

## **HISTORY OF THE STAR CLASS**

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(From the 1941 Log)

At the turn of the century when an automobile was very much of a curiosity and the motorboat was a spluttering noisy infant, yacht racing on Long Island Sound, the cradle of the Star, was an expensive big boat sport which called for rather substantial resources.

To quote from George Elder's history of the period: "Everything revolved around the racing of large yachts. In only one or two localities were regattas held with any degree of regularity or decorum. There the big fellows were raced, usually by professionals, while their owners sat upon the club veranda and sipped highballs. To the public the whole thing was only a millionaire's hobby, not a competitive sport. The hundreds of little clubs throughout the country were holding only occasional races for the nondescript craft in their localities, often on a makeshift and unsatisfactory time allowance basis."

"The average skipper had only an elementary hearsay knowledge of rules. There was no standard code and few knew where to obtain a rule book. They depended mostly upon a New York Yacht Club or Yacht Racing Association of Long Island Sound year book, which with luck might be found in some remote corner of the clubhouse. Racing instructions were vague and inaccurate and usually led to disputes and disqualifications. Intersectional racing was almost unheard of and such attempts as were made in that direction usually ended unpleasantly, with the committee showing marked favoritism for the local entries. Those were the grand old days that the rocking chair fleet now boasts of, the grand old days of sea lawyers and surreptitious pot-leading, when skippers did not know as much about aero-dynamics and racing tactics as our ten year old youngsters do today."

Small boat enthusiasts in North America were beginning to consider the one-design principle which had originated at Dublin Bay, Ireland, in 1878 with a small class called Water Wags. But each club was building its own exclusive little craft, inexpensive and often crude. Yachtsmen a dozen miles apart had no common ground on which to race and had little knowledge or interest in what fellow windjammers were doing just over the horizon, Small wonder then that these misdirected early efforts to introduce inexpensive competitive sport afloat were short-lived.

One of these little classes which took hold where the others back-dived into oblivion after a couple of years was the seventeen foot gaff-rigged sloop called the Bug. Fourteen of them had been built in the winter of 1906-07 at a cost of one hundred and forty dollars each. They were designed by Curtis D. Mabry, under the supervision of and in William Gardner's office according to the suggestion of George A. Corry. The now beloved "Father of the Stars" at that time believed an inexpensive fin-keeled boat of the sharpie type might prove a popular one-design class.

For four years George Corry led the Bugs around the triangular courses on Long Island Sound without causing much public enthusiasm. Then in two regattas, one in 1907 and the other in

1909, the Bugs so acquitted themselves on gale-swept courses which large yachts had either stayed away from, or had suffered severe damage on, that they began to attract more than the usual attention bestowed on such small fry.

A group of yachtsmen from the clubs on the western end of Long Island Sound appointed a committee headed by George Corry and including A. B. Fry, Thornton Smith and William G. Newman to develop a class which would provide keen racing for skippers of moderate means. The new Class was to be larger than the Bug, which had been found too uncomfortable and too small, and it was to provide inter-club competition in a real racing yacht to be sailed by the owner, and not by a professional, as was so common at the time.

So George Corry went back to William Gardner's office, asked for an enlarged Bug, which would be five feet longer and have a skeg, which its predecessor had lacked. On the board of Francis Sweisguth, long recognized as one of the outstanding naval architects, the new design took form. At the suggestion of the late Stuyvesant Wainwright the boat was christened Star, although the original circular descriptive of the Class refers to it as the "Bug Class of 1911."

The design completed and approved, twenty-two Stars were ordered from Isaac E. Smith of Port Washington, Long Island. Half of them went to owners at the American Yacht Club at Rye, the rest to other clubs at the western end of the Sound. The boats cost two hundred and sixty dollars complete with sails made by Botcher Brothers of New York. A complete suit of sails cost twenty dollars in those days.

The boats were of course gaff-rigged, the gaff extending far up above the mast as in the sliding gunter rig. They also had watertight compartments fore and aft with hatches on deck. Compared to the refined, many gadgeted Star of today, their rigging, sheets and spars were big enough for a clipper ship. It is interesting to note that all but five of the original twenty-two are still being raced.

The progress made by the Stars in the next four years was due to the inherent excellence of the design and the fine competition it afforded. Boats had been built and added to the Class each year but they had been confined largely to the seaboard from New York to Massachusetts. Without a Class organization it is certain that the Star would not have grown; it is doubtful if it would have even survived. A few of the far-sighted skippers in 1915 formed the Star Class Association of America with about thirty-five members. This was a loosely knit little organization with a single typewritten sheet covering its entire Class rules. Officers were George A. Corry, president; George W. Elder, vice-president; Allen Walker, secretary; and Charles E. Hyde, treasurer. Dues were one dollar annually.

