

Montego Bay Yacht Club

75th Anniversary Commodores Ball

Tribute to Commodores past and present – Researched, written and spoken by Rear First Commodore Lyn Langford,

What do 4 Fletchers, 1 set of cousins, 3 sets of father – son leaders, 75 years and a lot of fun and laughter have in common? One very special place and some very special people – the Montego Bay Yacht Club and our Commodores.

For the past 75 years this club has grown from a little house on Fort Street where Snipes, O-class and Dragons were the vessels of choice to a popular, friendly spot where families spend time together, children grow from kids to adults and people from all over the world feel welcome.

Over the years the club has been transformed into a wonderful place we all have come to enjoy whether it is for the food, the social atmosphere, the sailing or the friendships.

And over the years we have seen many leaders take the helm and steer the club in Directions – depending on the weather during their tenure. These leaders have worked tirelessly to make sure that the club is on course but rarely do they hear a ‘well done’ or ‘thank you’.

Well, Commodore’s, past and present, we are all here tonight to say ‘thank you’ for your hard work, your efforts, your sacrifices and your dedication. Some of you have seen rougher seas than others but we are all thankful for your service and this night is for you.

I had the honor of sitting down and talking with some of these amazing people and not only did I learn a lot about them, I learned that being the Commodore of the MBYC is not only an honor, it’s a privilege but it doesn’t come without issues. When one is the leader of a group or organization, sometimes decisions are made that are not popular – but it’s the responsibility they accepted. Imagine when the place you love to come and see friends and socialize to release the stress of a hard week at work becomes a dark and unwelcoming place where you feel as though you are a stranger in your own home. But the 17 individuals, who, over the past 75 years, we have selected to lead us, still feel there is no better place in JA than our little club!

The 17 I am referring to are our Commodores. Some of them have sailed over the horizon and are now at their permanent anchorage. I would at this time like us to recognize those Commodores who are no longer with us:

- Honorable Walter Fletcher - 1937 – 1953 (16 years)
- Bob Buhler – 1954 – 1955
- Leslie Fletcher – 1956 – 1959
- Robert Fletcher – 1959 -1980 (21 years) – our longest serving C’dore
- Honorable William “Billy” Craig - 1980 – 1984 and 1989 -1992
- Paddy O’Callaghan – 1988 – 1989

- Martin Orr – 1992 – 1993

****please raise your glasses ******

Gentlemen, thank you for keeping a weather eye and helping us to maintain a straight course.

We are Fortunate to have our other Commodores with us tonight. As I was preparing for the interviews I thought it would be fun to share with you some of our Commodores' fondest memories of their time at the club. On your table you will find some quotes and fun memories from those Commodores who are with us tonight. Now, I would like ask forgiveness for any type –o's but I would also like to make two corrections – Ogilvie is spelled O-g-i-l-v-i-e and on the history sheet, Mr. Edmund Hart was chairman of Doctors Cave and it was both he and Walter Fletcher that organized the first regatta in 1936. My apologies. See if you can guess which Commodore said what or remembered what – Commodores no helping! Perhaps I will tell you the answers at the end of our evening.

But the interviews were so much fun and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to not only sit down with these leaders but also take them back to some wonderful memories!

So, let's not take any more time. Let us begin to learn more about ...and honor... our Commodores.

Tony Hart

A member since 1950, he has seen the club transition from Fort Street to the Freeport area where we are now. He in fact was a critical component in this move. In the late 1960, as Chairman of Montego Freeport, he convinced the board to sell the club the land where we are now at a peppercorn price! Within 2 years, the club was built and the official address was no longer Fort Street but Montego Freeport. I am speaking of none other than Tony Hart.

Tony grew up sailing snipes and fondly remembers the pillars of Montego Bay and the yacht club. People like Mickey Nation, Leslie and Robert Fletcher and Ms. Ann (David's mother) who seemed to be the 'original' Commodore as her name came up several times in my conversations with many of the Commodores. As we were talking, Tony fondly remembered sailing adventures with his friend, Billy Craig as well as the gala events like the Miami / Montego Bay race ~ in those days the club was the gathering place for Montegonians!

