



Stories from the Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia

Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia

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Founded in 1892, the Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia is one of the oldest continuously operating yacht clubs in America. It is located on eleven acres of waterfront land beside the Delaware River and just south of Philadelphia. Its location, at the south end of Tinicum Island, provides excellent one design racing conditions and lends itself to being the premiere small boat sailing venue for the entire Philadelphia region.

Its sailors have won regional, national, international and Olympic competitions, have crewed in defense of the America's Cup, and have won major ocean races and cruised globally. The club burgee is recognized and respected throughout the yachting world.

CORINTHIAN YACHT CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA BECOMES NSHOF FOUNDING MEMBER

From the Commodore:

"The Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia was founded in 1892 and continues to operate from our clubhouse on the Delaware River just south of the City. We are pleased to demonstrate our commitment to sailing, both past and present, by becoming a Founding Member of NSHOF. Our members have sailed the world, participated in the America's Cup defense and won nearly every major race. In addition, we have a vibrant one design program for adults and juniors."

Arch McMichael, Commodore

History



On January 12, 1892 a group of 13 men, former members of The Philadelphia Yacht Club which had been taken over a few years earlier by The Quaker City Yacht Club, held a meeting at the Bullitt Building in Philadelphia. They felt dissatisfied with the state of affairs at The Quaker City Yacht Club as a result of schisms developing among the members and occasioned by undignified acts by some members. There also developed an incompatibility between people of different social and professional standing. During this period a change in the size of the yachts was taking place with larger seagoing yachts overtaking the then prevalent smaller 20' to 40' vessels. This meeting concluded with a resolution recommending the advisability of breaking away from The Quaker City Yacht Club and forming a new club. A month later, in February 1892, a charter was approved and a certificate of incorporation was issued for the newly formed

Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia. (CYCOP)

Among the thirty signatures that were placed on the CYCOP Application for the certificate of incorporation were names that are familiar to us today. They are: Alexander Van Rensselaer; Anthony J. Drexel, Jr.; Edward R. Coleman; and Addison F. Bancroft. Ned Coleman, who owned the largest schooner Norna, was elected Commodore, Ogden D. Wilkinson as Vice-Commodore, and W. Barklie Henry, who stood number one on the roster, Rear-Commodore. Their photographs are among those with the past Commodores on display in the present clubhouse.



As soon as the certificate of incorporation was granted, the organizers resigned from The Quaker City Yacht Club. So many others followed that eventually sixty resigned during the next few months to join the newly formed club.

As time went on other distinguished Philadelphia names became associated with the Corinthian Yacht Club. Names such as Edgar T. Scott, Walter Clark, Charles Longstreth, Samuel Kent, Ernest Du Pont, Walter H. Lippincott, Ralph Earle, Arthur Pew, R Fenimore Johnson, John Wanamaker, John T. Dorrance, Cyrus B. Curtis, A. Atwater Kent Jr., Fitz Eugene Dixon, and E. Paul Du Pont were listed on the membership rolls. With the establishment of the new club came the necessity to find an appropriate headquarters and/or clubhouse. A property down river in Essington with a wharf and protected harbor was found and subsequently was leased for \$500 per year with the privilege of purchase. The house on the property was an old hotel with 14 rooms on 12 acres of ground. The original building was built in the late 1700's by John Shreve and was used as a taproom. In December 1893 The Corinthian Yacht Club exercised its right to purchase the property and the price paid was \$9,000.

Such were the beginnings of the Yacht Club we ha

ve and enjoy today having survived over 118 years of maritime history. For more CYCOP history covering the first 75 years, see: Early Days of C.Y.C, by Robert Barrie - Published 1940 and The Later Days of C.Y.C - Published 1967. A Brief History of C.Y.C, by Albury Fleitas - Published 1996 is also available at the Clubhouse upon request.