During the first season of the new Association, Bill Inslee won Atlantic Race Week and Ed Willis's Altair took Larchmont Race Week. George W. Elder presented the first Captain's Island Trophy for what is still the premier long distance race of the Class and after 25 years still the most popular. George Corry with Little Dipper not only won that first Captain's Island Race but also his fourth Sound Championship to complete the "sorry Dynasty." Since that time, the "Father of the Stars" has raced regularly but the Class had grown too much for winning to be monopolized.

About forty people attended the first annual meeting and dinner of the Star Class on December 1, 1915, at Mouquin's in New York City. A demonstration was given over the newly opened transcontinental telephone in which each member, listening in on a receiver, heard President Corry challenge the Commodore of the California Yacht Club to an inter-sectional race.

During the winter of 1921 the first major change in Star Class racing was effected with the adoption of the Marconi or Bermudian rig as optional equipment. In this last year of the Star Class Association of America, as was the case up to this time, activity was so overwhelmingly concentrated on Long Island Sound that the Sound Championship was considered to be the championship of the Class from 1911 to 1921, inclusive.

By this time the idea of a national organization began to be looked on with more favor. Starting that summer with a plan to bring about a race between the champion of Long Island Sound and the best boat on Lake Erie, it was extended to include other groups. Individuals elsewhere, hearing of the project, wrote in for information with a view to starting the Class in their waters. The owners on the Sound saw the possibilities hitherto unrealized and a meeting was called to which representatives of the other groups were invited.

The Star Class Yacht Racing Association was launched on January 20th, 1922, at the Hotel Astor, New York City, the meeting being followed by a dinner and entertainment. A constitution and set of by-laws, drawn up by Elder were read and adopted, while Ben Linkfield, secretary of the older organization, suggested that the units be known as fleets. Five fleets were granted charters, these being: Western Long Island Sound, Eastern Long Island Sound, Lake Erie, Detroit River and Narragansett Bay.

The officers elected were: George Corry, president; H. S. Waterson (Lake Erie), vice-president; George Elder, secretary; and C. Burlingham (E.L.I.S.), treasurer. The National Executive Committee included W. J. McHugh (C.L.I.S.), W. C. Wood (N.B.), and J. F. Miller (D.R.). The Western Long Island Sound Fleet then turned over its funds to the new association. Dues were established at one dollar, and arrangements were made for holding the first championship on the Sound that year.

Before the end of 1922, four other fleets were organized, Massachusetts Coast, Lake Ontario, which already had Stars, and Southern California a new fleet with three boats. Central Long Island Sound, with four Stars was also given a separate charter. A total of one hundred and eleven yachts was recorded as belonging to the association. The first annual national championship was sailed on Long Island Sound with six entries from as many fleets. It was the first time in the history of yacht racing that yachts from the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts and the Great Lakes had met in a race. The first Star ever built, W. L. Inslee's Taurus, rather appropriately, won in a clean sweep with three straight firsts.

The annual meeting, which, beginning with the first Internationals was held in conjunction with the series, voted to increase the number of races from three to five, which it has remained ever since. George Elder recommended stake boats instead of government buoys and this too has since been standard, as have the courses.

The annual meeting voted to have STARLIGHTS issued in printed form and, together with the Log, sent to all members. The old International Trophy, the Star model, was retired and presented to the Bayside Yacht Club in recognition of having been won three times by a member of that club while a new and more representative one, our present cup, was obtained by popular subscription. Dues were increased to five dollars for the following year to cover the expanded program adopted.

The first printed issue of STARLIGHTS appeared in January, 1925, and it has been published monthly ever since. STARLIGHTS began to tie the Class together as members grew to know each other by reputation and to understand conditions confronting other fleets. Knowledge of conditioning and handling of Stars began to improve noticeably with this interchange of information.

Yachtsmen of other classes began to evidence a desire for intersectional racing and especially for standard rules. As the Star had shown what could be done the North American Yacht Racing Union was formed; many members of the I.S.C.Y.R.A. assisted in its formation and have been active in it ever since. The Star Class adopted the Union's racing rules, which subsequently were standardized with those of the International Yacht Racing Union, and the Union recognized the Star Class. The reciprocal friendly relations have been mutually advantageous in the intervening years.

An increasing volume of rumors were beginning to be circulated that the Stars were not really one-design, that every winner was a freak, and that all builders were trying to beat the rules. At the suggestion of Adrian Iselin it was decided to have every yacht in the Class measured and a certificate issued. For the tremendous task of measuring existing Stars, nearly four hundred of them, President Elder appointed Certified Measurers throughout Star territory. In the years immediately following less than half a dozen were refused certificates, and all but one of these were altered to conform to specifications. To help maintain uniformity F. W. Teves, Chairman of the Measurement Committee, devised a means of making and selling standard frames at cost.

