

HOTEL SHERMAN TROPHY

This was a racing power boat trophy offered but never awarded from the now demolished Hotel Sherman.

This hotel was a standard meeting place of businessmen and politicians in Chicago until its demolition in the 1970s for the construction of the present James Thompson State of Illinois Building.

Now, after more than 100 years, the Hotel Sherman Trophy will become an active trophy. Beginning in 2013, this trophy is dedicated to the Power Fleet Member of the Year. The winner will be selected based on participation in various club events.

The trophy was acquired at an auction by an alert club member. For a detailed history of the origin of this trophy, please read the article below by Nancy Broeckl.

“Sold!” to the Chicago Yacht Club, represented by Director and Power Fleet Chairman John Vignocchi. The Hotel Sherman Trophy, bearing the burgee of the original CYC prior to its consolidation with Lincoln Park Yacht Club in 1920, was discovered on the website for Christie’s Maritime Auction by Brian White, 2001 associate member.

The sterling silver shield with a speedboat in bas-relief was of historical interest because CYC was organized at the Sherman House in 1875. In 1904, the Sherman House was renamed the Hotel Sherman and remained a top nightspot with its College Inn restaurant and jazz venue until it was replaced by the Thompson Center.

However, a mystery remained. When was the trophy donated? What was the race? Why were no winners listed?

A search of the CYC archives at the Chicago Historical Society revealed an intriguing story, as reported in the Club publication Cruiser and the daily newspapers. In May 1912, The Hotel Sherman Trophy, value \$500, was listed as first prize for the 20’ speedboat class, along with \$500 for 1st place, \$250 for 2nd, and \$100 for 3rd. It was among prizes for the 40’, 32’ and 26’ speedboat classes, a \$5,000 perpetual trophy donated by William Wrigley, Jr., for winner of the free-for-all Championship of America, and CYC Commodore William Hale Thompson’s trophy for the first boat that showed a speed of 50 mph. Reed and Barton has promised to consult its historical data to confirm the date of the trophy.

To set the stage, 1912 was three years after the Burnham Plan was published, one year before construction of Municipal (Navy) Pier began, Thompson’s second year as Commodore, three years before Thompson’s first term as mayor, and a time of great public interest in yachting and hydroplanes, which dozens of CYC members were anxious to own. The year before, CYC members had signed a resolution “to take the initiative in starting a civic movement for the purpose of advertising the Lake and of getting people to come to Chicago for the purpose of enjoying outings on the water.” Five years before, when Thompson brought Valmore from the East, 35 yachts met Valmore in the Lake and thousands cheered as the flotilla sped past. “It is doubtful,” wrote John G. DeLong, yachting editor of the Tribune, if Octavius Caesar received a warmer welcome



upon his return from the Battle of Actium than William Hale Thompson was accorded yesterday. " (Lloyd Wendt and Herman Kogan, Big Bill of Chicago, [Indianapolis, The Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc.] 72)

So it was not entirely surprising that CYC member James Pugh was successful in interesting the Chicago Association of Commerce in the idea of yacht races. In fact, they enlarged upon the idea. The week of August 10-17, 1912, a Great Naval Pageant would be held in conjunction with the yachting activities. Before long, \$50,000 had been subscribed for cups and cash prizes by businesses and sporting circles.

The Western Power Boat races, under the auspices of the Associated Yacht and Power Boat Clubs in America of which Thompson was commodore, and an international yacht race between Canada and the U.S. would be the nucleus for a naval pageant "that would be on a bigger and grander scale than anything of its kind ever in this or the old world" and would attract hundreds of thousands from all parts of the country.

Other events were scheduled, including the Lipton Cup, Venetian Night, U.S. lifesaving service exhibitions demonstrating the righting of a capsized boat, 12-oar cutter races, swimming and diving contests, water polo, naval maneuvers performed by 400 cadets from the training station at Lake Bluff, fireworks, and the conclusion of a cruise of 2,000 motorboats carrying 15,000 passengers from the Central Plain and inland rivers to Chicago to "rediscover" Lake Michigan.

