

# Rochester Race — Lake Ontario International

Through its 100 year history Rochester Yacht Club has been the scene of some of the finest, most competitive sailboat racing in the world. RYC has been the host of World Championship Regattas, National Championships, Regional Competitions and numerous Freeman Cup Races, LYRA Regattas, and CNYIRA Regattas.

But the race that was conceived here in 1948 and sailed continuously for 29 years; the race that for a time was the world's longest fresh water race; the race that was described as "a test for men and gear;" the race that is uniquely our own and closest to the heart of all RYC racing skippers is the Rochester Race--now named the Lake Ontario International. This race was proposed by Earl Snyder in 1947 with the able support of the then Commodore, Bill Calkins, and prominent newsman and RYC member Cliff Carpenter. In contemporary issues of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Carpenter tells of the concept of the race in these words:

The nautical grind of nearly 400 miles will be known simply as the Rochester Race. To make it the world's longest, RYC officials will send the racers from Rochester to Stony Island near the eastern end of the lake; then back to Toronto; then east again to a finishing line at Rochester.

It is stipulated that contestants may leave Stony Island either to starboard or port in rounding it; and that they must pass through Toronto harbor, entering the harbor by either the eastern or western gap and leaving by the opposite gap. This will make passage at those checking points less perilous for big, hard-to-manage craft such as schooners.

The intention of the founders of the Rochester Race was not only that it should be longer than the Chicago-Mackinac classic, but tougher to sail, for it would require navigation of three legs of a triangle unlike the relatively straight Lake Michigan race. This was exactly what the outspoken Snyder wanted, for he made no bones about his feeling that racing sailing was tending to develop a "softer" breed of sailors.

This "test of men and gear," to use Snyder's favorite phrase, would start regardless of weather, with the skippers having the option of either being at the line at the gun or "hugging their moorings" until they believed their gear would stand the elements.

History has proved that Snyder, Calkins, and Carpenter were more right than they would have believed possible when they tried to "throw the book" at contenders. Year after year this race has been the scene of some of the fiercest winds, heaviest seas, and most difficult racing conditions that can be imagined. A number of years later Randy Beachner, in comparing the Rochester Race to racing on the ocean, said:

The wind and the seas on the lake are more confusing

than on the ocean. The weather is not as predictable. While the velocity of the wind will hit 10 to 15 knots higher on the ocean, the salt water sailors don't have to put up with sneaky shifts or sudden short squalls which can disable a craft before the crew knows what's happening. Ontario has a quick temper, while the Atlantic takes on a slow steady burn while rising to a boil.

A veteran of several St. Petersburg-Havana, Miami-Nassau, and numerous Rochester Races, Beachner puts eloquently into words the middle-of-the-night thoughts of many a Lake Ontario skipper.

James G. Dales was chairman of the first year's race in 1948 which saw seven of the eighteen starters forced to drop due to a strong northeaster that hit the first night out. The silverware that year was carried away by Fred Temple of Toledo in his 44 foot S&S sloop *Avilon*. The best finisher of RYC's eight entries was Bill Barrow's *East Winds* in third place.

The following year the course was changed to eliminate the pass through Toronto Harbor, substituting a buoy instead. It was a light air race won by Rochester's Bill Barrows in *Chance*. Herb Wahl's *Lorelei* was second. This race is memorable because the yacht *Heron*, owned by E. C. Greg of Bronte, Ontario, took five days to complete the course and finished with only one slice of bread in ship's stores. For years this slice of bread was mounted in a frame in the RYC clubhouse but has since disappeared.

An RYC entry was winner again in 1950 with George Ford taking the honors in *Venture II*. Co-chairmen of the regatta that year were Don Phelps and Helen Marth. The victor was a spanking new 51 foot S&S yawl. The August 23, 1950 Democrat & Chronicle had this to say about the race:

Off Toronto the wind shifted to dead ahead of the racers, bucketed up to a force upwards of 35 knots and kicked the seas into smashing rollers. The huge *Mitena* (John VanVoorhis' 12 Meter sloop) was unable to reef down. With her rigging threatening to give, she finally dropped out and ran for Rochester under jib alone. VanVoorhis, never a man to dodge a gale, explained he feared for the safety of his crewmen on the unprotected deck.

