

HISTORIAN'S REPORT TO OFF SOUNDINGS BOARD
ARCHIVES ARRANGEMENT AND FUTURE PROCEDURES

TO: Board of Governors, Off Soundings Club

FROM: Neal H. O'Connell, Historian

SUBJECT: Reorganization of the Off Soundings Club's Archives

DATE: January 14, 2003

On January 13, 1984 the Board voted "to donate our archives to the Mystic Seaport Museum for safe keeping". Since then these archives have been updated by the mailings that go to our general membership, mailings by the Secretary of Board minutes and pertinent attachments and the addition of some newspaper clippings and miscellaneous items. I found these records were as originally presented to the Mystic Seaport, added to in kind and need of attention.

Starting in mid 2002 and finishing in early 2003 your Historian, as a Seaport volunteer, inventoried, reorganized, added to and indexed the archives to the standards of the G. W. Blunt White Library.

Some records were missing, most noticeably those pertaining to race activities in the 1950's. A list of all current members whose date of election was 1959 and prior was developed in an attempt to obtain the missing records. A number of these individuals were contacted either by phone or letter by Bruce Lockwood and me. Though a number of enjoyable phone calls resulted only limited information for the mid 1950's was obtained from Jack English. Eileen Ames and Donald Robinson were also contacted. It is my opinion that further research would be useless.

Recent missing administrative data was obtained from Dick Roberts, Andy Anderson and Norm Peck.

The records have been organized into four categories:

Race information – Thought it varies somewhat over time and special circumstances, the usual flow of information is an early warning during the first quarter of the year's race dates, usually a spring and fall race. At the beginning of the second quarter, a First Race Notice is sent that gives general information about where and when, arrangements for anchoring /mooring and dinning, and the requirements for entering. A Final Notice is mailed the week before the race, usually in June. This Final Notice includes a listing of the boats entered by class, a sail number sequential identification list, class starting times, race courses, the rules of the race and any general last minute instructions. In June or July, spring results are mailed, recently with the First Notice for the fall. The fall Final Notice goes out in September. Final results for the fall race and combined results for the year are mailed in October.

In some instances newspaper articles about specific races and magazine articles about the Club's race activities in general or a special event, our 50th anniversary for instance, are filed with race results or are loose.

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Administrative information – Administrative activities are the behind the scenes work required to provide a spring and fall race and promote the “good fellowship of sailing”. Most administrative data is generated by three Board of Governors’ meetings (minutes and board and committee chairmen reports) and notices to the membership of a Winter Party (the early years), the Annual Meeting and Shore Party, and special communications to the membership such as the Commodores Winter News Letter.

Members’ information – Until 1948 membership information was kept in a small ledger. This ledger is in the library files as well as a complete file of “Members Books” from 1948 to 2001.

In addition to the membership roster, the Members Book contains the current officers and committee chairmen, constitution, by-laws, individuals who have won the perpetual and special trophies since inception of the trophy, a summary of each trophy’s deed of gift, past officers, the fleet and, recently, the deceased and new members since the last booklet.

Communications about new members has changed. Currently, a list of proposed members (posting) is mailed to the membership for review. If there is no objection, membership is automatic after 30 days. In earlier years the election of new members was communicated to members but apparently without any membership review.

Membership postings are often included with race notices and will be with the “Race Information” when so noted on the race notice. Otherwise they will be with “Administrative Information”.

Miscellaneous: This category contains information for which it is helpful to have a rather complete file on the subject in one place rather than mixed in among other administrative data. At this time the category contains a copy of our “Precedent Setting Decisions”, planning and venue studies, a copy of the history of the Club at the time of it’s 50th anniversary, old procedure write-ups and some personal files of past officers of the Club. The information is largely a duplicate of material spread throughout the administrative files.

There was other information in the archives. Photo albums of OSC events and loose pictures of what look like the Cruising Club or New York Yacht Club race activity. Unfortunately nothing is labeled so these pictures have limited value from a historical perspective. They appear to be largely pictures of Southworth friends and crew sailing, playing and partying during the early years of the Club. Also included was a book given to the Club that mentions the Off Soundings Club. Finally a gavel was included that had been presented to Ed Southworth who founded the Club. These items will be sent to the appropriate Mystic Seaport department by the library for inclusion in their files.

An outline of file organization and specific contents was given to the library, which they will computerize and use to prepare permanent labels and a master index for the Off Soundings Club archives. I am told that this will be done before the time of our next meeting.

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If we are to maintain these files in a reasonable manner in the future we have to expend some effort or money. I think a better result will be forthcoming if we expend some effort. With this in mind, I make the following suggestions.

The Historian's duties are written in the club constitution as " It shall be the duty of the Historian to keep the historical records of the club on file in a safe repository". The W. L. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport is a safe repository. However, the records are given to the library and are not ours. The staff is available, accommodating and helpful but we need to recognize that our records are just a small part of a significant historical collection.

Thus to accomplish his duties the Historian needs to assure that the appropriate procedures to get information to the library are working, that the library is properly filing and cataloguing the information and additional should add any appropriate information to the files.

I believe that the best way to accomplish this as follows:

- Continue to send a copy of all mailings to the general membership to the W. L. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, PO Box 6000, Mystic, CT 06355.
- Continue to have the Secretary mail copies of Board minutes and appropriate officer and committee chairmen reports to the above address. By appropriate I mean all written reports of the secretary, treasurer, race secretary and all reports of other officers and committee chairmen not fully covered by the board minutes.
- Collect all available publication material that concerns Off Soundings and see to it that it is included in the files. Such information is placed in acetate folders and a copy is made as well because newsprint deteriorates quickly and it gives copy in a convenient format for copying by researchers. It is much easier to make these copies before going to the library as it is an awkward, time consuming process.
- At least annually, verify that the library has received all the information it should have received and that it has been properly filed and catalogued. I think that the best way to see that this is done is to volunteer to do the job.

