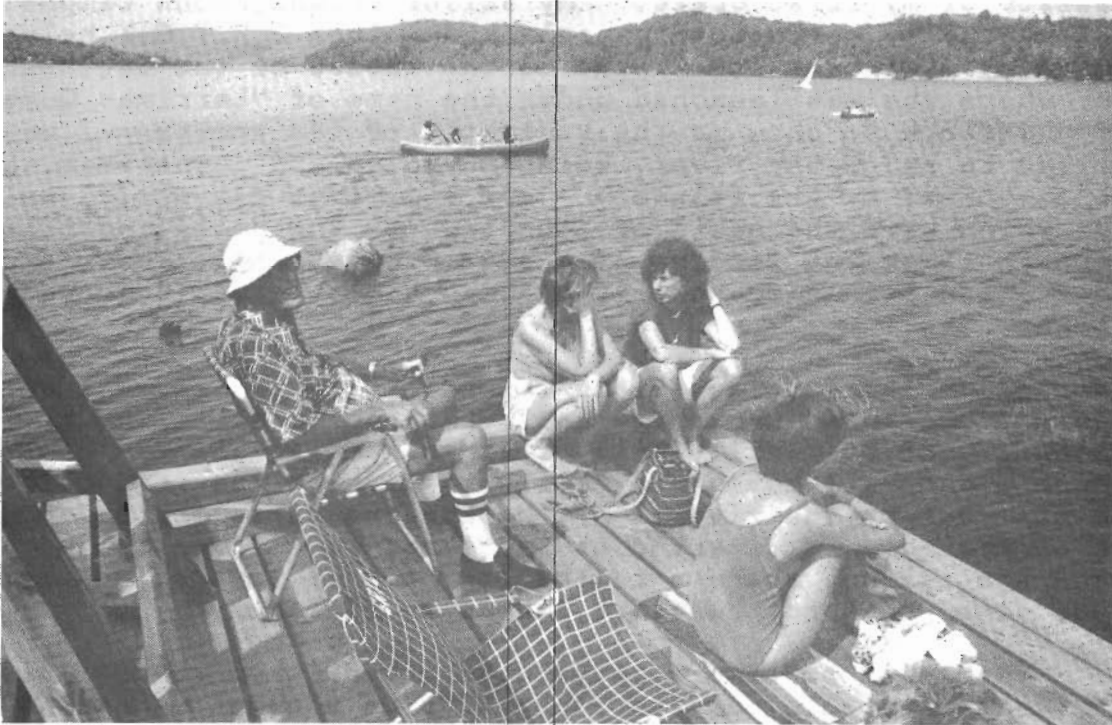


ME AND GRYC

By Patrick (PMO) Evans,
Founder member and Past-Commodore (1969 - 1970)



It's hard to realize that any member of the Gatineau River Yacht Club under the age of twenty five has never known the time when our Greek (GRYC) Islands have not been home port for the Club. They cannot remember, and most of us can't, when the islands were not islands but part of the river's West shoreline. Then came the construction of both the Chelsea electrical dam and the one at Farmer's Rapids. Their erection in 1925/26 of course backed up the water, widening the river, making new islands and "drowning" others. The railroad had to be relocated prior to the flooding, as did the the highway. In fact the old highway was the road that leads to the Club and which now stops at the river edge.

In 1951 I moved to the Gatineau from Ottawa, staying with friends who had built a permanent home at Larrimac where once they had cottaged. I became their "star boarder" for some thirteen years.

About the mid 50's, against my friends' well-intentioned advice about logs in the river I decided to buy a sailboat. Upon the tip from a sailing friend I made a bid for a 14-foot Rhodes Bantam which was the class boat of the Civil Servants' Recreation Association. The R.A. sailed their fleet at Dow's Lake and were at the time changing the class of old Bantams for a more modern one. My bid was successful and I became the proud possessor of my first craft. My sailor friend, John Campbell (who eventually moved to Gleneagle and joined G.R.Y.C.) helped me to move my boat from Dow's Lake to the waters of the Gatineau River where she was launched under the name of "Larrimac Queen". John undertook to show me the rudiments of the sport. I was thrilled to be on the river, being moved up and downstream, at no expense to me, by the friendly - and sometimes not so friendly - winds which have the habit of bouncing off the hills and trees, making at times the finding of a true wind a challenge indeed. It has often been said that if one can sail the Gatineau one can sail anywhere.

Under the tutelage of my friend, in time I found I could leave the "Queen's" anchorage and return to it all without wetting a paddle. Willy-Nilly I had become a sailor - of sorts. Soon John Campbell moved his family to the Gatineau and joined me with his boat on the river. It became the habit for us to do a spot of racing. We started at Larrimac, raced down to and around the island, then on to the log boom at Tenaga, returning by the same route to the start, where we finished.

From time to time we inveigled others whom we met sailing on the river to join our fun. By 1959 we thought we had something going and as a rather brash suggestion from me, still a neophyte sailor, I asked how about forming a sailing club. As the idea only came to me late in the season, while there was some enthusiasm it was thought that the following Spring would be a better time to consider the matter.

