

History of the G.R.B.C.

IT WAS A REAL BOAT CLUB YEARS AGO

Thirty-two years ago on July 17, 1872 the Grand River Boat club was incorporated in this city. The names of the ten members who signed the articles are B.H. Berry, William A. Bernard, L.C. Butler, E.C. Chapin, W.C. Ten Eyck, H.T. Carpenter, J.T. Page, L.S. Hudson, T.W. Westcott and S.S. Olds. Mr. Berry was the first president: Mr. Bernard the first vice president: W.C Ten Eyck was secretary: H.T. carpenter, treasurer, and E.C. Chapin, coxswain. The club started with forty-five active and ten honorary members.

It was real boat club in those days: races were lost and won, not only between members but in struggles with rival organizations of a kindred character.

Amateur boat racing was as popular in those days as football is today. Matches between two or more crews in the same town and larger meets where the number of towns were represented called out the same enthusiastic crowds that assemble around the gridiron today. From some of the early members the facts in regard to these races have been mostly obtained.

The club started with two boats, an eight-oared barge and a four oared shell. During the first two years the races were entirely between the club crews and were rowed on the Grand river, and the vigorous practice kept up enabled them to make a pretty showing at these.

In 1874, the club having bought a six oared shell went to Spring Lake where a race was rowed first with two crack Detroit crews and also against Chicago boatmen.

The first honors won from strangers came in 1875, when a crew went to Toledo to participate in one of the races of the Northwestern association. From the Toledo Blade of August 5, 1875, the following is taken:

“The first race was the pulling against time by the following barge crew, they having no competitors. Club colors, red, white and blue. Stroke, R.J. Shank; second, A.H. Whitehead, third, C.D. Kingsley; fourth, Hugh Lyons; fifth, William E. Crossett; sixth, E.F. Cooley; seventh, M.J. Buck; bow, L.H. Briggs.” The Blade adds: “They swept down the course in fine style and made the two miles in 14.54 1-2, having a difficult course to pull over on account of the current.”

The following Fourth of July the Lansing men were in Detroit where they rowed an eight-oared boat against seven ten-oared ones, winning the race by a quarter of a minute. Beautiful gold badges were given for prizes in this race and the following members of the crew received them: Stroke, R.J. Shank; second, A.H. Whitehead; third, E.F. Cooley; fourth, W. Logie; fifth, W.E. Crossett; sixth, W.W. Staley; seventh, M.J. Buck; eighth, L.H. Briggs; cox, Thomas Carpenter.

Vigorous practice was maintained and many home exhibitions given during the two years following. One note worthy incident of 1876 was that on January first of that year when the crew of eight went down the river on a practice row, the fact speaking well for the weather.

In 1877 the club met its Waterloo. A ten-oared barge was taken to Detroit to row against the great clubs there. The Detroiters were smarting still over their defeat of the previous year and the failure of their attempts to discredit the Lansing men, and were out for visitor, which they achieved. This defeat ended the first chapter of the club's history.



In 1882 M.J. Buck and Charles Holden reorganized the club. New members came in, practice on the water was resumed, and again a good racing crew was gotten together in spite of some indifference and discouragement. As he had never withdrawn, Mr. Buck thus holds the only continuous membership in the club.

The first year's barge was used when practice was first resumed, but later two-oared working boats were purchased and the club recommenced its practice of having races between its own members.

The following year two crews went to Grand Ledge on the Fourth of July and gave an exhibition race. This fired the Grand Ledger's with enthusiasm and induced them to organize a boat club which did not long survive however.

In 1883 the club rowed in the races organized by the Mississippi Valley association at Pullman, Ill., and in 1884 they again encountered Detroit with a four-oared shell. The Grand Ledge club defeated the Lansing crew in a Fourth of July contest at Grand Ledge in 1885 and late that same autumn M.J. Buck and J. Edward Roe went with a pair-oar shell to Grand Rapids to race against two Detroit crews. Mr. Roe was taken ill and Fred Blair rowed the race with Mr. Buck, the Lansing men winning in the race. At this meet Mr. Buck was elected to the executive board of the North western association, remaining a member for ten years.

For two or three years practice was kept up and how races rowed by the club crews, but finally the dam in the river lowered the water so that good racing was no longer possible. There was no question then however, of disbanding the club; its hold become strong and the members turned to entertainment of another sort which became as successful in its way as the racing had been. The organization was very strong socially and its annual balls were an event for the people all over the state for years.

About five years ago whist entered into the scheme of things and the Michigan Whist association has been twice entertained in its parlors; the first time in the old hall on Washington avenue north and the second in the new quarters on Michigan avenue.

The most prominent men in town have always been members of the Grand River Boat club. Its parties of whatever kind are important social events in the city and membership in the club is a much desired honor. The club now has nearly two hundred members. Its president is Hon. J.V. Barry; vice president, A.A. Piatt; secretary, Robert Y Larned; treasurer, George Van Buren; coxswain, R. E. Brackett, Jr.

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