

Bush River Yacht Club, 27 June 2009

Commodore Dice has asked me to say a few words about how our club got to where it is today. The club was founded on a Thursday evening, the 22nd of June, 1939. I might mention here that Thursday was always the meeting night until it was changed to Friday in 1992. I still think that was a mistake. It used to be nice to have Friday nights free. As you know, this year special arrangements were made for the openings at Crescent and Baltimore so the boats could leave on Friday. Another interesting tidbit is that Paul Seward, our founder, and Mae got married on Friday night, the 23rd of June, the next night after the first Club meeting.

At that first Club meeting, there were 22 young bucks present. I am sure they had been rounded up by Paul Seward and the Corbin boys, Bud and Lance. You know Paul Seward was elected the first Commodore of the club and served as Commodore six more times. I had the pleasure of knowing six of the founding members; of course they were in their later years. If you need to know anything about any of the others, ask Carol Burdette, she knew them all. That first meeting took place at the Otter Point Restaurant. I don't know anything about what Otter Point looked like back then, but it must have been a favorite watering hole for the boys as they had five speed boats, two cruisers, and a sailboat in their first fleet. Initiation fee into the new club was two dollars, and the dues were 50 cents a month payable in advance. No trust even in the early days.

By August of 1940, they had built a clubhouse on pilings, with slips surrounding it, somewhere in the Otter Point area. Who knows where they got the pilings and lumber with dues being only six dollars a year. However, they were active: boating, fishing, skeet shooting, and putting on Saturday night dances. The Bush River Boat Club was incorporated in 1940. Also in 1940 the Ladies Auxiliary was formed. Gertrude Parslow, Past Commodore Busters Parslow's mother, was the first president of the Ladies Auxiliary. The Ladies Auxiliary has always been a great asset to the club.

During World War II, the club was not very active. I only know of one of the founding members that served during the war, T. Leo Sullivan, but there probably were others. I am sure some of you knew Leo Sullivan, he was a lawyer in Bel Air for many years and was Commodore of the club in 1955. In the service, Leo was a glider pilot. He flew squads of rangers behind enemy lines in France. Once on the ground, the glider was destroyed, and the squad proceeded on their mission. Leo was left alone to work his way back through the battle lines for his next flight. I would say that was not an easy assignment. Just for the record, Peggy, Leo's daughter was the first female officer in our Club, she was Secretary for the year of 1992. As you all know, since then we have had two more female officers, Debbie and Janis.

In early 1945, the membership started growing and the club began to look for a new location. Three properties were considered: the Mitchell property below the bridge, the old Harford Boat Club, near Otter Point, and Camp Kema, the Girl Scout Camp on Long Bar. Camp Kema, our present property of a little over four acres, was bought on August 2, 1945 for \$8,500. My rationale as to why they bought property above the bridge rather than below the bridge is that they wanted to limit sail boats in the club, they already had one and that was more than enough. To pay for the property, the Bush River Boat Club Holding Corporation was formed and 1000 shares of stock were issued at \$25.00 per share. Stock today is still \$25.00 per share and the corporation has never paid any dividends and doesn't plan to. All proceeds go back to improving the property.

The club had its problems in the late forties and fifties. The original building on the property, with all its improvements, was destroyed by fire in 1948; and ten years later, in 1958, the club house was again destroyed by fire. In 1954 and 1955, hurricanes significantly damaged the piers. But these misfortunes did not deter the club from holding regattas, they sponsored power boat races from 1947 through 1956. They not only had hydroplane races, but also raced their own power boats. Power boat races were also held in 1969 and in 1999 through 2002. The racers loved the Bush River and there were some world records set. Paul Seward, himself, set a world record, not on the Bush River, but at Cambridge on the Choptank River.

In 1957, the pool was constructed, the first Club on the bay to have an Olympic size pool. As you see it now, it has been modified significantly from its original construction. In 1969

when I was Rear Commodore, the walls on three sides bulged out late Friday night before our opening on Saturday. That is why there are those large abutments on three sides of the pool. But I mostly associate the pool with the Queen of the Chesapeake Pageant. You know, when the officers get thrown in or, like today, when they jump in. Everyone knows we had the first Queen, Rachell Holmes in 1948, and three others since then, Virginia Davis, Ruth Ann Curry and Kathleen Quinn. A few weeks back, our 1957 princess, Carol Lee Bowman, and her sister, Betty Bowman, stopped by the club one Saturday afternoon. Carol Lee brought along a picture of her, when returning from the pageant, she dived off the diving board at the deep end of the pool. She said that was the only time she ever dived off the board, and I must say it looked like a pretty good dive. Carol Lee and Betty took a tour around the club and had nothing but praise for how many improvements have been made and how nice the club looks today.

Just a few words about our club's budget. As you already know, with dues at \$6.00 per year in the first years, and with only twenty two members the income could not have been more than a few hundred dollars. The year I was Commodore, 1971, I published a proposed budget in the Burgee of \$49,749. Dues were \$75 per year and the rent to the Holding Corporation was \$8,500. This year, the proposed budget is \$386,387, dues are \$800 and rent is \$87,800. So the ratio over time is pretty good. I was very fortunate during my year, we took in 48 new members on cold foot night. With all the new members needing slips, the excess money was used to extend C pier from the bend out, but without a T head which was added in 1979.

