

Sherborn Yacht Club

Early Years

by Robert G. Ambos, November 10, 2001

The idea for the club began late one snowy Sunday afternoon in February of 1961 in the living room of Bob and Gair Brooks at 215 Washington Street (currently occupied by Peter Doyle & family). Present were the Brooks and their children and Arnold and Barbara Whitman with their children. They had just returned from sledding on Saltonstall's Hill (Farm Road) and were sitting around drinking hot chocolate (for the adults liberally laced with rum). The conversation went something like this:

Gair: So, Arnold, what are you doing for the summer? Are you going up to teach sailing at that Holliston camp again? (*Arnold worked during the school year for Fisher College and routinely spent his summers elsewhere.*)

Arnold: No, I'm going to stay in town this summer. And I'm looking forward to it. For one thing, I can freely take a drop (*raising his mug*) when I've a mind to. (*Laughter*). I'm going to teach sailing right here at Farm Pond!

Bob: Here at Farm Pond? What are you going to use for a boat?

Arnold: That's what got me started on this. . . I learned that Tufts University Phys Ed department had bought new sailboats and were looking to sell their old Wee Nips. The price was good — \$75 — so I bought four of them.

Barbara: (*With a wry grin.*) Right, and crammed them in the garage. Makes it impossible to move around!

Arnold: Well, it won't be for long. As soon as I patch them up, I'll move the hulls out on the back lawn. (*then, to the others*) The wooden seats and floorboards need a bit of work.

Bob: How big is a Wee Pip?

Arnold: Wee Nip -- Think of what a Scotsman has in the pub after a long day on the Highlands. . . . It's a sailing skiff, centerboard, about 12 feet long, a bit under 4 feet wide. It's all wood. Single canvas sail, cat-boat rig.

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Arnold's plan went well and by summer end he had introduced a couple of dozen Sherborn citizens to the art and science of sailing . . . to the point where they wanted to stage races to see who was better skilled. Mulling this over, Arnold (no doubt with a beer in his hand) suggested to the group, "Why don't we have a Yacht Club?"

At an inaugural meeting/party on May 20, 1962, they adopted a set of by-laws and elected Steve Huppertz Commodore; Arnold Whitman, Secretary; and Bob Shaughnessy Treasurer. Although declining to become the first Commodore Arnold was the unquestioned leader of the club, officially serving as Secretary, dock-master, and arbiter of racing rules.



*Watching racing from the dock at the right side of the boat ramp (1963). The boat with the floorboards is a Wee Nip.*

They knew it would be more precise to call it the Sherborn Sailing Club or even the Sherborn Dingy Club, but they thought it was a fun joke to call it the *Sherborn Yacht Club* . . . visualizing with glee how newcomers to town would be asking “Where is the Clubhouse?”

or “Can we have dinner tonight at the Yacht Club?” They were also aware that many *real* yacht clubs offered reciprocal privileges to members of other yacht clubs.

The Club prospered and in the Spring of 1969, filed for and became a non-profit corporation. This brief history focuses on the years before incorporation.

## **Boats**

The Club sailed the Wee Nips through the year 1963. In 1964 the Club rented six all-wood Dublin Sloops at a cost of \$300 from the Dublin (NH) School. In the Spring of 1965 Bob Shaughnessy offered to lend the Club the money to buy new fiberglass Pearson Petrels, which offer was gladly accepted. (Bob was proprietor of the Bob Smith Sporting Goods store in downtown Boston and had special knowledge of, and interest in, boats.) The Club bought five Petrels for \$600 each and sailed the comfortable broad-beamed Petrels (with *Dacron* Sails!) through 1967. Subsequent Club boats were International 420s (1968–72), International 470s (1973–78), Alcort Apollo Sloops (1979–84), Windmills (1985–94), and JY14s (1995–present).

In 1964, responding to repeated inquiries from Sunfish / Sailfish owners, the Club began to schedule separate races for this class. In 1965, the Club established a special temporary membership category for Sunfish / Sailfish owners and sent a letter inviting these people to join. In 1968, a Vice Commodore office was created to oversee Sunfish competition.

## **Membership**

The earliest surviving official list of members is for 1964. Based on the memories of charter members, the following is a list of individual or family memberships who were believed to hold membership through 1964. (In other words, it includes all 1964 members plus those who were earlier members, but did not re-join for one reason or another.) Most of these people are still alive. The “(d)” indicates otherwise. The letters (CM) after a name indicates charter

membership.

