

The Race

The original conception of the Canada's Cup race came from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in an effort to encourage yachting on the Great Lakes. So it all began in 1896 with a challenge by the R.C.Y.C. to race its finest yacht and crew against a representative yacht from the U.S.A. for Great Lakes supremacy.

Since that first race in 1896 that proved the yacht "Canada" (R.C.Y.C.) victorious over Vencedor (Chicago Yacht Club), a total of sixteen challenges have taken place. Nine times the U.S.A. has held this coveted cup, with no vessel holding it longer than the 1907 winner "Seneca" (23 years).

A syndicate formed by a group from the Rochester Yacht Club secured Nathaniel G. Herreshoff for the design and building of a racing vessel to compete in the Canada's Cup race. Herreshoff, designer and builder of several successful America's Cup defenders, is widely known as the guru of fast sailing vessels.

Seneca's mere presence on Lake Ontario created much controversy. Her new sleek lines and awesome sail design labeled her as being an outlaw for Canada's Cup competition. As usual, N.G. Herreshoff would not release his plans and prints to anyone for inspection, so the R.Y.C. had to tow Seneca up the Genesee River to be weighed and measured at a steel yard.

Saturday, August 10, 1907, the race was on. U.S.A. - "Seneca" Skipper Addison Hanah; Canada - "Adele" Skipper Aemilius Jarvis. The dimensions were interesting, for Seneca represented the new type of form, narrow and easily driven with moderate ballast and sail area. Her "hollow ground" bow, absence of bowsprit and generally shark-like appearance were the subject of adverse comment by the conservative. The beautiful "Adele," with her traditional short waterline, big sails spread, heavy ballast, blunt entrance and run, and long overhangs were pleasant to the eye but spanked hard in a seaway. Seneca posted three straight astounding victories over Adele in the best of five series. Her most convincing victory over this 21-mile course came on a day where the winds exceeded 30 mph.

Seneca's revolutionary design showed that she had an incredible ability to accelerate. Her top speed may not have been the highest ever, but her cat-like quickness proved superior for years to come.

History

After Seneca's easy win of the cup, each Canadian challenge to recapture supremacy would be withdrawn when it was announced that Seneca would be defending. Eventually, Aemilius Jarvis purchased her and she made her way to the R.C.Y.C. to sail under the Canadian flag where she spent many of her happiest days.

During World War I a group of Army deserters escaped from a brig near Toronto, Ontario. They found Seneca moored at the R.C.Y.C. and hijacked her across Lake Ontario. The renegades ran her aground in U.S. territory and abandoned her. It was sometime after this occurrence Seneca was rerigged as a staysail schooner, giving up her gaff rig sloop design in a compromise for more aesthetic value than sheer speed.

The schooner rig didn't keep her from winning races, however; her list of accomplishments is a long one. Some are: Two-time winner of the Commodore's Cup, Nova Scotia Codfish Trophy, Port Credit Schooner Race, and at the age of 63 she won the Blockhouse Bay Race beating a relatively new boat.

Sailing under the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club, she could be seen sporting about with a female crew, something unheard of in that era.

The Restoration

After 18 years of ownership, Ed Lawless of Toronto, Ontario (perhaps one of her most conscientious owners), sold her and her history became somewhat sketchy. She eventually left the Great Lakes and found work on the east coast, traveling as far south as Florida. With her deep draft, Seneca was a little long-legged for most Caribbean adventures, so her warm water vacation days were numbered, and like a lost and forgotten athlete of another time, Seneca was hauled out of the water and left to die.

After three years of neglect, her road to decay in Florida came to an end. A New England man purchased Seneca--only to be sold once again in 1984 for a haul out and assessment for a complete restoration.

Nearly a year long search for a schooner with beauty and history ended when D.C. Steinman of Syracuse, New York found Seneca cradled in a barnyard in Brunswick, Maine. In the fall of 1984, Capt. Steinman purchased her and commissioned The David Stimson Boat Works to start this historic restoration project.

Her long leaf yellow pine hull, dead wood and keel remain to be original. N.G. Herreshoff plans and blueprints were supplied to the boat works by the Hart Nautical Museum (M.I.T.), Cambridge, Massachusetts, for detailed reconstruction. One year later and a ride down on a flat bed truck from Maine, the project rests here, complete, once again.