This was to become typical of late August Rochester Race weather.

The widespread prestige that the Rochester Race had achieved in its four year existence is evidenced by the fact that the 1951 winner Clark Stewart's *Escapade* of Detroit won first place in the Lake Erie, Chicago-Mackinac and Port-Huron-Mackinac Races as well as the RYC classic. Paul Tanner, of the Democrat and Chronicle, was aboard *Maple* that year and had this to say:

At 6 P.M. we saw our most beautiful sight of the race. The 73 foot yawl *Escapade*, blue hulled with



Crew of 1959 winner MALLARD, Top-Vince Palmer, Skipper Frank Shumway, Gerd Mueller, Vern Newell, Jack Yates, Bottom-Jo Ingerson, Chuck Lee.

five sails, one of them her big balloon spinnaker billowing out in front in the increasing breeze from the west hove in sight ahead. Only a quarter mile astern came the *Kittyhawk*, 70 foot black hulled yawl, her spinnaker flying a bit higher than *Escapade's*. At 6:45 P. M. the 60 foot yawl *Red Head* glided past, also under spinnaker, with a blue mizzen sticking out over her stern. Next to come was *Venture III* after having to beat up to the mark in the still increasing breeze.

The wind eventually reached 40-50 knots, causing many boats to take refuge. Vince Mulvey in *Blue Seas* and Arthur Hughes in *Lady Linden* both sailed this race.

In 1952 there was some talk of going to a biennial format but this was deferred because of RYC's 75th Anniversary celebration. The course was changed, moving the western mark to Hamilton rather than Toronto. Cliff Carpenter gives this account of the 1952 race:

With Lake Ontario living up to its reputation for

foisting criminal weather on the fleet, ten sleek Great Lakes racing yachts took the 3 P. M. starting gun off the Port of Rochester yesterday for the bruising lake-girdling 377 mile Rochester Race.

The race was only five minutes old before it claimed its first victim, C. J. Spaulding's 52 foot cutter *Sweet Chariot*, from Youngstown. A knockdown ripped *Chariot's* vast mainsail near the peak forcing her out of the race.

Three hours later, far out in the Lake beating westward dead into the eye of the wind another yacht bowed to the blow and turned to limp back to Rochester — the 63 foot schooner *Skookum*. Her mainsail also ripped as the hard driving Ritter Shumway coned his way through the winds that he clocked at more than 50 knots in the gusts.

When the schooner arrived back at RYC in mid-



1953 Winner *WHITE SQUALL*, Skipper Eric C. (Pete) Moore, Bob Corbett, Frank Umbehm, John Odenbach, Mike Stark, Frank Shumway, Bun Farley.



Commodore Gil Barber presenting the first place trophy to Mort Anstice in 1955.

evening it was revealed that the damage to the spreader occurred just before 4 P. M. Frank Shumway, dinghy sailor son of the skipper, went up the mast in a bosun's chair despite the high winds to inspect the damage. It was while Frank was up that the mainsail ripped across.

It was at the start of this 1952 race that crewmen and spectators got their only chuckle. When the proud *Escapade* hoisted her mizzen, there stitched to it in big black letters, was the legend "We like Ike." *Escapade* won again that year.

