

**History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club: 1899—2024**  
**125th Anniversary**  
**Jim Ham—Brielle Borough Historian**



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Parts reprinted from *Manasquan River Yacht Club: 100 Years Revisited 1899-1999* by Nancy Stark McFadden, 1999, with permission of MRYC..

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## INTRODUCTION

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Brielle, which at the time was part of Wall Township, was characterized by numerous farms dotting its rolling hillsides and a landing, or dock, at the end of Union Lane where sloops conducted robust coastal trading. Around 1882, the railroad was extended from Manasquan through Brielle to Point Pleasant, Bay Head and ultimately onto Philadelphia. The railroad provided easy access to the Jersey shore from both the New York and Philadelphia metropolitan areas. As a result, Brielle, with its location on the Manasquan River and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, became a popular destination during the summer months for vacationers. Many boarding



houses, summer hotels and “cottages” were constructed along the Manasquan River to accommodate the influx of visitors who flocked to Brielle during the summer months. Brielle, with its location on the northern banks of the Manasquan River and its heritage of commercial coastal trading, quickly became the locus of boating activities on the river.

The story of organizing boating activities on the Manasquan River, which is the story of the Manasquan River Yacht Club, follows.

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## MRYC ORGANIZATION

In the fall of 1899, a group of people gathered in Brielle to discuss organizing the boating activities on the Manasquan River. Their story is best told by Nancy Stark McFadden's account of the proceedings:

*"It was 1899.....on the brink of fall that year, on September 13, sixteen people came together in the Union Lane home of John H. Folk, a summer resident from New York, to lay the foundation for the Manasquan River Yacht Club. It was a diverse group that gathered that day for this "Preliminary Meeting", half businessmen from New York City and northern New Jersey with the balance local residents from the surrounding area. All shared a common passion for sailing.*

*The group included many notable names from the early days of Brielle and included Capt. George Bailey, owner of a fleet of vessels operating from Maine to Florida; John Folk and sons, Frederick J. and Howard N. Folk; Willard Fisk, a celebrated attorney from Jersey City; Henry Wainwright, proprietor of the Union House at the foot of Union Lane; Frank Earle, Clinton Fisk, Joel Parker, Standish Nichols, Walter Nichols, S.B. Pearce, Edward Schroeder, Henry Bailey, Amos Rodgers and Samuel Storer. Willard Fisk was unanimously elected temporary chairman and Frederick Folk temporary secretary. Four committees were formed: Constitution & By-laws, Rules & Courses, Regatta and Membership.*

*The following June the group reconvened at Frederick Folk's home for their "organizational meeting". There were eighteen in all, including many of the original group, plus Capt. Forman O. Bailey, brother of George who operated a similar business to his brother's, John and Orrin Bailey, Capt. T.S.P. Brown, William Brainard, W. Van Leer and Ralph Pearce. At this meeting the group adapted a 1,000 word Constitution and By-laws that established four standing committees - House, Regatta, Timers & Measurers, and Membership – and also specified the Club's signal flag, which is the*



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## MRYC ORGANIZATION (Cont'd)

*which is the burgee that is flown to this day.*

*Although sailing activities on the Manasquan had gone on informally for more than 20 years, the formation of MRYC marked the formalization of sailing on the Manasquan.”*

## FIRST CLUBHOUSE

The next order of business for the club was to find a location for their sailing activities.....a clubhouse and a dock. Henry Wainwright offered the grounds of his hotel, the Union House at the foot of Union Lane, to the club to get activities underway. Fortuitously, this generous offer was declined as the Union House burned to the ground in February 1912.

Capt. T.S.P. Brown owned a tract of land at the river on the west side of Higgins Avenue directly across from the current day Bogan's Basin (at that time, Higgins Avenue led onto the old wooden wagon bridge that crossed the Manasquan River to Point Pleasant). Capt. Brown built Brown's Inn on this site in 1890. This hotel burned down and was replaced by a building called "Wheelman's Rest", which was a combination of wheelhouse rest stop for cyclists and an ice cream pavilion.



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## FIRST CLUBHOUSE (Cont'd)

As there was also a dock located directly in front of the building, this location was quickly targeted as MRYC's potential first clubhouse. At an August 1900 Executive Committee meeting, Capt. Brown offered to lease the building to the club for \$30 per year for the 1901 season with a promise to do a small amount of painting and repairs.

