

## Knockabouts

By 1906 the development of Grindstone Neck that had begun in 1890 was deemed a success. Numerous cottages had been built, the Grindstone Inn had been added onto several times, a casino with a bowling alley and shuffleboard courts for Inn guests had been built, and a second church was being built for the Irish servants accompanying their employers to their summer homes. An original Episcopal Church, a salt water pool, a coal wharf, a golf course, and a stables had all been constructed ten years earlier.

People-especially wealthy people, it seems- always long to turn the clock back, and to live life as it used to be, and so Grindstone Neck was developed, according to the Gouldsboro Land Development's sales booklet, as a reaction to "ultra fashionable Bar Harbor." It was hoped Winter Harbor would offer "every advantage peculiar to resorts upon Mt. Desert Island" but also offer "the opportunity for the 'undress' life of old Bar Harbor. " Fishing and hunting in the "unfrequented mountains, lakes and streams" on the mainland was Winter Harbor's advantage over Bar Harbor as well as its reputation as a "water paradise". "No where in the entire region" the sales booklet continued, " can the sports of canoeing, boating and sailing be more thoroughly enjoyed,- there being no safer water on the coast. " <sup>1</sup>And this is where the story of the Winter Harbor Knockabouts begins....

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<sup>1</sup> The Gouldsboro Land Improvement Co., Winter Harbor, Maine: A Description of Its Property Upon Grindstone Neck and the Schoodic Peninsula in Frenchman's Bay, Near Bar Harbor, 1890.

One of the first buildings built in the summer of 1890 on Grindstone Neck was The Winter Harbor Canoe Club. Designed by Lindley Johnson of Philadelphia, it was located on the "harbor side of Grindstone on a site commanding a view of the entire harbor and bay and hills upon Schoodic Peninsula." It was to be equipped with a billiard room, a piano, a general assembly room, card room, locker room and dressing rooms. A wide "piazza" would extend the entire length of the front and "a tower with an observatory will surmount the structure." Boats and canoes of the cottagers will be kept at the Club slip, the sales offering stated, along with the company's steamer, the Silver Star, and a large steam launch owned by the company.

And so it was that one hundred years ago, in a summer sweet with the promise of continuing prosperity and plenty, the gentlemen of The Winter Harbor Club (the Canoe having been dropped), with time and money on their hands, and it must be granted, a good deal of vision, and looking for more amusement than even the Gouldsboro Land Company booklet promised, determined to develop a class of one design sailboats. The object, of course, was competition.

### Design and Construction

The first of many strokes of luck that have touched this remarkable fleet over the last 100 years was the choice of Alpheus A. Packard (1871-1948) of Marblehead to design and build them. Packard was invited to come to Winter Harbor and sail with F. E. Dixon aboard his Marblehead knockabout, Fifi, to observe the local conditions. He returned to his yard in Marblehead with instructions to design a boat that could get home in any weather, with speed as a secondary consideration.

Packard's partner at the time was 28 year old William Starling Burgess (1878-1947), the brilliant naval architect who would go on to design three American's Cup defenders, including (with Olin Stephens) Ranger, the fastest J of them all. Packard's partnership with Burgess in the yard in Marblehead lasted only five years, from 1902 to 1907. But as far as the Winter Harbor Knockabouts were concerned, that was time enough.

It's hard to imagine two more unlikely partners than Burgess and Packard. Packard's son Richard recalls that his father never said anything derogatory about Burgess but always called him a genius who could not design an ugly boat. But the partnership was doomed for four reasons. First, Burgess could not be persuaded that it was the repair work that paid the yard's bills; he was more interested in design and new builds. Second, Burgess was diverted from design work by his poetry and was, in fact, a published poet. He liked to sit at Packard's wife's feet and read her his latest creation. This made Mrs. Packard uncomfortable and didn't help business, Packard wrote. Three, like many naval architects in those days, Burgess became fascinated by aircraft after the Wright Brother's first flight and eventually went on to design many airplanes including the first hydroplane with Glenn Curtis. Four, the personalities were antithetical. Burgess was a Harvard man, was socially prominent in Boston, somewhat Bohemian, with an eye for the ladies. Packard on the other hand was an M.I.T. man, a technical engineer, mathematician and physicist, somewhat shy, quiet, dignified, deeply religious and not given to poetry. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 1. Letter from Richard M. Packard to Llewellyn Howland, Mar. 12, 1987 obtained from Sturgis Haskins

Burgess's personal life must have given Mr. and Mrs. Packard pause. Burgess' first wife had committed suicide in 1902 and was found clutching a note that read "You loved me once". At about the time the partnership began, Burgess began an affair with his best friend's wife (and for whom he designed the winner of the 1902 Quincy YC Challenge Cup, Outlook) which caused a major scandal in Boston society. While Rosamund Tudor Higginson got her divorce, Burgess left the country for four months right at the start of the Burgess & Packard partnership. Burgess and Rosamund were married in 1904. The daughter from this marriage was Tasha Tudor, noted illustrator and gardener and the son, Dr. Frederic Tudor. Burgess and Rosamund divorced when Tasha was nine, and he married twice after that. By this time, of course, Packard, was long gone.<sup>3</sup>

Most importantly for our story, though, Burgess and Packard were partners at the very time the men of the Winter Harbor Club needed a design and a yard to build it. Who designed the Winter Harbor Knockabout? No one will ever know since fire destroyed the yard in November, 1918 taking all the early designs with it. But if guesses count, Starling Burgess, the man Packard said couldn't design an ugly boat probably drew the lines and Packard, the engineer and detail man probably oversaw the engineering and building, making for a perfect partnership of abilities after all.<sup>4</sup>

The product of this marriage of talents, the Winter Harbor Knockabout, is 30'9" over all, 21'3" on the waterline, with a 7'4" beam and 5'2" draft. It is gaff-rigged, carrying 465 square feet of

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<sup>3</sup> Harry Davis, 'The Art of Tasha Tudor

sail and 3088 pounds of lead on the keel. The only change made to Burgess & Packard's original proposed drawings was to enlarge the cockpit at the expense of the cabin. Since most owners would be using the boats for daysailing, the extra cabin space was deemed expendable. The original committee conducting the negotiations with Packard was made up of George Dallas Dixon and F. O. Spedden. When Dixon was unable to continue, Spedden was charged with bringing the matter to a final completion.

