

History of the Boating Club

The Articles of Incorporation for the Boating Club were filed with the State on March 10, 1953, with a membership of 18, including the women, by the end of 1953. The constitution and by-laws were made with much reference to Roberts Rules of Order, which have been revised many times. The Boating Club is led by a Commodore, a Vice Commodore, a Secretary, a Treasurer and a Rear Commodore.

There have been 37 Commodores since the inception of the Club, with the 38th and current Commodore Cheryl O'Grady-Ritchie, presiding. At that time, they met at the Yacht Club, which was a raised barge set on the land where the Club stands now. Then, the group changed the meeting place to the Knight of Pithias Hall on Sheboygan and Portland St.

By the end of 1954, membership grew to 64, but dropped to one couple in 1959. Although disbanding had been discussed, in 1960 membership had grown to 19 again and by 1962 had grown even more. Membership drives, with a point system, created incentive to continue the Boating Club. Points were given for being at a meeting, more for serving on a committee and more for bringing in new members. A prize was awarded at the end of the year to the member(s) with the most points. Long-standing members, such as Milt and Bea Hoag, 1954, Larry and Dorothy Harshbarger, 1954, Jerry and Florence Mabie, 1954, Dan and Alta Gross, 1955, Marge Roloff, 1956, and Denis and Vi Schmitz, 1958, have seen the Club through many transitions. In 1959, meetings were held at individual members' homes each month with a pot-luck dinner. When membership grew to 20-25, a new meeting place had to be located. Mr. Bretthauer, on the west shore of the lake, provided a one-room building with a bar and outdoor facilities. The Yacht Club had burned and been rebuilt around this time, so they moved their meetings back to the Yacht Club, which has been enlarged and remodeled since then.

The flag, a burgee, is white in color with a blue lighthouse emblazoned on it. Prior burgees have differed from the current in that the original of 1953 was said to be blue with a design of a prop in the center and "Outdoor Boating Club" circled around it. In 1961, the burgee had names on it which was against the burgee rules (unknown at the time). In 1973, a firm in Hong Kong designed the burgee presently being used. All members were asked to fly it, especially when traveling in a group function. All new members must purchase a burgee as part of joining the club.

Cruises have been scheduled every year since 1961. The Club has been to Madison, Wisconsin Dells, Lake Wisconsin and the Chain of Lakes, putting in at King. Although the trips taken then seemed more adventurous, the group was smaller, and the boats were much smaller than what is the norm today. Recently, the club trips have expanded to the Mississippi River and some have crossed Lake Michigan from Sturgeon Bay to Lake Charlevoix. There had been a time when there were blackboards between the boathouses on the south end of the Big Hole with chalk in a jar attached to a string so if a cruise left, they would write the time, destination and number of boats for any wishing join them. Keeping an environmentally clean world was and is a way of life for the Boating Club. 8x10 signs that read 'This area left clean by the Outboard Boating Club' were tacked up on trees or posts in the picnic area as proof positive of our intentions. The methods of communication on cruises have also seen transitional changes from the time of the 2-way Walkie Talkie radio, which the lead and tail boats carried to

maintain the cruise, to the CB's of the 1960's to the marine radio technology of today. You can bet that the founders never dreamed that there would be telephones and GPS on boats.

The Club's social activities have included treasure hunts, cruise to New London, the Berlin and Omro Corn Roasts, pancake breakfasts, closed course races, patrolling the 44-mile races to Fremont, participation in Walleye Weekend and the 'Blessing of the Boats'. The Blessing of the Boats began in July 1965, which the Club planned and coordinated. 10 priests, ministers and rabbis were present to do the honors, with approximately 75 boats in attendance, despite tornado warnings. A WBA convention at the Retlaw, complete with style show, discussion groups covering several areas, dinner and dance was given in 1962. In the years since the 40th anniversary, our club has expanded our interests a bit. Not only have we continued with the Walleye Weekend dock installation and removal but have also shared our love of boating with the 'Big Brothers and Big Sisters' organization in the City. The children and 'Bigs' are treated to an evening of boating around the lake and then taken back to the Yacht Club for a light meal. We've been sharing these outings with both the Yacht Club and the Sailing Club members. The turnout has been extraordinary which means that many more youngsters are able to benefit from the experience. Our Ice Picnic, Poker Run, Salmon Roast and renewal of the Mississippi River Run are just a few of the new adventures our Club was doing in the 90's.

In 1978, for the 25th Anniversary, a dinner, dance and style show with prizes was given. Our 30th through the 50th anniversaries were also celebrated with dinners, dancing with various entertainments. The Club has continued to celebrate milestones having celebrated our 60th Anniversary in 2013. The club has been putting away funds in anticipation of celebrating our 70th in 2023.

Dorothy Harshbarger, our first historian, has compiled several scrapbooks and newspaper clippings that are an interesting track of the club's activities. Since Dorothy retired, Lois Zimmer has volunteered to carry on with this recording of our history. The club has since developed a website to store recent history and to communicate with its members. A file containing several anniversaries can also be seen. A history of summer cruise schedules for the last 15 years is posted for everyone's perusal.

The Fond du Lac Boating Club encourages family boating and following safe rules of the waterways. Safety is still important to our club. Some of our members were very instrumental in the drive to replace the navigation tower at Cal Harbor. On a hazy or foggy night, we especially appreciate their efforts. Our members keep abreast of all new regulations and support various water concerned interests throughout the Fox River Valley systems.

Our current membership now stands at 82 (2021), down from 152 in 1998 when this writing was started. A note of interest...we are sporting several parent/child families, two generations of active boating families. We also have several sibling families and children of past members, some who belonged, left us and now are back in the fold, but all are assuring us that the ideas and heritage of the Boating Club will be carried on for years to come.

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