

Early Sailboat Racing at the Portland Yacht Club

During the first 30 years of the Portland yacht Club, most activities centered on cruising. The only racing was the "City of Portland" July 4th regatta which began in 1870 and the Challenge Cup Regattas inaugurated in 1894, both of which lasted 40 years. The fleet was mostly schooners and with the introduction of steam power we saw more power boats as well as the infamous naphtha launches which tended to blow up. There were often casual races held during the club cruises, many of which were often planned and coordinated with other yacht clubs. The old adage that "whenever two sailboats are at close quarters, there is a race going on" occurred even back then.

Scheduled races began Saturday afternoons in 1900. However, some interest had been dulled by the Spanish American War and many owners had leased their boats which removed them from the PYC activities.

The first one design class, a 31' Starling Burgess gaff rigged sloop, was introduced in 1903. The Regatta Committee was allocated \$100 for prizes. Three courses were laid for racing that year, Class A (30-40 feet) ran a 11.5 mile course through White Head Passage, to Witch Rock and back, Class B (20-30 feet) had a 9 mile course around Fort Georges and House Island while the Starling 31s of Class C ran 7 ½ miles to the Brothers can and return.

Following the success of the Burgess 31, a new less expensive class of dories was introduced. Fourteen of the 21 footers were built by John Whitney and raced regularly until 1916. The introduction of the automobile and internal combustion engine drew more interest to power yachts and sailboat racing became almost non-existent though outboard racing was in vogue for several years.

World War I brought yachting to a standstill and all but one lone sailboat was left ashore. In 1921 interest in racing was renewed with a new class called Monty Cats. These boats were also safe enough for the Juniors to sail.

In 1926 the new John Alden 18' one design "O" Class entered the fleet and was joined in 1929 by the "A" or Atlantic Class, a 30'7" and more expensive vessel. 1928 had six boats sail the inaugural Monhegan Island Race starting at Town Landing, sailing to Cape Porpoise before running to Monhegan and back. During the '30s and '40s the start was moved to Portland head Light and the finish to Bug Light.

By then, a tradition of Interclub racing had begun and were the highlight of the racing season. They were sponsored in alternating years by the Merepoint and the Merriconeag Yacht Clubs with a Saturday race at one club and the Sunday race at the other. The alternate year was sponsored by the Centerboard Yacht Club and the Portland Yacht Club. The Depression and World War II took its toll on yachting and the Clubhouse was taken over by the Coast Guard. In an effort to revive the old rivalries, Mr. Guy P. Gannett contributed a permanent bowl for the Interclub Regatta in 1948. The first race of

the new Regatta was held at and won by the Merepoint Yacht Club. The Interclub Regatta continued for 50 years but sadly has ended along with weekend racing in the bay. In 1947 the club moved to its current facilities in Falmouth along with the Monhegan start. Nineteen boats entered in 1948, 1951 had the schooner *Gloriana* win Monhegan and 1952 found *Ticonderoga* set a course record of 16:24 due to the 40 knot winds. Hurricane Carol wiped out Monhegan in 1954 while Diane tried its' best to do the same in 1955 but 10 of the original 23 boats entered managed to make the postponed start two weeks later and enjoyed fair weather for the 26th edition of the blue water classic.

In 1949, the PYC crew won the prestigious Adams Cup (women's national sailing championship) held in Larchmont, NY. The boat was skippered by Mrs. William (Jane) Moody with a crew of Mrs. James Boys II, Mrs. Regis Gignoux, and Mrs. K. Dana Jones. Obviously, chauvinism was still running strong!

The next year, sailing classes were begun for Juniors using the Lightning Class while the smaller Turnabout Class was chosen to further the program, this fleet growing to 20 boats in one year. Seven races were recorded for the 1950 season as the fleets grew to the point the PYC held the New England Lightning Championships in 1956 and 1957.

The addition of larger numbers of smaller racing boats allowed the addition of Class "C" to Monhegan in 1957. This shorter 90 mile course used the Portland Lightship and Monhegan as marks, the race now known as the Manana Island Race. 12 of the 29 boat fleet raced this new course won by Henry Parkers' *Guillemont*. The first fiberglass boats appeared in 1959 where 30 boats entered.