Spring came and with it changed circumstances. Some of the previous Summer's sailors, for some reason or other, did not return to launch their boats. However these were replaced by newcomers. Several impromptu meetings were held on cottage verandahs and at the anchorages to discuss the formation of a boat club. Enthusiasm waxed and waned and the scheme, in spite of good intentions, did not take shape. This sort of thing persisted until the autumn of 1962 when our hands were forced. This is how it happened:

At the foot of what is now the yacht club road (old Highway 11) a squared log boom stretched on the water from the road-end to the cottages on the left bank. This boom, at the time, was the only access to these cottages and this meant that all groceries and supplies had to be carried the length of the boom.

Several of us had made a somewhat loose arrangement to make fast our boats, three or four of them, to the boom. Regrettably some of us were not too seamanlike in this operation, with the result that some near-accidents took place as the cottagers made their separate ways along the floating pathway.



In late August it was gently suggested that the sailors might find alternate moorings in 1963. We readily agreed to this affable request and as a result five of us met, on September 2nd, in the living room of the late Ivan Herbert (the five being Ivan Herbert, Al Richens, Gerry Byers, the late John Winfield and your truly) to discuss our joint problem. It was at this meeting I recalled to mind my several aborted attempts at forming a club over the past three years. Perhaps this might be the opportunity to again broach the subject. Together as a team we might achieve our aim where singly we might not. To my delight there was general agreement that a boat club might just be the answer.

One of our number was aware that the CPR railway bridge at Ironside was under repairs which consisted of replacing the timbering. A phone message or two and we found ourselves in possession of the discarded squared timber provided we carted it away. Within two weeks our small organization was increased by three new members, and we went into the timber trucking business, piling the timbers neatly at the end of the yacht club hill. Within six weeks the number of members had grown to 24.

All that winter we met, discussing this and deciding that. Ivan became President of the Gatineau Boat Club, I myself was Secretary, Alex Wylie was Treasurer and Gerry Byers, Harbourmaster.

By Spring we had grown to 90 members. The club had become the Gatineau River Boat Club (later to be changed to its present name the Gatineau River Yacht Club, upon the instigation of the Canadian Yachting Association). Various committees had been formed and arrangements had been made to rent Rita Mitchell's white cottage at the bottom of the hill as a clubhouse. What activity there was to make ready the cottage and to launch our garnered squared timbers as a floating jetty, at right angles to the hill!

It was not all work however as we managed to run two regattas along with a series of races for members. The juniors were not forgotten, being taught to sail, swim and canoe. They even held their own regatta.

A programme of social and fund-raising events rounded out the season of 1963 - our very first. By the time of the 1963 annual meeting our membership (number of heads) had grown to an astonishing 181, and the membership fees were only \$15.00 per family or \$10.00 for a singleton - and no initiation fee.

This first annual meeting was a crucial one to the fledgeling club. In spite of the huge membership at the season's end the Board of Directors felt that it was desirable to have the assurance that the members' initial enthusiasm would not evaporate when the going got a little tough. We had had our first experience of this as two of the founding members had resigned over a matter of policy and started a splinter group. Upon it being pointed out that there was only room for one sailing club on the Gatineau River, and that rival organizations would only lead to the failure of both, one of the two returned to the fold but the other remained adamant. To replace the dissidents a new president, George Cochrane, and vice-president, Arn Wilson (soon to become Commodore and Vice-Commodore) had been requested to fill the breach. A second matter, not on the agenda, also had to be dealt with and this hinged upon the first.

The first problem was no problem at all. The members present showed by their presence and their discussions of next season's sailing plans that the fears of the Board members were groundless.

The second question which did not appear on the prepared agenda had only erupted on the very afternoon of the evening's annual meeting and this is what happened:

Frank Macintyre, the real estate agent, had phoned me, as the Club's secretary, to say that the islands were to be placed on the market and would the Club be interested in purchasing them as a future home for the membership? Obviously this question was posed at a most opportune moment but time did not permit me to advise either the Commodore or Vice-Commodore so the announcement came as a bombshell to all present.

Excitement prevailed as one might expect and there was much discussion. It was finally resolved that the Board of Directors was requested to look into the feasibility of the proposal and report back to the membership on the findings.

That winter of 1963-4 was not a restful one for the members of the Board. How does an organization with such low membership fees and absolutely no collateral purchase a couple of islands and a summer cottage for a sum even as small as \$10,000 to \$15,000. The Board met eight times during the winter and there were dozens of 'phone calls and face-to-face meetings in twos and threes.

A plan, the details of which are too lengthy to be included herewith, was presented to the membership at a General Meeting on April 8, 1964 at which the Board was authorized to make an offer of purchase for the property. May 1st was the Red Letter Day when G.R.Y.C. took possession.

That was the beginning. A more complete account of the first five years and memories of those earlier years appeared in the 1982 Annual Report. And somewhere is the Club's Log Book which faithfully recorded all G.R.Y.C. happenings in full detail and pictures, for the first eight years. These recordings make good reading and are a reminder of 25 years of happiness for so many.

Wishing all fair winds and a snug harbour

As always

Pat.