It seems fairly certain that Spedden was the driving force behind the creation of the Knockabouts. Movie star handsome, Spedden married Margarett Corning Stone, called Daisy, in 1900. His profession was banking in New York, but he and Daisy spent much of the year traveling in Europe. They were returning from a trip to Algiers with their young son, Douglas, aboard the Titanic when Spedden was placed in charge of one of the lifeboats because he knew how to sail and row. [Note to Junior Sailors: Knowing how to sail can save your life!] The Speddens, their maid and Douglas's nanny all survived the disaster. Unfortunately, Douglas was killed on Grindstone Neck in the summer of 1915, the first automobile fatality in the State of Maine.

The Spedden's first summer season on the Neck was 1906 and after rowing crew in college and being a keen small boat sailor, he must have seen immediately that the beautiful new Clubhouse on Sand Cove needed a class of small boats to race. The Winter Harbor Knockabout owners deferred to his experience at every step in the process of establishing the class.

### Development of the Knockabout

What exactly is a Knockabout? Around the turn of the century, the term knockabout described a class of small racing sloops with no bowsprit. They originated in Marblehead when two friends each sought an easy-to-handle boat they could sail alone or with crew. The boats were to be lively sailors yet capable of the making the 10 mile round trip to Marblehead's Halfway Rock in a blow. The rig was to be simple: a gaff-headed main and a "stem stayail". The first two Knockabouts, Nancy and Jane, were built in 1892 by Higgins and Gifford and each cost \$450.

These boats were so well received that many more knockabouts were built before the turn of the century to a variety of designs. But this was not a one-design class which was felt in those days to inhibit competition. The only restriction on design was the 21' waterline, and competition produced some boats of extreme proportions or "freaks" to use the parlance of the day, including a Burgess-designed boat called Little Haste blamed for killing the class. Little Haste was 39' over all, had a two foot draft with her centerboard up and carried 950 sq. feet of sail. She was so fast and so extreme that no one wanted to build a boat to compete with her.<sup>5</sup>

At the time the gentlemen of Winter Harbor began their discussions with Packard in 1906, the most popular knockabouts being built were those known as 18-footers--named for their length on the waterline. (The Dark Harbor 17 1/2s belong to this class.) But the Winter Harbor Club men opted for the next larger size which was the 21-footers. Comfort for three while under sail was an important consideration as evidenced by the decision to

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Murphy, *Glass Plates and Wooden Boats: The Yachting Photography of Willard B. Jackson at Marblehead, 1898-1937*.

enlarge the cockpit at the expense of the cabin, and so was seakindliness. In the 21 foot class, the sail area was limited to 500 sq. feet with no more than 400 sq. feet in the main. This relatively short rig combined with the deep and heavy keel, made for a boat capable of ocean racing and "able to get home in any weather". (Their choice of a boat may have been old-fashioned by 1906 standards but their idea of creating a one-design fleet proved to be prescient. By the 1920s the number of one design fleets based on the knockabout proportions had exploded.)

Anyone who has sailed aboard a Winter Harbor 21 can appreciate the responsiveness of the boat to the helm, her ability to work to windward even in the sharp chop of the afternoon southwesterly and her ability to remain drier than other boats due to her higher than normal freeboard. In the tradition of Nancy and Jane, it is possible to singlehand the boat by rigging the jib to self tend. The hull is so easily driven that it coasts and coasts on its momentum, and anyone towing one of these boats or picking up a mooring has to allow plenty time and distance for her to slow down.

The fact that all seven boats have maintained their shape and sheer after one hundred years of sailing is ultimately attributable to their builders and engineers. The hulls are in some ways conventionally constructed, but were given extra strength compared to most boats of the day. For example, they are stiffened by means of steam-bent oak floor timber riders through which the ballast keel bolts are passed. These riders run well up into the hull and gradually distribute the load of the ballast keel to the hull instead of concentrating it as it would be if the smaller floor timbers themselves were expected to do the job. Their decks are braced against wracking by diagonal strapping of oak-another seldom seen

feature in boats of this era. The cedar planks are attached to the frames with copper rivets- the most durable fastenings of all. <sup>6</sup>

Anyone who has had the experience of putting a Knockabout up on the rocks and finding only a few scratches on the bottom paint on the lead keel at the end of the day, feels a debt of gratitude to the additional expense that the original seven owners went to in constructing these unusually durable sailboats. Heavily-and for their day, expensively-built, few boats have lasted longer than these seven without undergoing total rebuilds. Another small miracle seems to be the fact that these boats, one hundred years later, are all virtually equal in speed.

### The Knockabouts Arrive at Their Homes by the Side of the Sea

Launched at Marblehead in 1907 they were towed together at one time to Winter Harbor in early summer. Each Knockabout was accompanied by a rowing skiff one of which, Cloverly's, is still in the possession of a member of the Club today.<sup>7</sup> The original owners of the seven boats were: James Drummond of St. Louis, F. O. Spedden of Tuxedo Park, New York, and F. E. Dixon, George Dallas Dixon, H. S. Kerbaugh, William Wilson Curtin, and Richard G. Park all of Philadelphia. Lost in the mists of time are the way in which each boat was chosen or assigned to its original owner and what each boat cost: like lots of history, it just didn't seem important enough to record at the time. One would like to think that in that summer of 1907, they had a solemn ceremony in which they all drew their boats from a pot...

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<sup>6</sup> Maynard Bray

<sup>7</sup> These dinghies were probably built by the great small boat builder, W. P. Stephens, who joined the firm in 1906. D. Sole Knight and Daniel MacNaughton, *Encyclopedia of Yacht Designers*, 2006



The excitement generated by the arrival of the new boats and a new sport on the Neck must have had the whole Grindstone Neck community excited and involved that first summer of 1907. Boats houses were built along the northside of Henry Cove, railroads for hauling the boats were laid, and Captain's uniforms were ordered. A Committee was formed to determine courses and rules governing the new class. Mr. Spedden was appointed by the owners to form a committee to study the charts, prevailing winds, currents, as well as the sailing characteristics of the new boats and to establish courses and rules equitable to all owners and "at the same time produce good and wholesome sport." <sup>8</sup> Spedden formed a Race Committee consisting of W. H. Duff, Chairman, Nathan Trotter, J. L. Drummond, W. S. Lawrence and himself. Mr. Duff agreed to use his small steamer "Firefly" as Race Committee boat.

