

FOND MEMORIES OF OUR FOUNDING YEARS

By Rod Duncan

The Lopez Island Yacht Club is celebrating 30 years since it's founding in 1978. Although to this founding member it seems like only yesterday, many brain cells have come and gone since then, and the memory of those early days is fading. Before the last cell divides and dies, I am compelled to write this historical memoir of the circumstances surrounding the founding of our yacht club.

The founding members of the club were all sailors. Two of the founding members live here today: Pat Cunningham and myself. The first commodore, Robina Bant, lives now in Hawaii, but still owns land here and visits occasionally. She was instrumental in writing the club charter, which generously bestowed upon the founders a lifetime membership. Robina had obtained the state non-profit organization status. I was the second commodore, and was responsible for the first design of our burgee, which is very similar to our current version.

Scott Patrick was another founding member who passed away in 2007 here on Lopez. Scott was a consummate sailor and owned a wooden schooner called **Trader**, built in 1900. Back then a qualification for membership was to sail out of and back into Fisherman Bay, unaided by the "cast iron spinnaker" (as we referred to engines at the time). It was just such a qualification cruise that remain as one of my most vivid memories.

As you know, the entrance to our bay is wrought with many natural hazards: strong currents, shifting wind patterns, and a tortuous, twisty channel with little room to maneuver. I was Scott's crew, and bringing the 34' **Trader** into the bay with three large and heavy sails to control was a major challenge. The old hull was ponderous and slow, and didn't point well to the wind. Well, as fate would have it, a sudden wind shift back-winded **Trader** and the current set us ashore just north of where the **Sea Bee** is currently docked. As we frantically tried to start the old "jimmy" engine and get the sails down before they shredded themselves, an angry lady came out to rant at us and our outrageous behavior. I remember well the epithet she hurled at us, "I know you! You're Scott Patrick, and you're nothing but a sailing bum!" (Little did she know that the title of "sailing bum" was one that Scott wore proudly.)



One of the first orders of business (aside from all of the normal "monkey business") was to get a county permit to build a floating dinghy dock. The dock was constructed on Pat Cunningham's waterfront on the south end of Fisherman Bay. The dock was used for a season, then blew away to wherever during a winter storm the next year, never to return.

Our early club had several sailing events during the summer. We would often just sail to one of our island parks, usually Turn Island, on short notice, to raft up, party, sing sea shanties, and consume copious quantities of substances, both legal and otherwise. Other yearly events included sailing to the wooden boat festivals in Victoria and Port Townsend. (Wouldn't this be a great event for next summer?) We also held several sailboat races, one of which was called the "Bar to Bar Race." The only rule was that one member of the crew had to chug a beer at the Galley, race to his waiting boat, then sail, unaided by the cast iron spinnaker, to Friday Harbor, where the winner, getting ashore fast and by any means possible, was the first to chug a beer at Herb's Tavern. There were many good stories that came from the last minute frantic efforts of a closely contested race. Also, there was no sniveling allowed, and since there was only one rule, there was no protest committee.

The early yacht club was also extremely talented at building floats for the Fourth of July parade, winning many first place awards. (Evidently, this trait has been passed along to the current membership.) One of our first floats, a pirate ship, was the subject of a memoir I wrote for this newsletter last year. As I mentioned then, our ship was awarded first prize, but after the parade, the prize was retracted and given to the garden club, when it was revealed that float members were (to quote Scottish poet Robert Burns) "...engaged in activities more sore and awful, that even to name would them be unlawful".

After having taken a sabbatical from Lopez for 10 years, and returning in 2000, I was pleased to find that our Lopez Island Yacht Club was not only still alive, but flourishing with about 150 members, thanks to the hard work of many dedicated volunteers.

It is with these fond memories of our founding that I wish the club a heartfelt, "HAPPY 30TH ANNIVERSARY." ~ Rodman Duncan