

# History of the Webster Sailing Association: Synopsis and Addendum, 2010

## NAME & LAKE FACTS

Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg, (Nipmuc Indians, “freshwater fishing Indians”) Historians best translation, “The beautiful fishing waters at the boundary”. Neutral Indian fishing area, and “revered as the Abode of the Great Spirit, and the Happy Hunting Ground of the Indians that had gone to their reward”(Ayres). The last Nipmuc to live the traditional hunting, fishing and trading ways was Payne Henries , on the south side of the lake, who died in 1937.

Name officially declared by MA State legislature, about 1935.

Longest name of any body of water in U.S.

Area, 1450 acres. Shoreline, 17.5 miles. Length, 3.25 miles long. Middle Pond, 1+ mile at widest point.

Spring fed, and 1 inch of rain on lake surface = 1 million gallons.

## HISTORY

### 1800's

Samuel Slater builds first woolen mill in MA in 1812, at north end of lake. Constructs dams, controls water rights.

By raising water level 3 feet, Winter Cove is formed, and creates enough depth for WSA's facility there.

First race: Labor Day, 1889, with at least 15 boats, from Snug Harbor to Reed Smith's Cove, and back.

The 4 boats built on the lake by William Eddy were considered outstanding. His “Hustler” was called the best boat “ever to sail the lake—bar none” by Spaulding Bartlett, instrumental in forming WSA. It was the oldest and most photographed sailboat on the lake.

### 1900-1930 SEA SCOUT ERA & FORMATION OF SAILING ASSOCIATION

Prior to sailboats, the first races were 6 and 8- oared sculls, off of “Sea Scout Point”.

Informal weekend sailing races among lake residents. Sailing declines during WWI, and following tragedy as the “Idler I”, owned by the Morton family, capsizes and one drowns, off Jones' Point (not racing).

Early 1920s, only 3 boats raced regularly: “Hustler” built on Goat Is., “Undine” owned by John Bates, & “Meteor” built by Lenny Malser's father.

“Roaring Twenties”: motorized boats appear, irritating sailors. Both groups claim “right of way” on lake.

1934 , a Sea Scout “ship” formed (marine branch of the Boy Scouts).Mission, to teach how to use a boat, sailing rules, navigation & knot tying. Richard “Dick” Wales is the driving force. They're required to sponsor local sailing races, and a Race Committee is formed. Sailors were recruited by placing notes on boats around the lake. Seven boats participated in the first organized race in 1932. John Putnam's “Hustler” has 500 sq. ft. of sail! Others were Bartlett's “Skiff”, Ernie Benoit, Sr.'s “Meteor”, Horace Trull's “Undine”, Lebbeus Case's “Fleetwing”, & one skippered by Edgar & Perry Craver. “Fleetwing” is first in all races, but finishes 5<sup>th</sup> due to “handicapping”. The “Hustler” is the official Sea Scout boat for many years, and sails the lake for more than 100 years.

First Committee boat, obtained by the Sea Scouts: S.S.S. *Clarence Kozlay*, a surplus U.S. Coast Guard vessel which was a rescue surf boat in service off the coast of Maine. Dick Wales sails her from Portland to Boston, then overland to Webster. Kozlay was a captain who gave his life to save his crew.

Scouts build a small shack on “Sea Scout Point” for their operations. They organize races, set courses & buoys,

and rescue capsized & distressed sailors and their boats. These efforts, together with the added safety aspect, promote a new wave of interest.

1935, regular members form an “association” to assist Scouts, & to replace them when they disband, many years later. Trophies are awarded to winners, including Benoit, Craver, LeBoeuf, Putnam, Nims, Stefaniak and Trull. In September, 1938, a hurricane hits during a Sunday race. Luckily, there are no bodily injuries, but extensive boat damage, and the Sea Scout shack & wharf are destroyed.