□ Rememberances

The following text remembrances were written by Elwood Shoewell, the Corinthian Club Steward, who came to the club in 1914. In 2014, John E. Zimmermann III, Secretary Emeritus & Club Historian at Corinthian, transcribed the written accounts into Word files and submitted them to the National Sailing Hall of Fame in order to preserve the stories themselves.

This historical snippet is presumed to have taken place starting about 1917 when Mr. Charles Longstreth assumed the office of Commodore having followed Mr. Anthony J. Drexel, the Club's third Commodore.

Part I – The Fire

I do remember the yacht ELFIN belonging to a Mr. A. W. Gibbs was leaking so they tied her at the end of the dock and when the tide went out she had quite a list. The alcohol stove fluid ran over and filled the cabin with gas. The Captain came home about two in the morning, went below and lit a match to light a cigarette, and the whole deck blew up and flames went high up in the air. And of course bedlam in the house. Mr. Edward H. Johnson, Chairman of the House Comm. was asleep in the club and he woke up hollering fire and that brought out Mr. George Barrie with a fire extinguisher which he thought was up-side-down and by the time he got to the boat he had discarded both his pajamas and the fire extinguisher. Mr. Ashton Little who was aboard his house boat offered his assistance by running across the lawn and stumbled and fell into the fill in the yard--he came out swearing at everybody. Mr. Bancroft got out late and by that time the men had the fire hose on the boat but couldn't get any water. Mr. Bancroft had cut it off at the hydrant because they had carried the hose through his flower garden. When I told him the boat was afire, he said the Hell with the boat, it was insured but his roses weren't.

I might say that the Captain was very badly burned but we got him inside and used about 10 gallons of olive oil on his head until his whole body was covered. The doctor said we saved the man's life as well as his hide. It took several months, but he came out of the hospital without a scar.

Part II: The War Years (WW1)

"In the evenings I spent time with Mr. Bancroft where the background of the club was told to me, I learned the reasons for the club being here, about the split from the Philadelphia Yacht Club and why. By that time I learned that the club had a Commodore -- Mr. George W. Drexel -- a great yachtsman, highly respected by all members. He was followed by Mr. Longstreth, as Commodore. Mr. Longstreth was more Democrat than most and life really picked up. Lots of parties, mostly stag until war preparation. Two CYC members, Mr. Robert Glendinning, Sr. (former Secretary Zimmermann's great uncle) who was flying the only flying machine in and around Philadelphia who persuaded Mr. George C. Thomas to buy a plane -- with the help of Judge J. Willis Martin started a flying school in Essington, using the old Lazzaretto as a base, brought instructors here from the west coast and when the U.S. declared war they contributed to set up to the U.S. government.

Mr. Longstreth was a commissioned Navy officer in charge of certain service in the Fourth Naval District. His yacht was accepted by the government as a submarine patrol boat and carried the number SP 1. Due to this connection the club became almost a partner with the Fourth Naval District and most yachts were either given or loaned to the government. And when the ice came in the river most of the yachts around docked in our basin with all crews aboard. Lessons were conducted in the club house and watch kept guard at all gates and even members had to be identified who came in or out of the club.

During all these things happening of course there was quite a lot of private parties. When the war came either by order of by greed our servants all left to work in plants along the river or were drafted. Charles left with the aviators to Lake Charles, I was left alone with the Boardleys and of course put in a lot of time as the students had juice and coffee at seven o'clock. They had regular breakfast from 9:30 to 10:30 A.M. During this time even the roses and grass went by the board. The gardiner (his spelling) left and moved to Maryland. A strange thing happend just prior to his leaving -- the club owned a house across the street where Mr. Bancroft and the gardiner raised pigs. The gardiner came and told Mr. Bancroft that someone had took off with four of their best pigs. Mr. Bancroft did not get excited -- he had already learned from the Station Master at Moore the pigs had gone to Maryland to meet the gardiner on his arrival at the end of the month.

