

MEMORIES FROM GARNET ROCK

Garnet Rock

The following received from the late Mr Garnet Rock was first published in Mainsheet March 1984 and is reproduced here for the interest and information of Members who have joined since 1984.

Garnet Rock first became involved in yachting when seeking an activity for his young family to enjoy. It was thus he built a VJ ... the beginning of a long and fruitful association with sailing. He was a foundation Flag Officer of our Club, served as Commodore for the 1961/62 season and was the father of Laurie and Warren Rock who sailed from NYC for many years. Warren is a Life Member of NYC and a few years ago was a World Champion in the Tornado Class, as crew for Brian Lewis who is still the one to beat at NYC and in WA.



The formation of the Club was triggered by the firm decision of the Mounts Bay Sailing Club that an age limit of 18 years should be imposed on crew members in the VJ section of the Club. This was done with a view to increasing the flow of recruits from the VJ section into the 16ft skiff ranks.

Members of the VJ section, many of whom were above or approaching the proposed age limit, were most unhappy about this decision.

Consequently, at a meeting held in the sunroom of my Wembley home on the morning of Saturday, 31 May 1952, the new Club was formed and the Flag Officers appointed. They were Commodore: A.J. LeMaistre, Vice Commodore: C Rear Commodore: G.E. Rock. Paul Holland was elected Secretary.

On the following Thursday evening, the Commodore and a Flag Officer of the Mounts Bay Sailing Club attended my home by invitation, when the decision to form an independent club was duly communicated to them by the Flag Officers of the new club.

The ensuing discussion was quite amicable. It was agreed that VJ personnel retain membership and continue a normal sailing programme with the Mounts Bay Club for the 1952-53 season while the formation of the new club was being consolidated.

Season 1952-53

Without interference with the regular VJ races conducted by the MBSC on Saturdays, three properly organised races were sailed on Sundays from the Nedlands Jetty. A buoy, laid off the jetty for starting and finishing, carried a small flag plainly marked with the initials SYC. The name "Subiaco Yacht Club" was adopted originally because the area of land from which we proposed to operate was situated in the City of Subiaco immediately north of the Nedlands jetty.

Also during the 1952-53 season two teams each comprising six boats were entered in the annual VJ Teams Race - one from the MBSC and one from the SYC. (The name was changed to the "Nedlands-Subiaco Yacht Club" about the middle of 1953.)

There is a photo there of the original clubhouse, prior to its official opening in 1955. The seawall in this photo still exists- buried beneath the present grassed rigging area. The present start box was added at a later date.

Season 1953-54

About mid-year 1953 an offer was received from the proprietor of the Nedlands Hotel, Mr Steve McHenry, to allow the new club to utilise the old disused Pagoda Tearooms building which was the property of the Hotel. The offer was gratefully accepted and necessary alterations made to the building ready for the opening of the 1953-54 season on Saturday 17 October 1953.

Mr Bill Lucas, at that time Commodore of the Royal Perth Yacht Club, kindly accepted our invitation to perform the opening ceremony from the Royal Perth Club in his gaily bedecked launch. There were 30 starters in the opening race including 10 or 11 from other clubs.

Season 1954-55

This sailing season was marked by the fact that the WA Branch of the VJ and VS Sailing Association, of which I was President, held the Australian Championships on Perth waters between 27 December 1954 and 1 January 1955. The Nedlands-Subiaco Club was the host club to 10 boats and crews visiting from the Eastern States. The marshalling area was at the Nedlands jetty.

1955

Through the kind offices of Mr George Evans, at the time a member of the Nedlands Council, an approach was made to the Council and a lease for the original part of the present site was granted. Building was started by "busy bee" in June 1955. 20 weekends later on Saturday, 5 November 1955, the Clubs 1955-56 season was duly opened from a very acceptable new club house.

Name Changes

Originally (1952-53 season) "Subiaco Yacht Club"

1953 - Changed to "Nedlands-Subiaco Yacht Club"

1959 - Changed to "Nedlands Yacht Club".

The following thoughts come to mind.

By common consent of all concerned Mr A.J (Jack) LeMaistre was persuaded to continue as Commodore of the Club from 1952 until 1961 - a period of nine years. Is this a record in WA? Further more he continued to render valuable active service to the Club for another 20 years or so after that!

I have a copy of the original printed programme of the 1953-54 season – our first full year of activity. Should it be enlarged and framed for display at the Club? It is only a small card 12cm by 14cm folded in the middle.

On 31 May 1984 our Club will be 32 years old!!!!

I trust the above will be of interest to the Club. I feel that it is important for historical information to be correct.

Yours sincerely

G.E. Rock

Garnet's letter became the basis of this historical document.

The following article by Rob Vaisey was taken from the official programme of the 32nd VJ Commonwealth Titles and the Skate National Title Series presented by Nedlands Yacht Club from December 26 to 3 January 1972.

NEDLANDS, a little about us, the VJ and the Skate

The Nedlands Yacht Club was founded by a splinter group of VJ sailors back in 1952. The club is now entering a new era in its development with one of those VJ sailors, Brian LeMaistre, as commodore.

