

HISTORY OF THE NEW CASTLE SAILING CLUB

In the fall of 1952, Edward A. Taylor, who had been enjoying himself braving the seas and currents off New Castle in a 7-foot sailing dinghy, decided that the time had come to spread the gospel that there was a lot of fun to be had sailing on the Delaware River. There was plenty of opposition. Scoffers pointed out that the river was too dirty; the ship traffic too menacing, the currents too strong. But "Ted" and his first few enthusiastic converts including Newlin Booth, Allen T. Hill and Jack Cooper were not dismayed. They believed that under Incodel, the river was becoming progressively cleaner and that there was plenty of room for both the heavy commercial traffic and small pleasure craft. As for the current, they believed that the "right" sailboat could not only hold its own, but make good way in even a light breeze, and by sailing against the current take advantage of it for a free ride back to port if the wind should die.

The New Castle Sailing Club was organized on a cooperative basis in the fall of 1952 and the first meeting was held in Booth's office. Taylor was selected the first Commodore and subsequent meetings, mixing business with pleasure of course, were held in the homes of the board members and on occasion, at the Old New Castle Club. The first check was forthcoming from Dan Wolcott with others following in rapid succession. Charter members included Richard M. Appleby, Newlin Booth, John J. B. Cooper, James T. Eliason, Jr., Allen T. Hill, Robert J. Quillen, John C. Roman, Edward A. Taylor, Daniel F. Wolcott, and Robert F. Wright.

The founding fathers began shopping around in November 1952 and earned the gratitude of future club sailors by choosing the Thistle, a 17-foot sloop carrying 175 square feet of sail, as an ideal boat for our purposes for several reasons. She is fast, roomy, responsive and able. To the expected virtues of a comfortable and stiff day sailor, she adds the extra thrill that comes with planning. She is capable of holding her own in moderate breezes against the 2-3 knot river currents. She is unsinkable, although she may be capsized. She is a joy to handle for all; the avid racing skipper, the leisurely family sailor, the teenager, and the woman sailor.

The first Thistle, #542, was acquired in Galesville, Md. and by the middle of February, 1953, eager sailors were at work refinishing her bottom out-of-doors at the lower end of Packet Alley. She was properly launched and christened ONRUST with a dribble of ginger ale (attesting to the affluence of her owners who consumed the rest of the small bottle). During her first season she was taken out by only four members, but their enthusiasm was an inspiration to all and some of the scoffers began to think that perhaps it "could be done" after all. The Thistle had to be launched and hauled at the end of Packet Alley each time she was sailed. Near the end of the summer, Allen Hill acquired an old rowboat and ONRUST was moored off the northeast end of the Yacht Basin. This proved unsatisfactory as she capsized at the mooring several times and the rowboat was stolen. When she was tied to a raft in the Yacht Basin, the raft was stolen. Sailing departures and returns had to be carefully timed to coincide with the flood of the tide because the area was silted in and, as indicated in old snapshots, was a maze of old pilings.

In 1954, Thistle #60 (ORN) was purchased, our first dinghy was assembled at Eliason's, and through the good office of Booth and Deemer Steel the anchorage was located at the foot of Third Street in New Castle, just south of Battery Park. After the dinghy which was chained and locked on the beach had been smashed in, Booth donated a boathouse to the Club. Here the dinghies, sails and other gear could be stored in comparative security. The '54 Hurricane Hazel sent both ONRUST and ORN to Marine Construction for repairs.

In 1955, a year of encouraging expansion for the N.C.S.C. during the term of Newlin Booth as Commodore, the first Club Handbook was published and the Club was incorporated as a non-profit organization with the object of promoting the sport of sailing and the arts of seamanship and navigation on the Delaware River. A board of seven directors, later expanded to nine, elected each fall by the membership, chose their own officers and this group, aided by the various committees, conducted the business of the Club. Ever mindful of the fact that the ultimate objective was to enjoy safe sailing in congenial company, every effort was made to keep rules and red tape to a minimum. By 1962 the membership had increased to 60 active, 5 Honorary and 21 Junior members. In 1968, 1969 and 1970 membership was maintained at 65 active members. A membership limit of 65 was adopted on the basis

that 6 Thistles is a practical limit for our facilities and that 11 active members per Thistle is a desirable ration. The policy is reviewed periodically by the Directors.

