocktail Party. The speakers were Past Commodores Bernadine Collins and Fritz Horton who described some of the history of the early clubhouses, 1887-1997, and the 1997-98 design and building process of the new clubhouse.

Collins linked Burlington's early history as a major lumber processing port with the wealth that the first LCYC members used to build the first clubhouses on the waterfront, in addition to their mansions on the "Hill." After reactivation in 1962, LCYC became a "working club" with a "Corinthian spirit" which was reflected in the design and building of the new clubhouse in 1998, with members participating in every step of the process. Horton, head of the design committee, used slides from the construction to illustrate the long process that began with salvaging beams from the old clubhouse to be used in the new one, as well as all the finishing details at the end. Several members who were part of the volunteer crews in 1997-98 were recognized and enjoyed the slides of the 1998 Gala Opening Cocktail Party.

During the 2024 season, the Dock Committee, recognizing the need to replace the deteriorating 30-year-old dock system, worked with the Board of Governors and Finance Committee on a \$450,000 dock replacement proposal. The committee sent members materials outlining the proposal and held several information sessions, culminating in a vote at the Annual Meeting in October where members approved a

special six-year \$125 dues assessment. This is in addition to the initial \$200,000 deposit from the capital fund, with the balance funded through notes offered to members over a six-year period.

In March 2025, the dock manufacturer, StructurMarine, based in Quebec, will ship the new docks to Safe Harbor Shelburne Shipyard to be unloaded, stored and launched until April, when they will be floated to LCYC for installation. This is a major club asset that should last forty years or more, providing a safer, more stable system.