

A
Brief History of
Minisceongo Yacht
Club

Established 1941

“A Membership Owned Family Boat Club”



Minisceongo Yacht Club, Inc.
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CREDITS

Much of the original source material that is the basis for this booklet was written by others through the years. Most of it was taken from hand written memoirs, notes, minutes of meetings, issues of Ship to Shore, and some were stories carried on down from one generation of members to the next.

Note: . . we have families with up to 4 generations, so far, that have been active at our club. We expect there will be more as time passes.

In 1991, member John Munnely accumulated much of our recorded history, interviewed a few of the long-time members, did some writing and then organized much of this material for publishing in a booklet, including pictures, for our 50th anniversary.

Most of those pictures and more are in the possession of the club's historian for those who are interested.

I used most of that earlier booklet put together by John as the starting basis for this booklet, then after personally rereading much of the original source material, I have rearranged some, rewritten some and added some with events since 1991, and am publishing this smaller, condensed version of our history to be offered to members of MYC.

The emphasis here is more on the earlier years when some real personal sacrifices were made and the stage was being set for us by some very wonderful people. They were working families much like ourselves who were interested in boating and ultimately established the basis of a first class working yacht club that we all enjoy today. . . . I was very privileged to know many of them.

Lew Dunham, Commodore, 1975 . . .
6/30/01 . . .

INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains selected moments in our club's history we hope you will find interesting and informative as well as help you realize that Minisceongo is far more than just a place to keep a boat.

Once you learn about the spirited founders and their years of dedication and hard work as well as the personal sacrifices made by some of our predecessors, we hope you too will be inspired and want to become an active part in helping us maintain what we all are so fortunate to have inherited.

The story is really about a number of true pioneers of our club but has to begin with the one man who started it all . . . *Bill Sutherland.*

Part I - The Beginning Years 1941 - 1945

William Sutherland was the original founder of our club. Bill was a local, well respected, rugged individualist living on Munn Ave in Stony Point, NY on property now owned by MYC. He had a large workshop next to his home where the initial club meetings took place. Bill was a man of vision and dreams with tremendous energy and enterprise. He was a master mechanic and held a diploma from Cooper Union in New York City. He attracted people by his prodigious activity and fascinating projects. In 1940 Bill put together a syndicate to build three Lightning Class racing sailboats. The boats were to be built for himself, and two others. These three boats together with a Lightning built by a fourth person were the start of the official High Tor Lightning Fleet #41. The fleet charter was issued by the Lightning class in early 1941. It is not surprising to learn that during the construction of these Lightnings, Bill's workshop gradually became filled by locals interested in sailing or just plain curious about what Bill Sutherland was up to.

At first it was more like an informal club in Bill's workshop. Quite a gang hung out there. Bill was the "boss" along with a treasurer and secretary. It's reported that at the second meeting, the secretary lit the fire in the barrel stove in the workshop with the minutes of the first meeting. At the same time, the treasurer resigned. He said the club's money was getting mixed up with his own in his pocket and so a new treasurer was appointed. . . . But soon things began to get more formally organized. The workshop was crowded every meeting. In the winter, they usually had clam chowder and a keg of beer on meeting nights. It was rare that anyone was missing from the meetings.

The January 18, 1941, edition of the newspaper "Rockland County Times" announced the launching of MYC and the election of William Sutherland as its first Commodore. There were no docks; the boats were moored to stakes with lines to shore. The only power boat in the Club was an open launch. The entrance to the basin was only a foot or so deep at low tide and "you had to know where that foot was".

There was no clubhouse, just Bill Sutherland's workshop. Still,

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enthusiasm was high and the beginnings were definitely auspicious. Lightnings became more and more active up and down the river as more fleets were organized. Bill Sutherland sponsored the first Grassy Point-to-Nyack race which became known as the “Sutherland Trophy Race.” This happened in 1941 and was really the forerunner of the “Sutherland Regattas”.

But all too soon this activity and lively participation during 1941 would be interrupted. Pearl Harbor came that December and the pall of World War II descended on the Club as well as our Country. . .

The club lost 3 members in the war.

THE ORIGIN OF THE CLUB NAME

Many of the early members of the club were in favor of “*the Hudson River Yacht Club*” as the name of the new club and thought “*Minisceongo*” a ridiculous name which people would barely be capable of spelling. But feisty Bill Sutherland, being the Club’s founder and first commodore, firmly insisted that Minisceongo would be the Club title.

The name was taken from the name of the stream which runs under Penny Bridge along the west and northwest border of the Club’s grounds and empties into the Hudson River. The stream is generally believed to have been named by the Tappan Indian tribe, the northern border of whose territory extended to Stony Point. In 1790 one historian spelled the name “Minisconga Creek.” Early researches derived it from minnis, an island, co or con, object, and ga, place, referring to Grassy Point itself which is an island. A later historian wrote it Minniscongo, almost an Island. Bill Sutherland found the name rich in local lore, meaningful and distinctive. His successors also find it so today, lastly being spelled “Minisceongo”.

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THE ORIGIN OF THE CLUB BURGEE

American Yachting traditions are generally modeled on those of the New York Yacht Club and indirectly by way of Great Britain. Most yacht club pennants, therefore, are made up of the colors red, white and blue. It’s unusual to find a club’s burgee whose colors are other than those standard ones, let alone the “Kelly Green” of Minisceongo. The history of Minisceongo’s Kelly Green goes back to the nineteenth century when a large influx of Irish immigrants settled in Rockland County, many to work in the brick yards that lined Haverstraw Bay, particularly in the Grassy Point area where we are located today. The descendants of a number of these immigrants were the Club’s first members. The members of this largely Irish gang, with names like Ganson, Reilly, Lynch and a young man named Frank Sutherland, all heartily agreed upon their prejudicial choice for the burgee colors - “Kelly Green, of course, with a white “M”.

