

Reflections of Waquoit Bay Yacht Club Through the Years

By Betsy Rogers Young

It is hard to believe that it's been 85 years since the founding of Waquoit Bay Yacht Club located on Waquoit Landing Road in Waquoit. The club has continued through the years as a lively, fun-filled place of learning – swimming, sailing, racing and seamanship – and fun.

Betsy Nichols Lowery, who passed away this year at the age of 94, told me about her father and a few others including Homer & Sara Conant Ostrom setting out to organize a yacht club for Waquoit Bay. That was in 1926. Earlier in the 1920's Pop Nichols had begun to develop the Seapit peninsula. Sara Conant Ostrom, as one of the founders, was ahead of her time in insisting that women be allowed to become members of the club. This was revolutionary for 1926.

Sara Ostrom King reports that her family's membership in the club has been continuous throughout these 85 years. Actually, the next generation of Ostrom descendants has recently become members perpetuating the family legacy.

As a newcomer to the club in 1956, I remember sailing across the Bay to teach sailing to the younger children while the older youngsters taught the younger ones to swim. Norris Eastman was everything to us kids then – steward, sailing master, swimming supervisor, racing committee, lifesaving instructor and definitely ping-pong champ of the Club.

Back then races for the Beetle Cats happened every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon – rain or shine, wind or no wind, hot or cold. At that time about 10 Beetles sailed the bay. Cape Cod Knockabouts and Beetles raced every Sunday and holiday throughout the summer. Some of the junior sailors crewed for the senior races teaching the youth sailors the art of the jib and racing techniques.

The Club was created to promote sailing, but through the years families have learned more than the basics of tacking or reefing. They've discovered the joy of learning from each other and spending time together out on the water. This summer my grandchildren will participate in sailing lessons offered at the club and I will have the opportunity to pass a lifetime of boating skills onto them.

This summer the club offers an eight-week youth program of sailing lessons in Optimis for the young inexperienced and intermediate sailors. Older sailors are learning racing techniques and competing in inter-club races using the larger 420's sailboats. Adults gather on Sunday afternoons and holidays throughout the season to race their Knockabouts.

New this year is an instructional adult sailing program. Adults will be sailing the Club's 420's one evening a week for six weeks. They will be instructed in rigging/de-rigging, basic sailing and racing as well as docking, capsizing procedures while following prescribed safety rules.

Club members with larger boats have a cruising schedule each summer. This year's trips include cruises to Oak Bluffs, Edgartown, Cuttyhunk, Mattapoisett, Tashmoo, and Vineyard Haven's Lagoon Pond. The boats, both sail and power, raft up and use their dinghies to explore these harbors as well as relax and enjoy each other's company.

Today the Club retains its friendly, relaxed feel with the laughter of children learning to love and respect the bay and enjoy the activities it provides. The adults are not left out of the fun. They too enjoy the beauty and the camaraderie it provides. Members enjoy several social events held throughout the summer. One of these is this year's 85th Anniversary celebration.

We will be marking this 85th Anniversary with a dinner and dance on July 9. Members and friends will be entertained by the music of George Gritzbach's Blues Band.

We will be remembering the names of those who were involved with the Club over the years – Eastman, Lindberg, Barnard, Becker, Kline, Canning, Cannon, Crowell, Munro, Nichols, Clements, Jones, Lawrence, Brick, Riley, Savery, Converse, Bradley, Wise, Shepherd, Lipka, Levi, Berry, Fleischmann, Karl, Briana, Lunn, Collins, Crocker, Kanter, Hallenbeck, Kaye, Offen, Otis, Rich, Smaykiewicz, Vail, Lester, Khan, Rogers, Swain, Ostrom, McMenemy, Burns, Grinnell – just to name a few.

The thrill of gliding through the air and water, harnessing and facing the wind all at once, is a feeling that resonates through the generations. Parents watch their children, and then grandchildren, learn the art of sailing while enjoying the same waters they grew up exploring.