The Race Committee chose to operate the races under the New York Yacht Club Rules which meant carrying two anchors, two life jackets, and water jugs. But class rules were adopted as well. Only original equipment could be used when racing and the boats could not be hauled, repaired or changes made to the rigging or sails during the season without permission of the Committee. No pot-leading (applying a mixture of graphite and oil to lessen water resistance) was allowed. Jibs and mainsails were not to be held out by any other means than the wind, and spinnaker poles could only be attached to the mast. No yacht could carry a crew of more than three persons including the owner. Any other person on board was

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<sup>8</sup> Letter of W. S. Lawrence upon presentation to WHYC of a book in which to keep the Race Records in 1922

to be considered a passenger. One member of the crew could be a paid hand, but he could not take the tiller. Protests were to be filed in writing within 24 hours with an accompanying sketch of the relative positions of the boats. All interested parties were to refrain from discussing the protest before the formal hearing was held by the Race Committee.

Official racing began in 1908, with Wednesdays and Saturdays in August set as race days. It took three or more boats to make a race, and the Race Committee could end any race if it deemed the conditions had become unfavorable. A prize was offered for the series. Initially, a windward/leeward course of seven nautical miles with a time limit of 2 hours and 15 minutes was set alternating with a triangular course of  $8 \frac{5}{8}$  nautical miles with a time limit of 2 hours and 40 minutes.

A lunch, hosted by one of the boat owners, was served in the Clubhouse before each race and it never varied: cream of tomato soup, boiled lobster, potato chips and blueberry pie, preceded by martinis. While the captains circled the boats in front of the yacht club float, the voices of the owners and crew inside the Clubhouse must have grown steadily louder as they were warmed by the martinis and the prospect of the afternoon's racing. Good natured kidding and laughter, bold wagers (collected in a tin pot still residing on a shelf in the Yacht Club kitchen) and side bets culminated in the singing of the Winter Harbor song:

*For its home boys, home, it's home we want to be  
Back in our homes by the side of the sea  
Back in our seats at the Winter Harbor Club  
Where they mix the bonny liquor in a 20 gallon tub!*

As the boats were brought to the float by the captains, the owners and crew, dressed in blazers and boaters, stepped aboard. The five minute horn sounded at 2:30 and it was time to race.

And race they did. Legend has it that they forced each other onto the rocks, collided with each other and allowed themselves to be hit, and protested early and often. In the thirties, Francie Rentschler, M. G. Rosengarten's daughter remembers that on foggy days you couldn't see the boats, but you could hear their owners cursing and shouting at each other across the water.<sup>9</sup> The finish was always in front of the Yacht Club so that the spectators, nibbling on tea sandwiches brought from Bar Harbor by ferry, could view the afternoon spectacle.

### New Boats in the Fleet

In 1920 F. E. Dixon received permission from the Club to build into the class and the yard of George F. Lawley and Son was chosen to build the new boat. Since the drawings and lines of the original seven had been lost in a fire at the Burgess yard, Lawley sent it's chief engineer, Walter McInnis (later to become a well known designer and builder in his own right with the firm Eldridge-McInnis) and his brother to Winter Harbor to measure one of the existing boats. Walter McInnis recalls the experience in a 1973 letter to Sturgis Haskins of the Maine Antique Boat Society:

*It's a long time back to the cold month of February 1921, when my brother and I worried our way by train, Model T Ford taxi and rope-hauled ferry to reach Winter Harbor to make necessary measurements to duplicate a Winter Harbor One Design Class Knockabout.*

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<sup>9</sup> Memories of Grindstone Neck, 2005

*I was chief engineer of Geo. Lawley and Son Shipyard in Neponset, Ma. at that time. As you report in your letter of March 18th, the original design was by Burgess and Packard of Marblehead and the plans were lost in a fire. F. Eugene Dixon got permission to build into the class, provided the finished boat would pass inspection by a certified surveyor, with error tolerances of plus or minus one eighth of an inch. Lawley got the building job and we were off and running.*

*The story of the measuring is a classic. We landed in Winter Harbor about noon, put up at a wooden hotel, I think called the Winter Harbor Inn, and the thermometer went down to below zero for the duration of our stay. My younger brother came into my room that night carrying an armful of heavy downeast quilts and crawled into my bed, for the first time since we were kids growing up.*

*After dinner the first evening, we wandered down to the village and went into a combination barbershop and pool room. (Ed. Note: probably the present day Victorian). An open game of Kelly Pool was under way and it wasn't long before we had company who were curious to know what we were doing in town. When we told them, they were all completely skeptical but became friendly aids. We found out about the local lumber yard; we were told to go in and help ourselves to materials for setting up batter boards, making needed six foot framing squares and to stock for building a bleachers for them to sit in and kibbitz the entire proceedings. Best of all, we learned that the Rosengarten boat (Sphinx) had been winning most of the races and was top money winner in the auction pool.*

*This then was the boat that we set up and took all of our measurements from. The running comments from the gallery of a dozen to twenty downeast wags was priceless.*

*We were forced to make all our sketches at the inn, indicate the spaces to put the figures in, and fill them in on the boat wearing heavy wool gloves.*

*A full set of plans was made i. e. lines, offsets, construction drawing, deck plan, spars, rigging and sail plan, inboard profile and equipment list. We even duplicated scarp locations on deck and elsewhere to make the new boat a Chinese copy. Prof. Burtner from M.I. T. was the judge and jury that put his approval on the finished product...*

*I do think some of the other tracings of this boat are in the batch I later gave to M.I.T.. Write to the Curator, Francis Russel Hart Nautical Museum, M.I.T., Cambridge, Ma. 02139....*

*Two boats were built by Lawley- #1 for F. E. Dixon, delivered to Winter Harbor by Cap. Larsen of the Schooner Taomina in the summer of 1921. Sails by Cousens and Pratt and blocks by C. D. Durkee. No name is recorded on this boat.*

*#2 Simplex, owner, Edwin C. Hammond of Auburndale, Ma. Delivered in June 1924; sails by Wilson Silsby and blocks by Merriman Bros.*

*Very truly yours,  
Walter J. McInnis*

The Dixon boat had no name for a number of years and was finally named Elmona. She was painted blue, which was something of an innovation, since all the original boats were white, except for Mystery, which was black. Simplex was even more interesting. She was white on the starboard side and orange on the port side, so that she was clearly visible to the fleet on the starboard tack, and camouflaged among the fleet on the port tack.