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FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II

William Sutherland, without a doubt, was certainly the driving force behind the formation of the Minisceongo Yacht Club, yet there is another man whose pivotal importance in the Club's history must be recognized. His name is **Augustus E . Miller** and it was under his general auspices and with his encouragement that the Club was nurtured in its beginnings and benevolently fostered as it progressed.

"Gus" Miller was a lens grinder of German extraction whose business, *Oscillating Quartz Crystals*, located in North Bergen, New Jersey, experienced tremendous production during World War II. Since Gus had several government contracts, federal inspectors frequently visited his place of business and one of these inspectors and Gus soon became acquainted, as both shared a common interest in yachting although each belonged to different existing boat clubs.

It was around this time that a few members from the inspector's boat club became interested in purchasing some waterfront property. Their intention was to form another yacht club. The property they located was in the hamlet of Grassy Point, part of the town of Stony Point and consisted of most of the land that today makes up the boundaries of Minisceongo. For whatever reason, the purchase of this property was never consummated but the inspector remained quite enthusiastic about its potential and showed it to Gus Miller. Gus was not keen about the land, but he was afraid to offend the government inspector of his business so Gus bought the property for \$6,000 on April 24, 1946.

By then, Minisceongo had been in existence as a formally organized yacht club for approximately five years (including the war years) actually as "squatters" on the property that Gus bought.

It was quite some time before Gus ever went back to really look at the property. But when he did, a fortuitous meeting occurred. For there he met Bill

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Sutherland, also a squatter, operating a small boatyard on Gus' newly-acquired land. Their meeting could have been an ugly confrontation. Instead, Gus Miller marveled at the activities around Bill's workshop and boatyard. He was also particularly interested to hear that Bill had organized a small yacht club named Minisceongo. To Gus Miller, Bill Sutherland would soon become known as "The Captain of the Port."

MINISCEONGO'S HARBOR

Following the end of World War II, Minisceongo Yacht Club experienced a period of tremendous activity and growth. The membership poured their energies into the development and further organization of the Club. The Club had 55 members. William Sutherland was again elected Commodore. Several more members built their own Lightning boats in Bill's workshop. And the members began the task of developing the basin.

The protective anchorage of the harbor, the Club's most singular asset, with its narrow outlet to the Hudson, is not entirely a gift of nature. Certainly nature did her part by depositing the immense claybeds, the result of the decomposition of primary rocks in ages long since past. But the Club's harbor is a direct result of the exploitation of these clay beds, which began around 1815 as brick-making started to flourish. The brick yards spread quickly. Their insatiable quest for the rich clay and their inexorable dredgings into the valuable beds soon hollowed out the future harbor of our Club.

As the members actively began the improvements in the club's harbor and gap, these improvements were made in the typical self-sufficient and independent style of Minisceongo. . . . William Sutherland relates the story in his memoirs:

"There were many problems in making a club. The entrance to the basin was not good and we decided to dynamite it to deepen the

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water at low tide. So I had to go to the Town Clerk's Office and secure a permit for buying dynamite and also a permit to transport dynamite on the highways, and lastly a permit to shoot it off. Mr. Ossman (third Commodore and Stony Point town official) was a friend of mine and he issued all the permits to me".

"I brought the dynamite to Alex Supko's house in Tomkins Cove. After dinner, Larry Ryan, myself and Alex went out to set the charges. Larry Ryan wired it. I placed it in the water where we wanted to blow it and Alex fired the charge. We made craters ten feet in diameter, but it wasn't (deep) enough, it wasn't what we wanted. Later we had a scow come in to dredge. Soon large boats could enter and leave our harbor without fear of grounding."

In 1947 a committee was appointed to proceed with outlining a set of bylaws. . . .Also at that time, it was known that activity was under way exploring the possibility of securing a building that currently stood on property owned by West Point to be brought here and used as a clubhouse.

That possibility brought on some concern and more of a desire by the membership to gain some recognition and reassurance. This was, after all, a club that did not own the land, nor any boat-handling facilities, and was considering the purchase of a Clubhouse with it all being on someone else's land; August Miller's. The members rightfully felt this was quite an investment of time, money and effort; and they needed to be reassured that there would be some permanence to their labors. There was also some talk of incorporating at the time.

In January 1948, Minisceongo applied to and was listed in Lloyds' Yacht Register. That established that MYC existed.

But it was in February 1948 that the recognition and reassurance the club members were really looking for came. Abe Decker, a member of the new

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Clubhouse committee, had been asked to approach Gus Miller and reach an understanding with him in connection with the clubhouse project. After writing to Miller, Abe received and read Miller's reply at the February 1948 meeting which included the following:

Dear Mr. Decker:

The contents of your letter of January 30th 1948 are indeed gratifying. Under the present conditions I assure you it will be a pleasure for me to have your, or should I say our, Clubhouse on my premises; you see I feel part of the crew up there.

The building can remain on my property indefinitely. I foresee no reason why it should ever have to be moved. Of course, should some unusual events necessitate its removal, then I will permit removal of the building. This is to assure you I do not contemplate selling my property. I would like to keep Bill Sutherland on as "Captain of the Port."

*Sincerely,
s/Gus Miller*

After Gus Miller's letter was read at the February 1948 meeting, progress continued toward the more permanent organization and recognition the members desired. In May, the Club became an official member of the North American Yacht Racing Union.

THE CLUB HOUSE ACQUISITION

Also in William Sutherland's hand-written memoirs, he described how in 1948 the Club acquired the log cabin which was to become its clubhouse.

"At one meeting, Larry Ryan got up and told us that West Point, where he worked, had just made a swap with Bear Mountain for a piece of property for a reserve. There were fifty-five buildings on

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the property, including a log cabin, that was going to be auctioned off as one unit. So we decided to go up there on Popolopen Lake to see this log cabin. It was just what we wanted and we began to see if we could get it separated from the rest of the buildings in order to bid on it. Larry Ryan said he asked some of the officers at West Point and they said they could do nothing about it as all orders came from Washington.”