Membership during the first summer season of 1900 totaled 85. Initiation fees were initially \$3 (waived until membership reached 100) and dues were \$3 annually. In 1902, rent was increased to \$50, and the tennis court was added to the grounds. The Executive Committee also hired Amos Rogers as the club's steward for the first season at \$30 per month. It's not certain how long Amos Rogers served, though it is known that he was an MRYC member for many years.

## MRYC MOVES UPRIVER

Activities at the club developed rapidly with many cups and special races adding to the growing interest in sailboat racing at the club. To accommodate the growth of the club's activities, a new location came under discussion in late 1903.

Nancy Stark McFadden's account of these discussions follows:

*"A new location for the club came under discussion as early as December 1903, when a committee was appointed to explore either expanding the present clubhouse or finding another site. Several locations were considered, including ones to the east of the bridge and across the river in Point Pleasant.*

*Then in June 1905, MRYC leased a narrow strip of land, immediately west of the current club's location, from George Rankin for \$75 per year for three years. Two bids*

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## MRYC MOVES UPRIVER (Cont'd)

*for building a new clubhouse were considered. The job was awarded to Fred LaVance on the lower bid of \$895. Most likely construction was completed quickly in 1905, for when the Trustees met on September 1, 1905,.....they approved construction of solid shutters for the clubhouse windows. MRYC now had a home, if not the land, of its own."*

Furthermore, in September 1905 the club's Certificate of Incorporation was recorded at the County Clerk's office. This document is the first record of the club's stated mission:

*"The purposes for which the corporation is formed are to promote yachting and other sports on the Manasquan River, and to provide social entertainment for the members."*





# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## MRYC's Clubhouse Over the Years



# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## A PERMANENT HOME

No sooner had construction of the club's new clubhouse finished in 1905 when an opportunity for a permanent home for MRYC suddenly appeared.

Prior to the building of MRYC's new clubhouse in 1905, the land east and immediately adjacent to the club's new facilities, the Wiley Estate, was sold to the Manasquan River Land Company in 1901

Following is Nancy Stark McFadden account of what transpired:

*"In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Wiley had raced his sailboat on the Manasquan River. William and his wife Phoebe owned the land from the river to Riverview Drive as evidenced even today by the brick columns at the north end of Riverview Lane that once marked the entrance to their property.*

*In January 1906, MRYC purchased from the Manasquan River Land Company the parcel of land (part of the former Wiley estate) on which the clubhouse and pool now sit. The cost was \$1,900.*

*MRYC acquired a second adjoining parcel in 1907 from club members Mattie and George Plume. The Plumes in 1905 had purchased part of the Wiley estate to the east and north of the initial parcel purchased by MRYC. Living in the old Wiley home, the Plumes wished to preserve their unobstructed view of the river. So, in September 1907 they sold MRYC an additional 90 feet to the north of MRYC's initial parcel in consideration for one-dollar and a covenant on MRYC's property that prohibited creation of any structure in an area extending up from the river from what is now the deep end of the pool.*

*Two days later, MRYC purchased from the Manasquan River Land Company a 2-foot by 40-foot strip adjacent to the piece purchased from the Plumes. This was a move to*