One can guess that the prospect of another boat caused the owners to reassess the fleet in the summer of 1923. They voted to maintain the integrity of the class by dictating that no changes be made to the equipment, sail area, or design of the boats. A yearly inspection of all craft was agreed to, and Mr. Rosengarten <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Rosengarten was particularly concerned that all the boats weigh the same and carry the same weight. You can't help but wonder who he mistrusted and why. In the Dixon Boathouse today hangs an anchor from his boat carved from pine and painted grey made by his captain, Lester Sargeant. Was it a prank or was it really carried aboard?

offered to install scales at cost per owner of not more than \$15.00. Capt. Jesse Smallidge was retained to be in charge of hauling all the boats at the end of the season and launching them in the spring. The same bottom paint was to be used on all boats.

### The Marconi Rig Debate

A discussion occurred several years later over the possibility of converting the 21s to Marconi rig. The Speddens had moved to Northeast Harbor in 1923 taking Riddle with them. Spedden, ever the innovator, had considered changing the rig on Riddle to the more contemporary one, thinking, one can guess, that it might make the boat faster against the other designs he now had to contend with. Walter McInnis drew the sail plan but a note on the plan by his successor, Fred Goeller, says it was never used. Dixon, also an innovator, purchased Riddle from Spedden at the end of the season in 1926 and in June 1927 commissioned Goeller to draw up a second Marconi rig sailplan to which Riddle was converted.<sup>11</sup> In August 1927 the minutes of the Winter Harbor Yacht Racing Association (WHYRA) state that Dixon did not believe the owners were ready yet to consider changing all the boats over to the new rig for two reasons: one, they hadn't had enough time to try the new sail plan out on Riddle (though he was convinced it was faster), and since they were racing among themselves, there was no need to hurry the decision. The cost of each boat's conversion would have been \$1000. The matter was dropped without a vote that year. (Dixon also wanted all owners to buy new sails that year. They couldn't agree on that either, and it was left up to each owner.) Though there is no record of the decision, the owners of the 21s ultimately agreed not to change the

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<sup>11</sup> Research by Maynard Bray.

rig of the boats, a wise decision since only relative speed mattered among the fleet and it allowed the boats to be kept in original condition. Allan Smallidge writes in *Winter Harbor 21s* that Riddle's mast was eventually removed and used as the yacht club flagpole.

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## They Belonged to the Town, Too

The Knockabouts belonged not only to the Grindstone Neck community, but to the town as well. Every boat had a captain from the town, and most of these men had grown up hauling for lobster under sail on Friendship sloops, and so were experienced sailors and real seamen. By the time they were no longer young and "fierce" to be out hauling or fishing every day, they went to work on the Knockabouts. Dressed in suits and ties, and North Sea captain's hats, they would go to work in the boathouses that lined the north shore of Henry Cove. Every spring they lay eight foot beams with iron weights on the bottom out behind the boat houses and hauled the boats out into the sun for rigging, floating them off on the high running tide. In the fall, the boats would go back into the shed soon after Labor Day, to be scraped, varnished, painted and repaired all winter.

By the late thirties, and forties Doug and Dale Torrey whose father, Philip, was the captain of various Knockabouts, remember Bert Bickford, Connie MacKay's father, had replaced Jesse Smallidge as the man in charge of the Knockabouts. Lester Sargeant was Mitch Rosengarten's captain, and both Rosengarten and Sargeant were hated to lose, Doug remembers.

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<sup>12</sup> The chain plates from the Marconi conversion of Riddle were removed in the winter of 2006.

Other captains over the years were Ralph Crane, Dixon's captain (Phil Torrey was Crane's sternman during lobstering season), Elisha Bickford, John Stover, Willy Hammond, and Ralph Byers, Sr.. These men not only "tended" the yachts but taught the children of Grindstone Neck to sail. Phil Torrey's best pupil was Deo Edwards, a "crackerjack" sailor after whom he named his second daughter. Crane's prize student was young Fitz Dixon.

One of the great events of the summer, was the Captain's Race. Doug Torrey remembers that his father won this race many times and that the Knockabout owners used to place big bets on the various captains. Once when his father won, Jack Groome showed him a big wad of money he had won and gave Phil \$20 of it. (That was big money in those days, when Phil Torrey was being paid \$100 a month as a captain.)<sup>13</sup> Doug also remembered that his father loved to sail with Deo Edwards and her friend Edo Groome. Every time they won a race, the two children would jump overboard and Phil would have to sail back and pick them up.

Dale Torrey remembers a time his father "sailed the mast right out of Cloverly" in a Captain's race to Hull's Cove. Captain Phil was mortified that he had lost the spar, and was afraid of what Dickie (Eleanor Dixon) Gentle, the owner, would say when he got back to the dock. Her words, "Don't worry. We'll just get a new mast", came as a big relief to Captain Phil. The season closed with a party at the Casino for the Captains and their families.

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<sup>13</sup> Did the captains bet among themselves? Never, Doug Torrey, said. "There wasn't a loose dollar in Winter Harbor. Every dollar that came into town went straight in to A. B. Whitehouse's (the grocery store owner's) pocket."



## The Guard Changes and the Fleet is Dispersed

The fleet had an almost complete change of ownership at the end of the thirties and early forties. The war siphoned off many of the younger sailors like John Banes and Ed Clay, Jr, who once gone, didn't return to Winter Harbor until the 60s. Death claimed John Davis in 1938, Mitch Rosengarten and Sam Henderson in 1942. F. E. Dixon and Eleanor Widener Dixon were divorced in 1936 and his boats, Water Witch, Riddle and No. 8 changed hands within a few years. By 1940 only Henderson's Whippet, Hare's Cloverly, and Dixon, Jr.'s Elfitz competed in all six races, with Emily Townsend sailing Platt's Rambler in five races. No Challenge Cup was given as a result and Commodore Henderson presented a special cup for the season.