“So one of our members knew the Republican committeeman in Tomkins Cove and he and our member went to Tuxedo and saw Mrs. St. George, the representative in Congress, and told her our problem. Sometime later she called and told us the building was now separated, but she could not stop anyone else from bidding on it”.

“So the day before the bids were to be put in, I (Bill) and another member went to the People’s Bank where I had an account. I drew out a certified check for \$333.33 and the next day we went to West Point and put our bid in. When the bids were read off that afternoon, our hearts were in our mouths as a doctor from Highland Falls bid \$300.00. Next was our bid of \$333.33 and it was the last bid. We were then told we would have to put up a performance bond of \$ 1,000. Larry Ryan used his home as the bond. We had to take the building down and clean up around it and dump all the rubbish in an old mine shaft.”

The Club minutes of the year 1948 and the remembrances of other members fill out the memoirs by Bill Sutherland. The chestnut logs were numbered as the cabin was disassembled by hand and brought down to Grassy Point on a member’s flatbed truck. This was accomplished by the end of spring without incident and Larry Ryan received his performance bond back. A site for the cabin was chosen and the membership voted to put in a foundation for the clubhouse. A Club member, being a local contractor, did the

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foundation work at cost. Reassembling continued throughout the summer and fall with all the work being done manually by club members. The numbered logs were painstakingly placed back into their original position. A picture window was added where formerly a porch existed and a beautiful arch completed the interior design. All the original flooring was relaid and a new fireplace constructed. Finally, on December 10th, 1948, the first meeting was held in the new clubhouse and the membership enjoyed the fruits of their labor.

THE LADIES AUXILIARY

During this same period and as MYC began to really grow, the welcome presence of whole families and family boating led to more participation by women and, in turn, the organization of the Ladies Auxiliary on March 11, 1948. The Commodore of the club was most instrumental in getting the organization up and running. Its purpose was to help MYC, and help they did! Their contributions, chiefly financial and social, intertwined with the history of MYC from that day forward.

Before there was a clubhouse, the Auxiliary met at the Stony Point Redman’s Hall. After that, meetings were held at the Clubhouse one night before MYC meetings. This was fine when all the members lived in North Rockland. But as new members joined from more distant communities, meeting nights were changed to coincide with MYC meetings. They were held upstairs in the Clubhouse for a time. Then the meetings were shifted to the Snack Shack between April and October.

Opportunity knocked often. From a \$300 contribution toward land purchase in 1954 to \$2,500 for new Clubhouse windows in 1988, the Auxiliary always came through. Special mention must be made of the many contributions to the Clubhouse. Purchased and erected in 1948, it was just a hollow shell until the women’s touch was applied.

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It was the Ladies Auxiliary which provided the kitchen utensils, the stove and sink, the tables and chairs, the heating system, the drapes, the fire screen, the ladies room, the kitchen cabinets, the wiring for the entire building, an aluminum overhang on the east side of the building and more. There were years when the Auxiliary paid for electricity and insurance, too.

The contribution of the Ladies Auxiliary has been most beneficial and in the early days of the Club, critical to its development. Today, their good work goes on. Ladies Auxiliary members still work hand in hand with the social committee, maintaining an ambitious year-round schedule of events. The camaraderie, and the spirit of service continues.

As the basic clubhouse was being erected, Gus Miller suggested that an official lease for the property would be in the best interests of both parties. Mr. Miller offered a very reasonable rent which Bill Sutherland, who ran a boat yard as a commercial entity east of the clubhouse, offered to pay in quarterly installments. The taxes on the property were to be paid 2/5 by Bill Sutherland and 3/5 by the Club.

In November 1948, the lease was finalized. Mr Kennedy, the Club lawyer filed the lease in New City, the county seat, in December 1948.

That same month, the club members unanimously accepted their first official set of bylaws. (December 1948)

Minisceongo now had a new Clubhouse, a firm lease with the owner of the property and a set of bylaws. We were also recognized by Lloyd's and were a member of the North American Yacht Racing Union. Of the initial recognition concerns of the members, only legal incorporation remained to be accomplished. This question was put aside for a whole year while the Club concentrated on completing and furnishing the Clubhouse.

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Larry Ryan, the man who was so instrumental in Minisceongo's acquisition of a clubhouse, was elected Commodore by an appreciative membership on November 12, 1948. He was the fourth member to hold that position.

His year at the helm was full of great accomplishments. Throughout 1949 important finishing touches were added to the Clubhouse, the kitchen and bathrooms were completed, a cesspool was dug for \$25, water lines were connected, and in September a furnace was purchased and later installed with the duct work fitted by one of the members.

Small accomplishments were also in evidence. The treasurer was given an expense account of \$5.00 and a design for club stationery was ultimately approved. . . . Member Marty Brophy Sr. donated two huge anchors that grace the Clubhouse lawn.

In January 1949, members voted that annual dues be in the amount of \$10, payable in quarterly installments.

The "Annual Dinner" as it had come to be called, was held in February 1949 at the Villa Lafayette in Suffern with 169 people attending.

In April 1949, the first work weekend was designated.

In August 1949, the Club was host to the mid-Hudson Lightning Regatta, drawing competitors from all over the Metropolitan Lightning District.

In September 1949, the first summer barbecue was held, beginning a tradition that continues each year as of this writing.

At about this time, a member reported that he could get 250 railroad ties at Jones Point if they were rolled down into the river and towed to the Club.

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A number of members volunteered to take their boats up to get them. The ties were subsequently used to build up and help preserve the Club's embankments.

In November, approval was given for the purchase of a 550-gallon tank from Gurran Oil Co. for \$75. A man was hired to dig a hole for the tank and a collection taken up to collect \$18.15 to pay the man.