Having grown up sailing small boats, Tony was energized when in the 70's he sailed a J30 up in Miami and intended on purchasing one to bring back to Mo-bay however, on that same trip, he saw a brand new boat that had just come out on the market. He thought this little craft would be perfect for the sailors in Montego Bay! In a snap he bought 10 of them, shipped them to Mo-bay and this was the birth of our J-22 fleet!

Not only has Tony and his family supported the club in more ways than time will allow, but the Doctors Cave / MBYC marriage was his brain child and it goes without saying, we are all grateful for that.

I would like to ask our dock master, Mike Lyons to come forward to present Tony Hart with this token of our appreciation.

Bob Mallasch

Standing 6'4", a big barrel chest and snow white hair, this gentle giant cannot be missed. He commands his audience (on land and at sea) yet his charming but almost bashful character makes everyone feel at ease whenever he's around. Whether he is Dracula or Santa Claus, Bob Mallasch is a true gentleman. And what an interesting life he has led! At 18 years old he moved out of his parents' home in California because he wanted to be his own person! After several jobs that took him to some incredible places, in 1969 his company brought him to Jamaica ~ and we are so glad they did!!! He fell in love with the country and the people – and one very special lady. He said he immediately felt as though it was 'his' place!

Making his mark in the business arena was not difficult for Bob. To this day he has a fantastic reputation whereby people still request him to do drafting and critical planning. But there is one thing that perhaps many of you don't know, it was at age 50 that Bob learned to sail! He was a power boat man but wanted to try his hand at sailing. After speaking with Tony Hart one afternoon, Tony told him of a fleet of J22's that would be arriving shortly. Bob put his name next to boat #4 – as mighty Mike lowered her into the water, Bob proudly said in his best theater voice, "I christen you 'a – ya –so"

Well as Bob was polishing his new 'mistress' shortly after she had been rigged one afternoon, Deirdre O'Callaghan and Steve Callaghan were walking down the dock and said 'come on Bob, we'll help you take her out on her first voyage' so they left the dock, hoisted the sails, left the channel. Well, everything was fine until as they got down the channel and the green mark was coming up, Steve says 'ok Bob, time to tack'..... Well Bob pushed the rudder and the boat started to turn..... but Bob forgot to move. You see, one thing he neglected to tell his eager crew was that he didn't know how to sail!!! But – he was determined to succeed and succeed he did! He got the bug and now, every other Sunday he is out on his 'a-ya-so' giving the other racers a good run for their money!

As Commodore, Bob began the movement and preparation for acquiring the land out in front which is now our boat storage area. He got the first washer & dryer for the club and he and his wife, Norma, hosted the first children's Christmas party for over 40 kids from the SOS village where Bob – all 6 feet 4 inches of him – squeezed into a Santa suit that was made for Char Marzouca who was about 5 foot 3 inches tall. So if you close your eyes, the visual was probably quite amusing! But the kids loved it!!!

Under his helm, he had the first female flag officer on his team and in 1987, he hosted the 4th and final year of the mega race athon of: Miami – Mobay race that ran into Jamaica race week that then ran into Easter regatta! Many of the boats would stick around which made the 18 days of racing quite something. 1987 also saw the first tag & release marlin tournament! John McConnell convinced Bob that for conservation purposes – it was the right thing to do! With both Kingston and Port Antonio threatening to boycott the tournament, Bob thought it was the absolute right thing to do so he convinced the committee to approve the tag & release concept which is still in effect today.

Bob Mallasch has been an active member of the yacht club since 1970 and it gives me great pleasure to ask Billy Thompson to come up and present Bob with this token of our appreciation.

Bryan Langford

By far this is the most handsome of our Commodores - but I am a little biased.

Born in Kingston, Bryan Langford grew up loving boats! At age 9 he started racing in Kingston harbour with his father on his o-class, "the Astra". He then moved to mirror dinghies, flying 15's and Flying Dutchman's. .. As Bryan developed a reputation for having a bit of a knack for sailing, his presence was requested by several skippers and even at the age of 14, he was known in the sailing circuit as the one to have on your boat because he could cover any position! If a halyard got stuck at the top of the mast – 'send Langford up', if the spinnaker got tangled on a jibe– 'Langford – fix it!'