1960 found the Portland Yacht Clubs own Douglas Coleman sailing *Flying Saucer* to victory in Class "B" as well as overall in the 47 boat fleet. In 1961, Mason Briton and crew of perennial Monhegan racer *Delight* gave a brass sextant in memory of their navigator, George E. Ford, Jr. to be awarded to the navigator of the winning Monhegan boat. Secondly, the MORC Trophy was donated by Frederick Felton for boats under 30'. 1961 also was the year of the first female skipper in a Monhegan race. Mrs. Frances P. Copeland skippered her boat *Periwinkle* to second in Class C, just 38 minutes behind Ted Hood and ahead of 14 other yachts.

Labor Day 1962 saw the inaugural Schooner Trophy Race sending 24 crews 11 miles around a dozen marks in Casco Bay, a plaque with the winners name was placed below the original Schooner Model donated by Dana Bowker, since replaced by the schooner *America*. The race was contested until 2002 when it took a hiatus until it's resurrection in 2010.

The fall of 1963 marked the beginning of Frost Bite Sailing at the Portland Yacht Club. The Turnabout Class was used due to the ease of launching each week, consisted of 11 races starting September 15 and ran into mid-November. 20 skippers were involved, Merle Hallett beat Dick Chadwick by a mere ¼ point with Phil Tuttle coming in third.

Sailboat Racing since 1970 at the Portland Yacht Club

PYC's racing events have dramatically changed since 1970. During the 1970s, larger cruiser-racers over thirty feet in length, like a Pearson 10M, with full cruising oriented interiors dominated the offshore, big boat scene. Come 1972, the boats competed predominantly in seven different overnight races from Blue Hill to Kittery which Maine clubs including the PYC hosted as part of the inaugural summer-long Gulf of Maine Ocean Racing Circuit. Our PYC ran a series of local day races that fell under the banner of the Casco Bay Sailing Association starting in 1979 for smaller cruiser racers and one design fleets like the Tanzer 22, J/24, and J/30.

1975 Offshore



Pearson 10M



Tanzer 22

By 2015, there was just one overnight race held along the coast of Maine, PYC's flagship Monhegan Island Race. Big boats now consist of a mix of modern, lighter weight cruiser-racers like Beneteau 36.7s and stripped-out machines like a TP 52 which typically compete in day races as short as four miles that sail sometimes two to three times as fast as their 1970 ancestors.

2015 Offshore



Beneteau 36.7



TP 52

On the one design front, the 1970s featured the Ensign fleet some 25 strong with their full keels and deep comfortable cockpits and the Etchells with their tall rigs and fin keels. By 1978, the revolutionary J-24 arrived, a day sailor with offshore capability which quickly dominated the keelboat scene. These were followed by the J/30, J/35, and J/105 classes. The centerboard racers had the Finn in 1964, the Int. 420 in 1968, the Laser in 1973, while the venerable, but now 35 year old Turnabout fleet was replaced by Widgeons in 1976 and these lasted 20 years. To adapt with our US Sailing and New England Area friends, the PYC updated to Club 420's in 1987 and the Optimist Dinghy in 1990.

1970 One Design



Ensign

2015 One Design



Etchells



J-24

Scores of PYC members have become outstanding sailors over this period, including (but not limited) to '72 Bermuda Race winner Sandy Fowler, Merle and son Richard Hallett, Win Fowler, Del Damboise, '84 Halifax Race winner Jim Stanley, David and son Carter White, Scott Smithwick, Peter Levesque, Tom Hall, Alan Palmer, and Dierdre Lambert. These sailors have won races in many different boats in the U.S. and overseas venues,

participated in America's Cups and Olympic Trials, achieved collegiate All American stature, and have won GMORA's Yachtsman of the Year awards.