As the Club membership grew, the fleet expanded. A third Thistle, #466 (WELCOME), was purchased in January 1955, #873 (WAEGH) in July, 1960, #1082 (DISCOVERY) in September 1960 and #552 (AMSTEL) in April 1961. A motorboat, Phoenix, to be used as a rescue and work boat, race committee boat, and tender, was a welcome addition in March 1960. In the boathouse ashore several dinghies, as well as several Sailfish, privately owned by individual members, were stored along with the sails and assorted gear. A practical cement ramp was installed in the spring of 1960 making it possible to launch dinghies at low tide without necessarily getting wet feet.

On launching day in 1962, our first fiberglass Thistle, #1610 replacing #542, was christened ONRUST II. Most of the members were enthusiastic about the ease of maintenance and upgrading the fleet to all fiberglass hulls commenced. In 1963, #1678 was purchased to replace ORN. #1844 took over the mooring of #552 in 1964. In 1965, #2013 was purchased when #466 and #873 were sold. In the meantime, the original Phoenix was replaced by a Boston Whaler. See the next section for a complete listing and history of club boats. In 1967 a low profile concrete block house on the beach side of the road was put into service for the convenient storage of 6 dinghies on two levels.

The Club provides an opportunity for sharing the responsibilities of boat ownership. It operates on a cooperative basis in maintaining the fleet. Replacement and capital investment come primarily from initiation fees, which are the Active Members' equity in Club assets. Supplies, insurance and other Club expenses come from dues. The upkeep, launching, haul-out and refitting depend on "voluntary" contributions of members' time and talents. Over the years the wintertime work of refinishing the boats has been done in a variety of places, both indoors and out. Starting in the fall of 1959, storage space large enough for the whole fleet was rented at the New Castle County Airbase, where the work was done under the direction of the Fleet Captain and his Boat Captains.

On several occasions early in our history, a club Thistle was raced in regattas away from home waters at such places as Barnegat Bay, Riverton, New Jersey and Corsica River on the Chesapeake. More recently, we have been represented by entries in regattas at the Corinthian Yacht Club at Cape May and at the Red Dragon Canoe Club on the Delaware. The casual racing program within the Club is pleasant relaxation for the average member. However, some of us find that occasionally earnest competition with the Thistle class champions provides a stimulating challenge - and serves to keep our "top" skippers from getting heads too big for their sailing caps!

Some of the members of the New Castle Sailing Club are "old salts" who have owned, sailed and raced their own boats for many years. Others have had little or no sailing experience before joining the group. A pleasant Club tradition is that the more experienced skippers are willing and eager to help the novices by their instruction and example so that we may all become safe, competent helmsmen and discover the relaxation, thrill and fun of sailing Thistles on the Delaware River.

In September, 1976, the Club purchased a Flying Scot (#2906) for evaluation over a one- to two-year period by Club members.

THE CLUB BOATS AND THEIR NAMES

The founders of the Club wisely selected the Thistle centerboard sloop as the boat to be owned by the Club for the use of the members and their families. The Thistle is fast and maneuverable, capable of flying a spinnaker and of planing. It can point high and foot well to windward. It has a broad beam and a large, well-designated cockpit, affording comfort and pleasure for family and guest sailing.

Until April, 1962, the Club purchased only used Thistles, all with molded plywood hulls and wood masts. These boats gave good service at minimum cost. However, since 1962, new Thistles with molded fiberglass hulls have been purchased; these boats are denoted by the letter F following the boat number. The fleet of Thistles is well found. They require "continued tender loving care" to maintain them "shipshape and Bristol fashion", but such care is synonymous with the character of yachting and with the time hallowed practice of classifying boats in the feminine gender.