By 1939, Scouts rebuild a cottage with a tower, porch and longer wharf. All money & lumber donated by lake residents, while the members donate the planks for the wharf. There are 35 boats by this time, 75% of the racers live on the lake, and most boats are built by their owners. Officers wear white slacks, blue blazers, and white Officers’ hats. The race season is from July 4<sup>th</sup> to Labor Day. A red flag on the tower signals leaving all marks to port, green to starboard. The 2 races are the handicap, and the Winnabout. At the end of the season, a collection is taken for the Sea Scouts and expenses.

1939, “skipperettes” joined the races, with 18 girls in 9 boats competing weekly. Sixteen year old Shirley Howe won all four races. Jane Kimberly, age 7, is the youngest winner ever, in a 17-boat race.

“The fact that practically the entire town was at the lake to escape the heat caused an exceptionally large number of spectators”. “The corrected times for every heat in every race were published in the paper.” There were reports of close races, squalls, capsizes and rescues.

WSA by-laws are established.

### **1940s**

During WWII sailing wanes. The Putnam family kept the Association going during these years. Some members were in the Armed Forces, so there were 2 distinct groups: the young & inexperienced, and the elderly veterans of the races. At this time, they sailed out of Point Breeze, Craver Point, and Wheeler Cove.

The Sea Scouts slacken, & the Association takes over. “Ice planes”, without wings, cruise lake in winter.

The gas shortage decreases power boat activity, and increases the sailboat presence.

In 1949, the name **Webster Lake Sailing Association** is chosen, a constitution is drawn up and officers were elected. Dick Wales is the first president. Dues are \$3 and boat registration is \$2.

### **1950s**

Sea Scouts disband, & Dick Wales leaves with them. Tom Walker is the new Commodore.

Arthur Raymond sells Sea Scout Point, but WLSA does not buy it, fearing the low-lying property, with no room for a septic system. Point Breeze becomes the new racing starting line for 2 years, then the Putnam’s boathouse.

1953 WLSA becomes a member of the prestigious United States Yacht Racing Union, unusual for a small, fresh water club.

1954 The Power Boat Association asks to merge with the WLSA, which rejects the proposal. It was felt that the powerboaters wanted more “clout” in approaching the State to build a boat ramp, and the sailors were not interested in more noise, pollution and chaos.

1957 The new trailers and light weight sailboats make trailering more feasible, so reciprocal races with area sailing clubs begin. Alexander’s Lake & Indian Lake in Worcester participate, as well as Crystal Lake in Connecticut eventually.

1959 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary banquet held, with 40 members & 27 registered boats.

John Craver heads a land survey group to buy land for a permanent home for the club.

Winter Cove, off Bates Point Road, is chosen for its elevation, sheltered & safe cove, "lovely view" of the lake and inexpensive price.

Member and attorney Leonard LeBoeuf help incorporate the Webster Sailing Association on Nov.4, 1959. LeBoeuf suggests selling non-interest bearing certificates at \$10 / share to buy the land, and a trust was established.

Bill Boyd becomes first Commodore, an office he will hold for 13 years. He will oversee the purchasing of the land, the building of the clubhouse, and become Treasurer.

### **1960s**

April 18, 1960 club votes to buy land, finalized in May. \$4,500. is spent, and WSA gained 100 feet of waterfront at \$1 per foot. A Picnic area is cleared and a wharf& boat ramp are built.

In 1961 the club secures a loan for \$2,500. to build a clubhouse, called The Anchorage, which is dedicated on Sept 23, 1961. John Putnam & Edgar Craver tie the rope from the rope-cutting ceremony into a square knot, and hang it on the building, to symbolize the "knot binding us together in sportsmanship and comradery".

By 1963, there are 58 boats. That fall, Nichols College is granted use of the property, and races 5 dinghys. Membership grows to 100 people & 76 boats.

Phil Nims' boat, used for the races, is replaced by the Webster Floatilla Auxillary Coast Guard's boat.

THEY benefited by earning merit badges.

Members Crawford and Craver drive a hand-dug well 12 feet without hitting water. Eventually, they continue and reach water!

