

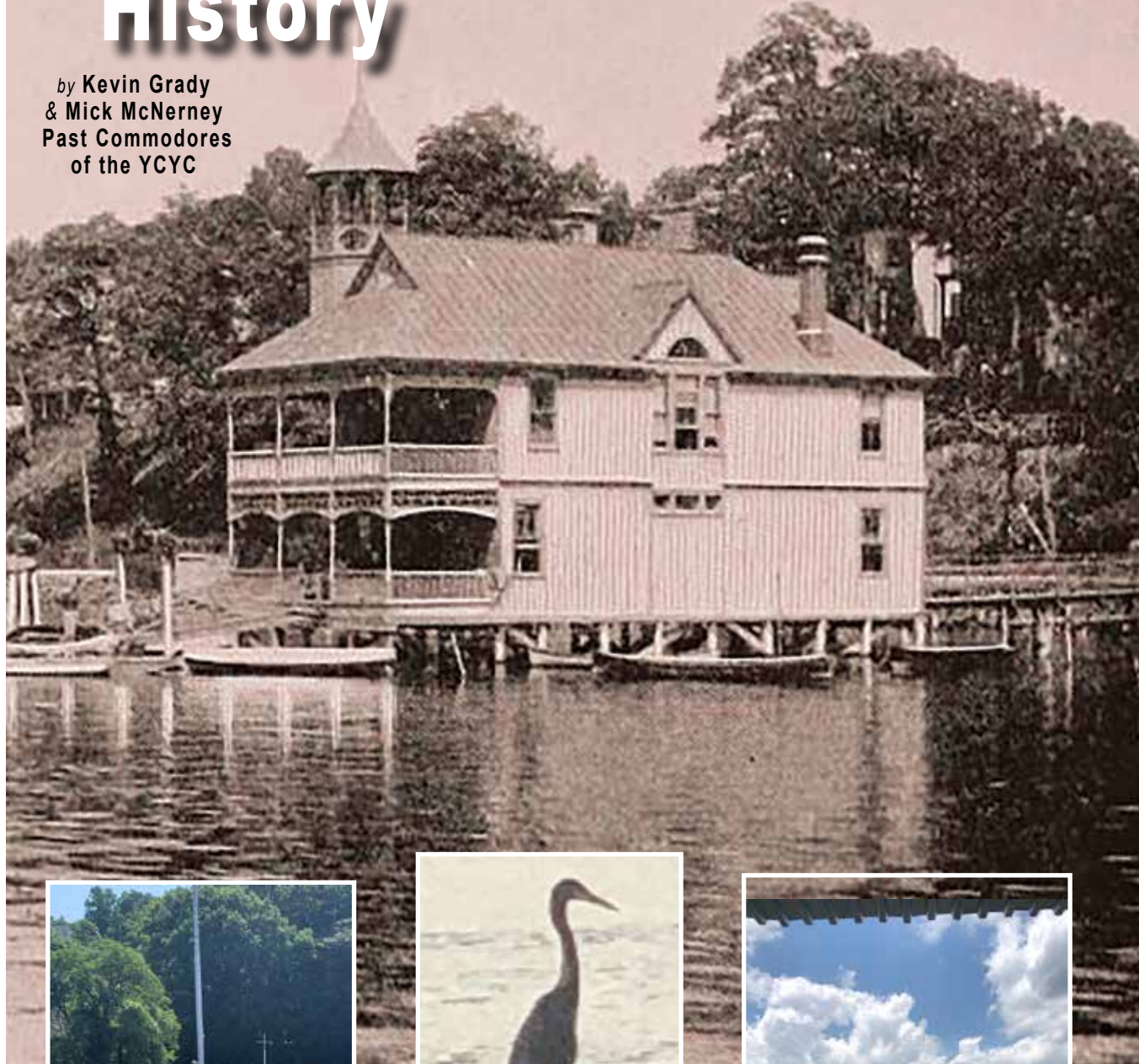
Yonkers Corinthian Yacht Club History

by Kevin Grady & Mick McNerney
Past Commodores of the YCYC

Co·rin·thi·an: [kuh-rin-thee-uhn]

1. An amateur yachtsman who sails his own yacht
2. A luxury-loving person; a bon vivant.

The Yonkers Corinthian Yacht Club was established in 1889 by a group of prominent Yonkers businessmen and landowners for the purpose of sailing their yachts on the Hudson River. Their names read like a street map of our current City of Yonkers: William Elliot, Joseph Lawrence, William O'Dell, R. Underhill and C.A. Valentine. The names of their yachts sound like something out of a Newport registry: Schooner Beatrice at 55 feet, Sloop Florida at 79 feet, Cat Boat Nina at 32 feet. The pride



of the club was the Mosquito Fleet, a "one design" racing boat. The fleet brought home many trophies racing on the river under the guidance of the NY Yacht Racing Association. The formal opening of the club took place on May 30, 1889. The local paper, The Statesman, reported on May 31, "How picturesque and brilliant the house looked at night, gaily decked with lanterns and flags and well lighted by electricity. From the entrance on Buena Vista Avenue, along the bridge over the railroad track, lighted lanterns swayed in the breeze, and the club signal, a triangular flag with the Y placed laterally, was dazzling in the tower in the form of a cluster of electric lights made to represent it, and it shone forth gloriously".

