

History of Portland Yacht Club Facilities

1860-2013

Compiled by Don Ryan and Phillips Sargent

The Portland Yacht Club was founded on April 26, 1869 at the offices of "Whisker Bill" Thomas at 184 1/2 Middle Street in Portland, ME. This Club was the result of the efforts of 21 individuals many of whom had completed a cruise to Boothbay Harbor. In June 1868 they agreed that if they could find 100 individuals interested in membership, they would proceed with formation of a yacht club.

In 1869 Club meetings were held at the offices of various members until 1873 when a clubroom was rented on Custom House Wharf for \$8.30 a month. This room, furnished and decorated by the members, had a balcony overlooking the club anchorage on the Cape shore.

Little Hog (Diamond) Island was offered to the club by the Deering heirs for a annual rental of \$100.00 a year. The club voted to raise \$700.00 to build a clubhouse there, but it never bore fruit. However, Little Hog remained a favorite gathering place at the beautiful secluded cove at the eastern end now known as Diamond Cove.

If you had looked on the clubhouse door on Custom House Wharf in 1876 you would have seen a sign which read " No person is welcome unless a member or a representative of a Portland newspaper."

1884 was a time of expansion and the club voted to build a new clubhouse at the end of Merchant's Wharf costing \$2,500.00. A janitor was hired for \$40.00 a month during the summer \$15.00 a month in the winter. The club voted "During the winter months the janitor shall have the club stove prepared with paper and kindling, in readiness to light at any time a member comes into the club rooms during the winter" Brrr

In 1895 a motion to refrain from having liquor at the clubhouse or at club banquets was thankfully defeated 64-11. The club library subscribed to Harpers, Century, Cosmopolitan, Life, Rudder, and Forest and Stream.

Once again the locks were changed on the clubhouse, this time to prevent vandalism. The club records are missing from 1905 to 1910. Sometime in the early 1900's the club purchased a lot of land on the South Portland shore having a water frontage of 124 feet same being at the foot of High Street and costing \$1300.00. It was soon voted to sell this property.

At 12:58 AM on August 10, 1926 the clubhouse was completely destroyed by a fire which had started on Brown's Wharf. Everything the club had treasured since 1869 was lost -- all trophies, silver, canons, and all the half models and models of members' yachts and furnishings. The mementos of almost 60 years were gone forever, but the club voted immediately to rebuild at a cost of \$10,000. As before mentioned the records for the next 12 years are lost, but it is reasonable to believe that the insurance coverage was satisfactory.

The harbor was closed in 1940 and the clubhouse was leased to the U S Coastguard on October 1, 1942 for @100.00 per month, and member dues reduced to \$1.00 per year. The clubhouse was returned to the club in December 1944 and although the Coast Guard had installed a heating plant, the quarters and building were in rather bad shape. The Coast Guard paid \$1,471.00 for damage done.

By the year 1945, members were disenchanted with the disintegrating condition of the club and its premises, and out of patience with the owner who refused to make repairs but wanted

to raise the rent. With the members seething, they began seeking a new location including surveying some of the city owned wharves. They declined an invitation to combine with the Centerboard Yacht Club.

An ad-hoc committee was formed to scour the area by land and sea for possible clubhouse locations. Soon after they identified the Josselyn property which included waterfront, road access and a presentable house. Through the prompt action of Herman Burgi, Bob Norton, and Walter Moore, the club was able to purchase land and buildings in 1946 for \$16,500.00 -- \$2,500.00 less than an individual was prepared to offer. Mrs. Josselyn was made an Honorary Member.

The old clubhouse was disposed of for \$2,500.00, and a new pier was built at the new club at a cost of \$5,000.00. Twenty-two new members were eager to sign on and Foreside Yacht Club merged with the "new/old" Portland Yacht Club. On January 8 1947 the first meeting was held in the new location and that following summer an auxiliary location was maintained at the end of Merrill's Wharf in Portland Harbor, feeling no doubt, that all ties with the harbor should not be severed.

In 1959 the club purchased about one acre of land adjoining on the east for \$16,000.00.

Property issues were among major issues in 1975. A Special Meeting of the Board of Directors was held to determine a plan for the Junior Yacht Club building (now the Steward's shed). It was decided to remodel the building into a multipurpose structure while continuing to house the Junior Yacht Club.

A Building Committee was instructed to hire an architect to develop plans for an addition over the dining room to be called the Captain's Cabin. Lindsay Lord volunteered to complete the plans.

On October 25 there was a Mortgage Burning party. A new walk-in cooler and refrigerator were purchased and delivered to the club to enhance the kitchen. The club and waterfront were battened down in anticipation of Hurricane Belle.

Under Commodore Dougald MacDonald's direction a Long Range Planning Committee was created to deal with repairs needed for the clubhouse and PJYC house. The estimated cost was \$152,000 to: repair the PJYC house for use by the Steward, repair the club house foundation and support structure, create a 14 by 58 addition for a one story lobby and office, relocate the stairs and build storage and locker space on the second floor. Financing was to be done via a ten year mortgage and dues increase to \$300 with a future increase to \$350 when justified.