At the urging of William Sutherland in December of 1949, incorporation was once again being suggested. In March 1950, Irv Kennedy, the club's lawyer, was given the authority by the membership to prepare the necessary papers pertaining to incorporation. A second reading of the proposed resolution of incorporation was heard in April with no objections. In May, after the third reading of the resolution, 27 out of 29 members present voted affirmatively for incorporation.

The Certificate of Incorporation was dated May 31, 1950. The original incorporators were McKinley D. Allison, Al Lynch, Ralph Goldsmith, Rolland Ossman and Louis Bucking. The purpose of the Club was stated forthrightly: . . . "To foster an interest in the use and enjoyment of our waterways and to create good fellowship among boatmen of all classes."

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In July 1950 the Club's annual budget was approved in the amount of \$1,022.

The first Social Committee was created about this time and the financial report for the Halloween Party showed: total receipts \$50.75, expenses \$25.95, and net proceeds of \$24.70, which were set aside to defray all expenses of the Christmas party.

In 1951, there was concern about the shortage of mooring stalls. In July, new mooring stalls were constructed. The Ladies Auxiliary voted to pay \$200 for the cost of the new stalls. They also contributed a coffee urn. Eugene Eagles donated a trophy cabinet and the Honorable James A. Farley, a clock to be placed in the main room of the Club House.

Publication of a monthly newsletter was proposed. The purpose of the paper would be to keep members advised of Club activities and to stimulate greater interest in the Club. It would also serve as a notice of monthly meetings. Eugene Eagles and Brainard Foote were named the first editors of the paper, which was named "Ship to Shore". The first issue was distributed in December 1951. Early issues of the paper carried advertisements.

In 1952 . . .

. . . the Harbor Committee obtained permission from the U.S. Coast Guard for the installation of channel buoys at the entrance usually called the "gap."

. . . MYC joined the Hudson River Boatmen's Association

. . . One-thousand railroad ties became available to the Club without charge and extensive work on the bulkhead was undertaken and completed by the following spring.

THE TAMSEN PROPERTY

The land Minisceongo Yacht Club leased from Gus Miller did not

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completely encircle the harbor where boats were moored. There was an easterly portion owned by John J. Tamsen which fronted the water both harborside (in “our” basin) and riverside. This section of property consisted of two acres and ran from the easterly side of the last house on Munn Avenue northerly to the river and then southeasterly back to Munn Ave. (which included a portion of the east bulkhead today).

In November 1952, at a regular meeting of the Club, the Commodore suggested to the members that an honorary membership be granted to Mr. Tamsen. It was the opinion of the Commodore, and the members agreed, that this honorary membership should be granted in view of the fact that Mr. Tamsen had been a good neighbor, allowing the Club to use his land and water rights. The Club secretary extended an invitation to Mr. Tamsen to attend the December meeting, which he did, receiving honorary membership in the Minisceongo Yacht Club.

Exactly one year later in October 1953, the Commodore received a call from member Larry Ryan, informing him that the Tamsen property was for sale for the sum of \$8,000. However, Mr. Tamsen wanted to close on the property within one week or else he would sell it to one of two interested buyers, one of which was the Gurran Oil Co. At that time, \$8,000 was a lot of money and the Club did not have anywhere near that amount in its treasury. Further, the membership would not be meeting for several weeks. Realizing that he would have to act fast, or the property would be lost to the Club, The Commodore, Warren Basley decided to put up \$2,000 of his own money toward the purchase price. He then contacted several other members who were businessmen in the community for contributions. Frank McDermott agreed to put up \$2,000, and Brainard Foote, Earl Wakefield, and Mickey Mazza put up the balance. Warren then went ahead with the purchase just before the deadline expired.

It was with some concern that Commodore Basley approached the membership meeting on Friday, November 13, 1953. What if the members objected to his acting without their approval? What if they did not approve the

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purchase? But they did approve it and a committee was established to explore ways and means of financing the purchase and to reimburse the members.

Title to the property was recorded on November 30, 1953. At the December meeting, The Property Finance Committee reported to the members that \$2,000 was taken from the Building Fund to be applied against the purchase price. To pay off the \$6,000 balance, the committee recommended that each of the 150 members be assessed \$40, payable within one year.

That wasn't readily accepted, but finally at the January 1954 meeting a consensus was reached. It was agreed that every member be subject to a one-time assessment of \$40. However, in lieu of a single payment of the \$40, members had the option of paying \$ 10 now and \$10 a year for three years. Within three years the money was repaid and Minisceongo truly owned its first property with riparian rights. In that sense, we ceased to be a paper yacht club.

As an expression of gratitude to Gus Miller for his support and generosity, the members in August of 1953 approved Stephen Doig's suggestion that the Club expend up to \$100 for the purchase of an oil painting of Mr. Miller to be placed in the Clubhouse. The painting was done by artist William Bruckner for \$ 100. Later, \$30 was allocated for the frame.

THE FIRST FLAGPOLE

In 1953, a flagpole was erected on the Club's grounds. It came from the estate of noted actor, director, and president of Paramount Pictures, Adolph Zukor, who had a residence in New City and a boat and boathouse on the Hudson in the Haverstraw area. After a while, the boat boathouse came into disuse and MYC was able to purchase the flagpole, which adjoined the

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boathouse, for a nominal sum.

The transportation and erection of the pole, typical of the effort members have provided over the years in building the Club, was described in the July 1953 edition of Ship to Shore as follows: (as is)

“We had no saw, so Mickey backed his truck against the pole while Nick wielded an ax. Two guy lines around a tree held fast but Larry didn’t have roots so he soared through the air like the man on the flying trapeze. There was a lot of work by Tim filling the spiral checks, a lot of fitting by Earl. Emil W. (thin) [Westerman] prepared the base six feet deep. Emil (stout) [Woolfing] cut out the ‘Lightning’ weather vane. A lot of members dug, sanded, screened and heaved. Denny and Earl O. rigged it. And the pole: It is about fifty feet high and the green light on Stony Point bears 5 degrees.”

