



## About the New York Yacht Club – Host of the Invitational Cup

The Isle of Wight in the Solent has long been the epicenter of yachting in England. In 1851, a schooner freshly painted black arrived there looking to win races. This was *America*, owned by John Cox Stevens, the first commodore of the New York Yacht Club (NYYC), and other club members.

*America* crossed the Atlantic on her own bottom and challenged all English yachts to a match race. No yacht was willing to race her, however.

Finally, *America* joined a free-for-all on Friday, August 22, around the Isle of Wight, hosted by the Royal Yacht Squadron – an entry in the NYYC Invitational Cup 158 years later. Watching the race, which included 15 English yachts and *America*, was Queen Victoria, who supposedly inquired, "Which is first?" Told it was *America*, she asked, "Which is second?"

"Ah, Your Majesty, there is no second," was the reply. Or so the story goes. *America* won the Royal Yacht Squadron's "Hundred Guinea Cup."

The NYYC was started seven years before, on July 30, 1844, when John Cox Stevens invited eight friends to his yacht *Gimcrack*, anchored in New York Harbor. The nine who met 165 years ago resolved to form the NYYC and named Stevens commodore. The theme of the club was, in those days, to race sailing yachts. Three days later, the new commodore announced, members would be departing on a yacht-club cruise to Newport, RI. Thus, began the connection between the NYYC and Newport. The 2009 Annual Cruise was the club's 153rd.

The NYYC's first clubhouse was built in 1845 on land donated by Commodore Stevens, at the family estate at Elysian Fields in Hoboken, NJ, overlooking the Hudson River. (The estate is now the site of the Stevens Institute of Technology, endowed by Edwin Stevens, John's brother, and the fourth commodore of this club.) The clubhouse, a small Gothic-revival building, officially opened on July 15, 1846. This was followed the next day by the first club regatta, billed as a "trial of speed." This became the Annual Regatta. This summer (2009), the NYYC hosted its 155th Annual Regatta presented by Rolex.

On July 12, 1857, surviving members of the *America* syndicate donated the silver trophy they won in England, the "Hundred Guinea Cup," to the NYYC. They called it the America's Cup, in honor of the yacht that won it. They invited yacht clubs from around the world to compete and promised, "friendly competition" between nations. This was nearly 40 years before the first Modern Olympics; four years before America's Civil War.

Finishing first in the America's Cup, NYYC boats did with stunning regularity. Yachts flying the club flag held onto that trophy for 132 years, or until 1983. During that stewardship, NYYC boats won 81 of 93 races. Journalists have described that as the "longest winning streak in sports."

The first transatlantic race was held in the winter of 1866. James Gordon Bennett Jr., the young publisher of the *New York Herald* and soon to be commodore of the NYYC, was the only owner to go on the race from Sandy

Hook, NJ to the Lizard in England that started on December 11. On Christmas day, his *Henrietta* finished first in a three-boat race. Newspapers dubbed it, "the Great Ocean Race."

The NYYC started another famous transatlantic race in 1905, from New York to the Lizard in England. The race was won by the famous *Atlantic*, a NYYC vessel. Her time of 12 days, four hours and one minute lasted for 100 years or until 2005 as the NYYC Transatlantic Race Record for monohull yachts. Since 1866, there have been 25 transatlantic races -- 11 of which were hosted or co-hosted by the NYYC. A 1997 transatlantic race – the Atlantic Challenge Cup – organized by the NYYC with Rolex was reprised in May, 2005, as the Rolex Transatlantic Challenge with the support of the Royal Yacht Squadron. Here *Atlantic's* then-100-year-old record was eclipsed by Robert Miller's *Mari-Cha IV*.

In 1898, the NYYC was billeted on the second floor of a house on Madison Avenue in New York. It was chockablock with "models, members and memorabilia," wrote the *New York Daily Tribune*. It was then that Commodore J. Pierpont Morgan surprised fellow members by announcing he would donate three lots on West 44<sup>th</sup> Street to build a new clubhouse. The building, designed in the beaux-arts style by Whitney Warren, opened in 1901. It is known for its Model Room and Library. The clubhouse is 108 years old. "Except for the absence of motion, one might fancy oneself at sea," is how the *New York Times* described it in 1906.

In 1983, the NYYC finished "second" in the America's Cup. A significant piece of the club was gone. Four years later, the club purchased Harbour Court, in Newport, R.I., the former summer home of NYYC Commodore John Nicholas Brown. When the club's Newport clubhouse opened in 1988, 1,500 NYYC members and guests attended. It was described by NYYC Commodore Frank Snyder as the club's "Window on the water."

Harbour Court created a new energy and focus at the NYYC. In 1994, it hosted its Sesquicentennial Celebration for members and friends. In 1998, the NYYC hosted Race Week at Newport, presented by Rolex, the Disabled World Sailing Championship and the ILC Maxi World Championship. In 2000, as part of Race Week, the NYYC hosted the Rolex IMS Offshore World Championship. In 2005, it hosted the Rolex Swan American Regatta, the 12-Metre Worlds and the ISAF Team Racing Worlds. In 2006, the NYYC hosted the Rolex Farr 40 Worlds and the IFDS Blind Sailing Worlds. The seventh edition of the biennial Race Week at Newport, presented by Rolex, will be in 2010.

Youth, too, is being served at one of the oldest yacht clubs in America. Harbour Court has twice hosted the Optimist Dinghy Association US Championship and the IYRU O'Neill World Youth Sailing Championship. In 2000, Harbour Court hosted the U.S. Junior Championships for Sears, Bemis and Smythe Trophies. In 2002, the NYYC hosted the ICOSA Sloop National Championship with Brown University. In 2008, the club hosted the Intercollegiate Sailing Association (ICSA) National Championships.

The NYYC has been extremely active in Team Racing beginning in 1984. In 2000 the NYYC purchased 13 Sonars that are dedicated to that activity. A team representing the NYYC has won consecutive ISAF Team Racing World Championships, in 2007 in Spain and 2009 in Western Australia.