If the twenties and thirties were the years of F. E. Dixon Sr. , Mitch Rosengarten, Sam Henderson, and the Davis brothers, the 40's and 50's was the beginning of the era of Fitz Dixon, F. E.'s son. Dixon was born in 1923 on Grindstone Neck and was 15 in 1938 when his mother bought Hammond's boat, renamed Elfitz, for him. By the end of the 40's he had come to dominate the August Series. A 1948 racing song by Rod Landreth has the lyric

*Fitz Dixon is our commodore, and quite efficient too  
And when it comes to Knockabouts our tale is sad but true  
He hastens o'er the starting line and as he rounds the mark  
He's wont to say, "Alack aday, I hope they're home by dark!"*

Dixon dominated racing during the fifties and sixties, sailing always with his crew of Joe Thayer Sr. and Joe Thayer Jr., against

William Weaver, Dr. Clem Kolb, Jim Gentle and Ferg Mohr, some of whom, the song tells us had trouble picking up moorings.

*There are rules for shooting moorings, but Weaver makes his own  
He sails right by it forty times, but all Mohr does is groan*

But the fleet of Knockabouts was slowly being dispersed. The decline of the Grindstone Neck community in the fifties and sixties took their toll. By 1969 when Cloverly moved to Sorrento, only the two Lawley-built boats both owned by Dixon were still in Winter Harbor and racing had virtually ended.

### **The Fleet Returns**

In the summer of 1980 Sidney Fisher took a new member of the club, Alan Goldstein, for a sail on one of the remaining Knockabouts. Goldstein who had owned and raced a number a boats out of the Rochester (NY) Yacht Club appreciated old boats, having restored a 1916 Friendship sloop and a 1954 Bunker and Ellis lobster yacht. He was immediately impressed by the Winter Harbor 21 and began to search for one to buy. As luck would have it, Cloverly, was residing in a barn just over the hill in Sorrento, owned by Sturgis Haskins. In August 1981 Goldstein bought the boat and took her to the Caterpillar Boat works in Blue Hill for restoration. There Robert Speer, Peter Chase, and A.B Boardmen spent 812 hours bringing Cloverly back to life.

On July 24th, 1982 Knockabout racing resumed at the Winter Harbor Yacht Club with three boats competing. The course was set to the Turtle Island bell and back. Commodore William Holden aboard F. E. Dixon Jr.'s Fling was the Race Committee.

*The first Winter Harbor 21 race of the season was run on Saturday in a 15 knot southwesterly breeze. First across the line was Cloverly, Alan Goldstein, at the helm with crew Frank Shumway, John Odenbach and Robert Hemmes, followed by Sole, John Banes, skippering, with crew Harry Dixon, Tom Lurch and Ben Madeira aboard. Elfitz was last across the line, with F. Eugene Dixon Jr. captaining, and Joe LaCasce, Jim Trimble and John Eikenburg as crew. The course opened with a beat out of Sand Cove to the Mark Island bell, a distance of 1.6 nautical miles. As the Winter Harbor 21s approached Grindstone Ledge, Cloverly held a narrow lead over Elfitz, followed by Sole, a distant third. The turning point of the race now occurred. Sole, elected to tack and head east toward the Schoodic shore in an effort to get back in the race. Elfitz elected to continue on a westerly course, thence to tack and run up under Ned and Mark Islands, anticipating a southwesterly which would ghost the vessel past the Mark Island bell without a further tack-a tried and proven strategy. Cloverly continued to cover Elfitz to the Grindstone Ledge then seemed to have second thoughts. Al Elfitz began her quest for the southwesterly breeze under Ned Island, Cloverly tacked and headed east. It was too late, however. Sole and Captain Banes had found strong breezes to the east and was gaining ground rapidly. It was now clear that, barring a significant change in conditions, Sole or Elfitz was to be home first.*

*The expected breezes under Ned and Mark Islands suddenly died, leaving Elfitz virtually becalmed. Sole stormed past the Mark Island bell and headed to the Turtle Island gong and then home. While the time separating the three boats narrowed to less than two minutes at the finish, neither Cloverly nor Elfitz could make up the ground gained by Sole in her drive to the east. Sole was first, Cloverly second, and Elfitz, third.*

*In August of that year, the three boats were tied for first going into the last race, which was won by F. E. Dixon Jr.*

*It is rumored that more of these boats may answer the starting gun at the Winter Harbor Club when the 1983 racing season begins.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Summary printed in the Ellsworth American. Written by Wm. Holden III

In 1961 Anne and Maynard Bray discovered Rambler II, Sphinx and Whippet, all for sale, in a shed at Andrews Boatyard in Sorrento. The Brays spread the word among boating friends in the Mystic, Connecticut area where they were living at the time. The result was that all three Knockabouts were bought by mutual friends and sailed to Fishers Island Sound from Sorrento on their own bottoms.<sup>15</sup> There they sailed often, raced some and were admired by many Mystic area sailors. The Brays recall racing in Off Soundings aboard Sphinx, but at times during the sixties, raced on all three boats. Rambler II's owner converted her to Marconi rig and the other two owners shortened the booms three or four feet to lower the rating and reduce the weather helm.

Ultimately, as at Winter Harbor, these three Knockabouts dispersed, but the Brays kept track of their general whereabouts. Realizing that Goldstein had restored Cloverly and was reinvigorating the class, Maynard Bray suggested that he might want to go after Sphinx which he'd heard was for sale. It wasn't long before Goldstein and John Banes, grandson of Mitch Rosengarten, the fierce sailor of the twenties and thirties, were on a plane intent on bringing her back to Winter Harbor. At the same time, Rambler II, was found. Both boats were in need of a fair amount of work, Bray recalls, and they were taken to the Winter Harbor Marina and restored by Marshall St. Cyr. Rambler II was purchased and restored by club Commodore William Holden III. In 1983 John Banes raced Sphinx again for the first time since 1941.

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<sup>15</sup> Cal Stinson Jr. recalls that the new owner of Sphinx took three weeks to make this trip, calling the Stinsons every night from one fogged-in harbor to another.

