

RYC ROOTS



A Historical Perspective of the Racine Yacht Club Through Time.

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Building our Yacht Club...

By Steve Wheeler

Our present Yacht Club building was constructed in 1972. It is well to know, though, how we evolved over time. Our original clubhouse had a rich history that stretched back to 1916. The story of that facility, and that of the construction of the building we are now in, can largely be told by using the following slightly edited quotes from one 1972 edition of our Club newsletter, the *Reef Point*, which covered many of the details of our evolution; that *Reef Point* was entitled, "From Humble Beginnings to Realization." Some added comments are in italics. Most of the images used here are from the RYC archives.

1916...

"As we can all realize, a new clubhouse is not built over night. In fact our clubhouse was really started about 56 years ago (*prior to 1972*). The charter for the Racine Yacht Club was signed in 1916. The first meeting of the Racine Motor Boat and Yacht Club was called to order on January 23, 1916 by the temporary President, M. Dreager. An election of officers was held. The name of the Club was changed to the Racine Yacht Club. The House Committee reported that the building the Club was leasing from the Glass family could be purchased for the sum of \$2000.00. The location of this building or cottage was about one-half the way "up the hill" in line with Barker Street."

1925...

"The Racine Water Department wanted to build the present Water Department Building and in order



The original Racine Yacht Club clubhouse, ca. 1916. RYC archives



This photo shows the Edgewater Beach bath house just to the left of the clubhouse, ca. 1922. RYC archives

to do so the clubhouse would have to be moved. An attractive lease was drawn up between the Water Department and the Racine Yacht Club, and the clubhouse was moved to the lakeshore. The land at the new site was much lower at that time, so the building had to be placed upon pilings about four feet high. Many months and many dollars later the surrounding yard was filled and leveled off; all work was done by Club members. It is interesting to note that in the 1920s the Racine Yacht Club formed the

Edgewater Beach and Bath House Corporation. The company built a bath house and rented its facilities and suits to the bathers for the purpose of making money to run the Club."

1929...

"In October disaster struck in the form of a severe storm. Water was extremely high, the beach in



High water after the 1929 storm. RYC archives



front of the Club was low, and the government pier was not as effective as it is today. The storm almost wrecked the clubhouse and most members gave up on rebuilding. It wasn't until 1933, when Otto Wadewitz became Commodore, that any serious attempt was made to rebuild. At this time the clubhouse was rebuilt, placed on a foundation, and a basement and many other improvements added."



The clubhouse in 1937, some years after being placed on a new foundation that included a basement. RYC archives

1947...

"Serious consideration was given to the building of a new clubhouse. Preliminary drawings and sketches were drawn but, after getting a few rough cost estimates, \$45,000 was thought to be too high for the Club to bear. The flag pole was rebuilt instead and raised to its present height of sixty feet by "Red" Nymphius. The name of our first Junior member to lose his life in World War II, Gene Hardy, was placed on a plaque at the base of the flag pole."

1948...

"Our original bar was built in the basement as it had always been dry and nobody thought otherwise. It was usable for about two years but the lake level was rising."

Many who remember the old building will also remember the duck-boards that, for many years, were occasionally placed on the floor to keep member's feet out of the water there.

1950...

"A new bar was added by enclosing the front porch and laying foundations where the former porch had been. This addition was the old bar we all knew so well. At the same time, an addition was added to the north end of the old dining room." (photos at right)

1955...

"It was found necessary to start the building of the Wadewitz Pier, the first section of which cost \$13,000.00. Members raised the money by purchasing planks and pilings. Their names were placed on name plates and attached

to their purchases. *The tops of the wood pilings were capped with zinc sheeting to prevent water intrusion. Nameplates were soldered to the caps.* The cost of a plank was \$5.00 and \$25.00 for a piling. In the next five years, from 1955 to 1960, the Club was constantly being improved upon. The galley and women's head were added as boating was fast becoming a family affair. The lower deck basement was remodeled in 1961 by covering the walls with knotty pine and putting tile on the floor."

1966...

"Our next big step forward was the pier extension and breakwater. This task took a lot of courage on the part of the membership and especially the men in charge. They all had their problems galore, but the finished



Top: The addition of the new bar on the east side, over what had been a patio, ca. 1950s. Center: The inside of the new bar at the old Club. When sitting at it, one faced west. The bartender is Bob Patterson. Bottom: The dining room in the old Club building, ca 1950s. It faced north (the galley was on the south side of the building). RYC archives

product is enjoyed by many. At the present time we have invested approximately \$100,000.00 and many man-hours in the pier. This new addition was paid for by a yearly assessment and was fully paid in 1972."

1971...

"A new clubhouse was re-born at the general membership meeting held May 20, 1971 when the Long Range Planning Committee reviewed the accelerating deterioration and increasing obsolescence of our old clubhouse. This committee presented the costs for remodeling and updating our old building, and also



presented the idea of building a new clubhouse. The membership gave the committee authority to proceed with plans for a new facility."

Building...

Probably the most difficult task was to design a building that would meet the needs and desires of most Club members, and yet be economically feasible for the Club to consider. Many sets of plans were drawn, and revised, and re-drawn, until the final concept was on paper.



