

History of the Log Canoes and MRYC

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the past commodores I want to welcome you to the dedication of our new log canoe etching, which is emblematic of the rich history between the log canoes and MRYC. My name is Bill Rowan and I served as your commodore in 2013.

But first the past commodores congratulate Tim Hanlon as commodore elect in MRYC's 95th year of service. Tonight I would like to say a few words about our first commodore and how MRYC came to be known as "The Home of the Log Canoes."

Miles River Yacht Club, "The Home of the Log Canoes," why is that you ask? They have been around since the war of 1812, long before MRYC was ever thought of. Log canoes have a long sailing history on the bay. Adapted from Indian canoes, log canoes were modified for oystering.

By the 1800's when buy boats had to leave for market early and canoes needed to reach them fast to get the best price of the day, the skippers shoved boards off the side, placed men on them for ballast and added sail for speed. Thus began the log canoe races, informal as they were.

Organized log canoe races were first held around 1840 on the Miles River and they competed for the Douglas Cup. The winner received the cup; the boat that finished last was presented with a ham skin to grease the bottom of his boat to make her sail faster. Log canoe racing was abandoned during the Civil War. Loaded with southern sympathizers, canoes raced union guard boats in successful attempts to reach confederate lines. In the mid 1800's the US census showed 6300 log canoes operating on the bay. By 1903, with the advent of the gas engine, they all but disappeared.

By 1916 it deteriorated to the point that only one log canoe was left in condition to race on the Miles River.

Enter John P. Cosden, a local businessman, who met with a small group of men for their weekly poker game in the back room of the Citizen's Bank in St. Michaels. During the course of the game, talk turned to reviving the tradition of log canoe races on the Miles River. They came up with idea of a 4th of July race in 1920 between Sam, Island Blossom and Mary Rider. In 1921, realizing that continued success in promoting a race required organization, John Cosden started actively soliciting friends in forming a club. They met again in the back room of Citizen's Bank and decided to form a club with ten charter members, which became known as the Miles River Yacht Club. John P. Cosden was elected in 1921 as the first commodore and served until 1926.

The Club grew and the log canoe regattas flourished. In 1926 Bill Green, skipper of Mary Rider, asked Governor Albert C. Ritchie for permission to sponsor a subscription campaign for the perpetual trophy to be known as "The Governor's Cup." The cup was presented to MRYC in 1927 by Bill Green and accepted in trust by the Club. Bill Green was elected commodore in 1928.

The rules for winning the cup were contained in a letter of June 21, 1927 from Governor Ritchie. But it was rule #4 that had far reaching effects. It read, "the first contestant winning the cup three times in succession becomes the permanent possessor."

George Wilson on Magic was the first winner in 1927, but Bill Green in Mary Rider won it in '28, '29 & '30. Winning the cup three times in succession gave Bill Green the right to permanent possession. But Captain Green thought the cup should be a perpetual trophy as indicated in the engraving and asked the Governor to eliminate rule #4. Because of his sportsmanship, we have the Governor's Cup to compete for annually and, most importantly, to perpetuate a long tradition of log canoe racing on the Miles River. This past July the Governor's Cup Regatta was run and won by Island Blossom, skippered by Corbin Penwell. Yes, the same Island Blossom that competed in the 4th of July regatta of 1920.

In the 1930's the regattas grew in popularity. There were more than a thousand spectator boats anchored around St. Michaels harbor. Entries continued to climb and establish new highs for participation in the MRYC regattas, with the big attraction being the log canoes. There were no regattas during WWII. In 1946 the regatta that year broke all records for turnout. The three day schedule of 69 power & sail events featured 2000 craft ranging from moths to large cutters, yawls and schooners, and of course the star attraction, the log canoes. Approximately 10,000 yachtsmen & spectators were on hand to watch the races.

To this day the log canoes race eight weekends on the bay with four run by Miles River Yacht Club. Yes, Miles River Yacht Club is "The Home of the Log Canoes." The history of both are inextricably entwined. The tradition continues tomorrow with the log canoe Labor Day series out here on the Miles. You can either watch them from the shore or by boat, so if you have the time, go see the living tradition of Miles River Yacht Club and the log canoes.