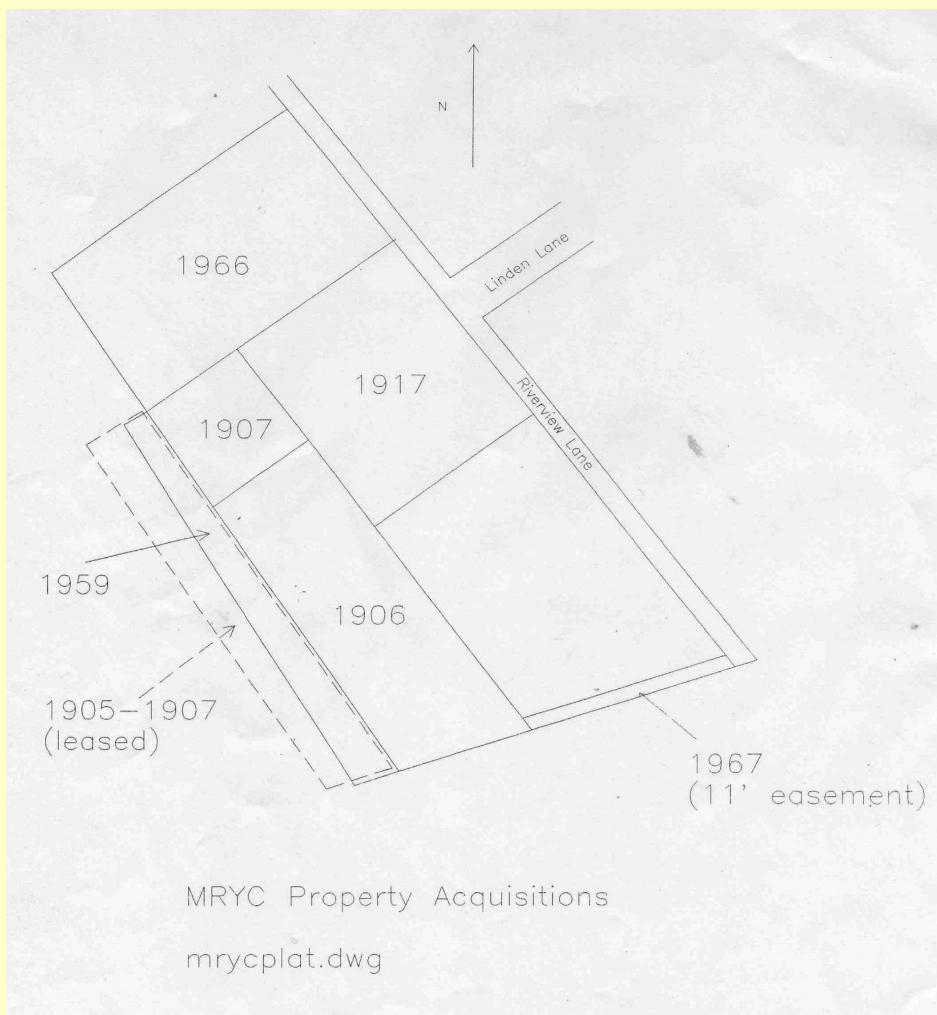
# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## A PERMANENT HOME

*minimize the chances of a street right-of-way, which could potentially cut across the property, from ever being used. Finally, ten years later, in February 1917, MRYC purchased from the Plumes the property where the tennis courts now sit for \$700.*

*Four decades would pass before MRYC made any more land acquisitions.”*

It appears that the club immediately moved the new clubhouse, that was built in 1905 on the adjacent, leased Rankin property, to the newly purchased “Wiley property”, as disbursement records in 1906 showed an expense of \$165 for “moving house”.



By the end of 1906.....seven years on, Manasquan River Yacht Club now had its own home on its own land! This home would remain MRYC’s clubhouse for more than 50 years until the early sixties.

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## STRONG FOUNDATION

The club continued to grow rapidly in its early days. Membership grew from 85 in the first summer of 1900 to 172 in 1907 and further expanded to 241 members by 1910.

To support this growth, the club's facilities needed to be upgraded and expanded. MRYC took out its first mortgage in 1906 for \$2,000 to finance the land acquisition, while the Women's Committee, forerunner of today's MRYC Women's Auxiliary, raised \$2,533 for the Building Fund. These funds were used for expansion of the clubhouse, dock and walks; purchase of furniture for the clubhouse; building new tennis courts; and various other facility needs.



# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## STRONG FOUNDATION (Cont'd)

One of the charter members of the club was Capt. S. Bartley Pearce. Capt. Pearce was a multi-talented individual. He was the town's first Fire Chief, owner of a boatyard on the river (located where current-day Hoffman's Marina is located) and a master boat builder. He built a variety of boats, many of which were in high demand from members of the club. Capt. Pearce was also involved in two very noteworthy events. First, he won international boating acclaim in 1907 when he helmed William Schroeder's Dixie in the International Cup Races on the English Channel. Against very experienced competition, the upstart Yankees' Dixie, piloted by Capt. Pearce, won the prestigious Harmsworth Trophy....a first for an American. Next, the railroad in 1907 wanted to build a solid-fill embankment across the river to support the railroad tracks. Capt. Pearce piloted an 80-foot ocean going yacht through the draw, anchoring the boat well upriver. This demonstrated that, contrary to the railroad's contention, that the river was navigable well upriver from the railroad bridge. As a result, the embankment was never approved by the government and the river remained open to the Atlantic Ocean.





# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## STRONG FOUNDATION (Cont'd)

In these early days of the club, in addition to sailing, tennis was a very popular activity at the club from its earliest days. The first formal tennis activity was a tennis tournament on September 3, 1910. The competition included Men's Singles and Doubles and mixed Doubles. In addition, card games were a daily activity with bridge whists played most Wednesday nights, while dances were held every Saturday night during the season.

## CHALLENGING YEARS

The years following the first World War were influenced by the great events of those days....the Great Depression and World War II, and a local event that threatened to permanently change the nature of the MRYC.

During the 1920's, the Point Pleasant Canal was completed which had a significant and unexpected impact on the Manasquan River. The canal's completion in December 1925 resulted in a significant volume of the river's tidal flow being diverted through the canal. The reduced flow through the Manasquan River's inlet resulted in the inlet silting up and blocking direct access to the

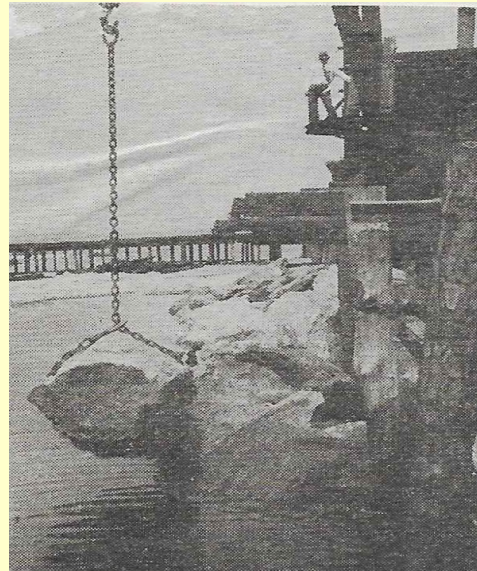


ocean. In addition, the composition of the river's waters became fresh water and there was minimal tidal action with the inlet closed. However, with the canal opened MRYC's sailors could get "downbay" and the lack of tidal flow allowed for more opportunities to sail as low tide was effectively eliminated.

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## CHALLENGING YEARS (Cont'd)

There were several manual attempts to open the inlet, with horses and fire hoses, during the latter half of the 1920's; none were successful. Finally, the Army Corps of Engineers started building two stone jetties and dredging the inlet in early 1930. The river once again merged with the ocean in February 1931 with the official opening ceremonies held in August of 1931.



During the Great Depression, the members struggled to keep the club open. But capable management of the club's affairs allowed the club to continue operating during these challenging times. As a concession to these difficult years, social events were opened to non-members. In 1932, MRYC completed construction of its first bulkhead and permanent dock, as well as dredging the basin and approach channel to the club. Because of the challenging economic times, it was very controversial to fund and complete this project, but in hindsight it was the correct decision to make. Another impact of the depression years was the club dropping the initiation fee in the mid-30's to \$30.

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## CHALLENGING YEARS (Cont'd)

The war years were a somber period for the club and the nation that brought additional challenges. Membership dropped from 147 in 1940 to under 100 members, as many people were off to the war. Because of the impact of the war on MRYC, membership comprised of mostly the young and the more senior members of the club. Despite these challenging times, it was a happy time for the young members of the club as the older members made sure that the youngsters could continue to enjoy many of the traditional activities of the club. Importantly, racing continued during the war years, though on an informal basis, with an unusual assortment of sail boats. Sneaks, a moth, a duck boat and a snipe were some of the boats that made up the sailing fleet during these times!



Post war in 1946, was a jubilant time at the club, as members started returning to the club. Membership bounced back to 162 in 1946 and to 172 in the following year. The club was back stronger than ever with a full schedule of events in both 1947 and 1948!



# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## BABY BOOM YEARS

MRYC's 50th anniversary was celebrated on September 3, 1949, which served to kick off the "baby boom" years at the club. MRYC membership grew steadily during these times, peaking at 264 in both 1962 and 1963. Dues in 1952 were \$10 active/\$12.50 spouse/\$25 family, increasing to \$15/\$15/\$30 in 1960 and further to \$20/\$20/\$35 in 1961. Beyond sailing, daily activities in the early 1950's included tennis, horseshoes, water sports, archery, croquet, badminton and table tennis...a full spectrum of sporting activities!