Some of his fondest memories were racing with Dr. Roy Foster on 'Corida' and his Uncle Keith Jones on 'Cocoaban'.

A life member since 1997, he has been on many committees and as Commodore he remembers good times and Not so good times. But he accepted the role and did the best he could! A true sailor at heart, I don't think there is anything Bryan can't sail!!! And an advocate for tourism, he introduced the Round Hill race during Easter regatta a few years ago, and hoped that it would develop into a wonderful spectator sport for the guests of round hill. It would also have exposed the club to persons who may not have known we existed!

Some of his fondest memories are coming to the club at lunch time and seeing a whole verandah full of people! He didn't tell me this but I know he especially misses the crème caramel that was always in the fridge!!!

As part of Alice Fletcher's J22 crew, Bryan always enjoyed racing. But he learned quickly that on land she was lovely, calm, mild – tempered Alice, but on the race course.....look out!!! She turned into a competitive racing demon who expected her crew to tow the line!!! He truly loved racing with Alice!! And in true Bryan style, he could always lighten the atmosphere with a joke or inference if things got too tense!

Passionate about boats, he is held in the highest regard by many for his knowledge and expertise when it comes to boat handling or general boat questions. And when it comes to respect, he reciprocates that with people like Mike and Billy - two people he has worked very closely with. All three seem to have this unspoken understanding and they all know that rain or shine, the boats come first! Hurricane or norther, the boats come first! None of them like to see a boat in distress so when a storm is approaching you would often see these three men on the dock preparing to take boats over to the safe anchorage in the lagoon. Like mommy ducks and their babies in tow, these three always looked after the boats.

He has tried to share his knowledge of the sea and his love of sailing with his boys, and personally, I think he's done a pretty good job!

For Bryan, the Montego Bay Yacht Club holds many memories, it's where he would bring his 'then' girlfriends to test them and find out if they would fit in in the crowd – and Fortunately I think I passed that test better than others - but it's also where he, after coming off of a long sail from Cayman with the Fletchers, he learned he was going to be a father, and it's where today he watches his son follow in his footsteps and enjoy the sport of sailing.

At this time I would like to ask Billy Thompson to come and present Bryan with this token of our appreciation.

David Fletcher

To say we wouldn't be here without this gentleman and his family is the absolute truth! The Fletcher family – all together – has served in the position of Commodore for a total of 42 years! That's over half the time the club has been in existence! And we cannot forget the support from entire family led by David and gene's mother, Ms. Anne.

The Fletcher family is synonymous with the Montego Bay Yacht Club! They were one of the original sailing families! The Fletcher family introduced us to wonderful people like Roy Reid who was part of the Fletcher family from a little boy, as his aunt worked for Ms. Anne. As Roy grew up he started working at the yacht club and in 2004 retired after over 50 years of service!

A dinghy sailor at heart, David Fletcher won his first regatta at age 9 in his prangy 'levity breaks'! He never missed an opportunity to sail – anything! Snipes, o-class, prangy's, sea scout's, star's, ... you name it ... that is when he wasn't trekking from his home on Fort Street to good hope with his pal Athol "sleepy" Chin.

David loved adventure! He and Athol would go 'walk about' for days on end and Ms. Anne, his mother would get word from a cart man in Trelawney that he saw the boys heading in a certain direction. As a mother – my heart dropped when I heard this – but in those days, the Fletcher family was known far and wide and to this day, is still a highly respected name.

I am honored to have known David for over 20 years. I have heard stories over those years that amazed and astounded me. And what I have taken from those wonderful years of friendship is that David loves mischief!!! And he has some incredible stories of when he and pals, like Billy Craig and Peter manse, would tour at casa Blanca – which was the place to be - sunset lodge or beach view hotel and bar! According to David, he was only 'doing his job'. You see, Fletcher and company had the contract to clear the pan am flights that would arrive in Mo bay and David took it upon himself to deliver those bags that were delayed to the hotels. Well he always seemed to end up delivering the bags to the pretty single women who came on holiday and lost their luggage! David's philosophy was that he just doing his job!

