

# HARVEY'S LAKE.ORG

## Power Boat Races 1950s

By F. Charles Petrillo



The "Miss Helen," a 22 ft. all mahogany Cris-Craft was a fast boat for it's time. The 1927 6 cylinder Scripps Marine engine could deliver 30 miles per hour in the water. Owned by E.F. Schmaltz, the boat was named for his daughter Helen. Both are sitting in front of the craft in this 1928 photo.

In the late 1930s a number of summer Lake residents with a common interest in motor boats began to host informal gatherings at various Lake cottages.

In 1939, led by "Acting Commodore" Reese Meredith, serious discussion began to consider hosting motor boat races sanctioned by the American Power Boat Association (APBA). The Power Boat Association was a national speed boat organization formed in 1903 and it currently is an affiliate of the *Union Internationale Motonautique*, a world governing power boat association. The Harvey's Lake Boat Club was incorporated in 1940 with Attorney (later Judge) Frank L. Pinola as Commodore to qualify for APBA racing.

There were earlier precedents for both the boat club and speedboat races at the Lake. In 1915 an informal association of cottage owners met as the Harvey's Lake Club and sponsored social and recreational events including boat races.

In 1927-30 speed boat races were sponsored by the Harvey's Lake Protective Association over a 2.5 mile oval course. Early racers were William Davis in a hydroplane;



**Outboard boat in a 1952 race**

Robert Rosenbluth in a 200 H.P. Hacker Craft; Emerson Schmaltz in a Chris-Craft; Warner Goff in a Dodge; O.H. Mullison in a Fay Bowan. Active in this period and in succeeding decades was John Zorzi, a Wilkes-Barre motorboat dealer who had a boat launching site at the Lake.

These early races were 5 mile events, twice around a course. William V. Davis won the event in both 1927-28 but

in 1929 Robert Rosenbluth won the event in 8:31 minutes in a 200 H.P. Hadir-Dolphin with second place by Dean Carey in a 200 H.P. Chris-Craft. In the 100 H.P. or less class Helen Schmaltz won first place in her boat "Miss Helen" and Jack Zorzi took second in "Miss Wilkes-Barre."

The 1930 race was dominated by Dean Carey in a Century Hurricane hydroplane – beating William Davis' Bradley Peck, touted as the fastest boat on the Lake. Others in the races were T. Newell Wood, Jack Zorzi and William Woolbert.

The Harvey's Lake Boat Club APBA races were held on September 2, 1940. There were five events for different boat classes plus a "surf board" event – the latter won by Walter Woolbert. In the larger horsepower classes the 100 H.P. inboard event was won by Peter Bednarsky and the 150 H.P. inboard race by Donald Warner. In 1941 T. Newell Wood, in a hydroplane craft, was the overall winner in the free-for-all event. Other event winners were Jack McGee and Frank Pinola (tied) and William Woolbert. The Woolbert brothers, William, Robert and Walter, also gave an aquaplane exhibition.

The war years followed and APBA races were not held until 1954, although the Club held races among its own members during the intervening years. In September 1950 the Club also purchased a Club site, 50 feet of Lake frontage from K. Russell Smith, adjacent to his flying service near Alderson. In August 1957 races were held between the Club's members and Gilbert's Landing Boat Club, Lake Wallenpaupack. There were three race classes and all were dominated by Gilbert's except for Lake racer George Gwillam. There were only twenty entries but the joint competition renewed interest in sanctioned APBA races.

In August 1954 the Lake Club and Gilbert's jointly sponsored an APBA race series with 75 boats from five states: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, New York and Delaware. The winners in the six classes were:

- A. Hydro, Cliff Miller, NY;

- B. Hydro, Henry Keller, PA;
- D. Hydro, Sherwood Wilson, PA;
- AU Stock Utility, Buddy Fleming, MD;
- BU Stock Utility , Donald Caldwell, PA;
- DU Utility Stock, Leon Pontius.

Sherwood Wilson, Trucksville, was the only local winner. This event was for outboard events with an APBA inboard event scheduled for Labor Day. In 1955 4,000 spectators watched as 75 drivers from eight states raced 125 various classes of boats in a five mile course marked out by four buoys. One driver flipped his boat twice but managed to finish the race. The winners were Class A Utility, William Chilton; Class B Utility, Ronald Zuback; Class D Utility, Dr. James Tower; Class A Hydroplane, William Chilton; Class B Hydroplane, Ronald Messenger; Class D Hydroplane, Bernard Ebert.

In 1956 the year's event was totally dominated by Leon Pontius and his brother Donald Pontius, of Hummels Wharf, PA. They captured four of the six events. Other winners were Terry Meekley, Lock Haven, and Howard Hett, Jr., Binghamton.

About 5,000 spectators viewed the 106 entries in the 1957 races. The usual states were represented, but also Florida. In Class A (30-35 MPH) Craig Dewald, Reading, won the Stock Utility and Hydroboat races. In Class B (35-40 MPH) George Kolego, MD, won the Stock Utility race and Jack Evans, NJ, won the Hydroboat race. In Class C (40-50 MPH) Dick Rees, PA, won the Stock Utility race and Bill Parker, NJ, won the Hydroboat race. In Class D (60-70 MPH) Rick Hart, Del, won the Stock Utility race and Michael AuClair, NY, the Hydroplane race.



**Preparation for the races at the Harvey's Lake Boat Club**

The 1958 race, however, only drew 42 entries who competed in a course of three laps around a two-mile course. There were six classes of races and the winners were: B-Hydro, Leonard Wilcox, NY; A-Hydro, Ronald Althouse, PA; D-Hydro, Walter DePew, NY; A-Runabout, Roger Hoffman, PA; B-Runabout, Robert McCan, PA; D-Runabout, Richard Kane, PA.

The 1958 races were the last APBA sanctioned outboard races. There was too much boat traffic on the Lake by other boat owners which had to be controlled to safely run the races. Also the Smith Flying Service had issues with operations during the races. In the last APBA race Charles Hornickel, Lock Haven, was the District 3 APBA inspector. Many familiar names from a half-century ago managed the race: Burt Lauderbaugh, Chairman; Harley Evans, Vice-Chairman; Walter Woolbert, Starting Clock; Harold Snowden, Jr., Timer; Harley Evans (as Gunner); William Woolbert, Pit-Steward; Dr. H.

Irwin Evans, Medical Aid; John M. Moore, Jr., and William Woolbert, Surveyors; George Walters and Wayne Chaney, Safety Patrol. Dr. C.A. Miller was Club Commodore.

In late 1961 the Club agreed to purchase the balance of the Lake frontage and plane hanger of K. Russell Smith who was closing his Lake service. The formal sale occurred in February 1962. The hanger, with later renovations, still serves as the Club's headquarters. The Club's membership was also growing and was increasingly interested in sailing craft with sail races beginning in 1959. In 1963, after a spirited debate, the Club's name was changed to the Harvey's Lake Yacht Club.

Interest in classic speed boats, however, has never waned at the Lake. The Northeastern Pennsylvania/Harvey's Lake Chapter of the American Classic Boat Society was founded in 1990. It is one of 56 ACBS chapters in the United States and Canada. The Lake chapter has over 100 members, several of whom have restored some of the Lake's classic race boats. Each August the Lake chapter hosts an annual boat show at the Grotto Marina at the Sunset section of the Lake.