As for the naval pageant, preparations were underway to defend Chicago against an August 10 naval attack. Under command of the gunboat Dubuque, the attacking fleet of the Hawk, Gopher, Don Juan de Austria and the revenue cutter Morrill from Lake Erie would be pitted against the Tuscarola, Yantic, Wolverine, Dorothea, and Essex. No part of Chicago, from Michigan Avenue to Oak Park, would be safe from the 4" guns trained on the City which could drop 4" shells with precision anywhere within the City limits. Hydroplanes traveling 40 mph were also to be used to determine whether this type of craft would be of assistance in warfare.

Chicago Yacht Club and the commodores of Columbia and Jackson Park were recruiting hydroplanes to compete. Entry blanks were sent to every yacht and power boat club in this country and in Europe. Race officials were invited from throughout the U.S. Entries totaling 39 were received from Toronto, New York, Oregon, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Missouri, and England.

Tickets could be purchased at Orchestra Hall for 50 cents, or box seats for \$2 on the grandstand on the big breakwater. You could reach the pier by taking a steamboat from the Clark Street bridge or one of the steamboats at the Grant Park landings at the foot of VanBuren and at Randolph. Or you could watch for free from the fishing pier or the windows on Michigan Avenue.

The first event was the match race between two P class boats for the "Yacht Racing Union Challenge Cup," a sterling silver trophy designed by Tiffany and donated by Commodore S. O. Richardson, Jr., of the Toledo Yacht Club and now known as the Richardson Cup. The Royal Canadian Yacht Club's Patricia raced against CYC's new boat Michicago, commissioned by a syndicate composed of Fred Price, Sterling Morton, George Clinch, Charles Fox, Ogden McClurg, William Lydon, William Hale Thompson, Charles Thorne, and others, five of whom had been or were to become CYC commodores. Michicago, representing L.M.Y.A., won the first race; however Patricia, owned by Norman Gooderham of Toronto and representing L.Y.R.A., swept the next three races and the series and was first to be awarded this still-raced-for trophy.

On the 12th, the hydroplanes were to race—defined after much discussion as a racing boat whose propeller acts in or against the water and which has one or more of the following characteristics: one or more breaks in the longitudinal continuity of the immersed surface or an underbody having one or more lifting surfaces, an area of immersed transom extending 50 percent of the immersed midship section area taken in 50 percent of the load waterline actual and with crew on board in racing position, and rating of more than 16 times the square root of the waterline length.

That day, according to the newspaper Inter Ocean, a gale-force nor'easter sent high waves breaking over the grandstand. All events except the Lipton Cup were postponed. If the lake calmed, the first free-for-all for the Wrigley Trophy and a match race for women powerboat skippers would be held. That night, Mayor Carter Harrison demonstrated the feasibility of open-air speaking to immense gatherings by use of a telephone attachment. During one race, the lifesaving crew got real practice when they rescued the crew of a hydroplane which sank directly in front of the grandstand where 8,000 were watching. The boat, however, sank.

The biggest disappointment was CYC's James Pugh's 40' 550 HP with two 120 cylinder engines Disturber III. It had been built by Weckler, 2719 W. Irving Park, to withstand heavy-weather Lake Michigan conditions. Pugh, who had been the moving spirit in the speedboat class in the West and who had entries in all but the 20' class, raced around the course at risk of his life to carry out the program, while Baby Reliance II and seven smaller craft did not start for fear of swamping. While Disturber III was ruined by the rough weather, Baby Reliance II, a fragile boat, completed the course twice in millpond conditions and was awarded the trophy.

So ended the pageant. Of the 39 hydroplane entries, only a handful showed up, with no entries in the 20' class. Hence, no winner is listed on The Hotel Sherman Trophy.