Now that there were five boats, racing took a more serious turn. A Race Committee was re-established and the boats began racing on Saturdays in July and August.<sup>16</sup>

The next two boats to return were Riddle and Water Witch. Thad Danielson from Cape Cod, owner of Water Witch, called Bray at WoodenBoat and described the boat he owned. When Bray told him he owned a Winter Harbor Knockabout, he came to town and stopped in at the Winter Harbor Town Office telling the town Manager, Alan Smallidge, that he believed he owned a Knockabout and before restoring it, it wanted to look at some of our boats. When Goldstein heard this story, he rushed over to meet him and began to negotiate to have a member buy the boat. Dexter Coffin Jr. of Palm Beach became the new owner. Riddle was purchased by Goldstein and Dixon and then re-sold to John Eikenburg Sr. of Houston, Tx.

There were now only two boats left to find, #2, Whippet and #1, Mystery. After much searching Whippet was located on the Hudson River and purchased by Barbara Ross and her son-in-law, Dallas Salisbury in April 1988. She had been owned by the same family for 15 years, and they were reluctant to sell her at first. But after several letters, the owners agreed that the proper place for her was back with her class in Winter Harbor. Unfortunately she was in the worst shape of any of the boats, Bray recalls. Once in the Benjamin River Boatyard in Brooklin, Maine a close inspection revealed that she had to have her stem, floor timbers, aft half of the keel, transom, most of the frames, shearstrake , a couple of

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<sup>16</sup> When buying new sails for Cloverly in 1983, Fitz Dixon suggested to Goldstein that the boom be raised one foot since there had been some head banging incidents over the years. Thus Hood cut Cloverly's leech 14" shorter. New sails were purchased by the fleet in 1989(Doyle) and 2004 (Quantum), all cut with shorter leeches.

middle planks, garboards, decks and cabin replaced. It was a huge task but Doug Hylan and his crew did a beautiful job.<sup>17</sup> The day she was launched in late June of 1989 all but one boat, Mystery, was back home and restored.

Sailing with Goldstein in the summer of 1987, Bray handed him a slip of paper. "What's this?", Goldstein asked. "That's Mystery", Bray replied. Bray had been cruising in the vicinity of Tiverton, R. I. when he had spotted a Knockabout hull with a different trunk cabin, Marconi rig, and diesel engine. Bray could recognize the hull, but for the unschooled eye, the only thing which proved she was a Winter Harbor 21 was one of the original portlights in her deckhouse. Now what are the chances of the one man who could identify a Knockabout sailing into the very harbor where Mystery was anchored? It was another example of fortune smiling on this fleet.

Goldstein lost no time in contacting the woman who owned the boat, but she did not want to sell. She told him she cruised in the boat each summer with a captain and was not ready to give that time up. With the Centennial of the Yacht Club coming up in 1990, Goldstein offered to have the boat trucked to Winter Harbor just to have it at the Yacht Club for the celebration. But in the winter of '88 he received a call. The man who had taken her cruising had died, and she was ready to sell.

Mary Coffin, Dexter's wife was persuaded to buy Mystery and send her to the Maine Maritime Museum Apprentice Shop in Bath, Me for restoration. Because she was to be Mary's boat and for the Coffin ladies, she was painted pink, and on July 4th, 1990, the

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<sup>17</sup> See WoodenBoat #93 for a description of the work done

hundredth anniversary of the Winter Harbor Club, she was rechristened at the Yacht Club float.

In the winter of 1989, while Mystery was undergoing her refit, the Winter Harbor Yacht Club and the owners of the Knockabouts received the William Avery Baker Award presented by Mystic Seaport. The award reads:

*In recognition of significant restoration or preservation of a recreational boat or class that best typifies American craftsmanship and love of small boating*

The Yacht Club centennial year of 1990 was a grand year for the Knockabouts. On the Fourth of July, each yacht was towed in front of the Yacht Club and received a cannon salute, and on the same day, for the first time in probably 50 or 60 years, all nine boats were on the line for the first race of the season. New trophies were awarded: the Independence Day Race donated by Alan Goldstein, the July Series donated by Alita Weaver Reed (granddaughter of Sam'l Reed, intrepid racer of Knockabouts in the 20's and 30's and daughter of William Weaver, 50s era racer who had trouble picking up a mooring) and the August Series, donated by Fitz Eugene Dixon, Jr.. The Independence Day Race that year was won by John Baner in Sphinx and was presented at the July Centennial Celebration dinner in the Yacht Club. (See appendix for winners of the three trophies in the years since 1990.) That year there was even a repeat of the lobster lunch before a race held on Fitz Dixon's birthday on August 14th. In addition, with the fleet now reassembled an attempt was made to get each owner to sign a right of first refusal to the Yacht Club. Some of these remain in effect today, but others have lapsed with new owners....

Now sailing has become quite competitive again, but as is fitting for the approach of the 21st century, many things have changed. Women are usually crew and sometimes skippers which has probably diminished the profanity between boats. And thanks to the self-correcting rule of the IYRU, protests do not occur. Fitz Dixon, who has graduated to Race Committee Chairman, likes to point out that the courses are much shorter than in the old days. Some of it may be due to today's shorter attention spans, but the boats are older and, these days, so are the skippers.<sup>18</sup> The martinis and tea sandwiches, the paid hands, the spinnakers, the blazers and boaters are all gone, but the Knockabouts still sail out of Winter Harbor each summer Saturday, with Mt. Desert painted on the western horizon, headed for the Turtle Island gong.

Looking back, it is easy to see all the fortunate events and decisions that enabled the Winter Harbor Knockabouts to survive into their one hundredth year as what may be the oldest intact one-design racing fleet in the country, if not the world. The decision to build heavily and well at the Burgess Packard yard, the flawless design of Burgess which made these boats small jewels to be protected and preserved by their owners, the excellent maintenance including the 900 decisions made each fall by each owner to store them undercover, the chance discovery by Maynard Bray of Mystery and the fortuitous trip to Winter Harbor by the owner of Water Witch, and the devotion of the Brays to the class throughout the years, as well as Sturgis Haskins of the Maine Antique Boat society, and the attention paid to the maintenance of the class by the F. E. Dixons, father and son, all these events and decisions added up to something rare in the world of yachting.

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<sup>18</sup> Seven of the nine boats have owners near the age of eighty in 2006.



Upon the occasion of the 100th birthday celebration of the Winter Harbor Knockabouts, August 4th-6th, 2006, the following toast will be offered:

A salute to the owners of the Winter Harbor Knockabouts, past, present and future. Your care, time and, yes, money have insured that these boats will outlive us all. Thank you for the contribution you made, are making and will make to yachting history and the history of Winter Harbor.