1917 and 1918 were the worst winters I had ever seen, and when spring came things were really bad here. No way to cut the grass, old Dan the horse had died by request and the help of

Dr. Glass, so we Dr. Harte and myself run a wire fence across the lawn from the house to the hedge and put sheep in the lower half of the lawn, but the dogs and the river soon cancelled that mode of grass cutting. At least it lasted for a year then we had an old time resident Harry Horn to cut the grass for the hay he could get and believe me he got plenty."

Part III - Scandal afoot in the Treasury

"During these times (1929 - 1935) Vice Commodore , Mr. W. H. Lippincott, was laying the ground work for his coming administration by having the lawn graded, new grass planted, flag stone walks around the pool and a brick wall around the building. He also built the bath house in the basement. In 1931 he became Commodore, unlucky for him the depression of 1929 got here first, but for the Club the depression was a big help. The new basin having been finished in time was filled with all the yachts you could possibly get in it...which boosts the treasury to heights never before reached. So much so the unbonded Treasurer begged borrowed or stole several thousand dollars by 1933. Happy to say the club later got it all back, with interest...due to the help of Commodore Ralph Earle who followed Mr. W. H. Lippincott to the Commodoreship.

The Treasurer that had the Doe (Elwood's spelling) and would not and could not be persuaded to meet the Trustees, but Mr. R. L. Taylor who was on the Board and through business interests could see the Treasurer. So they made a proposition that Mr. X (name changed to protect the guilty party), the Treasurer, could sign...an agreement that would give the Club - CYC - that is a lean on the inheritance from the Senior X's Will but that could not be divided until the death of a brother of the Treasurer who at the time was very ill and expected to die in a short time. As usual he did not die but got better, up and out.

Mr. Earle had asked me to keep tabs and if and when he did die for me to call Mr. Earle at any time or any place. When he did die a couple of years later of a heart attack, I happened to see the notice in the early edition of the paper about 3 o'clock in the morning. After debating with myself, I called the Commodore at 3:30 in the morning. I almost frightened him to death but he liked it. At any rate, we had a new Treasurer Mr. S. L. Kent, Jr. From then on the Treasurer was strictly business....."

The year of this remembrance is 1933 following an embezzlement scandal by the previous Club Treasurer (mentioned above) -- John E. Zimmermann III, Secretary Emeritus & Club Historian

Part IV - A Crazy Night

...At any rate, we had a new treasurer, Mr. S. Leonard Kent, Jr. From then on the treasurer was strictly business until 15 years later when income got in the red and he quit...told me he did not like red. We did pretty well - lots of parties, races, club cruises during Commodore Earle's, Mr. Dixon's and Wilmer's administrations. Commodore Earle had purchased a beautiful little place on the Sassafra River which we used for headquarters and very nice parties.

Lots of improvements to the docks and building mostly paid for by Commodore Earle with no fan fair. Club parties at the home of Commodore Wilmer on the Chester River were something; he went so far as to hire a quartet of Negro boys in and around Centerville to sing at one party and took along a quartet from the Orpheus Club. Believe me that was some song fest. The Negro quartet was short a bass singer, he having been locked up the night before. Somehow Dr. Wilmer went to the jailer and borrowed the guy with a promise to return him after the party, which meant I had to protect the Commodore, had to be sure he got drunk enough after the party not to run away. Succeeding on our way to a party for Commodore Wilmer at Ordinary Point we had to go through Mr. Paul Thompson's farm and through the woods. When we got fast under a tree which we had to have cut down. Then it started to rain and the bus mired down in the sand. We hired a tractor to pull it out but he got mired down also, so we had to carry the food, the drinks, cook as well as everything else a 1/4 mile to the house, but were on time and but for Mrs. A. Atwater Kent, Sr., no one would have known we had any trouble. During the party, the tractor got the bus to high ground and we of course got home Sunday morning about 9.

[BACK TO YACHT CLUB STORIES PAGE](#)