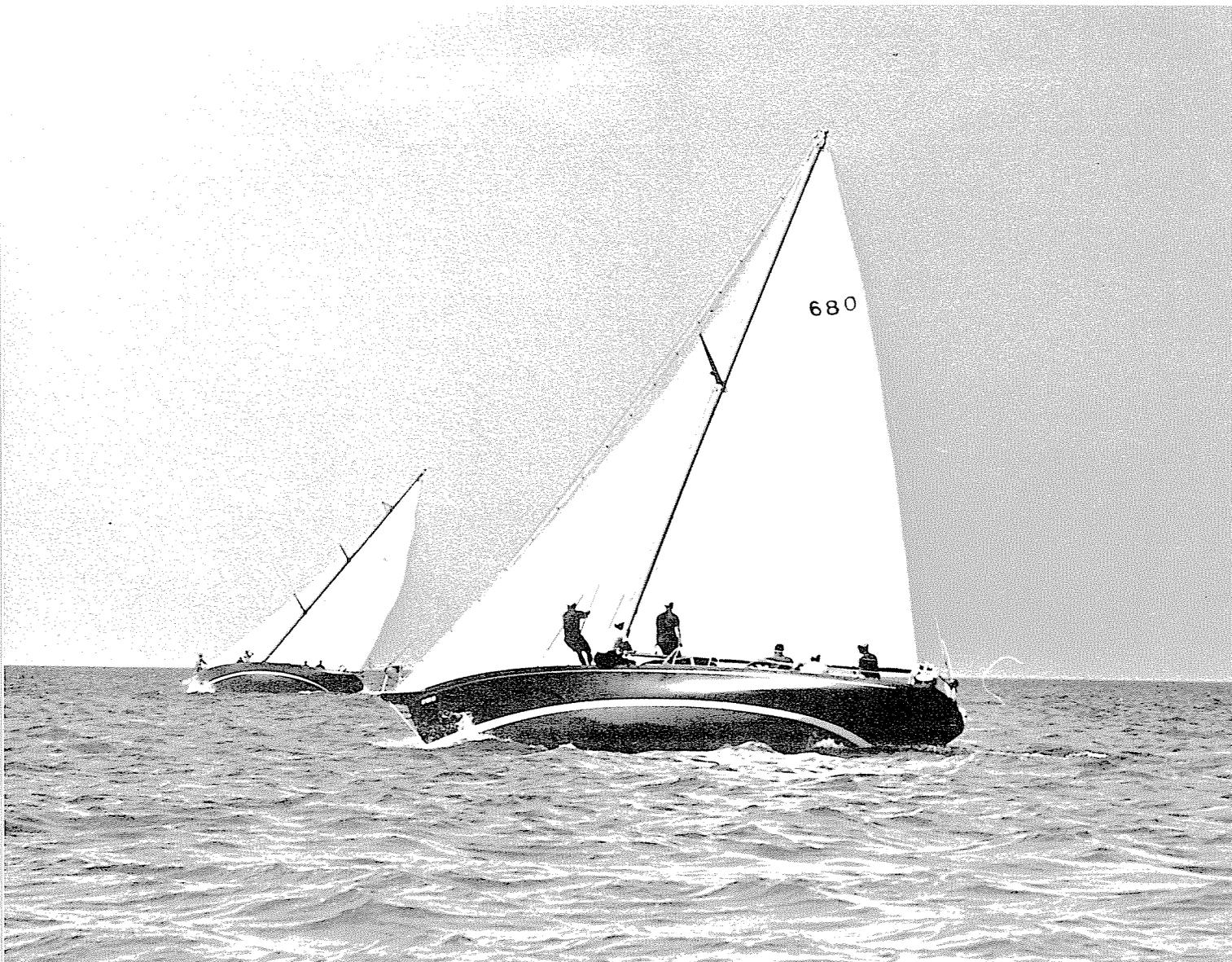
The 1953 Rochester Race, the last sailed under the annual format, was won by RYC's Eric C. (Pete) Moore at age 70 plus. An account of the race said:

Victory for Moore's 46 foot cutter *White Squall* not only wrote a punch line climax to more than a half century of yacht racing, but it was made doubly attractive for it returned the huge Rochester Bowl to the host Rochester Yacht Club.

No Rochester Race was held in 1954 because of the Canada's Cup competition but the following year it was sailed again over a shortened 270 mile course. The race was won by RYC's Mort Anstice in his Rhodes 27 *Rascal*.

From 1956 through 1964 the Barrows Race, ending in Toronto, was sailed in even numbered years alternating with the Rochester Race. It was won by Anstice's *Rascal* in 1956, Frank Shumway's *Mallard* in 1958, and Alan Goldstein's *Madame* in 1964, outstanding performance by RYC skippers.