### Post Script

In an a sad confluence of events, Fitz Eugene Dixon Jr., the man who sustained the Grindstone Neck community, the town of Winter Harbor and the Knockabouts themselves for six decades, and had planned the birthday celebration, died two days before the festivities began. The community, forced to celebrate and mourn at the same time, was cheered and relieved by the announcement at the dinner dance on Saturday evening that Hilary Miller, Dixon's granddaughter, was the new owner of number 9, Elfitz. Hilary is fifteen years old and this is the boat Dixon's mother bought for him in 1938 when he was fifteen. That night the community could get a glimpse of the continued involvement of the Dixon family in the community, the town and the Knockabouts.

After an inauspicious start to the five race regatta on Friday when there wasn't enough wind to sail, Saturday and Sunday produced two perfect days of moderate but dependable southwesterly breezes. The knockabouts raced, ducking in and out among the islands that separate Frenchman's Bay from Winter Harbor, with the benign countenance of Cadillac Mountain smiling on them

from the west, and Schoodic Head keeping a watchful eye on them to the east.

The racing was spirited and the competition close. As Alec Cutler, Chairman of the Race Committee, said at the awards ceremony, the quality of racing and boat handling has improved so much since he began coming to Winter Harbor fifteen years ago that it was not surprising that five places out of nine had to be settled by tie breakers. The winner of the series was Anthony Harwood aboard Rambler II whose original owner was George Dallas Dixon Jr. Second went to Alan Goldstein in Cloverly in a tiebreaker over Rick Hauck in Sole, the boat originally commissioned by F. E. Dixon Sr. in 1922 and now owned by F. E. Dixon's widow, Edith Robb Dixon. Fourth was Mystery and Windsor Coffin. Fifth place went to El Fitz with William Beautyman at the helm of the boat now owned by Hilary Miller. Sixth was Whippet sailed by Sam Heffner, with Water Witch captained by Bruce Elliott seventh. Eighth was Riddle, Spedden's original boat, sailed by Richard Brown and ninth was Sphinx sailed by Mac Marshall, John Banes' son-in-law.

# Appendix

## Winter Harbor 21 Owners

### #1 Mystery

1906	William W. Curtin	Philadelphia
By 1922	John Davis	St. Louis
1928	H. S. Harper	New York
1937-9	Chartered to Miss Deo Edwards	
1941	Chartered to Mrs. Shipway	
1944-1951	Mallick Belshaw	Prout's Neck
1951	William Weaver Jr.	
	Mrs. Beatrice Greenhalph	Tiverton, R. I.
1989	The Dexter Coffin Family	Key Largo, FL

### #2 Whippet

1906	James Drummond	St. Louis
By 1922	S. J. Henderson	Philadelphia
1940	Mrs. Henderson in	
1944	Prof. Curtis Hemenway	Petit Manan
1961	Robert Gill	Noank, CT.
	Leslie Roe	Poughkeepsie, NY
	Thomas L. Stoner	Croton on Hudson, NY
1988	F. E. Dixon, Jr./Alan Goldstein	
1989	Dallas Salisbury	
	Washington, D. C	
2000	Samuel Heffner	Baltimore

### #3 Cloverly

1906	R. G. Park	Philadelphia
	M. G. Rosengarten	Philadelphia

By 1922	Sam'l C. Davis	St. Louis
1927	Chartered to Graham Dougherty	
1923	John Davis	St. Louis
1932	Chartered to C. N. Read	
1934	Chartered to S. C. Davis	
1935	Chartered to S. C. Davis	
1936	Chartered to H. P. Stokes	
1937	Chartered to Miss Elizabeth Stokes	
1938	T. Truxton Hare	Philadelphia
	Eleanor Dixon Gentle	Philadelphia
	Howard Flierl	Albany, N. Y.
1969	Sturgis Haskins	Sorrento, Me.
1981	Alan Goldstein	Key Largo, FL.

#### **#4 Riddle**

1906	Frederick O. Spedden	Tuxedo Park, N.Y.
1926	F. E. Dixon	
1932,34,36,38	Chartered to Dr. Edward Krumbhaar	
1938	Dr. Edward Krumbhaar and Samuel Bell	
1950	R. Gilpin Ervin	Manchester, Ma.
1960	Jeff Hall and Bill Sweeney	Nahant, Ma.
1980	James Freidlander	Mystic, Ct.
1986	John Eikenberg	Houston, TX.
1990	J. Taylor Crandall	Woodside, Ca.
2005	F. E. Dixon, Jr./Alan Goldstein	Winter Harbor
2006	Edith Robb Dixon/Alan Goldstein	Winter Harbor
2007	Charles Wiggins	Houston, Texas

#### **#5 Water Witch**

1906	F. E. Dixon	Philadelphia
	Franklin Pepper and	Philadelphia
	J. Rulon-Miller	Philadelphia
By 1922	F.E.Dixon	Philadelphia
1923	Chartered by E. C. Hammond	
1924	Chartered to W. H. Smith	
1925	Chartered to Hecksher Wetherill	

1926	Chartered to Graham Dougherty and Robert Toland	
1927	Charles Cheston	Philadelphia
1928	Chartered to Louis Madeira and Schofield Andrews	
1933	Chartered to various members including Miss E. Dixon and Thad Danielson	Leverett, Ma.
1986	The Dexter Coffin Family	Key Largo, FL.

#### **#6 Rambler II, ex-Zephyr**

1906	George Dallas Dixon	Philadelphia
By 1922	M. F. Maury	Philadelphia
1933	Chartered to Mrs. Roland L. Taylor and Wm. Drake	
1936	Chartered to Miss Deo Edwards	
1939	Harry N. Platt	Philadelphia
1940	Chartered to Miss Emily K. Townsend and Dr. Gleason Rand	Winter Harbor
1961	Ed Perry and Howard Gible	Mystic, Ct. W. Hartford, Ct.
1983	William Holden III	Sudbury, Ma.
1992	Anthony Harwood	Atlanta, Ga.