The Monhegan Island Races

PYC's flagship offshore event was first held in 1928 with the Manana Island race for smaller boats beginning in 1957. Come the late 1960s, in conjunction with an overall growth in U.S. sailing, the number of entries began to swell, peaking with 142 boats in 1985. Famous race boats and sailors participated from throughout the U.S. including *La Forza del Destino*, *Stampede*, *Freebooter*, *Toscana*, *Déjà vu*, *Gem*, *Pioneer*, and *Starlight Express*. Boats from the Maine Maritime Academy, US Coast Guard Academy, and the US Merchant Marine Academy regularly attended. The PYC was well represented by Merle Hallett with a sequence of boats named *Scaramouche*, Jim Stanley with his *Capellas*, Bill Reynolds with *Matriarch*, Doyle Marchant in multiple *Revolutions*, Dick Hale in *Bandito*, Ned Semonite and family in *Black Owl*, Bob Kellogg and Geoff Emanuel in a variety of boats and recently, Scott Smithwick in *Kaos*.

Highlights of individual performances include the following:

- Current PYC member Merle Hallett has competed in nearly every race since 1960 having won his class numerous times. He oversaw the construction by Handy Boat of his custom 42 foot Taunton-design racer in 1977 pictured below.



- The run of Manana Race wins by PYC member Dr. Del Damboise, sailing his Pearson 30 *Barbara*, has few equals in the annals of the race. He won the race overall 5 times including in consecutive years between 1981 and 1984.



Barbara

Jan Pedersen in *Heitorik* and Wayne Smith in *Defiant* both have 3 Manana wins apiece but recently the David Ruff family in *Go Dog Go* have amassed 6 wins in the last 10 years.

- Orrs-Bailey YC member Abbot Fletcher finished second in class in his beloved Tripp 37 *Majek* in 1999, his 34th Monhegan Race. Sadly, he passed away four months later. The Manana Island Race trophy was renamed in his honor soon afterwards. Abbot won his class in 12 Monhegan and Manana Races over the decades between 1962 and 1999.
- In 1991 the wind blew 35-60 knots in an unforecasted and short lived mini gale that occurred during the first six hours of the race. All but 9 boats retired (5 Monhegan, 3 Manana, and 1 Seguin), Bully, a Baltic 50 won Monhegan. 1992 was also windy and allowed *Encore*, James Dolans SC 73 set the course record of 10:46:57 which still stands.
- PYC member Scott Smithwick has put together one of the best race records in history. Over the period 2000-2015, Scott and his 41 foot Frers racer cruiser *Kaos* has won his class 9 times.



Kaos

Unfortunately, race participation began a slow but steady decline starting with the economic recession of the mid '80s, following a national trend of declining interest in offshore, overnight racing. The RC changed from the traditional course to a point to point course ending in Camden, Maine for 2013 and 2014. This change was not received as anticipated and Monhegan returned to her original August ocean triangle format in 2015.

The Pilot Races

The event began in 1968 as a 90 mile offshore race for Hinkley Pilots which took participants out Hussey Sound, around Whaleback Ledge and the Portland Lightship and back to Falmouth. Opened to other big boats the next year the Pilot race continued as an offshore event until 1978 saw it transformed into a weekend-long day racing regatta. Now the event features one day of short course day racing for PHRF and one design fleets within and outside Hussey Sound with a party for members and participants Saturday evening.

PHRF Maine State Championships

Beginning in 1986, PYC inaugurated this new event to crown an overall offshore racing champion in Maine. Initially, racing was started inside Casco Bay but by the late 1990s, the event was moved outside Hussey Sound. Drop marks were used to obtain perfect windward leeward courses, a monumental task given water depths greater than 100 feet. The Championships ran out of steam in 2009 but were reinstated in 2015.

The Fall Series

Held over 5 weekends in September and early October, this event dates back to the 1950's and attracts boats from Casco Bay to enjoy what is arguably the best time of year to sail in Maine. The Series consists of four weekends of round the bouys racing and one Saturday devoted to the Lightship Race, which takes boats out and around the location of the old Portland Lightship off Cape Elizabeth and back to the finish inside Hussey Sound. The Stanley Moore Memorial Trophy, begun in 1955 as a weekend of racing among the annual Club cruise morphed into the winner of the Lightship Race in the mid '60s.