In those days, the Fletchers had some lighters –boats about 30 feet long that were used to carry things – well musicians who played for the guests at casa Blanca would borrow these lighters and play their

music from the water. Rumor has it that many a night, after socializing, he would call to one of the musicians to carry him home because he always felt more comfortable on the sea than on land!

Among his many adventures at sea, in 1961 David sailed on 'Cohoe' along with his father Leslie and Tommy Vermont in the first Miami – Montego Bay race. David has participated in more Easter regattas, independence regattas, and pigeon island regattas, than time will allow for me to mention but I will share this with you, if you ever want an evening of interesting, fact – filled, sailing stories, bring a bottle of J&B and sit down with David Fletcher. He is a walking history book and I promise you, he has some great stories.

It was a very exciting year when David was Commodore because not only was it a pineapple cup year but the round the world race was happening too and Montego Bay was one of their stops!!! David and his committee had to extend the current dock and get creative with all the boats that would be coming in. The club was alive with in excess of 40 boats that year!!! It truly was an amazing site. There is a photo on the board out front if you haven't seen it.

There were some very special people that helped David through his years as Commodore - people like Felix Hunter and John Atkinson – but the main person who has kept him in line for 53 and a half years is his wonderful wife, Alice.

David, we thank you, we thank your family for envisioning, creating and supporting the Montego Bay Yacht Club for so many years. I am honored to ask Roy Reid, to present David with this token of our appreciation.

Dr. Simon Clarke

All of my interviews were wonderful but nothing could beat sitting in the cockpit of 'sea major' at dusk talking with the eloquent, Dr. Simon Clarke. For me it brought back wonderful memories of time shared with the Fletchers on the then 'carronade'. They say it's bad luck to change the name of boat but for Simon, this music aficionado, 'sea major' is very appropriate.

There are so many fascinating things about Dr. Simon Clarke like his years of service with the United Nations, his work with Kofi Annan, the fact that he has lectured in many, many countries, but tonight we are focusing on his love of the sea and his service to our club.

Simon became a member in 1976 and has been an active member of our club ever since. Passionate about exposing young people to new and different experiences, Simon created the summer peace camps where youngsters from all communities came to the club for a two week camp to learn environmental studies, arts and crafts, marine activities, they went out boats, - this effort helped to remove the stigma the club had of being an elitist club. Our sons participated in the peace camp and Simon your efforts bridged the gap in both directions and it truly was wonderful!

Simon loves his club and when he heard that there was to be an Olympic committee in western Jamaica he rallied to have the launch here at our club. Dignitaries from Kingston and the Olympic committee were present to announce Jamaica's efforts that year.

Under his watch as Commodore he not only revamped the tennis court before it was professionally done, but he invited dignitaries such as Sir Howard Cooke to be an honorary member. And the reverend Tony Ottey as well because Simon felt that those who go down in ships need a chaplain by their side!

Simon felt the position of Commodore is a special one that should be recognized with respect and dignity and so, it was his idea to have the very first Commodore's ball. I don't think any of us will ever forget that special night when we walked in the front doors and were greeted by our Commodore, Dr. Simon Clarke, in his full military dress – inclusive of hat and white gloves!

Simon always does things with elegance and flair and while everyone looks wonderful this evening – nothing will ever compare to that first ball!!!

Racing Easter regatta with Billy and others as crew are some of his fondest memories but exposing his grandsons to sailing and watching as they too developed a love the sea is one of his greatest rewards.

"MBYC is a unique society of men and women who share a common love of sailing and the sea", Simon believes a club like this could epitomize what we could do as a society.

Grateful for the friendships and support of people like Bob Mallasch and Ron Smith, Simon's wish for the club is that it gets to a place where young men and women from all areas – regardless of physical address – can come to learn and enjoy the sport of sailing.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will ask Mike Lyons to come and present Dr. Simon Clarke with this token of our appreciation.

Evelyn Harrington

Effervescent, exhilarating, breath of fresh air, and a giggle that makes you smile, this Irish lass was an overseas member before moving to Jamaica in the mid 80's.

Evelyn Harrington always lights up the room when she walks in. She is the first one to celebrate the season with earrings that light up or antlers on her head and when it comes time for St. Patrick's Day, look out!!!

