

## LEWES YACHT CLUB HISTORY

It was on a hot, sunny afternoon in August 1932 that it was first decided upon to endeavor to organize a sailing association which within a fortnight gave birth to The Lewes Yacht Club. The idea was the brainchild of the late Major George Edwards Davisson of West Philadelphia, Swarthmore, and Lewes Beach. Marjorie F. Virden, a Lewes resident, though like George, a native of the Quaker City, was sunning in the backyard of her parents', Captain and Mrs. Thomas James Virden's, Pilot Town Road residence, when a suntanned blonde young man, wearing only a badly torn pair of white duck trousers arrived to discuss what turned out to be an excellent idea in his mind. He was, of course George Davisson, then about thirty years old. His reason for the visit was to suggest the formation of a sailing club. Mr. Davisson had already counted between eighteen and twenty-five small sailing craft in the Delaware Bay, had a tiny boat of his own (Moth class), and wanted nothing so much as to enter competitive sailing. It was decided between the two folks discussing a yacht club, to round up everyone they thought would be interested and shortly thereafter, a meeting of seventeen people gathered one summer evening on the veranda of the bayfront cottage of the late Thomas W. McComb of Chester. Right then and there the name was decided upon as The Lewes Yacht Club. The next Saturday and Sunday competitive racing was inaugurated. As it was rather late in the summer season not too many races were held, although they were carried on during September. Some members were only part-time residents of Lewes, but enjoyed sailing on the Delaware Bay so greatly that they made a point of arriving Friday evening for trial runs, and with much interest participated in the two day contest. Since there were many different types of sailboats, there was at first what was dubbed an "Allowance Class" and the following year there was also a Snipe Class.

The seventeen charter members included the late Richard Reese Sr. of Wilmington and Lewes Beach, who at that time owned a cottage next to "Davey's Inn", the Davisson cottage, and his son Richard Reese Jr.; Commander Frank S. Carter Sr. (USN ret.) and his two children, Helene (now Mrs. Anthony Potter) and Frank Jr.; the late John B. Wine and his son John W. Wine of Narberth, Pa. and Lewes Beach; Howard Tunnell Long of West Philadelphia and Lewes Beach; the late Balmer J. Raynor and attorney Leighton S. Dorsey, both of Wilmington and "the beach"; George Davisson and his brother, J. Patterson Davisson; Captain George E. Chambers Sr. a Lewes resident; two young men from Ardmore, who at the time had a trailer on the Davisson land on the beach, namely George E. Fleming and his brother Douglas Fleming; Marjorie F. Virden of Lewes, and of course Mr. McComb. Mr. McComb, who had a sizable yacht, was Fleet Captain for many years.

The year 1933 was a terrific one for the Lewes Yacht Club, which, by that time could boast of thirty or more faithful sailors. The entire figuring on the allowances was done by George Davisson at his cottage, with Marge Virden knowing not a whit about how to compute the scores sitting silently waiting for the final results to send to the

Philadelphia newspapers, and also the Delaware Coast News, predecessor of the Delaware Coast Press. Miss Virden was asked to be chairman of the yacht club's initial dinner-dance held at the Rehoboth Beach Country Club. She called a meeting at her home, which was well attended, and everyone was given a job.

An excellent four course dinner was served, admission was \$2.50, and it was attended by about ninety persons. Place cards for the Officers Table were made by Mrs. Raymond Atkins, the members supplied flowers, which Betty Atkins arranged, and the Lewes Yacht Club paid absolutely nothing to dance to the Country Club's excellent band. Thus the LYC social portion was launched.

The following paragraphs are from a letter dated September tenth 1934, written to "The Rudder" and "Yachting" magazines by Helene L. Carter, then secretary of the club:

This growing young club of Lewes, Delaware at the mouth of the Delaware Bay, has just completed a most successful season. Starting June 3rd, a series of 16 point races was held for the club's handicap class, winding up with the final race on September 9th. Extra Dry owned and sailed by W. Virden Burton of Lewes won the championship and the Hotel Henlopen Trophy. This cup, donated by W. S. Grenoble of Rehoboth Beach, must be won three times to gain permanent possession. The Titia, owned by the Commodore, Richard Reese, has the first leg, won last year. Extra Dry had a winning total of 85 1/2 points. Skippy, owned and sailed by Frank S. Carter, Jr. of Lewes, won the Commodore's trophy, a silver bowl offered for second place, with 83 points. Dipper, owned and sailed by George E. Fleming of Ardmore, Pa., placed third with 80 1/2 points, winning a wrist watch donated by Walter C. Feaster of Lewes, Delaware. Races were sailed on a handicap basis, allowances being computed from average times in three previous races. Dipper was scratch boat during the majority of the races, having actually finished first in every race but one.

Two special races were held during the season. A 4th of July test, on an allowance basis, was won by Skippy with the margin of only four seconds over Extra Dry. On Saturday, September 1st, the annual race around the breakwater took place in a northeaster and, as the course takes the fleet outside the protection of the breakwater, it turned out to be wet, and a rolling affair. On a scratch basis, Dipper won a special cup donated by Rear Commodore Chambers and Frank S. Carter.

The Club, numbering eighty-two members and only fifteen months old, hopes to form a class of one design boats for future racing but will continue its annual handicap series for its present fourteen boats.

Its first dinner and dance was held on September 8th at the Rehoboth Beach Country Club to wind up the season.

Officers, re-elected for the coming year are as follows: Richard Reese, Commodore, Wilmington; George E. Davisson, Vice-Commodore, Philadelphia; George E. Chambers,



Rear Commodore, Lewes; Helene L. Carter, Secretary and Treasurer, Lewes; Thomas McComb, Fleet Captain, Chester Pa.

There was no clubhouse until 1938. Prior to that time the race committee was headquartered beneath a huge beach umbrella and a much used table and chairs, high on the sand between the Reese and Davisson cottages. At 9AM, July 15th, 1937, Lewes Yacht Club was incorporated in preparation for the construction of the clubhouse the following year. Dated correspondence on file indicated that this move had been anticipated and envisioned right from the very inception of the club.

While there have been a few periods of slackening interest, they have been surprisingly few, gradual growth has been the rule. In 1957 funds were raised to build the patio which has been put to such heavy use. It became obvious in the early '60s that the clubhouse had been outgrown and action was started that resulted in the expansion and renovation of the building to its present size. Through the generosity of Otis H. Smith, a wing was added in the early fifties that enabled the original clubhouse to suffice until the major reconstruction work of 1963. Work, primarily done by club members, in the basement area of the clubhouse during the winter of '67 produced a beautiful social and bar area. During that same time period, plans for a marina on the canal property were developed, this being another dream of the founding fathers.

It is rather interesting to note at this point, that it is hard to find minutes of a meeting from 1933 to the present, where at least one of the following five items is not mentioned or discussed at Lengths:

Docks on the canal property  
A Liquor license for the club  
Dues delinquents  
Roof leaks  
Erection of a flagpole

We anticipate a great change in the minutes for the next thirty years to come because:

- Rowland Marshall is to see that the docks are started as early as possible in the spring of 1967.
- We have applied for a liquor license in spite of the unbelievable amount of red tape.
- The By-laws were updated and clearly spell out the fate of dues and capital assessment holdouts.
- The roof hasn't leaked of late. Fingers crossed.
- Dr. James Beebe Jr. has been appointed chairman of the LYC flagpole committee and will be responsible for mention of a flagpole in the future