Bob & Catharine Ambos  
 Peter (d) & Rita (d) Billings (CM)  
 John and Joan (d) Belcher  
 Bob & Gair Brooks (CM)  
 Bob & Lois Bullard (CM)  
 Austin Callaway (CM)  
 John E. Carlson  
 John (d) & Peggy Culver  
 Edith (d) & Bob (d) Dahlroth (CM)  
 Bob & Bert Delaney (CM)  
 James Dietterick  
 Bill and Ann Emerson  
 Steve (d) and Elizabeth (d) Huppertz (CM)  
 Jay (d) and Noel Gay (d) Lincoln  
 John (d) and Jean (d) Logan  
 Russ and Amanda Moore (CM)  
 Jay and Janet Mullen (CM)  
 Carol and Thomas (son) O'Neil  
 Dick and Barb Ostberg  
 Bill (d) and Marty Saunders (CM)  
 David Semonite  
 Bob (d) and Anne Shaughnessy (CM)  
 Ruck (d) and Anita (d) Sherrill (CM)  
 Van and Bev Stevens  
 Mike Trum  
 Joe (d) and Betty Valentine (CM)  
 Les and Pat Watson  
 Warren and Helen (d) Wheelwright (CM)  
 Arnie and Barbara Whitman (CM)  
 Tom and Gail Widger  
 Harry and Connie Wilcox



*Petrels racing at a 1965 July 4<sup>th</sup> Regatta. Bob Chambers skippers the lead boat with Barbara Ostberg as crew. Len Wilson skippers the second boat with Arnold Whitman as crew.*

Membership grew steadily, and by 1970 stood at about 117 families, couples, or individuals. Records indicate the following elected officers of the Club. The last column indicates the annual dues for a family membership.

| Year | Commodore / Vice Commodore     | Secretary       | Treasurer          | Annual Dues |
|------|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|
| 1962 | Steve Huppertz                 | Arnold Whitman  | Bob Shaughnessy    | \$?         |
| 1963 | Bob Brooks                     | Arnold Whitman  | Steve Huppertz     | \$?         |
| 1964 | Bob Dahlroth                   | Arnold Whitman  | Joe Valentine      | \$35        |
| 1965 | Bill Saunders                  | Arnold Whitman  | Warren Wheelwright | \$45        |
| 1966 | Bob Shaughnessy                | Jean Logan      | Warren Wheelwright | \$45        |
| 1967 | Arnold Whitman                 | Lil Waters      | Warren Wheelwright | \$45        |
| 1968 | Robert Bullard / Pete Billings | Margaret Furber | Warren Wheelwright | \$45        |
| 1969 | Charlie Cannon / Bob Cook      | Gair Brooks     | Warren Wheelwright | \$45        |
| 1970 | Dick Reilly / Dick Husselbee   | Gair Brooks     | Warren Wheelwright | \$40        |

## **Youth Programs**

From the beginning, the Club's sailing instruction program emphasized children and it was assumed that many juniors would progress to racing, which proved true. Early young sailors were Mark Billings, Candy and Leslie Brooks, Rusty and Ann Moore, Steve Sherrill, Smokey and Noel Whitman, and Greg Worthington. Records indicate Candy Brooks and Greg Worthington were Junior Champions in 1962. As they got older, former Juniors developed into very tough competitors and routinely won Senior racing trophies. Examples of such are: Doug Ambos; Debby Barnet; Glenn Caldicott; John Ingalls; Dan Itse; Gwen Scott; and Brian, Dan, and Mark Shaughnessy; . Many of these former Juniors also served as Dockmasters, some eventually serving as Commodore of the Club.

Learning to sail also meant learning to swim. As a safety measure the Club insisted that each young sailor be able to swim. Before getting permission to skipper a boat, each trainee had to show that he or she could handle a capsize. Some of the Club's juniors were also competitive swimmers on the Sherborn Swim Team.

## **Docks / Moorings / Racing Arrangements**

One of the first things Arnold did after deciding to teach sailing on Farm Pond was to get permission for the endeavor from the Sherborn Board of Selectmen. After the Selectmen proved sympathetic to this proposition, he suggested that the Town provide a mooring raft just to the right of the launching ramp (as viewed when facing the water). After this was done, the Club built a wooden ramp out to the raft. This was workable, but just barely. The real solution came in 1967 when Club members Irv and Jane Pockel, owners of the 3+ acres of Pond frontage just to the left of the launching ramp, offered to lease about 200 feet of this frontage to the Yacht Club (for the princely sum of \$1 per year) This was an ideal arrangement: a private site accessible from public property (and parking). Peg and Artemis Joukowsky very kindly continued the practice when they took over the property.