A concept sketch for a proposed new Club building, 1971. RYC archives

The general membership was asked to make suggestions on all phases of the new clubhouse and many of their suggestions, especially in regard to allocation of space, room sizes, layout and décor were incorporated into the final drawings."

Funding...

"Each individual member has a right to be proud of their financial contribution to the new clubhouse. In order to raise the needed equity funds, each member was required to purchase a Class "A" membership certificate at a cost of \$300.00 or a Class "B" membership certificate at a cost of \$100.00, depending on the individual's membership classification. Initially, \$45,000.00 was generated from the sale of these certificates. A long term mortgage

in the amount of \$70,000.00 was negotiated with a local lending institution."

Resolution...

"At the general membership meeting held February 17, 1972, a resolution was passed approving the plans as presented by the Building Committee, authorizing the officers to execute all mortgage documents and directing the Building Committee to proceed with construction of the new clubhouse—IMMEDIATELY."

1972...

"Construction begins. The day of the eagerly awaited ground-breaking ceremonies arrived on April 28, 1972. Elected officials, other invited dignitaries, and many Club members watched Commodore Vern Barber and Mayor Huck officially turn the first shovel of dirt for the new clubhouse. The weather tried to dampen the spirits of those attending, but succeeded in only wetting a few suits and hair-do's. Under the

capable direction of Gary Knop, RYC member and Vice President of Camosy Construction Co., the general contractor, work on the new building proceeded smoothly and swiftly towards completion. Club members deserve many thanks for time and talent contributed during the construction months. Interior and exterior walls were painted, floor coverings laid, doors hung and finished, the trophy case and cabinets built, sound systems wired, and innumerable other tasks performed... ALL BY CLUB MEMBERS. The Ladies Auxiliary deserve recognition for their contributions, especially as construction approached completion. The ladies conducted an auction and rummage sale in our old clubhouse, selling everything that wasn't needed or to be used in our new building. It's amazing how the value of an item increases with persuasive selling. These same ladies needed to raise money to buy the attractive bar stools and tables to be used in the bar-room of the new clubhouse. The money was raised from various members, who each agreed to purchase an article of furniture, after listening to their plea for assistance."



Groundbreaking. Commodore Vern Barber is in front with Racine's Mayor Huck (with the shovel) behind him. RYC archives



Completion...

"On September 30, 1972, the auction was held in the old clubhouse and by October 1, 1972, the move into the new clubhouse was completed. Amazingly, only 156 days after the ground-breaking ceremony)." *There follows a fairly long description of the building itself and it was noted that, "Money to furnish the Club office was donated to the Club. In appreciation of this gift, the Office has been named the Commodore Otto Wadewitz Room." And, "To some Club members, the new Ladies Room and the new Men's Room represent the biggest improvement from our old clubhouse." For those who remember the old building, that is certainly a true statement.*

Commodore Vern Barber wrote...

"Our new Yacht Club building is not the end of our long range planning, but in reality the beginning of a new era. Our new building is the instrument to generate more involvement in yachting. What we do to support and encourage boating will make the long effort an asset to ourselves and the community. The Long Range Planning Committee has incorporated the future growth and development of the Club into our new facility. The membership is the top priority of consideration for today and tomorrow's needs and activities. Involvement has been the



The Racine Yacht Club today; it is somewhat larger than the original concept sketch. The building stands in the approximate location of the old dinghy harbor, which no longer exists. *Steve Wheeler photo*

key to our success in erecting our new Yacht Club building. It has been accomplished through several years of planning all facets of construction and practicality of function by a dedicated Planning Committee. Each of us was involved when we pledged our certificate money, which was a basic commitment. Many gave beyond this by spending time and talent in completing the building. With a continuing bond of effort and energy we can generate the best for the future."

The old Racine Yacht Club clubhouse, which had served so well for so many years was demolished at about the same time as the new building was finished. In addition, "Decky" Blish's house, at the back of the property, and the oar shed,



The loss of an old friend...in 1972 the old clubhouse was demolished. *Courtesy of Arlene Whitt*

just to the south-west of the old Club building were torn down, too. Decky's house (which had been RYC property for many years) had served as something of a Junior clubhouse and as a shop for the building of four Penguin sailboats by Tom Owen in the early 1960s. The oar shed, which had also stood for many years, had lockers in which members could store gear.



The old oar shed, in the foreground of this photo, was near the back of the old Club building. It had a crowned roof and a low profile which leads to some suspicion that it may have once been a deckhouse on a lake schooner. Decky's house can be seen at the back of the property. *Courtesy of Arlene Whitt*

In 1974 the Richter Building was constructed, basically on the site of the old Club building. Designed and built largely with donated materials and labor, this building, named after Bill Richter, serves as storage for equipment and as a gathering place for sailing schools and other activities.



The Richter building. It stands on the site of the old clubhouse. *Steve Wheeler photo*



A publication of the RYC Historical Committee, a volunteer group dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of RYC's rich history. Written by Steve Wheeler, with quotes from a 1972 Reef Point newsletter and photos from the RYC archives.