Mindful of the history of the town for which it is named and of the river on which it sails, the Club has named its boats for predecessors sailed under the flags of The Netherlands, Sweden, England and the

United States. The names are discussed in the following paragraphs and Club craft history is outlined in the table which follows.

ONRUST

The first Thistle was acquired by the Club in January, 1953, the year the Club was organized. It was christened with appropriate ceremonies ONRUST (Restless), after the ship of the Dutch explorer, Capt. Cornelis Hendricksen. Henry Hudson, the English navigator in the service of the Dutch East India Company, discovered the Delaware Bay and River (named South River by Hudson) in 1609. But it was the Dutch navigators, including Adrian Block, Jan deWith, Cornelis Jacobsen Hey and Hendricksen, who in 1613 to 1615 explored the river. ONRUST, described as a 44-foot yacht and built in the harbor of what is now Block Island, explored and traded for furs with the Indians along the west (Delaware) bank of the river in 1614. During this voyage, Hendricksen rescued from the Indians, somewhere north of the site of New Castle, the first white men who are known to have trod Delaware soil; they were three Dutchmen from a trading post on the Hudson River.

ORN

The second Thistle was purchased by the Club in April 1954. It is named ORN (Eagle) after the ship of the Swedish Governor Johan Classon Rising who captured Fort Casimir from the Dutch on Trinity Sunday in 1654 on his way up the river with a new expedition of settlers for the Swedish colony on the Christina. Peter Stuyvesant on July 19, 1651, had acquired from the Indians the land (previously sold to the Swedes) from Christina Kill to Boompjes (Bombay) Hook, a stretch of about 30 miles along the river, including Sand Hook (New Castle). Stuyvesant anchored two warships before Sand Hook and built Fort Casimir, it being his purpose to command all river traffic and exact tolls from Swedish and English travelers. When Rising arrived in 1654, Stuyvesant's warships were gone and the Dutch in Fort Casimir had no powder for their guns. ORN was a large and powerfully armed ship. Rising, contrary to the instructions of his government and the friendliness of the Dutch, took the fort and town. No shots were fired until after the seizure when Rising had the Dutch cannon loaded with Swedish powder to salute his flag.

WELCOME

The third Thistle was acquired in January, 1955. It is named WELCOME, after the English ship that brought William Penn. to America. Penn landed at New Castle on October 27, 1682, to receive from the English magistrates of New Castle, John Moll and Ephraim Herman, "actual and peaceable possession of the fort of New Castle by giving him the key thereof to lock upon himself along the door which being opened by him again, we did deliver also unto him oneturf with a twigg upon it, a porringer with River water and soyle in part of all". Thus, the second English Government of New Castle was established. Eighteen years before Penn., on October 1, 1664, Sir Robert Carr acting for the Duke of York received the surrender of the town from the Dutch.

WAEGH

The fourth Thistle was purchased in July, 1959, and christened WAEGH (Scales or Balance) after the Dutch flagship of Peter Stuyvesant. Stuyvesant, enraged by Rising's arbitrary action in 1654 and knowing the instructions for friendly action given him by the Swedish government, formed a fleet of seven ships carrying 317 soldiers. On September 1, 1655, Stuyvesant recaptured the fort and town, again without a shot being fired. Dutch sovereignty continued undisturbed until 1664. However, WAEGH, a formidable ship, was to figure a second time in our history.

DISCOVERY

The fifth Thistle was acquired in September, 1960, and named DISCOVERY after the English ship commanded by Captain Samuel Argall. Argall, in the service of the English Lord de la Warre, governor of the Virginia Colony, in 1610 sailed into the Bay and explored Hudson's South River for a few miles. The cape that we know as Henlopen was first named by Argall, Cape La Warre, subsequently giving rise to the name Delaware for the bay and river and, later, the State.

