

Centennial year book for L. Y. R. A (1984)

Looking

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## Looking back one hundred years 1884-1984

A century ago, on January 5, 1884, the concept of an association of yacht clubs of the lakes was first proposed by G. Herrick Duggan to the annual meeting of the Toronto Yacht Club. A young club, in existence barely four years, the Toronto Yacht Club had sprung from a group of dissident R.C.Y.C. members and included many of the most prominent Toronto citizens and yachtsmen of the day. Duggan and his associates had a clear purpose — to secure agreement on a common handicapping system so that all lake sailors could enjoy friendly competition, and to then provide for such competitions.

On January 28, Duggan's initiative caused an invitation to be extended which resulted in a founding meeting on March 29, 1884 in the Queen's Hotel, Toronto. Present were delegates from the Toronto Yacht Club, Royal Canadian Yacht Club, Oswego Yacht Club and, by proxy Bay of Quinte Yacht Club.

The meeting was productive. A constitution was drafted and adopted creating the Lake Yacht Racing Association, and the first order of business, promptly dealt with, was to study the available measurement rule alternatives and select the Seawanhaka Rule for determining the rating of yachts racing on Lake Ontario.

With the election of officers business was concluded and it is recorded that "the delegates adjourned to dinner which was served in the Queen's best style, the mayor presiding with Mr. Leys\* in the vice-chair. After dinner, cigars were in order, and the delegates spent a very pleasant evening over the subject nearest to their hearts, and separated with great regret, but feeling satisfied that they had accomplished, or almost accomplished, a good work." And well they might, for no similar body existed in North America in 1884. It is believed that the L.Y.R.A. is the oldest association of yacht clubs on the continent.

The object of the association was set forth in the constitution — "to encourage yacht building and yacht racing, and to establish and enforce uniform rules for the government of all racing in which yachts of two or more clubs compete."

\*John Leys: Commodore, Royal Canadian Yacht Club and first president of the L.Y.R.A.

Thus the four founding members of the LY.R.A. were the Toronto, Royal Canadian, Oswego and Bay of Quinte Yacht Clubs. Their differences forgotten. Toronto Yacht Club and Royal Canadian re-united in 1889 and their active membership and participation has continued to this day. In 1952, R.C.Y.C. celebrated its' centennial by hosting the LY.R.A. regatta and 1984 finds the LY.R.A. centennial regatta back where it all began.

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The first recorded regatta was in 1887 as the fleet cruised from Toronto to Charlotte, Oswego, Kingston and Belleville. This "port to port" format continued for many years, occasionally varied by pausing to race at one of the ports of call. In those gracious days the full programme often spanned more than two weeks.

Always the LY.R.A. meetings had measurement rule considerations on the agenda. These matters and planning for the next regatta consumed the delegates attention as had been foreseen by the founders. Seawanhaka Rule underwent several revisions before giving way to the Universal Rule in 1906, which in turn was replaced by the RORC rule in 1938, CCA in 1950 and IOR in 1970. However, a real need for a secondary rule was recognized in the 1920's. The LY.R.A.'s own rules committee responded by developing the "Veteran's Rule" expressly for those yachts "to whom the pump is more important than the mast". In use until the late 1930's, the Veteran's Rule has its latterday equivalent in the Lake Ontario Rule, also developed and introduced under LY.R.A. auspices.

Throughout, the hard working committees also contended with scantling restrictions (which caused marvellous controversy for years), sail measurements, class promotions (the Lake One-Designs) and even painstakingly defined "a yacht" which, among other things, "must not be engaged in trade".

The first recorded long distance race was sailed in 1908 from Hamilton to Chaumont in light airs. The winner in a fleet of 16 fine yachts was "Genesee" from Rochester Yacht Club, winner of "Canada's" Cup in 1899. Years later, in 1921, distance racing became an integral part of the LY.R.A. programme as the first Freeman Cup race was sailed from Hamilton to Kingston and won in a hard north-wester by Commodore Aemilius Jarvis aboard his 60-foot schooner "Haswell".

After the dormancy of the 1914/18 war years, LY.R.A. actively resumed in 1919 when a high quality fleet followed an opening regatta in Hamilton with a course race in Toronto, then a race to Olcott, racing again the next day to Charlotte, participated in a Rochester Yacht Club regatta, then closed with a race to Cobourg. All this in little more than a week, in the days before auxiliary engines — but with the lure of prize money.

The years between the wars were the hey-day of the P-boats and the R-boats which numbered more than twenty strong. But the winds of change were blowing, and by 1939, the gaff rig was rarely seen, the P's had been succeeded by the 8-metres and the R's were giving way to the fast cruisers and again the LY.R.A. was struggling with the problems of rules and handicapping. But once more war intruded. A last ill-attended regatta was held in 1941 and not until 1945 did activity resume.

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Through the subsequent four decades, the long established format has worn well. Sometimes the Freeman Cup Race preceded the regatta and served to bring the fleet to their chosen rendezvous. In other years the famous distance contest was the climax to another hard fought series "round the buoys". But, while the form varied little, and the sailors participated in ever increasing numbers, the yachts were transformed by the fiberglass revolution as the classic wooden racers virtually disappeared, replaced in awesome numbers by the highly sophisticated IOR boats, the handy and able cruiser/racers and the combative one-designs born of international and Olympic competition. How fitting that this centennial regatta held in the city where it all began will be graced by fine racing fleets of 8-metres and R-boats reminding us of what has been.