Early docks consisted of well-aged cast-off Town of Sherborn swimming docks. Early each spring a work party of Club members would assemble on the beach to repair these in the (vain) hope that they would last through the season. It was not until the early 80s that the Club designed and built its own docks from scratch.

The sailing race course was first defined and marked with bleach bottles tied to sash weights. The Race Committee (typically Arnold plus a companion or two) ran the races from a wooden dingy bought second hand by the Club for \$50. This dingy became known as "Arnie's Relic" and served this function until the early '70s. When it was retired, as a joke it was filled with dirt and deposited in front of the home of members George and Lee Sprague at 180 Lake Street. The Spragues accepted the joke and grew tulips in it for several years.

The growing popularity of the Sailfish / Sunfish program generated a need for members to park their boats when not in use and in 1964 the Club suggested that the Town establish an official Permit process for mooring boats. In 1969 the Club formally took over layout and installation of moorings. By the mid '70s the demand became so intense for moorings that anyone who wanted a new mooring permit was advised to arrive before dawn to wait in line for the Town Office to open on the first day of issue. Celebrity resident and Club member Jack Williams (news anchor at WBZ TV) was one of those who did just that to get a Sunfish mooring spot.

## Social Scene

Then as now, many Town newcomers joined the Club for social benefits. It was similar to other ways to get to know people (e.g., Newcomers Club, Couples Club), but had the advantages of a clear theme and a membership that was a legitimate cross-section of the Town.

Certainly, the average 1960s member liked to party, and as the Club grew, the opportunities for such multiplied. At first, parties were featured only at season beginnings and endings. Since a fee was charged (\$2 per person was typical for a simple cocktail party), these events were profitable and more were added as the years went by. By 1965, the Club had progressed to sponsoring five events designed strictly for entertainment:

Memorial Day season-kickoff cocktail party at the 93 North Main Street home of Bob and Lois Bullard

4<sup>th</sup> of July Clam Bake in the spacious 215 Washington Street yard of Bob & Gair Brooks

Mid-summer moonlight sail to the island for a cookout

Labor Day Commodore's Cup series of races and parties

New Year's Eve party.

The Labor Day events featured a Friday evening cocktail party at the 91 North Main Street home of Bill and Marty Saunders, a Sunday afternoon family cookout at the Whitman's, and a pool-side awards cocktail party at the 20 Prospect Street home of Joe and Betty Valentine.

In 1967, the Club inaugurated a Memorial Day Predicted Log Race on the Charles River. In 1970 the Club began sponsoring a spring dinner-dance (*Buoy-Room Ball*). The 1970 event was held at the Natick Labs Officers Club. The fee for the evening was \$5 per person.

## The Times

In 1962 the population of Sherborn was about 1800 (about 500 families -- most of whom knew each other). The Police department was Chief John Paul plus a few part-timers, who cruised the streets in a single vehicle. The Fire Chief was Les Klein, who was also proprietor of the always busy Klein's Garage and Filling Station. Except for the Fire and Police departments (the latter operated out of John Paul's home), all Town government functions were housed in what is now the Sherborn Community Center. Jackson's Store (was located next to Pilgrim Church) still sold groceries and a few bottles of tonic and served as the Post Office. A new street in town was Great Rock Road, where new houses were selling for astonishing prices — as high as \$35,000!

Most houses were occupied by a married couple and their children. The father worked all week and the mother stayed home and raised the children. When the weekend arrived it was understood by all that the adults deserved some recreation. The attraction of beautiful Farm Pond and the tranquility of sailing on it was obvious. Once the parents learned to sail, they found it was a lot of fun to race each other every Sunday. Separate "leagues" were also formed to race during weekday morning and evening hours. During the early years at least 75% of the members came down to race regularly. At cocktail parties preceding regatta weekends the focal point was the sign-up board that determined when you would sail, in what boat, and against what competitors.

Speaking of cocktail parties, most of the adults had lived through WWII and were products of that era. Among other traits was a fondness for alcoholic beverages — usually the stronger the better. At a typical Yacht Club cocktail party — always loud with plenty of laughs and few if any children — the party-goers would have three or four strong drinks, then form a group to invade a restaurant for dinner. Most of the members were also cigarette smokers and no gathering could proceed without numerous strategically placed butt-cans.

“The Era of Wonderful Nonsense” — *Westbrook Pegler*