

A Brief Outline of the History of the Famous Chesapeake Bay Log Sailing Canoe

by

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of

THE MILES RIVER YACHT CLUB

In the Grollier Society "Book of History", volume one, page 144, appears a picture of the earliest efforts at boat building. The dug out canoe hollowed from a single trunk was the far off parent of the present Chesapeake Bay Canoe. These drawings are of the stone age, and show a pre-historic canoe sharpened at both ends that was found in Sussex. The other view is of a German specimen blunt at both ends. It is perfectly evident that from this beginning not only developed the Chesapeake Bay Canoe, true in a measure to its original type, but the present cup defenders, Stars and all other types of boats.

In volume one, page 20 of the "Book of Knowledge" published by the Grollier Society, appears a picture of American Indians burning and scraping out the center of a log in order to make a rude canoe three centuries ago. The third step of development all in the same line of human thought was the earliest efforts of Eastern Shoremen to join two hollowed out logs together, using a keel to hold on the wind when sailing. The fourth decided change was the joining of three logs when in 1857 the first center board was placed in a boat at St. Michaels, Maryland. The fifth and last improvement to reach the pinnacle of perfection attained was the building of the pure racing type starting about 1880, all of these steps proving that "necessity is the mother of invention." The oystermen had to have larger boats and only hewn out logs would stand the wear and tear on the bottom of shoveling up the oysters. This type of boat, as in the meter classes, in which invariably the larger boats win, conditions being equal, forced in the early stages of racing development, a handicap system and except for a short period when the fleets were divided into three classes of length this handicapped system has always prevailed and does now in "The Governor's Cup" races. From these beginnings came the multitude of steps necessary to have developed the wonderful artsman craft displayed during the past century by George W. Lambdin who built the Colonel Ed Lloyd; Charlie Tarr whose pride was the Magic; and the newly equipped Margaret P. Hall; Robert D. Lambdin's great pride was the Dashaway; Charles Caulk built the boat named after John L. Sullivan; Greenbury Coffin, whose two outstanding models were the Maybelle and the Belle M. Crain; and John B. Harrison who built the boat of that name, which proved to be the fastest of all the models of the time she was racing. Other famous boats of this old period were: James Plummer's Sadie; Samuel Harrison's Annie; the old canoe called the Mrs. Jenks from Kent Island; Willie Harrison's Manie; the Witch of the Waves; the Water Witch, the great pride of Critenden Harper "The Rena," and Sid Covington's group of Island boats, the most famous of which were: the Island Blossom, Island Bride, Island Belle, and the present Island Bird the smallest of the lot. It would be easy to continue naming hundreds of them, all of which had their followers, and in the opinion of their owners were unbeatable.

The Miles River Yacht Club was just recently presented a champion flag that was won by the Colonel Ed Lloyd in 1875 in a race at Oxford. The Lloyd at this time was owned by Nichols Plummer, and sailed in this race by James F. Burns.

No doubt there were many impromptu races of local communities held prior to this date, and possibly some more or less organized races. However, in 1885 according to Robert Blain, Chairman of the Regatta Committee, Chesapeake Bay Yacht Club, a race was held under the auspices and sanction of that Club. Then, for quite a period, annual races under their rules and regulations were held either at Oxford or at St. Michaels. It was at the beginning of this period that the canoes reached the heyday of their popularity both in number of entries and the gorgeous and large sails they used to carry. I have been informed that in this day it was not unusual to have as many as thirty entries. The start on the Miles used to be off Deep Water Point, the crew overboard holding the boats up. Drawings were made for windward positions as in horse racing, and at a given signal by Captain Jake Morris the crew all scrambled in and began what may be two or three hours of racing.

In 1903 Robert D. Lambdin built at his own expense and sent as an exhibit from the Eastern Shore of Maryland to the Chicago World's Fair, a fully equipped canoe, and named it the "Chesapeake."

Due to the innovation of the gasoline engines, the watermen who owned these boats, finding it so much handier to accomplish

their work, dismantled these famous old racers and placed engines in their boats, a good many of which were rised on. So that in a period of a very short time these famous old races were a thing of the past. This condition went along for a few years and was deplored by all true lovers of canoes, and in or about 1910 there was an attempt made by seven Clubs in Norfolk, Baltimore, Washington, and Easton, formed together under the name of the Chesapeake Bay Yachting Association, to try to revive or stimulate the lost interest in these canoes. This effort did not meet with the success it deserved.

Then another period of inactivity came to pass, and it was not until about 1921 that the Baltimore Sun and Evening Sun sponsored their first Regatta for the Work Boat Championship of the Chesapeake Bay. At their races were three entries: the Sam, the Island Bird, and the Louise. These three entries constituted later the fleet that sailed under the Miles River Yacht Clubs first Regatta. In the next Regatta, George H. Wilson brought back the Magic.

In 1927 the Mary Rider was remodelled and re-conditioned making four for that year. The following year the Island Blossom and the Belle M. Crain were brought back, re-conditioned and put in the races, and it is very gratifying to the Club to last realize by the Margaret P. Hall's entry of this year, and the old Mayflower, and the Belleair that their efforts have begun at last to show the results so much desired of getting the fleet back to its present number.

In 1895 the first year book of the Chesapeake Bay Yacht Club shows a page in colors of the private signals of such famous old boats as the Island Belle, the Island Bride, the Sunset, the Mary, the T. H. Oliver, the Meta, and the Powell Point.

About 1895 General Charles A. Chipley donated a cup known as the Anchorage Cup to be won three times before permanent possession. The Island Blossom, then owned by Will Myers and sailed by John Gibson, eventually won this trophy.

The nearest approach to the actual resurrection of any of these boats so far is the Mary Rider. This boat was built about sixty years ago on Tligham's Island by Tom Crior. She was brought to St. Michaels in her seventh year, and was christened the Martha Dodson. Having lived all those years of her life as an oyster boat, with more or less attention being given to her she drifted into the hands of various different people and eventually was owned by the negro Perry Haskins, to whom in 1911 I gave \$36.50 for the hull. At this time she had been practically abandoned. Her seams were open and marsh grass was growing through them. She had neither stem nor stern post. Her boards were practically gone. Her rising was so rotten that all had to be removed. There was two weeks of actual time put on her by Robert Chaplain and myself, and it was the most satisfying and happy labor I had ever performed. This boat was christened the Mary Rider, and as far as any one knows prior to its being remodelled, it had not in the old days been put on any of the races. Unlike the Island Bird it had just been a work oyster boat. The Island Bird was one of the Island series built by Sid Covington, and was built with the pure idea of speed and for racing, as so many others were at this particular period. These two boats represent probably the greatest contrast in hull and ability to carry sail.

In the spring of 1927, realizing the human interest possibilities in reviving these wonderful boats, the Miles River Yacht Club prevailed upon Governor Ritchie to sponsor what is now known as the Governor's Cup. This trophy is solid silver in the shape of a punch bowl, standing about two and one-half feet high, and the funds to purchase this trophy were voluntarily subscribed by Governor Ritchie, the Miles River Yacht Club members, and citizens of Talbot County. This trophy was won in its initial year by the Magic, sailed and owned by George H. Wilson. The last two years the Mary Rider has won, sailed by C. Lownd Johnson and Captain George Lambdin. The increase in entries since the sponsoring of this trophy has completely vindicated our opinion that it would eventually become quite a prominent race.

It is our firm belief that sufficient work has now been done and the result accomplished will carry on with its own momentum to the end that the boats will live for many years to come.