She loves her sailing too! As a crew member on 'zipper' she handled the jib like no other!

Believe it or not, there is a serious side to Evelyn and when she became Commodore she took that role with honor.

It was at the time when the doctor's cave – MBYC courtship was reaching the final stage and its Evelyn's signature on the marriage certificate. She started the paving project on the car park but only got half way..... It was completed at a later date.

Evelyn also had her challenges as Commodore because in 2004, a gentleman by the name of Ivan came to visit us and devastated our dock, along with other things! As Commodore, she had to think fast

when the storm was approaching. Luckily for us she did and we were able to get the club up and operating within about two weeks.

She is grateful for the support she received from friends like Elaine Neiderer who was her treasurer while she was Commodore and her fondest memories are those wonderful – long – relaxing lunches with Cousin Patrick and Peter harper.

To Evelyn, MBYC is a special place where on any given day, a friend can be found. Her belief is that one's relationship with the club is like any other relationship; you have to work at it, support it, and be there in order to keep it alive.

Evelyn – thank you for brightening our days with your wonderful Irish wit and beautiful smile.

I would like to ask heather Vernon, our club administrative assistant, to present Evelyn with this token of our appreciation.

Peter Harper

When you think of this Commodore there are usually two things that come to mind – sailing and Red Stripe!!

If calculated I don't think any of us can match the hours spent here at the club to those of Peter harper.

An avid sailor, he bought his first boat, a Dragon, with his friend martin Orr and he learned to sail it, rebuild it, repaired the mast and shipwrecked her but the irony is that he spent more on the paint for her than he did when he purchased her!

He has competed in numerous competitions including 4 pineapple cup races, J22 worlds and North American events, 4 Antigua race weeks and multiple Jamaican regattas both here and in Kingston. These days our regattas are very exciting because normally you can count on a strong competition between Peter and his nephew, Richard Hamilton.

Under Peter's reign as Commodore, he purchased the club boat for Mighty Mike, built on the extra room that is now an office and tried to keep the club going in a difficult time. A lot of transition took place while Peter was Commodore but he kept on sailing. There were many Sundays when the verandah would be full of young children like his daughter Abi and son Gavin – who all learned to crawl here. It truly was a family place – a second home for many of us and for Peter, it still is.

As he himself is going through a transition phase – he told me he was the oldest this past March down at Mosquito Cove and the youngest two weeks ago in Antigua – he is grateful to those who have kept the club going. He is proud of his contribution in developing the youth sailing program and truly hopes it will continue for many years to come.

One of his fondest memories is in 2002 when he entered his homebuilt catamaran – skylarking – in the mosquito cove race and came first across the line!

Whether it's a racing Sunday, a happy hour Friday or we need advice on how to fix something, we can always count on Peter to support the club.

I would like to ask Heather Vernon to come and present Peter with this token of our appreciation.

Ron Smith

If he's not on the tennis court, you can find Ron Smith sailing in his Dragon.

When I sat down with Ron we talked about how his years as Commodore were somewhat trying because the club was in a transition mode where the talks of Doctors Cave / MBYC merger were still in progress so there really wasn't much that could be done – physically to the club. But socially – to keep the spirits of the members up and to try to generate new members – Ron started the captain's sail whereby one two or three host boats would take members and nonmembers for a cocktail cruise. He also thought of the parade of lights during the holidays which were always so lovely to see.

Having been on the committee for several years and always taking the dock under his responsibility, it was a natural progression for Ron to take on the Commodore position – especially when Simon Clarke told him he must!!

As a sailor, Ron enjoyed his time as crew on Kaper and recalls a few close calls when Billy's drive to win really challenged his crew. One Kingston harbour race Ron recalls racing on Kaper. It was a terrible wind and the spinnaker was up. They were coming down the channel and there was a concrete pier in front of them. The boat began to broach and the boats behind were shouting at Kaper. Ron turned to look at a stunned Billy holding the broken tiller in his hand! As they frantically started taking the sails down, the boat started to do full circles as Billy tried to grab what was left of the tiller and steer the boat to safety.