AMSTEL

The sixth Thistle was purchased in April 1961. It was named AMSTEL after the new galiot (a Dutch design with round ribs and flat bottom, a mizzen near the stern, and carrying a square mainsail, a maintopsail, a foretopsail, and two jibs), of which Captain Jacob Jansen Huys was master. This galiot accompanied WAEGH on its supply and additional colonizing expedition to New Amstel in 1657. While small boats had been available ever since the first Dutch landing in 1651, this reportedly was the first ship made available on a continuing basis for the use of the colony.

PHOENIX (Tender)

The first PHOENIX, a 16-foot Old Town, was purchased in March, 1960, to provide the Club with a boat to furnish aid if needed to members sailing Thistles and Sailfish, to facilitate maintenance of the sailboats, to place and remove moorings, to act as a committee boat for races, and as a Club tender at sailing picnics and on weekends. It is named for the first steamship seen at New Castle. Built by John Stevens in Hoboken in 1806-7, PHOENIX in 1809 steamed via the Atlantic Ocean, Delaware Bay and River to Philadelphia, the greatest voyage made since the first U. S. steamship was built and operated by John Fitch at Philadelphia in 1786.

CLUB BOAT HISTORY

Thistles

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Acquired</i>	<i>Sold</i>	<i>Color</i>	<i>Comments</i>
542	Onrust	1953	1962	Black	1st Club Thistle
60	Orn	1954	1963	Dk. Green	
466	Welcome	1955	1965	Red	
873	Waegh	1959	1965	White	
1082	Discovery	1960	1967	Lt. Green	Kit Boat
552	Amstel	1961	1964	Tan	Kit Boat/fiberglassed hull Struck 2X by lightning
1610F*	Onrust II	1962	1971	Blue	1st Fiberglass Thistle
1678F	Orn II	1963	1972	Yellow	Color faded
1844F	Waegh II	1964	1974	White	Amstel II for 6 mos.
2013F	Welcome II	1965	1976	Red	
2261F	Amstel II	1966	1977	Green	
2436F	Discovery II	1967		Yellow	Color faded
2897F	Oust III	1970		Blue	
3036F	Orn III	1971		Black	
3230F	Waegh III	1973		White	
3453F	Welcome III	1975		Orange	

Flying Scots

2906F	Amstel III	1976		White	
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Tenders

Phoenix I	1960	1964		16' Old Town
Phoenix II	1964			14' Boston Whaler

*F denotes fiberglass hull

THE NEW CASTLE SAILING CLUB

50 YEARS OF BOATING ON THE DELAWARE

By Scott Latham

Fifty years of history, 130 member families – and a waiting list to get in. Not bad for a small club that was ridiculed by some at the outset who said it just wouldn't work, and by still others today who hail from more grandiose yachting organizations with much fancier and (alas) often faster boats.

But the New Castle Sailing Club has proved its resilience time and again when faced with adversity and – on some occasions – its very survival. Current members expressed pride in their plans for their Golden Anniversary celebrations, which were carefully timed to coincide with Delaware's Separation Day festivities on June 7-8, 2003.

The occasion commemorates the state's independence from the British Crown and the governance of the William Penn family in 1776. Donald Grant, NCSC's Commodore, was scheduled to preside over a regatta, a multi-faceted parade with state and town officials and residents of Old New Castle, a picnic, and still another "Parade of Sails" presented by the club itself, with the skipjack "Martha Lewis" of Havre de Grace, Maryland, leading a procession of sailboats up river to Battery Park Wharf.

But things weren't always so rosy, as a quick glimpse "back to the future" will show. On July 5, 1954, the *Wilmington Morning News* ran a glowing account of the fledgling club's uphill battle to launch its sailing dreams:

Scoffers said the Delaware River was too dirty for yachting; might be clean enough some day – but right now, whew! It would nasty up the paint on a boat's sides, and besides, it smelled bad. They said the tides were too fast and that a sailboat couldn't hope to make headway against the current. They talked of the danger of being run down in the ship channel and of being capsized in a sudden squall. And they invidiously compared the low-lying marshy shores of the Delaware to the beautiful scenery of Chesapeake waters.