As a byproduct of the growth of MRYC during the 1950's, by the end of the decade the club was outgrowing its facilities. So, in the late 1950's plans were developed for a new, modern clubhouse and a 30-by-60-foot Olympic sized swimming pool with an adjoining terrace. In April 1961 Brielle's Borough Council gave the green light for construction. After that summer season, the old clubhouse was demolished. For most members, it was a sad occasion to see the old clubhouse torn down, as there were many fond memories associated with it over the years. One last party, a costume party, was held on September 16<sup>th</sup> to wish it good-bye.



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## BABY BOOM YEARS (Cont'd)

Finally, after many contributions from club members, the new clubhouse was dedicated in June 1962, with Howard N. Folk, an original founder, on hand to play a role in the dedication ceremony of the club he helped found 60 years prior. The new clubhouse, while bigger and more modern than the original, was also winterized. Because of this feature, it marked the beginning of year-round club life and activities.

During this time, for the first time since 1917, there were additional land acquisitions. In September 1959, a narrow strip of land on the western boundary of the club, adjacent to BelAire Street, was purchased. In March 1966, MRYC acquired the entire Wade estate, which was all the property west of Riverview Lane up to Riverview Drive. The club resold all this land except for where the picnic area is now. Similarly, in 1966 the club purchased and then in 1967 sold the home and property next door to the Wrights, leasing from them an eleven-foot strip along the bulkhead.

The same year MRYC dedicated its new clubhouse, brought another important event for the club. After many years of trying, MRYC was finally admitted into the Barnegat Bay Yacht Racing Association (BBYRA), due in no small part to the efforts of Commodore Ward Wight. This membership opened many more racing opportunities for the club. MRYC's success in the BBYRA is evidenced by the many wheels of Bay Championship flags hanging in the main hall of the clubhouse.

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## PRE-CENTENNIAL YEARS

Let me conclude this history of MRYC with the years preceding the club's centennial in 1999.

In 1974, as the club celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, many of the baby boomers became adults, maintained their memberships and enrolled their children in many of the club's various activities.....including sailing, tennis and swimming.

In 1975, a key capital improvement was to install air conditioning in the clubhouse. 1975 also brought the initiation of ocean racing. This was supported by the discovery of the Atlantic Handicap Racing Fleet Organization. The first race was the Wardell Memorial Trophy Race held on June 14, 1975. Due to very heavy fog, the race was postponed to September 6<sup>th</sup> with 18 boats racing from the Inlet to Shark River and back, with Al Bessemer's American Jane the winner.

1976 brought the country's bicentennial and MRYC celebrated by shooting off 200 fireworks from the club's west dock.

In the winter of 1985-86, the "Manasquan River Boat Works", as it was affectionately called, got underway. With member Don Loughran as the catalyst, plans for a pram design were secured with these sail boats built by hand by club members. As there was no class for these sail boats in BBYRA, these MRYC prams only sailed on the Manasquan River.

During the 1990's, the clubhouse and grounds began to show their age and needed some refurbishing. In 1994, the pool deck's concrete surface was replaced with pavers; in 1996 the lady's room was renovated; in 1997 the dormers were removed from the pool-side roof as a new roof installed; in the Spring of 1998 an entire new bulkhead was put in with a new lift included; and in 1999 the men's



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## THE 2000's

The years after the centennial has seen the continued evolution of the club.... with a key link to it's past!

As previously highlighted, in 1966 the club purchased some property west of Riverview Lane, from the end of the parking lot to Riverview Drive. The club then resold this land. In 1966, MRYC also bought the house and adjoining property to the east, and a few months later re-sold it to the Wright family.

Now, around 50 years later in 2014, the club re-acquired the Wright family property and demolished the house...and yes, the house was the original Wiley home from the early days of the club. The land remained empty until COVID erupted in 2020 closing the clubhouse. During these trying times, a tent was erected on this empty land so the members could safely gather when most other public places were closed....and this is how "The Bluffs" were born on a beautiful ridge overlooking the waterfront. The Bluffs have now become a central place for club members to gather and socialize during the summer season.

2017 saw another key addition to the club, as MRYC's bar was opened representing the first major addition to the clubhouse in decades. Next, the kitchen was renovated, which in turn allowed the addition of a professional restaurant service.