How can anyone talk about the Bush River Yacht Club and the Bush River without mentioning the bridge. You know that Baltimore city got its start at what we now call Old Baltimore on the left side of the river mostly on Aberdeen Proving Ground above Chilbury Point. But do you know when the first bridge was built over the river and what happened to it? The first bridge was built in 1858 by the Northern Central Railway and taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1861, right before the outbreak of the Civil War, or, as Bessie would say, the War of Northern Aggression. There were draw bridges over the Back, Gunpowder, and Bush Rivers as the track proceeded from Baltimore to Philadelphia. However, there was no bridge over the Susquehanna. A ferryboat, the "Maryland", was used to carry the train over the river. In early April 1861, there was considerable evidence that a plot was being planned to burn the bridges and destroy the railroad to assassinate President

Lincoln on his way to Washington and to prevent troops from going to protect Washington. To avert the plot from happening, an armed force of about 200 men was organized and distributed along the line between the Susquehanna and Baltimore, principally at the bridges. These men were drilled secretly and were apparently used to whitewash the bridges, putting on some six or seven coats of whitewash, saturated with salt and alum, to make the outside of the bridges nearly fireproof. The white washing, was so extensive in its application and stark white looks that it became the wonder of the neighborhoods.

At the same time, the secessionists, under the leadership of Marshal Kane had held sway in Baltimore, airing their treason and assailing troops on their way to the defense of Washington. Their success whetted their appetite for further crime. Issac Trimble, who had been a former Superintendent of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad Company, was selected by Baltimore Mayor Brown and Charles Howard, president of the Board of Police of Baltimore to lead a body of men to burn the railroad bridges. Trimble, with 160 men masquerading as policemen and militiamen, assembled about half-past three o'clock on the morning of April the 20th at the ridge over Harris Creek, within the city limits of Baltimore. After firing the bridge Trimble marched his men to the engine house at Canton, where they awaited the arrival of the night mail train. Trimble instantly seized the train and loaded his force upon three cars and started north with the intension of scuttling the ferryboat "Maryland". The train reached Back River Bridge about five o'clock in the morning, and William J. Dealy, the boy telegraph operator, was made prisoner. Then proceeding north it stopped at Magnolia where James A. Swift, the telegraph operator was also made prisoner. No other stops were made until it crossed the Bush River Bridge. Arriving there at about eight o'clock, Trimble, was informed by Conductor Goodwin, of a southbound freight, that troops were concentrating at Perryville, so he abandoned his plan to scuttle the "Maryland". There was a large pile of timber just north of the Bush River bridge, which had been stored for repairs on the bridge. The timber was set on fire. With the fire underway, the next move was to fire the draw-span, and wait on the south side of the bridge until the draw-span was completely destroyed. The party then destroyed the Gunpowder Bridge and made an attempt to destroy the Back River Bridge, but the salt and alum whitewash with which it was covered stopped their effort. Returning to Canton, Trimble marched his troops to the City Hall where they were received in triumph. While the acts of Trimble and his men disabled the railroad for

40 miles south of the Susquehanna, it did not prevent the movement of troops for defense of the Nation's Capitol. With the railroad being intact from Philadelphia to Perryville, a route was opened via the ferryboat "Maryland" to Annapolis and to the Annapolis branch of the B&O Railroad to Washington DC. The three burned bridges on the Pennsylvania line were repaired and the road opened through to Baltimore, May 14th, 1861, without any assistance or protection from the government. Could that happen today, less than a month to repair the bridges? As a comparison, Ernie Sadera has been trying for the past nine years to get some dredging of the Bush River, which may or may not happen this year. The bridge that is out there today was built in 1913 and the draw was opened by a single attendant pushing a single button from 1913 to 1943. Today it takes 14 men to open the draw, what progress.

So that's a little history of what has occurred around this part of the Bush River and the Club. There is one other thing I thought you should be aware of. How many of you know that there is a Club song? I have a copy of the words which were written sometime in the infancy of the club. I had asked our renowned Past Singing Fleet Captain, Steve Cooney, to sing it but he elected to take off for Spain. So I will try to read it.

It is to be sung to the tune of: THERE IS A TAVERN IN THE TOWN.

We have a boat club in the town, in the town

And o'er the Bush that we sail down, sail down

There's not a light or depth that is known

For we can sail it all alone, all alone

The Club is just an infant

Just like all the babes new born

But give us two or three more years

To let it shape its form

Ahoy! All shipmates with the friendship that's galore, that's galore

We'll all jump in and take our place behind the oar
And boost this Club to heights with all our push
So that's the story of our Boat Club on the Bush

In closing, I would like to leave you with one thought. As written in the words of the song "if we all jump in and take our place behind the oar," the Bush River Yacht Club will continue to be the best club on the bay.