While we don't see nearly enough of you these days, we are grateful for your service and I would like to ask our other Dragon sailor – who faithfully goes out every Sunday and if you've ever seen it, there is something truly majestic about seeing a Dragon under sail – Billy, would you please come and present Ron with this token of our appreciation.

Winston Dear

His laugh can be heard for miles – whether out at sea or close by – you know when Winston dear is here!

A community leader who truly believes and lives by the mantra that you must give back to your community, Winston has done a great deal for Montego Bay.

As lead surveyor for Mobay Freeport, he had to come by canoe to survey the land where we now stand. He believed that Montego bay had so much potential to develop into a thriving city that in the 80's he worked on a committee with Tony Hart and others to grow Montego bay in three prime areas – tourism – industry and commerce. This three prong approach was the start of what we see today.

He was chairman of the greater Montego Bay development committee and was on the committee who created the traffic system for mo bay – including the one-way structure. Which, I think a few people may want to talk with you about that one!!

As a director of Barnett estates the sewage pond project was in a heated debate about location in proximity to Alice Eldemire drive and after much back and forth, Winston proposed to move the ponds 1200 feet to the southwest which allowed for the development of Fairview center.

Winston served on the yacht club committee for several years and prior to becoming Commodore, he was Miami Montego bay race chairman at a time when the race was in a bit of turmoil and almost to the point of collapse. Billy Craig and he flew to Miami to sort things out and along with the help of Felix Hunter; they were able to get the race back on track.

As Commodore, Winston worked hard at trying to change the elitist stigma the club had by inviting members of the chamber of commerce and leaders in the community to become members. He would encourage businesses to hold luncheons and socials at the club in an effort to show that everyone was welcome and the club was a great facility to be a part of.

As a sailor, Winston has done his share of racing. From his J22, Nina (which we are very happy to see her all fixed up and back on the circuit) to cruising on Stoshus. But his fondest memories are when he would crew on Kaper with his good friend Billy Craig. One pigeon island race he recalls was when Billy – as skipper – created a strategy that he thought was a sure fire way to win! While the other captains and crew were drinking and carrying on, Billy put a curfew on his crew in that after a certain hour they weren't allowed to have any more liquor thinking this would give them the advantage as the Kaper crew would be racing with a clear head the following day. Well it back fired terribly because they came in dead last!!! I don't think that won't be Nina's strategy!!!

Winston, thank you for your community service, your club service and I would like to ask Roy Reid to come forward to present you with this token of our appreciation.

Richard Hamilton

Few have stepped up to the plate like our current Commodore. In 2007, when the club was floundering for a leader, he put his own name forward because he had a passion for sailing and wanted to ensure it grew and developed into the potential he knew it had.

It was Mark Hart who convinced Richard Hamilton to be Commodore – “you won't have to do any more than what you are doing now” he said. Well Richard, that was 5 years ago and we're glad you are still with us.

Richard has truly been a strong leader - both on and off the water. Over the past five years he has overseen the completion of the club renovation, focused funds into extending the dock as well as getting a new motor for the crane.

Whether racing his J22, 'Renegade' or taking his Laser for a whirl, sailing is his true passion. So much so that - even though we had the optimist fleet – he and Peter harper - as I stated before – tested out one after a happy hour in Cayman. He also saw kids in Cayman racing Pico's and came back to Jamaica energized with the thought that this would be a great boat to introduce to more kids across the spectrum and get youth sailing going again in Mo bay. So, he called a few people, who called a few people and thanks to Richards drive and those individuals who agreed with his vision, our Pico fleet arrived! This effort has allowed us to get to where we are today with our youth sailing program and Richard, we thank you.

As a Commodore, he encourages feedback and participation from not only the other committee members but from all club members ~ he wants everyone to remember the club is here for you so please get involved and participate!

While he continues to work on bettering our current club, he still has a vision of something more - like the addition of a gym or squash courts. But for now, he hopes one day our club will get back that 'old time feeling' where friends meet for lunch and after J22 racing the many crews come off the boats ranting and raving about a bad tack or a near hit and then settling it all with a red stripe and a good laugh!!

Richard, while many of us feel that you will run a close second to Robert Fletcher with your years as Commodore, tonight we thank you for your service. I would like the members of the youth sailing club to come up and present you with this token of our appreciation.