2024 saw the MRYC celebrate its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary...it's Quasquicentennial! A gala party was held to celebrate this important club anniversary, which culminated in a fireworks display over the river that has been central to the club over the years, the beautiful Manasquan River. As the club looks forward, due to the ongoing stewardship of its members, MRYC is well positioned to continue to be an important part of the social fabric of our 'Town by the River', Brielle.

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## MRYC FLEET

In MRYC's early years, the club's sailboat fleet was mainly cat boats, which is a sailboat with a single sail on a single mast set forward on the bow with a shallow draft. Around 1911, sloops began replacing cat boats. Sloops have two sails attached to the mast...a small jib in the front and a larger main sail. In addition, around this time a new class of One Design "Class C" sail boats were also introduced to the fleet.

In the early Thirties, Perrine Sneakboxes became popular. These sail boats were primarily built by J. Howard Perrine of Barnegat. A sneakbox is a small 15-foot sailboat with a single sail attached to the mast. In 1957, an improved version of the sneakbox, the Beaton Sneakbox, was introduced to the club and eventually replaced the aging Perrine sneakboxes. By around 1960, the sneakbox fleet at the club totaled around 20 boats.

In 1962, the Jet 14, a 14-foot dinghy boat with two sails, was introduced to the club. The Jet 14 was a fast boat of fiberglass construction. In the following year, M-16 or M-scows, another dinghy sailboat with two sails, made its debut at MRYC. In the Seventies, both Blue Jays and Lasers were added to the fleet. In 1973, the club's fleet consisted of 23 sneakboxes, 7 Jets, 13 M-scows, 2 E-scows and 27 duck boats....quite a large and diverse fleet!

Finally, in the winter of 1985-86, member Don Loughran obtained plans for a pram design sailboat, which could be raced as either a cat (one sail) or sloop (two sail) boat by moving the mast forward. Eighteen Optimist prams, or "Optis", were hand-built by members of the club and are sailed every year in the winter series that runs from November through April....by only the hardest sailors!

# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club

## MRYC FLEET (Cont'd)



< Cat Boats (1909)

Perrine Sneakboxes >  
(1954)



< Beaton Sneakboxes  
(1971)



Optimist Prams >  
(1985-86)



## The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club Commodores

1900.....Willard C. Fisk	1970.....Carl M. Wiedmann
1902.....Frank Brainard	1972.....Leonard G. Rydhold
1903.....E. Carroll Beckel	1973.....Howard H. Wright
1905.....Clinton Fisk	1975.....F. Michael Heinrich
1906.....Albert H. Ellis	1977.....Oliver B. Conover
1908.....Edwin B. Heyes	1979.....William E. La Rue
1910.....Richard B. Beaumont	1981.....Robert A. Schwarz
1912.....Edwin B. Heyes	1983.....Donald R. Lintner
1914.....Edmond S. Higgins	1985.....J. Gregory Deppeler
1916.....William M. Morgan	1989.....F. Michael Heinrich
1918.....Frederick N. Watts	1990.....James I. Dunn
1920.....Richard B. Beaumont	1992.....G. Wayne Patterson
1923.....T. Tasso Fischer	1994.....Robert S. Underhill
1925.....William B. Leavens	1996.....Dennis M. Day
1927.....Walter B. Browne	1998.....David S. Kuykendall
1928.....Charles L. Frazier	2000.....C. Winslow Miller
1929.....Harry Q. Mahle	2002.....J. David McFadden
1931.....Mott V. Marcellus	2004.....Richard A. Carton
1934.....John E. Wade	2006.....Carl A. Nordell
1935.....William J. Heidt	2008.....Robert Zilai
1936.....John E. Wade	2010.....Edward Thomson
1939.....William J. Heidt	2012.....Nancy Kerr
1940-57.....John E. Wade	2013.....Keith Kernan
1958.....Richard R. Cocks	2015.....Ken Olenyik
1960.....John H. Deppeler, Jr.	2017.....Patricia Surdovel
1963.....Thomas W. Mason	2019.....James Aridas
1965.....L. Ward Wight	2021.....Elizabeth Baccaro
1968.....James E. Kelly	2023.....Kevin Carton



# The History of The Manasquan River Yacht Club 2024 Aerial