(Unfortunately, the flagpole was destroyed years later in an accident in 1962. In preparation for the opening day ceremonies that year, the pole was being lowered for sanding and painting when a gust of wind caused it to be dropped to the ground with a resounding crash. No injuries to the members working on the project were reported although there were some bruised egos. The pole, however, did not survive the fall, having broken into a number of pieces. On June 10, 1962, a metal flagpole was placed in service on the site of the former pole. The top portion of the new pole utilized the top portion of the wooden pole and the original Lightning weather vane was again placed atop the partially new pole.)

In March 1954, the basin entrance was dredged with the \$300 in equipment cost being paid by Gus Miller. Also the embankment in front of the Clubhouse was receding, filling in the basin behind Finger 2. Steps were taken in October to bulkhead the bank and dredge the basin at that location with twenty members who volunteered to do the work.

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In March 1955 approval was given to undertake the piping of water to the fingers. . . . On May 29 the Clubhouse was broken into and the Club’s starting cannon stolen. . . . On June 7, the thieves returned and stole ammunition for the cannon. The year closed with the mortgage on the Tamsen property being paid off.

The next year (1956) started off with members approving the building of a 150-foot finger at the east end of the basin. Approval was also given to spend up to \$2,500 for repairs to the east breakwater. The members voted to establish a membership limit of 170. MYC was the subject of an article in the January 1956 edition of Yachting Magazine entitled, “Do It Yourself Yacht Club.” The article stated that the key to the Club’s accomplishments was its “work days” held several times yearly on weekends with good crowds coming out to repair and improve the Clubhouse, roadways, parking areas, grounds, shore lines, breakwaters and docks. It further noted that good planning by the various club committees keeps work to a minimum and leaves most of the boating season for good times. The article cited the Club as having plenty of spirit and goodwill that has been marshaled to bring good times on the water at very moderate cost.

THE WEST END BOAT YARD

From the earliest days, MYC members utilized Bill Sutherland’s small boat yard which was available for hauling, storage, and boat repairs. Bill had built a track and cradle system for a commercial venture, capable of hauling small boats. It served the members of MYC until 1959 when Bill Sutherland announced he was closing his yard.

This launched a vigorous search by those members of MYC who had hauled and stored with Bill each year. Two committees were formed. One investigated a travel lift system which was rejected by the membership because the cost was beyond the Club’s resources at the time. The second

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committee investigated a railway system for hauling, which was approved pending getting property rights for boat storage in an area that would be appropriate.

Hence, obtaining the property became the first order of business. MYC owned just the one parcel of land at the time, the former Tamsen property east of Finger 1 which was not appropriate for use as a boatyard. Gus Miller owned most of the rest of what is today known as Minisceongo. Gus agreed to take the Tamsen property on the east in exchange for his land on the west where the Snack Shack and the boat yard are today. He agreed to grant rights of way so the members could erect a rail system and move back and forth freely from the basin to the newly-acquired boatyard land over property he would continue to own.

A separate corporation was formed by interested MYC members to acquire the boatyard property, bordering on Minisceongo creek, and to erect the railway system there from the basin to the property. Shares of stock were sold in the corporation, known as the *West End Boat Yard*, to finance their capital requirements. Elmer Jones was elected President and Earl Jacobson Vice President. Earl Wakefield, who was elected Treasurer, donated \$2,000 as a start-up fund to be repaid as the business of the new yard permitted. The loan was paid off in the second year of the yard's operation.

West End Boat Yard members constructed the rail track system in time for late 1959 hauling. Bill Sutherland's hauling cars were reconstructed to conform with the new 6.0' gauge track. In the first two years of operation there was no power other than manpower to haul boats. Elmer Jones's dump truck also helped. In 1961, a single-drum winch driven by an old four cylinder gas engine was obtained to assist in hauling. It was replaced in 1963 by a double drum winch obtained from Ward Brothers. That winch was driven by a six cylinder gas engine obtained from a wrecked Ford car located in a member's body shop. The original track system was expanded as boat owners who wished to haul and store in the yard increased. Each boat owner was required to lay their own track, with club supervision, and they did.

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Railroad tracks, ties, and spikes came from various sources. A transfer car was furnished by Harold Brown of the firm Beckerle and Brown in Pearl River. An old jeep was obtained, with a winch at the rear to move boats into and out of siding storage tracks as several West End Boat Yard members erected sheds over the tracks to cover their boats.

Note: On February 13, 1972, the stockholders of the West End Boat Yard met and voted to liquidate the corporation. This action was prompted by the fact that the Club had by then acquired all the land which it formerly had leased and had taken over all the functions formerly handled by the Yard.

In 1960 . . .

. . . the Club's bylaws were amended to establish Life member-ships.

. . . a parcel of land on the southwest corner of the Club's grounds was leased to Jerry Martin. Jerry erected a building on the land and conducted a marine business selling, equipping and repairing boats until September of 1965, when he closed down the business. Jerry utilized a travel lift and pit with access to the water near the Penny Bridge.

. . . Serious consideration was given to the construction of a pool on Club grounds. Response to the proposal was initially rather favorable and some members began to contribute to the start-up cost of its construction. However, as more members got involved, the tide turned, boating was to remain as the sole purpose of the club and the proposal died with a refund of pool deposits made.

In April, 1961, the NY Central R.R.'s offer of 1,000 railroad ties was gratefully accepted.

In December of the following year, a strong northeasterly with high winds significantly lowered the level of the Hudson. Stony Point Bay was bare of water from Gurran's dock to Stony Point. The gas dock was resting askew on the bottom of the basin. The piles on Finger 4 were high and dry. It was reported that some structures in the boat yard moved around a bit.