By 1902 the original club, located at the foot of Vark Street, had 125 members and 25 yachts. In an interview from 1986, Elizabeth Sansalone, the YCYC Recording Secretary from 1981-2000, (whose father, Reginald Thayer, had been Commodore at the club in the 30's and 40's) recalled going to the club as a youngster: "They were sort of gentlemen sailors at the beginning, and when you read the old rules about the dress regulations it's really very amusing because they had to wear white flannel trousers and blue wool blazers with a certain number of stripes, depending on rank. Very formal. Very uppity and Victorian. Now people come down in shorts and t-shirts. One big change is that most of the people in the club are real working people."

In 1912 the club moved to its present location, upriver on Warburton Avenue, the reasons for the move are unclear. Speculation has it that the club was forced to move by industry which was expanding on the downtown Yonkers waterfront. The original Vark Street location is now the home to the Domino Sugar Refinery.

There is little recorded history of the club during the Depression and two world wars, suffice it to say the Corinthian stayed in operation through all that devastation.

Disaster hit the club in late summer 1944. The Great Atlantic Hurricane was a destructive and powerful tropical cyclone that swept across a large portion of the U.S. East Coast. Particularly destructive to the Jersey Shore and New England, the hurricane blew up the Hudson River on September 14, 1944 and totally destroyed the Corinthian Club. The clubhouse was ripped to pieces and scattered for more than a mile. Eddie Andersen, who would a decade later become a club member, recalls playing on the river as a kid and coming down in the aftermath of the storm: "We came down the river and this club had blown down, there was a boat rental place by Greystone that completely blew away, only the pilings remained. All that was left of the Corinthian fleet was one boat."

After the devastation of the hurricane, then Commodore Francis Van Sutendahl arranged for the nearby Ludlow Yacht Club, which had been forced to close, to bring its barge with a dance floor and a galley upriver to the site of the Corinthian. Andy Skrobola and Walter Sullivan, returning World War II veterans, recalled making an appointment to join the club where they were greeted by Commodore Van Sutendahl, who was quite a character. "He met us at the gate with a martini in one hand and a

cigarette holder dangling from his lips," recalled Mr. Skrobola. "He had an ascot and was wearing a smoking jacket, we didn't know what we were in for" mused Mr. Sullivan.

In the years after the second World War, as boating on the Hudson thrived, the club would expand to three barges with a magnificent deck on the river. Under the leadership of Commodore Van Sutendahl and with a new wave of members returning from the horrors of war to peacetime pursuits, the 50's, 60's and 70's were a time of great fun, parties and camaraderie according to Messrs. Skrobola and Sullivan.

On a Saturday morning in mid-November 1979 the club suffered a devastating fire. Walter Sullivan, who could see the club from his house, reported "I practically saw it start, it came up between two of the barges. We had such a gale blowing up the river that it just laid across blowing north and set all the barges aflame. By the time the firemen arrived it was out of control, all they could do was contain it." According to the official report the fire was started by a faulty wood burning stove and declared out by 11:52 am. The report went on to state "Nothing was saved."

The fire caused a majority of members to resign from the club, those who stayed cleared the debris, got a small trailer and were back in operation by the next boating season. Member Billy Harsaghy recalled, "After the fire we used to stand around on the dock fishing, the guys that were faithful, with a fire going in a 50 gallon drum. And we cleaned up a

little bit at a time. Never gave up hope, and then new members joined, new blood, and things started popping again. You can't keep a good club down."

Six years later another fire burned the temporary trailer and the club was near rock bottom again. The rear Commodore was then Joe "Pip" Maglio, a two-fisted World War II veteran. He recruited his buddies who hung out at the JFK Marina in Yonkers to join and keep the club afloat. At the same time a group of young "River Rats" from southwest Yonkers joined and started to build the club back to its earlier form.

In the years between 2000 and 2010 the membership ranks grew again amounting to what are the "core" members of the club to this day. The club is proud of the fact that there were two woman officers as far back as the 80's. In 2018 a woman rose to the ranks of Rear Commodore and the glass ceiling was finally shattered in 2020 when the first woman Commodore took over the helm.

The YCYC today has a membership of 25 people. The membership is a balance of seasoned experienced hands as well as a new generation that recently joined. Facilities include a launch ramp, docks, a mooring field and ample storage space on land for the winter. There is a spacious clubhouse, an outdoor shower, three decks, two of which are on the river as well as a covered cooking area with several grills, a smoker and a fryer. True to the spirit of their predecessors, the club is a fun place to be with the pursuits of boating and swimming and great food. A spirit of family is very much alive at the YCYC.

If you are in the area during boating season stop by and say hello. If you are interested in membership call 914-376-3183 and leave a message.