Did those remarks discourage the group of sailing enthusiasts who make New Castle their headquarters? Not one bit.

A year and a half earlier – on January 7, 1953, to be precise – the founding fathers (Four Men and a Dinghy?) had pooled their resources with eight other would-be boatmen to purchase a used Thistle (hull #542), a 17-foot sloop carrying 175 square feet of sail. They christened her "Onrust," the Dutch word for "Restless." In April 1954, they added a second – even older – boat (hull #60) and gave her the Swedish name "Orn" – or "Eagle" in the language of the New World.

The New Castle Sailing Club was, quite literally, off to the races. Every Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon, the two wooden sloops – with various crews aboard – vied for line honors in the much-maligned slime of the Delaware River fronting "The Strand." A quaint note in the club's minutes that year had some practical advice for the sailors, suggesting with a straight face that "in the absence of a second dinghy...club members wanting to board boats already sailing, or wanting to have the dinghy returned to shore from a mooring, display a white flag, handkerchief or other white signal, and that members while sailing frequently check the shore to catch the signal."

Sailing 'Legends'

As in all clubs that survive their birth pangs, the founders have achieved legendary status. Edward A. "Ted" Taylor was named the first Commodore, John J.B. "Jack" Cooper was elected Treasurer,

Newlin T. Booth became Vice Commodore, and William K. Barney was the Secretary. The original group, made up primarily of employees and executives at the nearby Dupont, Hercules and Atlas companies, was filled out by Richard Appleby, James Eliason, Allen Hill, Nelson Quillen, Robert Quillen, Daniel Wolcott, William Moore and Henry Hargradine.

Their vision was to create a sailing club that operated on the basis of cooperative ownership of boats and a total sharing of responsibilities for upkeep, management and administration. In this way, one could enjoy the pleasures of “yachting” without incurring the expense, and sometimes massive costs, associated with individual ownership. Of course, this involved a willingness to accept boats that did not always have the latest bells and whistles in terms of gear, sails and equipment. But the formula worked reasonably well as new boats (and new sails!) were rotated on a regular basis into an expanding fleet, and the old ones were sold off or trashed for spare parts. The boats are in the water from late April to late October but – as in baseball – the “off season” is short: regular Saturday morning work sessions begin in early February, as does classroom instruction for new members.

Today, the club has a fleet of eight Thistles – including a brand-new boat christened “Gold Rush” in honor of the anniversary – four Flying Scots (a beefier, slower 19-foot sloop suitable for rougher weather), its own website, clubhouse and storage barn, a complete training and instructional program for novices, and a full stable of 12 dinghies. No more waving of handkerchiefs to get out to the mooring! With a completely open membership policy, the club maintains its facilities, as well as an upgraded capital improvement program, with annual dues of \$300 and a one-time initiation fee of \$300 (slated to go up incrementally until it reaches \$500 in 2008). Fifty years ago, annual dues were \$25 and the initiation fee was \$75.

Again, the contrast with the distant and not-so-distant past couldn't be more stark. In the 1950s, when the waterfront was a bit more of a “frontier” territory, there were frequent shooting incidents involving youthful target practice at the moored boats, waterfront sail house, and even occasionally over the heads of the sailors on the river. From the minutes: “While sailing north of New Castle, Millelot had three shots pass over the boat and one ricochet off the water and hit the boat. He yelled at the boys and they ran off...” Thefts of outboard motors and other equipment occurred on a sporadic basis and, of course, the shoreside facilities were Spartan at best.