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In the 1950's and early 1960's, winters were extremely cold in the Hudson Valley, freezing the river and filling the club basin with two-foot-thick ice. This ice moved with the tide and raised havoc with the dock pilings. Each fall the docks had to be separated from the pilings and rafted together in the east end of the basin to relieve pressure on the poles. Nevertheless, each winter pilings were bent, broken or pulled out by the ice and each spring, on every weekend, the club constructed pile driver had to be worked to repair the damage. As a result, the members' boats were neglected until late spring. In 1961 the Commodore had read about a de-icing device used in a marina in Cos Cob, Connecticut. He decided to go see whether the device could help MYC solve its problem. When he returned, he and some other members developed a system which they tested first in a bathtub, then each year changes were made, until a system of sorts was working with little trouble and requiring only that it be checked every morning and night.

In April 1963, the members voted to purchase an electric hoist with about 1,000 lbs. capacity (club set limitation) to be installed on the new bulkhead extension behind Finger 4.

On November 12, 1968, a storm with gale-force winds and a high tide covered the east breakwater, brought water up on the Clubhouse lawn and caused extensive damage to MYC property. Both breakwaters required repair with stone, especially along the outer face of the east breakwater, where the wooden breakwater essentially disappeared along with the outer corner of the gap bulkhead. Supports at the shore end of the ramp to Finger 5 washed away. In front of the Clubhouse, over 50 feet of the bulkhead, between the ramps to Finger 3 and the club docks washed away five ties deep.

Without researching to determine the year it was built, it is important that our history record show that members constructed and used a club pile driver for many years. From the very early years right up until the late 90's, the pile driver was a very important and necessary piece of equipment. It was used during some portion of every year's operation and was rebuilt and repowered at least twice over the years. Although outside contractors were used for the

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piling work at the gap and travel lift pit, practically all other piling work done at bulkheads, pulling broken piles, or resetting and/or driving new piles was a major part of the harbor committee's task each year, especially when major changes were required as new docks were first installed. The use of the club pile driver saved the club many contract dollars over the years and was readily available if and when needed for restoring damage after a big storm.

Along with the pile driver, and while creosote was still legal, members were involved in creosoting some of the untreated pilings obtained by the club. In later years pressure treated pilings were purchased for use in the harbor if used pilings couldn't be obtained from the local utility companies.

**Part IV- The Mortgage Years
1970 - 1983**

A CRITICAL PERIOD - PROPERTY PUT UP FOR SALE

In 1969 the Club was advised that the property leased from Gus Miller would be offered for sale and that the Club's lease would not be renewed for 1970. During the balance of 1969 the officers of the Club held discussions with Gus Miller regarding the possible purchase of the property. During the course of these discussions the Club received an offer for a one-year extension of the lease at an annual rental of \$7,000 with an option to purchase the property for \$175,000. There were a number of dissenters for various reasons, and some people left the club during this period, but the offer was finally approved at a general meeting of the membership held on November 14, 1969.

The granting of a lease for another year gave the newly-formed Financial Planning Committee some time to explore ways and means to finance the purchase. The committee recommended the creation of associate memberships and the acceptance of 30 to 40 of these members, depending on harbor space. It was felt that if enough new people could be attracted right away, the additional boat slip fees that these members would generate could be the answer in financing the purchase of the property. The amendment to the bylaws authorizing the establishment of the associate membership class was approved at the December, 1969, membership meeting.

Again in typical Minisceongo fashion, fingers 1A and 2A along with pilings creating slips were added in short order, some main fingers were spliced together with plywood spanning different levels of docks and many slips on Fingers 1A, 2 and 3 had only pilings with access to boats over transoms from the main dock. But the club had no problem filling all available openings over the winter of 69-70. It looked encouraging.

At the September 1970 Club meeting, having seen the income that could be generated by Associate members, the final agreement on the purchase of the Miller property was approved. The members also expressed their appreciation to Gus Miller, who had adjusted the agreement to meet the Club's

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financial capabilities insuring the member's ownership of the property worth considerable more than he had charged them.

There were mixed emotions among several of the older members during this transition, with so many new faces they felt they had lost control especially since many of the new Associates had become probationary members within a year. And the record shows that by 1973, there were 101 Associates out of 231 members (including a number of dry-sailors) with several that had already become regular, or probationary members and were very much in evidence around the club.

During this transition period, most of the construction and work was being concentrated on providing and improving dock space for the influx of Associates members. In the meantime, the bulkhead at the entrance to the Club and seawalls were deteriorating and were in need of restoration. After the Army Engineers gave the necessary approvals in December 1975 for work at the Gap, a relatively new Associate offered to have his company undertake the reconstruction of the bulkheads at cost. This was a substantial undertaking which served the Club well over the years.

Soon thereafter, the same member, who had also built his own boat, volunteered to build a gazebo on the west bank, and build it he did, all by himself. Although members offered to help in the construction, he refused all offers of assistance, this was his project and his recreation. On the Club's opening day in 1978 the Gazebo was dedicated to the memory of member Emil Westerman, the "Father of The Fingers." Emil had passed away while serving as Vice Commodore and was present at a Ladies Auxiliary function when he was taken.

In 1981, 400 tons of stone was used to raise the level of the east bulkhead and 19 piles were driven to help support the west bulkhead on the harborside. Large individual stones were also gathered and hauled to the west bulkhead that had been obtained from several property owners on Route 9W

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who had given the Club permission to take rocks and boulders from their property. . That same month, a member donated 1,000 feet of used firehose for use around the Club, but mainly for attaching to slips and fingers to act as a “fender” for boats.

