

THE WHITBY YACHT CLUB

The Little Club That Grew.

By R.B.Townsend It sprawls between the waters of Whitby Harbour and Lake Ontario, a once (and still to a considerable extent) quiet, charming, rural refuge between the bustling industrial centres of Toronto and Oshawa. From the upper decks of the clubhouse a sailor can view it all, water on 3 sides, nearly 12 acres of grounds and 13 acres of waterlots belonging to The Whitby Yacht Club. He can speculate on the results of a race around the buoys, identify yachts (and the goofs of their skippers) as they enter the harbour, watch boats heading for the Whitby Marina farther up the bay ignore the channel markers and run aground on Vickery's Island (a shoal) and keep an eye on the nearly 300 vessels tied up to the clubs floating docks, the junior clubhouse, workshops, mastsheds, and generally watch the activities on shore. What is now The Whitby Yacht club, "a member owned facility yacht club" is the result of nearly 40 years of effort by its members.

It was little more than a swamp when seven men of vision, led by founding Commodore Mel Goreski looked over the little used harbour with abandoned barges, no access roads and much shallow water on the protected inner bay. Physical problems were complicated by the fact that the ownership of the lands was in doubt. All three levels of Government denied title to the lands. The Federal Government saying they had turned the waterlots over to the Town; the Town denying knowledge of the transfer; and the Province saying where their property line for the Ontario Hospital ended. A survey paid for by the founding members determined the lot lines, a fence was erected, a building that was under demolition uptown strangely reappeared on the property to become the first clubhouse, dredging was underway and a Yacht Club was formed. Through the efforts of Mel Goreski and his men of vision and dedication, including John Vicery, Jim Stewart Carl Mantz and Larry Cond, Fred Dionne, and others. It wasn't long before the old Buckle Factory from the Town of Whitby suddenly had a reincarnation at the club property as its first club house. Part of that building is now the club workshed. Within a year, after extensive dredging and landfill, the club had it's first regatta where the participants paid \$10.00 to become charter members. The charter was issued on the 14th day of November 1967. It wasn't long before sailors were taking notice of the little club on the bay. The 'basin' was soon full of keel boats, and the need for more docks was apparent. By 1973 over 90 keel boats, including the three or four power boats, and over 100 senior members confirmed the need for the club to formalize its lease arrangements on the extensive property it was managing. A quit claim from the Feds and the Provs was a windfall to the Town, and a 25 year lease on the ground lots was signed containing a provision that a new club house be erected by the club on the property. on which the club would pay taxes. The new clubhouse, was opened on January 1st 1974 (after a warm up the night before) with Commodore Harry "Tanker" Jones and incoming Commodore Jack Blutcher, officiating. High water (which caused shore erosion), & the designing and building of docks, an active racing programme, an even more active cruising programme, were all factors in melding the membership into a cohesive club. Throughout the sailing season the racing fleet was out every Wednesday evening and there was usually dinghy racing on Thursday evenings. For the cruising fleet many races of a novelty nature and short cruises have been organized. Throughout the winter season, Wednesday night was "Winter Sail Night" with sailing oriented programmes and discussions on sailing. Friday evening has been Hospitality night, and members can always

depend on friendly members to spend some time with, a time to relax and socialize over a free buffet snack and maybe, to enjoy a friendly game of darts. With the clubhouse built and paid for by the membership, which by 1977 numbered some 275 families, and some 300 steel floating docks (all built by club members), the club embarked on a major project of building some 2200 feet of shoreline protection, and an enlargement of its parking area to accommodate over 500 cars. Before this was completed the club was struck by a major storm (September 24th 1977) which destroyed many docks and damaged a good number of the boats. The problem was a surge caused by a prolonged heavy east wind. Tank tests conducted on behalf of the club by Queens University indicated that a groyne at the east end of the club property would eliminate the surge problem completely. The groyne was quickly built, being completed long before Government approval was forthcoming. Now all club boats are docked in safe, tranquil waters. From the lake, access to the club waters in the bay is quick and easy: a wide, deep harbour channel is maintained by the Department of Transport. In preparation for the large, multimillion dollar parklands being developed by the Town of Whitby, the natural bay was dredged to a depth of 8 feet below datum. Additional land and a new access road through the proposed park lands has been recently negotiated, further enhancing the club property, which in turn will enhance the proposed parkland. An active racing programme has always been the hallmark of the club. Club racing, including a very strong Thunderbird fleet, was highlighted in 1973 when the club hosted the Thunderbird Worlds, won by Commodore Harry 'Tanker' Jones.

Members have won many trophies in the L.Y.R.C., C.Y.R.A. and other racing organizations around the lake as well as some ocean races such as the Bermuda One Two. Racers have joined the even more active cruising sailors in showing the distinctive club burgee, not only around Lake Ontario, but throughout the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, the East Coast of Canada and U.S.A. as well as the 15 or more WYC Boats that have sailed about 25 or more recorded trips to Bermuda. One WYC boat has twice circumnavigated the Atlantic Ocean in an 18 month cruise and several WYC Boats are now cruising the Caribbean, one hoping to do a circumnavigation.. Whitby is very much a sailing club.. The world will get to know the Town of Whitby by the good reputation of the Yacht Club, and its members. With its spacious clubhouse and grounds, and with new docks and facilities, there is always room for visiting sailors.

Members of clubs with reciprocal privileges are warmly encouraged to stay for a night or a weekend when cruising down the lake during the sailing season ... but why wait till then. There's a warm welcome at any time, for sailors, particularly during the social functions, Wednesday Night Sail Programmes, Friday evenings or Saturday or Sunday afternoons. The Whitby Yacht Club is a major yacht club in Canada. With a nearly full membership, an active junior programme, many young members from a young and growing community, and with good support and co operation from the Town of Whitby, it will continue to be a dominant force and make a substantial contribution to the quality of life in Durham Region, and to the sailing community, particularly on Lake Ontario.