But by 1961, with membership at 60 families and a fleet of six Thistles in the harbor, the club began its slow climb into the “modern” world. That year, the first newsletter was introduced – with the seemingly inevitable name of “Scuttlebutt” – and an outhouse was erected on the waterfront so that members would have a place to read it. This led to repeated “tippings,” although no such incident was reported while a member was still inside. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that it was not until 1982 that the “Scuttlebutt” was able to report with some finality: “The outdoor, often horizontal head, will be replaced by an in-the-sailhouse porta-potty.”

Looking for a Home

Other improvements also took time. Repeated attempts by a search committee to purchase the club's leased land at the waterfront ended in failure – even though founding member Newlin Booth was the owner of Deemer Steel, the specialty casting company that owned the property. In the late 1950s, the Board ultimately rejected Booth's offer to sell the parcel for \$5,000. “To this day,” said William Wool (Commodore 1969-71) in a recent interview, “I think it was the biggest mistake we ever made.”

But, Wool recalled, other projects were more successful – like the three-year efforts of lawyer and club member Jake Kreshtool to put the kibosh on the plans of Delmarva Power & Light to run high-

voltage power lines first over – then under – the river just south of the anchorage. “Well,” said Wool, “Jake thought this would be harmful to club members. So he bought one share of DP&L stock so he could sue. Those power lines you sail under on your way to Pea Patch would have been next to our landing.”

The club did other things right – sometimes of necessity, sometimes not. In 1973, the New Castle County Airport put the Board on notice that its lease of a hanger, where the club stored and maintained its boats during the winter, would be terminated. Five years later, a suitable alternative had still to be found. Charlie Paschall, a member since 1963 (and who today at 75 is the man who has been a member the longest), loaned out his backyard and garage to keep the fleet afloat. It was another six years before the Board purchased the current property on South Street and began what has become the almost continuous renovation and improvement of the clubhouse and the barn.

Stormy Weather

Like all clubs, NCSC history is replete with its share of disagreements over policy – sometimes over continuing issues, sometimes over one-time disagreements that exploded spectacularly in a display of verbal forensics and then disappeared like a squall over the horizon. The purchase of the first Flying Scot in 1976 is an example of the latter. One of the oddest twists is the fact that Sandy Douglass, the original designer of the Thistle in 1945 (hull #1 is still raced competitively by former National Champion Christ Klotz), was the man who came to the Spring Dinner that year and sold the club on the idea of a Scot. One club champion immediately resigned from the Board over the issue, and others wrote letters of protest calling into question the very notion of “soiling” the fleet with anything other than a Thistle. Yet the Scots remained a permanent feature of the landscape, and the issue has largely blown over. (And, don’t tell anyone: in the early days of the club circa 1957, there were as many as four Sailfish that were part of the regular fleet.)

One issue that has *not* blown over is the continuing debate between day sailors and racers. A wise observer of human character (and perhaps of old salts in general) once remarked that any time you get two boats sailing side by side, you have a race. But through the ages, New Castle day sailors have complained periodically about the occasional collisions and damage resulting from close-quarters maneuvering in the heat of competition. They preached the gospel of leisurely evening sails and picnics along the Jersey shore. Racers have traditionally responded with unkind remarks about day sailors running aground on the rocks or into the stone jetty that divides the Delaware longitudinally from just south of New Castle to Pea Patch.

Club records indicate it’s been an endless debate – “from Day One,” as Charlie Paschall recalled it. In 1974, the Board went so far as to suggest that racing be officially discontinued. In 1975, the club conducted a survey of its members and discovered that two-thirds were more interested in pleasure sailing than racing. The very next year, there was an effort to pack the Board with non-racers. It failed. Other attempts to “resolve” the issue have produced equally inconclusive outcomes. Dedicated day sailors note that more than 60 percent of the total of approximately 600 “sails” logged by members each year are made by – who else? – day sailors. Racers respond that they are limited to racing for just four hours each Saturday morning, yet even as a minority they account for 40 percent of the sailing in just that one weekly outing – so who is “dedicated” here, anyway?

