

There is nothing quite like watching a bald eagle drop out of a clear blue sky and grab a fish as you sit on the back of your boat. A breeze rides up the river from the south. Tree-lined shores roll in different tones of green as the wind pushes past. Sunlight plays off the rippling water and the bird climbs back to the air, fish twisting in mighty talons. The shore of the Hudson River has been much reworked in the centuries since that same south wind filled the square sails of the Half Moon, but eagles still perch in bleached-out trees, enjoying a fresh meal in the sun.

What is it about this river that draws us all to the banks; to rest, to eat, to play, and reflect together? We have built great cities along its shores for commerce and trade. Smaller villages are scattered in between, holding a space close to the water where we raise our families and find an honest day's work.

Castleton Boat Club

by **Laura White-Rivers**



photo: Robert Francis

The early 1950's was a thriving time in the Village of Castleton. Fort Orange Paper Company and the Castleton Paper Mill offered steady employment to residents and returning servicemen. Tidy store fronts were shaded by trees along a busy Main street. Villagers could find anything they needed with a quick

walk to the grocery store, pharmacy, jeweler, or the hardware store. The Castleton Boat Club began with a group of duck hunters who used an old dock behind the railroad tracks for access to the river, and by July 25, 1952 they formalized their love of boating on this little slice of shore. Sam Garafalo was chosen to be



The 1964 Albany-to-NYC race line up may look much different than last year's Fun-Run, but the club's love of performance boating remains the same.



photo: Village of Castleton.



The Castleton Boat Club, almost 70 years later.

the first Commodore, and one parcel at a time, the young CBC patched the property together with hard work. The Club's first building was a tool shed donated by the village, and eventually, lumber sheds were added as neighboring lots were attached to the property.

This attitude of self-sufficiency has persisted since the post-war years, and all work at the club continues to be self-performed by the membership. Sea wall work,

buildings, ramp improvements, and equipment maintenance are handled in-house as often as possible.

Through the years, this club of humble roots has become internationally known as a stop for cruisers traveling the Great Loop. The simple "gin-pole" mechanical crane that leans out over the seawall is available to sail boaters who share the same sense of self-sufficiency the club was built on. The long-reaching masts of sailboats must

be removed prior to heading through the locks north of the club. Captains and mates work together to prepare their boats for the journey during the day, and summer nights will find them sitting on the deck discussing marine topics, history, or current events with club members. Often, conversations must reach through language barriers because many are international travelers. Despite cultural

differences, the conversations are always amiable and friendly, and they head north leaving as friends. Many full-time cruisers return regularly as they wander the salty, eastern seaboard. Years later, they are greeted by familiar faces lounging under the tree as they come up the ramp to sign in.

The pace of life has increased since the 1950's, but along these shores people have saved spaces to pause for relaxation and inspiration. Past Commodore, Don Justus planted a sugar maple tree by the north ramp up to the clubhouse, preserving a spot on the property for members to reflect and watch the water meander by. The little sugar maple has grown soundly on the shore since the 1980s. Wedding vows have been made under it, generations of children growing up at the club have climbed it, and countless sunsets have been enjoyed while sitting under its sturdy branches. Not long ago, a few members named it "The Tree of Lost Ambition". They gave it a location on social media, and people will smile as they sit down and "check in", knowing that their big plans for the day can wait a little longer while they spend time with friends.

While relaxation is key to enjoying the water, the daily operations of the club are sustained by hard work and fundraising events. The annual Raffle Party is a fun bash, serving up chicken barbecue, music, and a chance at a raffle prizes totaling \$10,000. They are the only club to offer first prize winnings of \$ 5,000 in cash with a meal! Castleton is also known for the event Horsepower on the Hudson, where high-speed boats fly by the club and have a chance to show off flashy paint and powerful engines.

The club's love of speed goes back a few generations. For many years, the club was a sponsor of the once-famous Albany-to-NYC Marathon. The small-boat marathon could trace its origins back as far as 1928. The race revived itself in various incarnations of class and engine requirements over the years, but it always came down to being the first-in-class to make Manhattan after braving 136 miles of the Hudson's

often challenging conditions. By 1963, the future of the race was in question. Thus, in 1964, Castleton Boat Club stepped up as a sponsor of the marathon, going so far as to add additional moorings and extended fueling accommodations for the hopeful contestants. A February 1964 issue of the New York Times described a winning boat as a "17-foot Glastron with twin 100 horsepower Mercury motors, (who) averaged 54.7 miles an hour, demolishing the previous record of 47 m.p.h. set in 1938."

The Club's hospitality has brought boat racers and dignitaries alike to its banks, thus reinforcing its nickname of the "Friendliest Club on the River". Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, Nelson Rockefeller, and Woodrow Wilson all enjoyed a peaceful view of the timbered shore and marveled at the mighty Castleton Cut-off railroad bridge to the south. Providing a generous reception to guests and travelers has always been a primary mission of the CBC. The CBC values its connections with neighboring clubs and has maintained membership in the Mohawk-Hudson Council since its inception in 1960. Each year, members head out in a small fleet to reunite with friends at other clubs, faithfully supporting their parties, bashes, and barbecues. There is a sense of community between all boaters who collectively call the Hudson River a home port. We leave the land and come to this river every season through our clubs. We come to be with friends, to return to what is natural and free, and to watch the eagles raise their families across the bank from our own.

Like the Mole observed, in Kenneth Grahame's, *The Wind in the Willows*, the river is "a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea." On this river, we are all connected; by love of the water and the thrill of casting off our lines. It does not matter where we come from on the land. We head out on our vessels, set our heading, and we write our lives stories together out on the water.



HORSEPOWER *on the* HUDSON!

August 7, 2021 • Castleton Boat Club • 92 South Main St, Castleton, NY 12033
 N 42° 31.700' • W 73° 45.530'

In 2011 Jim Kelly and a few other members of the Castleton Boat Club were lounging on the party dock admiring a group of go-fast boats powering by. They would stand up and cheer the boats on faster, enjoying the sound of the engines throttling up.

There is no sound quite like a well-built motor hitting its sweet spot. It is the RPM where a lumpy cam smooths out, and it can still pull you back in the seat. The boat leaps over the waves and the prop churns up a rooster tail in response.

That afternoon, he had an idea. Why not invite the boats to come to the club? CBC would throw a party and have the boats do what they are doing anyway - flying by the club. The event would be nothing formal. Just a good time; On land there would be hot-rod cars, music, and burgers. Down on the docks there would be flashy boats, built engines, and bikini tops.

Jim remembered, "Year one we really had no clue if any boats would show up, if cars would show up or if any spectators would come. I had contacted Johnny Saris of Performance Marine in Bolton Landing, and he helped spread the word on the first Horsepower. The event was scheduled to start at noon, and at 11:45 we had one boat." Jim was a little concerned. "Then, at exactly noon, about 12 go-fast boats all pulled in together. As we tied them up a few more came from the south. Most of the boats we had never seen in front of the Club. That first year, the colors, the loud engines, and the speed – it was absolutely amazing! So amazing that it doubled in size the first 4 years to become what it is now."

The atmosphere is casual and fun. Horsepower is the perfect way for Captains to show off the work they put in their boats. There are no classes or restrictions. Pontoons, party cats, vee-hulls, twin engine, or outboard; all are invited. There is no pressure or points; they can run if they want, or just show off at the dock. It is a chance for captains to compare notes on their set-ups, or just catch up each year.

Horsepower is in the planning stages for 2021, and all CDC guidelines will be met come August. We all look forward to having a fun and safe event and to see everyone again this summer!