In 1979 Architect Lindsay Lord again developed plans for expansion and remodeling of the clubhouse. Once the plan was approved it was voted to borrow \$225,000 to fund the project at an interest rate of 10.5%.

The expansion and remodeling of the clubhouse was completed on May 15, 1980 at a cost of \$219,000. The club also obtained a "right of first refusal" on the Bryant property contiguous with PYC immediately behind the parking lot.

October of 1981 saw a very unusual N'oreaster hit the Falmouth shore during a Halloween party at the Club. Once the lights went out members stayed to watch the storm build to epic proportions with winds in excess of 60 knots. Snow Goose, a Southern Cross 30 parted its mooring and came

to grief under the pier only two pilings out from the land. The next morning revealed over 20-30 vessels aground along the shore between Handy Boat and Falmouth Town Landing.

The Board began to consider use of the club during the off-season in 1982. Use was for members only and trial rules and charges were developed.

With the passing of Tina Bryant, the club purchased the land between the parking lot and the Bryant house for \$100,000, adding 82,000 square feet of property including the small pond.

The club saw more interest in use by members for private functions. Rules were developed for use of the facilities during Commissioned and Non-Commissioned period.

In 1984 a volunteer ad hoc committee of several interested members formed to evaluate the potential of adding a swimming pool and tennis courts on PYC property. This idea created quite a bit of dissension within the membership on both sides with heated discussion occurring. A proposal was submitted and then withdrawn when a membership poll resulted in: 37 in favor, 77 open, 5 no opinion and 127 opposed.

In the late 80's a waterfront and grounds emergency plan was developed to provide for properly securing equipment, floats, vessels and property in any kind of emergency.

In the mid 90's the heating system was renovated and propane heaters were installed to eliminate the need to use the electric heat except in emergencies. This combined with renovations to the great Room made for a much cozier club house during the cooler months.

A new pre-stressed concrete launch ramp was installed in 1995 at a cost of \$26,000. This will make launching and retrieving boats by members and Junior program participants much easier. Of note is that the old ramp had an annual maintenance cost of approximately \$2000 with some years much higher. The new ramp should require very little maintenance for many years.

A Long Range Feasibility Study, chaired by Dave Semonite, was formed to look at future club needs, physical plant, financial resources, etc. to coordinate all activities to make them. Large capital costs included a \$20,000 parking lot wash out after heavy rains and \$40,000 in repairs to the pier decking. Both were covered by insurance. The report of the Feasibility Study would be presented for all members to review and comment.

The Feasibility Study had been completed and a plan for major Club renovations was presented along with a financing plan. There was also a plan to build a separate Junior YC building. Both proposals passed by secret ballot. A second vote on whether to finance this through dues or assessment was taken, and an assessment was chosen by a majority. Payment could be made at \$300/year for three years or \$825 in the first year. New members for several years will be required to pay the same assessment as well as dues and initiation fee so that they share in the expense that they will enjoy. Much of the financing was coming from several members who would be repaid at an annual interest rate of 7.5%.

In 1998 major renovations were made to the clubhouse which enhanced its attractiveness and functionality. These were a result of the recommendations from the previous Feasibility Study.

were Early in the 21st century, after many years of consideration, renovations to improve the attractiveness and functionality of the ladies Room were begun. A few years later, the men provide with equal treatment.

A dues increase of \$30 and assessment of \$125 were recommended to fund capital improvements pier repairs. Surplus from the prior year allowed for the reduction of the renovation debt by \$35,000 and establishment of a \$15,000 “sinking” fund for future capital improvements. This leaving the Club virtually debt free.

It was decided to not pursue building the Junior structure as it would decrease parking space (which continues to be at a premium) and helped reduce some of the tensions with the neighborhood.

In 2005, for the second time in its history, the PYC experienced a fire. A carelessly tossed cigarette butt into the mulch around the shrubs near the door from the parking lot ignited, entered near the trophy room, and expanded up chase-ways into the second floor. Quick action by member/neighbor Joe Kilbride and fast response from the Falmouth Fire Department averted what could have been a total disaster. Even so, there was \$90,000 damage in this confined area, which was covered by insurance.

Beginning in 2011, a major renovation was made to the kitchen. The changes improved efficiency, modernized equipment and brought the facility into total compliance with current restaurant regulations.

In 2012 an ongoing suit with neighbors over the use of the prior Bryant property for parking was settled by the Maine Judicial Court. Agreement was reached that the property could be used for such purpose on a specified number of days when large numbers of guests were likely to be in attendance for regattas or other functions.

In 2013, the Portland Yacht Club continues to be one of the more welcoming and handsome facilities on the east coast. It is often visited by other well known clubs on their downeast cruise. The facilities, grounds and waterfront continue to be maintained in “BRISTOL” fashion.

Respectfully submitted September 2013,

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