It should be added hastily here, lest the uninitiated jump to the wrong conclusions, that absolutely none of this on-the-water jousting and boardroom bickering has prevented both racers and day sailors alike from pooling their resources and taking long skiing vacations – *together!* Or booking a bareboat charter for a cruise of the Chesapeake. Reliable witnesses have even reported instances of day sailors and racers actually *helping* each other during work sessions.

Racing Beyond Racing

One thing is for sure, while the racing program has had its ups and downs over the years – in part because of membership turnover and shifting demographics – it has withstood the test of time and enjoyed a distinguished history of its own. As early as 1955, a club boat placed 19th out of 26 Thistles entered in the Atlantic Coast Championships at Lavalette, N.J. That same year, an NCSC racer finished seventh out of 12 boats in the Governor’s Cup at Riverton, and then-Commodore Booth joined the Thistle Class Association (TCA). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, club Thistles – as many as six boats one year – were also trailered regularly to premier racing events at the Corinthian Yacht Club in Cape May and to the Heather Bowl at the Red Dragon Canoe Club in Edgewater Park. In a 1966 excursion, 88 club members, their families and guests attended a picnic and outing in Port Herman, Md. Four club Thistles and two Sailfish were towed through the Chesapeake Canal (and back), bringing the assembled to a grand total of 225 people and 23 boats.

In 1970, a young sailor by the name of Sven Donaldson won the club championship. He later went on to reach the national level in various racing divisions and has authored several books on sailing techniques and technology. He is now a regular staff writer for *Pacific Yachting* magazine based in Vancouver, British Columbia. (Sven’s father David later became NCSC Commodore, a post he held when the Board proposed to ban racing!)

In 1978, club member Ivy Barton became the first woman to graduate from the previously all-male U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, N.Y. Her younger brother Gregory followed her there some years later, as did another (unrelated) club member by the name of Scott Dunn. All three were active in New Castle’s racing program.

In October 1986, the Delaware River Perpetual Thistle Trophy Regatta (aka “Delripett” and formerly known as the plain-old Cityside Regatta) became a two-day event that was officially sanctioned as part of the East Coast Fall Series sponsored by the Thistle Class Association.

In more recent years, a number of club members have traveled frequently to the Midwinters Thistle championships in St. Petersburg, Fl., and to various venues for the annual National championships held during the summer. In 1994, the club was first recognized as a Fleet by the TCA. Since then, a total of four members have taken their competitive urges to the next level – buying their own Thistles in an effort to sail bigger, faster, better – while maintaining their membership and active racing within the club as well.

Happy Medians – or Mediums?

For others who came to the club as complete novices, both the daysailing and racing programs seemed to hold an equal attraction. Ed Lasbury, who joined in 1986, recalled his early classroom instruction under “Teacher for Life” Denny Dolan. Dolan inspired Ed to sign up for numerous advanced seamanship and performance racing courses. “A special opportunity came in 1991,” Lasbury said, “when a mutual friend invited [confirmed day sailor] Willard Robinson and myself to crew on his Tanyana 52 from St. Thomas to Annapolis. We had ten wonderful days at sea with one exception, a gale off Cape Hatteras.” When he retired four years later, Lasbury’s family bought him a special gift – not a Rolex – but a week’s cruise on the Chesapeake and a seven-day racing course at “J World.”

Howard Kingshill, a former club champion who joined in 1971, will turn 92 shortly after anniversary celebrations are complete. “I gave up sailing five years ago because of osteoporosis in the leg,” Kingshill said. “I didn’t want to wind up in the drink.” Nevertheless, he still frequently comes

down to watch the racing on Saturdays. In addition, as New Castle's oldest member, he has vigorously promoted the idea of restoring the youth sailing program to what it was years ago. As part of this effort, he would like to revive the club's Dave Dossett Perpetual Trophy. Named after a member who died in 1986 at the age of 26, the award is given to the best skipper under the age of 27. Kingshill, who was part of the "Thistles-only" crowd when the Flying Scots were purchased, now says he would make an exception. "It would be a good idea to buy a couple of one-man Lasers and have them reserved strictly for young people – they're not that expensive, especially if you buy them at the end of the season."