#### **#7 Sphinx, ex-Yare**

1906	H. S. Kerbaugh and S. C. Davis	Rosemont, Pa.
By 1922	M. G. Rosengarten	Philadelphia
1941	Sailed by Messrs. H. Harper Jr. and John Banes	
194?	Calvin Stinson	Prospect Harbor
1961	Sam Crowley	Noank, Ct.
	Roy Burdick	Noank, Ct.
	Jerry Hughes	Noank, Ct.
	Tom Decker/Tom Wagge	W. Chatham, Ma
1983	John Banes	Houston, TX

and Francie Rentschler

Philadelphia

John Banes, Francie Rentschler,  
Margaret Ann Marshall,  
Rebecca Banes

**#8 Sole, ex-Elmona, ex-Vivo**

1922	F. E. Dixon
1935	Chartered to Harry Platt and J. T. Thayer
1937,39	Chartered to Dr. Edward Krumbhaar Dr. Albert Levinger F. E. Dixon Jr.
1948	Chartered to Dr. Clem Kolb
1982	Chartered to John Banes
1990-92	Chartered to Anthony Harwood
1992-2000	Chartered to Philip B. Fisher
2001	Chartered to Fredrick Hauck

**#9 Elfitz, ex-Simplex**

1924	E. C. Hammond	
1938	F. E. Dixon Jr.	
1992-2000	Chartered to Robert H. Lee Jr.	
2001	Chartered to William Beautyman	
2006	Hilary Miller	Palm Beach, FL

**Winners of the August Series 1922-1941**

No records kept before this time

1922 M. G. Rosengarten      Sphinx

Amazingly there was a tie for first place among Rosengarten,

Henderson and S. C. Davis. A deciding race was sailed. The remaining boat owners acted as Race Committee aboard F. E. Dixon's steam yacht, Firenzi.

1923 E. C. Hammond                      Water Witch

A two way tie occurred this year between Hammond and S. J. Henderson and was broken by a race

1924 E. C. Hammond                      Simplex

1925 S. J. Henderson                      Whippet

1926 F. E. Dixon                          No. 8

1927 F. E. Dixon                          No. 8

1928 No award given due to insufficient number of races sailed. However, M. G. Rosengarten scored the most points in the four races sailed.

1929 M. G. Rosengarten                      Sphinx

1930 M. G. Rosengarten                      Sphinx

1931 F. E. Dixon                          No. 8

1932 M. G. Rosengarten                      Sphinx

1933 F. E. Dixon                          No. 8

1934 F. E. Dixon                          No. 8

1935 F. E. Dixon                          Riddle

1936 Dr. E. B. Krumbhaar                      Riddle

1937 M. G. Rosengarten                      Sphinx

1938 M. G. Rosengarten                      Sphinx

1939 S. J. Henderson                      Whippet

1940 F. E. Dixon, Jr.                          Elfitz

A special trophy donated by S. J. Henderson was presented

1941 Mrs. Shipway                          Mystery

End of records

Winners of the Junior Challenge Cup for Knockabouts presented to the Club in 1934 by Mrs. A. Atwater Kent :

1934 F. E. Dixon Jr. & Peter Krumbhaar  
1935 F. E. Dixon Jr. & William O. Christian Jr.  
1936 William O. Christian Jr & Wilmont Lewis Jr.  
1937 Peter Krumbhaar & David Krumbhaar  
1938 F. E. Dixon Jr. & Wilmont Lewis Jr. and  
John Banes & Edward Clay Jr,  
1939 P. B. Fisher Jr. & William O. Christian Jr. & H. E.  
Wulsin  
1940 David Krumbhaar & W. O. Christian Jr. & P. C. M.  
Butler  
1952 Timothy Reath  
1953 George Reath Jr.  
1954 Florence Wetherill Schroeder

**Winners of Independence Day Trophy  
Presented by Commodore Alan J. Goldstein**

1990 John Banes  
1991 Alan Goldstein  
1992 Alan Goldstein  
1993 Alan Goldstein  
1994 John Banes  
1995 J. Taylor Crandall  
1996 Anthony Harwood  
1997 Anthony Harwood  
1998 Alan Goldstein  
1999 Alan Goldstein  
2000 John Banes  
2001 Alan Goldstein  
2002 Rick Hauck



2003 Anthony Harwood  
2004 Rick Hauck  
2005 Rick Hauck  
2006 Alan Goldstein  
2007 Alan Goldstein  
2008 Windsor Coffin  
2009 Alan Goldstein  
2010 Rick Hauck  
2011 Rick Hauck

**Winners of Alita Davis Weaver Memorial Cup  
July Series  
Presented by Alita Weaver Reed**

1990 Alan Goldstein  
1991 Alan Goldstein  
1992 Alan Goldstein  
1993 Alan Goldstein  
1994 Alan Goldstein  
1995 Alan Goldstein  
1996 Anthony Harwood  
1997 Anthony Harwood  
1998 Anthony Harwood  
1999 Alan Goldstein  
2000 Alan Goldstein  
2001 Rick Hauck  
2002 Sam Heffner  
2003 Anthony Harwood  
2004 Sam Heffner  
2005 Alan Goldstein  
2006 Rick Hauck

2007 Alan Goldstein  
2008 Rick Hauck  
2009 Alan Goldstein  
2010 Alan Goldstein  
2011 Alan Goldstein

**Winners of August Series Cup  
Presented by F. E. Dixon Jr.**

1990 Alan Goldstein  
1991 Alan Goldstein  
1992 Alan Goldstein  
1993 Alan Goldstein  
1994 Alan Goldstein  
1995 Alan Goldstein  
1996 Anthony Harwood  
1997 Alan Goldstein  
1998 Anthony Harwood  
1999 Anthony Harwood  
2000 Anthony Harwood  
2001 Anthony Harwood  
2002 Anthony Harwood  
2003 Alan Goldstein  
2004 Anthony Harwood  
2005 Anthony Harwood  
2006 Alan Goldstein  
2007 Windsor Coffin  
2008 Rick Hauck  
2009 Alan Goldstein  
2010 Alan Goldstein  
2011 Alan Goldstein \* Only two races sailed

**Winners of the Carkhuff Memorial Trophy  
Presented by Ellin Dixon Miller and  
Bruce Miller  
For the Best Summer Record Overall**

2004 Sam Heffner  
2005 Alan Goldstein  
2006 Alan Goldstein  
2007 Alan Goldstein  
2008 Rick Hauck  
2009 Alan Goldstein  
2010 Alan Goldstein  
2011 Alan Goldstein