Also in 1981, according to our 10 year mortgage contract, the club was committed to a “balloon” payment in the amount of the balance of the mortgage. Board member Lew Dunham met with Gus Miller early that year and it was agreed that the club would continue making the same 2 payments annually at the same time and amount until the mortgage would be satisfied with one final payment in 1983. In an early 1983 Club meeting, Lew suggested that some of the money normally used for the 2nd yearly mortgage payment be set aside for a mortgage burning celebration. Subsidizing a social event had never been an option before and the members were quick to approve. So it was that on August 23, 1983 the Club celebrated the satisfaction of the mortgage with a mortgage burning ceremony held on the Club grounds with 351 members and guests in attendance for the “MOBU”. as it became known. A large 40’x100’ tent along with tables and chairs were rented for the affair which started a tradition for the following years. A plywood stage was constructed under the tent where various forms of entertainment was presented throughout the day which ended that evening with ½ hour of professional fireworks being fired off from the west bulkhead near the gap. There was an actual burning of the mortgage (copies) accomplished by the original founders, Bill Sutherland and Gus Miller. Twenty of the 35 past Commodores were present. Many of the pictures of past commodores now hung in the club house were taken that day.

Although the club has since had more loans or mortgages for various purchases, the final payment on this mortgage was especially significant for the charter and long time members who could now see that their many years of labor were secured with complete ownership.

The following month (September) members approved the acquisition of

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the Lewis property which abutted the Club property near the southeast corner on Munn Ave. Member Frank Sutherland, nephew of Bill, loaned the Club \$40,000, to be applied against the purchase price of \$46,000. The loan was repaid in a couple of years. This acquisition assured the Club’s ability to maintain control over all the access to the basin which had been in question. Shortly after its purchase, the members decided to demolish the house on the property and leave the land vacant except for the garage which was left standing. It became known as “Dougie’s (Van derMark) Place” where he assembled, stored and repaired compressors for our winter bubbling system.

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Member and earlier Commodore Len McLeod had been researching and advocating the use of “gabions” in the construction of bulkheads for some time when finally in 1985 the Club approved their use. Gabions were first installed to line the northwestern part of the basin. This was a labor intensive task done by members. Later a gabion bulkhead was built, extending from the east end of the bulkhead in front of the Clubhouse some 180 feet toward Finger 1.

The following year the east bulkhead was reinforced on the river side using 1,100 tons of rock obtained from a contractor doing a “bank removal” job nearby on the Palisades Interstate Pkwy. In that same year MYC started furnishing a mooring dock for the Stony Point Fire Department fire boat.

The Club also instituted electrical metering service for each boat slip beginning with the 1988 boating season.

The gas dock was reconstructed in 1988, and work also begun late in that year by a contractor to carve out a travel lift pit and construct the I-beam track for the travel lift itself. The retiring railway system had served until that time when the travel lift replaced it in April 1989, eloquent testimony to the good members who built it in 1959 and operated it for 30 historic years. With the acquisition of the travel lift, the winch, rail tracks and ties along with the privately owned sheds were disposed of over the next two or three years, and so was the way the Club hauled out boats for 47 years.

In February 1989, “MYC South” was born when a group of MYCers that were in Florida for the winter got together for an outing. Their first event didn’t enjoy the usual Florida warm weather, but this was the start of an annual February/March get-together that became very popular and was continued for several years until all the “sponsors” passed away.

The 90’s brought many new people as we lost some cherished long time members. Improvements and growth continued, including new and bigger mortgages and new dedicated people who were involved in

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maintaining our facilities as well as the traditions and values of our club.

The boatyard was further improved, more space was added and new utility fixtures were installed. . . . a new security system was installed, our east bulkhead at the gap was reinforced with steel sheeting, and a new picnic pavilion was constructed. This pavilion was dedicated in honor of a charter member, *Francis X. Sutherland*, nephew of Bill, who had been an active member and boater from the very beginning, for over 53 years, right up until he died.

Sailboat racing lost some of it’s luster on the river but it continues to be an important part of our activities at MYC and the Sutherland Regatta remained a major event each year in the lower Hudson valley.

The year 2000-2001 brought new and upgraded dock facilities for fingers 4 and 5 with plans for more of the same in the future . . . and on and on it goes.

There are still many “unsung heros” not included in this story that have made major contributions to our club, even today, but few, if any, beyond “the originals” can be singled out for special recognition for we would be slighting so many others who in their own quiet way help to keep and improve our club every passing year.

If you stroll about and look over the well-maintained Club grounds and gaze out over the fleet of boats in the basin toward the green rolling hills that hug the Hudson River shoreline, the beauty and serenity of the scene will most likely cause you to pause in wonder and appreciation of what the original members and their successors have accomplished, through hard work and dedication. A few men with a love of boating started a boat club on the banks of an old clay hole. They, and the members who later joined, transformed that inauspicious beginning into a Yacht Club that is widely admired for its facilities, family-style, non-commercial atmosphere and spirit of cooperation

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among members.

We hope as time marches on, you too will make some contribution to our history that will be recorded in the future, not necessarily by name, but by helping to enhance the club and maintain the objective of the club spelled out in our bylaws as follows:

The object of the Club shall be to encourage the sport of yachting, particularly in the Hudson River Valley, to promote the science of seamanship and navigation and to provide and maintain a suitable clubhouse and anchorage for the recreation and use of its members and guests.

. . . and above all, that you will continue to put emphasis on boating and boating facilities above all other interests which was the original intent of the many people who passed this way before us.

Appendix A

The Hudson River

Minisceongo Yacht Club was established on the west side of the Hudson River in Stony Point, New York approximately 45 miles north of New York City. The river, a major American estuary, flows for 315 miles from its source in the Adirondack Mountains, past Troy, where it is joined by the Mohawk River, its main tributary, between the Catskill and Taconic mountains, and empties into New York Bay and the Atlantic Ocean at New York City.

An important transportation artery, the Hudson is navigable for ocean-going vessels to Albany and for smaller vessels to Troy and Lake Champlain. The New York State Barge Canal links the Hudson with the Great Lakes.

The Hudson is famous for its scenic beauty, which inspired the 19th-century Hudson River school of painting. The Palisades, high cliffs overlooking the southern part of the river along the west bank, reach over 500 feet into the sky. Hyde Park, the home of President Franklin Roosevelt, and West Point, the site of the United States Military Academy, are also located along the Hudson.