Another former Commodore, Rufford Harrison, remembered the mid-1970s when, he said, almost no one used the spinnaker. "But very occasionally, one would see that bit of color on the river. One by one, more people became interested in it, until someone pointed out that the spinnaker was just as much a part of a Thistle as the mainsail. Finally, the Board agreed that we had to learn spinnakering, and that the only way to get people to use the sail in racing was to force them to use it. So it was decreed [in 1982] that in at least one race every Saturday, the Race Committee would raise the 'spinnaker flag' and anyone not using it would be disqualified." But there was a kicker, Harrison said. "Not everyone went along with this. The sailor whom we all regarded as the best in the club – or certainly one of the best – immediately resigned and never sailed with us again."

The club's changing policy on protests has been another source of, well, protest. As late as 1978, protests were simply not allowed in club races. Instead, boats were instructed to do a 720-degree turn if they violated a rule, and a 360-degree turn for hitting a mark. This was consistent with the Basic Principle of the Racing Rules of Sailing, which calls for violators to accept a self-penalty. There were several problems with this. First and foremost, many people didn't really know the rules, and they remained blissfully ignorant ("No problem!") that they had failed to do their "spins." Others knew all of the rules half of the time, and half of the rules none of the time. Same result – no spins. Then there were the normal subjective differences of perception: no spins. At any rate, at some point it was felt that a friendly reminder ("Protest!") might be necessary to get people's attention. As of this reading of club documents, it remains a mystery as to whether this policy was officially announced – or whether it simply was handed down through the club's rich tradition of "oral history." In any case, for better or worse, protests were accepted as part of the "game," and the club immediately instituted an annual seminar to teach sailors the basics of the rules.

Parting Thoughts

Another rich source of "oral history" has come from Frank Nelson, whose nickname "The Admiral" was as at least as inevitable as "Scuttlebutt." Nelson joined the club in 1987 and quickly established his credentials as an accomplished sailor, especially in light airs. In 1996, at the age of 73, Nelson won the club championship. But he is best known for his role in 1989 in organizing the club's annual March of Dimes Regatta, which he has continued to spearhead even while taking a temporary leave from the racing circuit. This year's event was scheduled for the first Saturday following the anniversary festivities.

Looking back over the past 50 years, Charlie Paschall marveled over two aspects of the club's operations. First, because of the membership limit and size of the sailing fleet, he had never once failed to find a boat on a mooring when he wanted to sail one. "There was always one available," he said. "You can't get a table at a good restaurant more easily than that!" The second thing he noted was the club's exceptional safety record, especially given the number of novice members and the sometimes difficult conditions on the river. "There is always room for improvement in our training programs," he said. "For example, we should put together a manual for the instructors themselves.

But no one has ever drowned, thank God, and that's pretty incredible when you think about how long the club has been in operation."

A final piece of wisdom came from Hans Greiner, Class of '71, who served as Commodore from 1979-80. Greiner recalled the first metal shack at the beach, the constant tipping of the outhouse, the scramble to survive as a club when the airport storage facilities got yanked, the long search for a clubhouse, and the final purchase and ultimate paying off of the mortgage. "All this happened about 20-25 years ago. The NCSC has grown and flourished in those years, but the spirit has remained the same," Greiner said. "When I read the monthly newsletter or when I talk to [former Commodore] John Ingram as I did just a few weeks ago, it seems that the issues have basically remained the same. The old-timers complain that the club is not the same as it once was, and the newcomers will use the current state of affairs as the starting point for improvements (changes?) or whatever. This is the way the NCSC will continue to remain a unique sailing club. If it stops changing, it will most likely cease to exist."

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