The Rochester Race of 1959 was won by Frank Shumway in his New York 23 *Mallard*. Shumway reported after



*MALLARD and LADY LINDEN at start of 1961 Rochester Race.*

the race that "the weather was heavy for as long as in any race I have sailed - for 24 hours squalls and thunderstorms raised 20 foot waves on the lake." Alan Goldstein's *Madame* and Russ Hay's *Green Witch* placed 2nd and 3rd in division.

Following Shumway's 1959 victory RYC skippers fared poorly, not to win again for ten years. The popularity of this one time premier event waned and in 1961 there were only three entries. The race was won by Norman Walsh's *Inishfree*.

Many felt the race was doomed. Complaints that were voiced included "too late in the year," "no more vacation time," "weather too heavy," and "selfish to start and finish in Rochester every year." Frank Shumway and Jonathan C. Heinrich, believing there was still room for the Rochester Race, experimented with different courses for the 1963 and 1965 races and entries increased to 9 and 14, respectively. They were won by Bernie Herman in *Inishfree* and Dave Howard and John Hilton in *Invader III*.

In 1966, with Frank Shumway's encouragement, a group of U. S. and Canadian skippers met in Niagara Falls

to discuss the future of long distance racing on Lake Ontario. This group, which included Ted Booth and Bud Doyle, decided that Lake Ontario did in fact need a distance race of two nights duration and the Lake Ontario International Race was born. It has been sailed annually since 1966 over a fixed course from Toronto, around R2 buoy at Youngstown, around Stony Island, leaving it to starboard, and finishing in Rochester. Island Yacht Club and Royal Canadian Yacht Club were to alternate as host Club for the start and Rochester Yacht Club was to Host the finish.

Carefully scheduled so as not to conflict with the Freeman, Mackinac or Bermuda Races, the LOI continued to be sailed mostly in late August. Also, it was decided that the race would be sailed under the auspices of LYRA.

The first Lake Ontario International in 1966 saw 20 yachts at the starting line and was won by the legendary C&C design *Red Jacket* under Perry Connelly. RYC contenders were Alan Goldstein, Bernie Wahl, Jon Heinrich, John Odenbach, Helen and Joe Ingerson, Jerry Castle, and Frank Shumway, with Castle's *Kindo* winning Div. II.

In 1967, 24 boats competed in a rare light air race with only three arriving in time for the Awards Banquet. Herb Wahl's Cal-48 *Ayasha* won. The first RYC boat to finish was Bernie Wahl's *Ballerina*.

The 1968 race was won again by *Red Jacket*; however, the U.S. regained the team title with John Odenbach's *Rampage* and Bob Strassenburgh's *Capsule* taking 2nd and 3rd in Div. I, and Helen and Joe Ingerson's *Zest* and Ted Roth's *Allene* taking 1st and 3rd in Div. II.

The following year saw an RYC boat return to the winner's column with a victory by Alan Goldstein in his new 40 foot, Derecktor designed *Madame X. Rampage, Mallard, and Zest* all placed in division.

Bernie Herman won in 1970 and 1971 in *Bonaventure IV* and *Bonaventure V* with Frank Shumway, Henry Williams, Erv Lyke, and John Odenbach among flag winners.

An ever growing fleet of 26 boats started the 1972 race. Frank Shumway in the outdated Columbia 50 *Volante* won by an incredible five hour margin. This was Shumway's third victory in Rochester/Barrows/LOI races.

The 1973 through 1976 races were won, respectively by Bernie Herman's *Bonaventure V*, Al Bernel's *Abino Robin*, Peter Blacklock in *Sunshine*, and Gordon Fisher's *Terrier*. Shumway and Odenbach placed well each year.

Other fine RYC performances were Rolf Armer's 3rd in Division in *Wotan* in 1974, and Ervin Lyke's similar finish in *Audacity* in 1975. The 1975 race also saw RYC's new racing skipper Jonah Pruitt win the Peck Farley Trophy for first Rochester boat with a fine 2nd overall finish in *Jeremiah*. Henry Williams' *Susan B. Anthony* and James Robfogel's *Ping* led the RYC fleet in 1976.

So, while this somewhat lengthy recount of the history of this famous RYC sponsored Lake Ontario long distance race comes to an end, the race itself continues to grow in popularity. Year after year the entry list increases as does the competitiveness of the fleet.