The first 20 years of the club's history have almost passed. The new \$20,000 additions to the club which include a licensed bar will alter the future of the club. In fact this series will almost surely be setting the future traditions of the club in its second era.

The club's history started with a rift in the Mounts Bay club during the early 1950s which resulted in the formation of the Nedlands-Subiaco Yacht Club.

The Mounts Bay Club committee at that time had a rule that forced the VJ yachtsmen who were over 18 years of age to sail in a skiff crew. Now this ruling did not suit many of the youngsters who wanted to continue sailing their VJs.

A group of them and their parents left the Mounts Bay club and formed the Nedlands-Subiaco club. There was no clubhouse and races were staged from the shore near the Nedlands Baths, which are about a half a mile upriver from the present clubhouse.

To the credit of both clubs there was little hostility in the break. In fact some of the Nedlands-Subiaco crews sailed in a team's race for the Mounts Bay club at the end of the season when the breakaway occurred.

The Mounts Bay team in that race was able to win a perpetual trophy for the third time and retain possession of it.

The Nedlands yachtsmen had a tremendous enthusiasm for sailing and gathered into the club many other yachtsmen who were to become some of the state's best. The parents fostered in the club a tradition of junior training which has lived on with the passing of the years.

One of the most farsighted of the early members was Graham Rock who selected the present club site and initiated junior training into the club.

The surroundings of the club were a different spectacle when in 1956 the Nedlands Council granted us the present site. Bamboos had overgrown the whole area and the nearest road was at the top of the hill behind the club. A stone wall which has now almost disappeared was at the water's edge and boats had to be lifted over it coming and going from the water.

However club spirit developed further as members built the present junior clubhouse and planted lawns for rigging on.

When the club shifted to its present site in 1955 the name was changed to become the Nedlands Yacht Club (Inc). However the Subiaco district colours of maroon and gold are still to the fore in the club burgee.

After the shift the VJ yachtsmen started to win for themselves and the club a string of Australian championships.

Warren Rock, a foundation member, is probably still the only yachtsman who has won Australian VJ championships as both a skipper and a forward hand. In 1958/59 as a skipper with Ken Edwards up front on Frisky he won the junior title, then as forward hand for Brian Lewis on Daring won the senior title in 1960/61.

Graham Rock and father Garnet are credited with having introduced both the three way mast suspension system and the storing of spinnakers in boxes in front of the mast. Until these innovations were introduced the VJ mast suspension systems were responsible for many cracked keels as they consisted of solid plywood from mast step to keel. Spinnakers were stowed in the cockpit as best crews could.

Laurie Chivers in his early years as a boat builder sold Chivers design VJ all over Australia, very successful, many of them too.

Neil Head was the originator of twin planks on VJs. Until he fitted a skipper's plank only the forward hands sat out from the hull. Head also used a 'Long Plank' for his VJ forward hand in the early 1960s but this was outlawed.

Skates became the club's senior class in the 1956/57 season. Sydney Skates had come to Perth the following summer and Sydney skipper Ray Young sailing Classic won the national title.

Then Laurie Chivers, probably the most dynamic skipper in the history of Skates, sailed his way into the record book. Chivers won the 1959/60 and 1960/61 championships, then in 1963/64 won the title again to become the only Skate skipper ever to have won three national titles.

Laurie Chivers and Ken Court were the first Skate crew to use a 'Long Plank'. Later the Lake Macquarie crews developed it even further than Chivers had done but we claim that Neil Head and Ken Court later refined it to the present stage of development.

As yachting entered into the boom days of the 1960s so did the Nedlands club. The present senior clubhouse was opened at the start of the 1962/63 season. Combined VJ and Skate Australian championships were held at the club the following season.

The combined series was so successful that this series is a natural follow up.

A succession of classes came to the club during the 1960s starting with the 9ft Pelican Trainer. Then followed Quickcats (which have now almost died out), Yvonne, Kitty and Manta catamarans and the single hull Cherub and Moth classes.

The latest classes to become racing fleets are the Mirror Dinghies and Tornado catamarans.

During the early years of the club a spirit of self help was engendered into the members and regular busy bees were held to get necessary work done.

This 'do it ourselves spirit' is still with many members as you will see during the coming series. We also have a strong tradition of being a family club as it started with youngsters sailing VJs and their parents assisting them. Later the parents in many cases were to take up sailing themselves.

Since 1960 there has been only one year when an Australian championship was not held from the club and for this reason 'Nedlands' is known at most yacht clubs in Australia.

One family with close ties to the club and VJ and Skate classes is that of Charles Court MLA, OBE. Mr Court is our patron and Mrs Court a frequent visitor; three sons Barry, Vic and Richard will each skipper a Skate in the Skate championship. While Ken who has won four Australian Skate championships as a forward hand will be taking a keen interest in the series although he now sails a cruiser.

Vic and Barry started sailing together in a patched up VJ which leaked like a sieve and gave them some of their most memorable sailing experiences.

Barry is now married to Margaret Court the tennis player and Marg is almost sure to be at the club during the series.

Here in the West the VJ and Skate classes have found that a combined Association has proved best for both classes. I hope that our visitors from the eastern states can see the affinity that the classes have and take home the idea of working towards a combined Australian VJ-Skate Association.