In 1927 four new fleets were granted charters; not a remarkable figure according to present day ideas. But one of these was the Philippine Island Fleet which I. C. Rockwell started at Manila and the other was the Solent Fleet in England, organized by Colin Ratsey. This was not only the first fleet in Europe but his Joy was the first Star to be built on that continent. Together with existing successful flotillas at Cuba, Vancouver, and Hawaii the Class was really started toward world-wide recognition,

For the first Internationals ever held away from Long Island Sound seventeen entries showed up at Warwick on Narragansett Bay. This was also the first of the series to be managed by the newly created International Race Committee. The event was the best handled that the Class had yet staged. So evenly rematched were the entries in the Internationals becoming, so many problems were introduced by the large entry lists, so necessary was it to insure an absolutely square deal for boats travelling thousands of miles for the privilege of competing for that Gold Star that only the Class itself could be expected to cope with the problem.

In 1928 Enrique Conill established two fleets in France, one at Cannes and the other at Paris. This was the start of European development but, despite Conill's able missionary work and persistent enthusiasm, he was hampered by the unwillingness of the yachtsmen in Europe to adopt a rig they felt to be obsolete. Thus started the major impetus toward the modernization of the sail plan of the Star.

In 1929 the new Flotte de Paris staged the first official Star race ever sailed in Europe, while district and national championships, interfleet and intersectional events grew to unprecedented proportions. The first Great Lakes Championship was but the start of a development on the lakes of North America which has been phenomenal.

At the annual meeting the third rig was adopted by an almost unanimous vote and made optional for 1930.

Almost immediately with the adoption of the tall, modern, in-board rig the growth in Europe began to make itself noticed. Enrique and his brother Fernan Conill began to send in one fleet charter application after another and before the end of 1930 France had no less than seven fleets. Spain, Portugal and Switzerland were welcomed also during this period.

In 1931 the Star Class was established on Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela, at Stockholm, Sweden, as well as at Hamburg in Germany, surely a remarkable achievement in a depression year. The German growth was to prove subsequently a forerunner of a remarkable enthusiasm in that nation, an enthusiasm to be reflected within a few years by some thirty-four entries at Kiel Race Week.

As the Class entered 1932 the inclusion of the Star in the Olympic yachting events for the first time furnished an impetus that helped offset unfavorable economic conditions throughout the world. The association gained sixty additional boats and four new fleets at a time when other yacht building was not only nearly at a standstill but when thousands of craft, large and small, were not even put into commission. Most important perhaps of the new fleets was that at Phillippeville, Algeria, the first on the continent of Africa, marking a new era of development along the shores of the blue-watered Mediterranean.

In the debut of the Stars in the 1932 Olympic games Gilbert Gray of New Orleans won the title for the United States with Colin Ratsey placing as runner-up for England, G. Asther's Swedish Star and H. E. Wylie's Windor, Herbulot's Tramontane for France, the Maas brothers for Holland, and Cecil of Canada being very much in the running. Not only were the Stars the biggest Class, aside from the Monotypes, in the Los Angeles Olympics but Star members figured in every Olympic yachting victory, an illuminating sidelight on the influence of the Association in the sport of sailing. Two members of the Class sailed on the triumphant Swedish six-metre; the winning French skipper of the Monotypes was a Star member, as was the helmsman of the runner-up Holland entry and the American and English craft. A Star sailor was also at the tiller of the victorious American eight-metre.

In 1933 interest in the Class in Italy grew amazingly as reflected in new fleets at Genoa, Naples and the Royal Naval Academy at Livorno. The Bone Fleet in Africa strengthened the foothold of

the Class on that continent's Mediterranean shore while other flotillas included Lake Keuka, Waikiki Beach, Hawaii, and Fort Lauderdale.

The year was marked by the death of beloved Bill Gidley, former treasurer and Vice-Commodore, by the destruction of many Stars on the Atlantic seaboard by a hurricane, and by the fact that a leading dictionary to the usual description of the word "Star" as a "celestial body" added "and a standard international racing yacht." Intersectional racing as at Noroton, Larchmont, Marblehead, Kiel and elsewhere reached new marks in quality and quantity of entrants. Flexible spars predominated on winning boats. Batavia in the Netherlands East Indies was chartered as was the Norfolk Broads Fleet in England, three new flotillas in Italy and six lake fleets in the United States.

Europe and the flexible rig took the spotlight in 1938 when Walter von Hutschler and Joachim Weise won the World Championship and took it to Europe for the first time, and when Stars everywhere began emulating some features of her rig which they were not already using.

Also worthy of note is the unique fact that throughout three decades the Star has been free of commercialism. Professionals have played no part in the racing. Nor has the growth of the Class been due to well-planned advertising and sales campaigns of commercial boat builders. Nor have we had the temporary impetus which derives from being the brainchild of any of the popular boating magazines, although all of them have generously and helpfully encouraged us. We know, and the yachting world knows, the principles of the Star Class which alone account for our position today.