Despite the physical demands of the 218 mile race and the high probability of bad weather somewhere along the course, the "test of men and gear" continues to be one of the premier long distance events in yacht racing.

## Freeman Cup - LYRA Regatta

The Lake Yacht Racing Association (LYRA) is believed to be the first association of yacht clubs of its type in the nation. Formed in 1884, with an original membership consisting of Toronto Yacht Club, Royal Canadian Yacht Club, Oswego Yacht Club, and Bay of Quinte Yacht Club, the goals of LYRA as stated in the minutes of its first meeting are these:

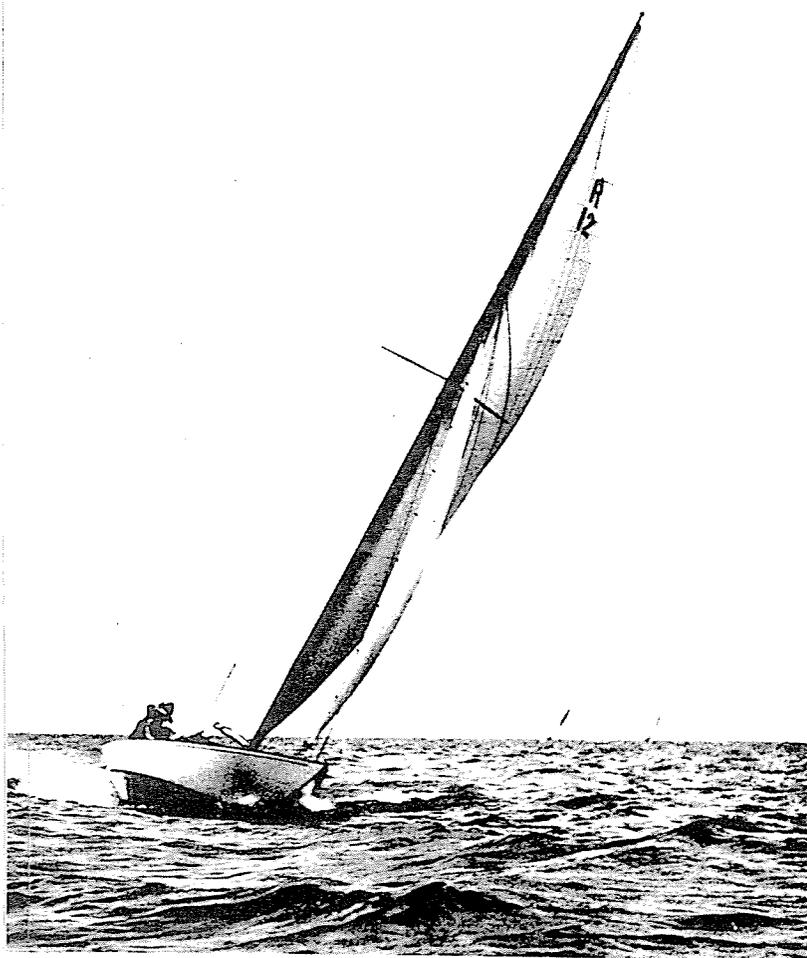
The object of the association shall be to encourage yacht building and yacht racing, and to establish and enforce uniform rules for the government of all races in which the yachts of two or more clubs compete.

Rochester Yacht Club became a member in 1887 and Commodore George H. Newell became vice president and, in 1888, president of LYRA.

RYC has continued its association with LYRA for 90 years. This is exceeded only by RCYC which is the only survivor of the founding clubs that has maintained its LYRA membership without a break

Lieutenant Colonel L. F. Grant, in his book entitled *History of the Lake Yacht Racing Association* published in 1963, describes in detail the early years of the organization. Among the first actions was the adoption of the Seawanhaka Rule under which regattas were raced and which was subsequently adopted by most other clubs on the lake. This rule is described in this way:

Simply, the rule was that racing length was half the sum of water-line length and the square root of the sail area. The rule obviously encouraged long overhangs and, as there were no scantling restrictions, some very flimsy boats were built under its influence.



W. Peck Farley's *ROGUE*, RYC's first Freeman Cup Winner in 1925.