In 1524 Giovanni da Verrazano was the first European to sight the Hudson. Henry Hudson, for whom the river was named, explored it in 1609 and the river valley was settled under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company, which established the Patroon system of landholding.

Appendix B

Sailing at MYC

When the young men who gathered around Bill Sutherland's workshop back in 1941 began to study sailboats and how to race them, sailboat racing was still an infant sport in the United States. Until the 1930's, most recreational racing was done on large yachts by the wealthy. But the great depression of the 30's saw the development of low-cost boats that could be sailed and raced by people of average means. One of the most popular of these was the Lightning, a lightweight 19-foot pleasure craft designed by Sparkman and Stephens. A centerboarder, it carried 177 square feet of sail and could move briskly in all wind conditions. In 1941, a Lightning could be built by its owner for just \$300 including plans, sails, and materials.

As noted earlier, the Lightnings built by Bill Sutherland, together with the Lightning owned by Doc Myles, constituted the nucleus of High Tor Lightning Fleet # 41, recognized and accredited by the American Lightning Association in 1941. Four more Lightnings were added after World War II and the racing began in earnest. By the early 1950's, MYC was growing quickly and so was the Lightning Fleet. There was an ambitious schedule of races on Sundays all through the summer, plus special events like forays to Newburgh and Greenwood Lake for races. MYC hosted the Metropolitan Regional Lightning Championships on several occasions during this period. And they held an Annual Regatta, wherein Lightnings, Snipes, Thistles, Penguins, and other fast one-design racing boats came to MYC for hospitality and a series of races over two days. In time, this event evolved into the Sutherland Regatta.

As the Club grew, so did the scope of MYC sailboat racing. Newer Lightning owners were soon giving the original Lightning racers all the competition they could handle. By 1959, there was a mini fleet of teenage sailors (the Minnows) who raced in dinghies. The end of the 60's saw another generation of fast Lightning skippers arrive and at that time there was a total

of 18 Lightnings in the Fleet.

A group of smaller racing sailboats, the Sunfish Fleet, began racing at MYC in the 70's and a Charter was issued establishing it officially. It continued for more than a decade. During these latter years, a new type of sailboat began to make its appearance at MYC, the keel-bottomed cruiser. They were bigger, heavier and roomier. Families used them for sailing vacations as well as day trips. They formed a loose association known as the "Snoozin / Boozin / and Cruisin Society." But the racing bug is a virulent one. It can bite anyone. By 1972, the cruising group asked for, and received, full racing status. Named the MYC Auxiliary Sailing Fleet, they posted and sailed their first full season's racing schedule in 1973. A handicap system was used to put the competition of the various size boats on a "more level playing field".

The 1970's were golden years for sailboat racing at MYC, with two major and several smaller race groups at the Club. By 1981, however, the Lightning Fleet had dwindled to just a few fiercely competitive boats. Most of their members were now in the ranks of the Cruising Fleet. During the next several years, retirement and illness would claim many of the cruising sailboat racers also. Two racing members responded to this challenge by requesting permission from the MYC Board of Directors for MYC sailors to join forces with the Hudson Cove (Haverstraw Marina) racers to form the Haverstraw Bay Racing Association in 1986. The Board approved the request. Each club sponsored its own series of races and regattas, but the two groups race together. It was not unusual to find 30 or more sailboats participating in an MYC-sponsored weekend race.

In 1988, the "Knot Ready for Prime Time Sailors" formed an informal fleet within MYC for the purpose of learning sailboat racing and joining together for cruising and social activities. While initially composed of members with little familiarity with racing rules and techniques, several eventually graduated to regular fleet status. Another ad hoc racing group was formed in 1991 to encourage racing within MYC. An ambitious schedule of races was held over the summer, attracting more than 20 sailing competitors.

Just what form sailboat racing will take at MYC in the future cannot be predicted. Along with many other factors, modern facilities at marinas have help bring a different breed of boaters to the water in recent years where a boat is used like a condo and the sport of boating is not the high-interest activity it once was. The newer boats, especially the power boats, are equipped much like the modern home and the comforts appear to have diminished the more active enjoyment of traveling, exploring and racing on the water.

But one thing seems certain. As long as there are sailboats, they will be out there on the river, racing each other. It has been said that any time there are two sailboats on the water, there is a race going on even if one doesn't realize it.

Promote our sport, power or sail.

Appendix C

A Near Disaster

Charlie Strachan who eventually became a member at MYC remembered the dreadful storm that overtook the our Club's Hi Tor Lightning Fleet on July 4th 1949. Charlie was at the beach with his family at Greenwich Point. Several Connecticut boaters, he later read, were drowned when the freak, unpredicted storm hit the coast. This same storm, unusual in its violence, swept the Hudson when approximately 20 Lightnings from the Minisceongo Hi Tor Fleet, with crews largely composed of wives and children, were out for a weekend race. Charlie recalled the old rivermen saying they could not remember in all their years a more powerful storm nor an angrier more deadly river.

Amidst the fury, every boat but one capsized; skippers and their family crews, approximately 50 people, struggled to survive in the waves and wreckage of their boats. Timothy Reilly's was the only Lightning that did not capsize. He had managed to drop his sails before the overpowering winds struck and he sailed under bare pole down to Croton Point.

Fortunately the storm was of short duration and it was also fortunate that several club members and rivermen with power boats, in the best maritime tradition, immediately went to the rescue. There were no fatalities; every sailor was recovered. The Club secretary that year, wrote letters to the rescuers; in part, he wrote, "Without your boat and aid, circumstances may have turned out disastrously... May we thank you again and say that we are fortunate in having friends and club members ready and willing to help out in just such an emergency."

Several members recall that in the following year a number of members switched from sail to power boating and it was a number of years before sail racing reached its former popularity at the club.