Thursday Night Races

Arguably the most successful PYC sponsored racing event since its inception in 1961, this more casual "beer can" racing attracts all sailors whether they're inclined to race or not. The event starts at 6pm with an after race BBQ. Scoring of Thursday Night Races began in 2012.

America's Cup

We became and Associate Sponsor of the America's Cup with 7 other yacht clubs in 1994 (including San Diego, St. Petersburg, Fort Worth, New Orleans, Detroit, San Francisco). The New York Yacht Club was the official and primary sponsor. One of the boats was Young America sponsored by Unum Insurance in Portland.

MS Regatta

Started in 1982 by Dan Wellehan and Merle Hallett as the first philanthropic regatta on the East Coast. This has grown to over 120 boats in PHRF, classic, cruising, and one design classes, has been the largest big boat regatta north of Boston for decades. Run by a cast of PYC characters who plan, set up, run a silent auction, do Race Committee duty, and put on one heck of an after party, all to benefit those with Multiple Sclerosis.

One Design Racing

Etchells Fleet 27

Etchells Fleet 5, originally started at PYC by member Tom Crotty in the early 1970s. Though sleek and technically demanding, the fleet was not ultimately successful. The class was re-started in 2000 by PYC members Chris Robinson and Jeff Bennert and the fleet quickly grew to 16 boats in 2003 and currently has more than 25 boats due to the efforts of Fleet captain Ralph Carpenter. The Fleet hosted a world qualifying regatta in 2013 that drew boats from around New England and Canada. Sailmaker Robbie Doyle from Marblehead won the 13-boat regatta. PYC hosted the 26 boat 2006 New England Championships. They now host the Lobster Bowl Regatta in mid September providing a great weekend for 25+ entries. Drink! Eat Lobster! Sail Wicked Fast! (This says it all)

J 24 Fleet 43

PYC's stalwart J-24 Fleet has been racing continuously since shortly after the boat was originally introduced in 1977. PYC member George Tonini raced his from 1978 until age 80 in 2004. His sail number, 1031, coincided with the boat's name Trick or Treat and orange colored hull. 16 current members amount to one of the largest local J-24 fleets in the U.S. Several members have been racing their J-24s for at least 25 years, including Jeff Smith, Tony Jessen and Bruce Morse. The Fleet holds races every Wednesday Night. The Fleet has also hosted the 2-3 day Downeast Regatta every September since 1980, which attracts J-24s from as far away as Newport RI and New York. In 2015, the Downeast Regatta also served as the J-24 North American Championship.

420 Fleet 76

The 420 Class started racing in Casco Bay in 1968 first with the International 420 where Ned Semonite, Tim Tolford, and Scott Fox honed their skills in local, New England and National Regattas. These fragile racing craft were replaced in 1987 by the more robust Club 420, the staple of Junior and Collegiate programs. PYC juniors climbed the leader boards at many events in New England. The 1997 Bemis, Youth Nationals, and Club 420 Championships were owned by Pete Levesque and Nichol Ernst, while 2006 Bemis winner Alan Palmer and Katy Gullick as well as 2014 Collegiate All American Dierdre Lambert all came from the PYC Junior Program.

Laser Fleet 103

1973 had David Whiting forming the new Hussey Sound Laser Fleet with 6 boats. Soon, there were over 40 boats in the Fleet racing locally on weekends and Tuesday (now Monday) nights at the PYC. They even held New Years Day races for 6 years, stopping only due to an ice covered bay or frozen lines, decks, or frostbite. PYC Laser sailors have competed in the District 7 circuit for 40 years producing Maine and New England Champions, several Nationally ranked racers and even an Olympic Trials campaign by

Ed Rowe. 2015 had 23 boats sail 19 races over 4 weeks in the renewed Frostbite Series chaired by Race Officer Chris Morin. Jamie Carter, Junior Program alumni, was the winner.

International Optimist Dinghy

Optis entered with a rush in 1990, quickly growing to rival the Laser Fleet size. PYC junior racers developed into a dominant force winning State, New England, and Junior Olympic Championships. Many of these Regattas were organized and run by the PYC and legions of PYC members. This past 2013 New England Champs had over 300 boats on four starting lines for a three day event, the largest number of entrants in one Maine regatta ever.