In 1969 the mortgage was paid off.

### **1970s**

A pontoon boat was purchased and used as the Committee Boat.

In 1974, an adjacent plot of land was bought for \$5,000. Actually it was a mound of dirt that was leveled in about 1980.

Summer vacationers increase, and members now come from NY, NJ, and New England.

In 1977, Phil Nims sells his "Packachog", which he designed & built in 1933, and sailed on the lake for 45 years.

His wife, Alis Nims, faithfully served WSA as Secretary for 60 years, and was an invaluable member of the club.

In addition to the usual membership duties, she would record race times, calculate the handicap figures, and determine winners every Sunday afternoon.

### **THE 80s, 90s, AND NEW MILLENIUM**

A newsletter, the "Jibs & Jibes", was started by Dave and Jan Perry, to keep members informed. More recently, we established and maintain a website on the world wide web. Members can correspond by email and other social networks.

WSA has continued to thrive. While its focus continues to be promoting sailing and racing, the club offers a relaxed, casual, safe environment which attracts whole families as well as the sailor with a competitive spirit.

It's a tribute to the organization that there has never been a serious accident or tragedy despite so many years of activities.

Members can be seen cooking on the grill, celebrating a birthday in The Anchorage, or fishing and swimming off the docks. That first time out on a sunfish, solo, can be a lifelong memory, and spur great sailing adventures of the future.

It is simply a pleasant place to spend a hot summer or cool autumn afternoon, whether there is an accommodating breeze or not. On those days when the wind is really blowing, there's nothing more exhilarating than being on that starting line with kindred spirits.

We achieved not-for-profit status at the turn of the century, and have healthy, cooperative relationships with neighbors, other lake organizations and local businesses. The club is actively involved with the Webster Lake Association and assists in its efforts in water quality, sediment control and invasive species. WSA sponsors and administrates open races on the lake for the entire community, and encourages the WPI racing team. Winter Carnivals, ice fishing contests and ice boat races are some of our events when there is "hard" water.

Many new docks and moorings have been added, and Committee boats and motors are constantly updated and maintained. Other improvements have enhanced both the functioning and esthetics of the property, and it is a credit to the cooperation and comradery of its members that the 100+ years of sailboat racing on Webster Lake continues.

WSA is usually at capacity, with a waiting list for membership, and as we always say, it's the best deal in town!

There's a certain pride in knowing that you're part of something bigger than yourself, something worthwhile and historic, and that you can play a part in its continuation for the generations that will follow us. It's not by coincidence that in 2010, WSA still contains the names of our founders; Benoit, Craver, LeBoeuf and Stefaniak.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary banquet was appropriately held at Point Breeze Restaurant, where the bow of the SSS *Clarence Kozlay* is preserved and proudly displayed. We are currently at 86 members.

We hope that the tradition continues long into the future for the second oldest sailing club in Massachusetts, the Webster Sailing Association.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Pezzella

Commodore, May 1, 2010

**Presidents & Commodores, in chronological order:**

Dick Wales 1949

Tom Walker 1951

Bill Boyd 1959- 1972

Dick Maise 70's

Mel Tews 70's

Roland "Bo" Kuehn 80's

Bob Gurlitz 1991 - 1999

Tom Pezzella 2000 - present

**REFERENCES**

*A History of Webster,.....pp 1 – 49 and 115.*

*Early History of Webster, Dudley, and Oxford*, Macek, Paul J. and Morrison, James R., Webster, MA, 2000.

*The Great Trail of New England*, Harrel Ayres, Meador Publishing Co., Boston, 1940.

*The Spy*, Picture Magazine of Worcester County, October, 1930 (\$.10).

*A History of the Webster Sailing Association*, W. Sanford Durland III, College of the Holy Cross, May 15, 1982.

The *Webster Times*, various unidentified newspaper articles, 1930s to present.

The *Hometown* newspaper, May – July, 1982.

