

WHAT STARTS A SPORTSMAN'S CLUB?

(An Early History of the Yahara Fisherman's Club)

Written by Keith Ackley 5-15-1978

It was a cold wind blowing in from the northwest late in April 1945 when Art Barber, who was the city lock tender, had a caller with a letter for him. He was from the city parks department and the letter said that the Cuna National Credit Corp had purchased the malt house and the property across the road from the locks. They were going to build their national headquarters on the site and the city promised them they would make a nice park for them next to the locks. The letter stated that all fishing boats along the shore was to be removed and the three old boats the lock tender had for rental must be removed.

Later that day Art took the notice over to the Malt house, a small tavern operated by Oscar Lockmer, a place many of the local fisherman stopped. It was a place where some of the biggest fish stories were started. To this day there is still some question that maybe there may have exaggerated a little on some of the stories but we have no proof they did.

Lockner told Art to leave the notice with him, and he would take it up with some of the boys that usually stopped in after Gisholt Machine Shop day shift ended. Fishermen after fishermen read the notice now posted on the wall and were amazed some mad to think the city would do such a thing as this. The talk got around "what can we do about it"?

We all agreed to hold a meeting the following week at the Malt House at 4:00 pm to come to some conclusions. We're now at that meeting, it's been suggested Oscar Lockner conduct the meeting and Harold Fetzer act as the Secretary to which we all agree. Oscar read the notice and said "Gentleman. What is your pleasure"?

There were about fifteen of us around the large round table in the far corner of the old tavern. Many suggestions came out, but the one we thought was the best, was "lets start a fisherman's club".

Lockner said "I want all of you back at the same time next week and you are to bring with you a name for the club and also some suggestions of membership fees". He said he had asked the two aldermen whose wards bordered the locks to be at the next meeting.

Next week at the same table, in the same corner, sat the fifteen delegates along with the two alderman. Many names for the club were read off by Lockner and no two were the same, but we all agreed the "Yahara Fisherman's Club" best described us. We also agreed a \$1.00 membership a year was appropriate. We agreed on 15 different committees and Lockner appointed each one of us to head a committee. He said we could choose who we wanted on each of our committees. All we had to do was get their \$1.00 membership and tell them they were on your committee and advise them what they were to do.

The chairman of the membership committee asked how many membership cards to have printed. We thought we have 100 printed but he said the printer claimed 200 would only cost a little more. So, we agreed on 200. Lochner said as we have no cards ready as yet, when someone wants to join get their \$1.00 and the address. We will get the card to them later.

Before the 200 cards were ready, we had nearly 400 who had signed up, but at this meeting we had just decided the name, what the cost of membership would be and the committees. Harold Fetzer, the secretary, was told to send a penny postcard to each member that joined advising them of the meeting to be held the 1st Tuesday in May and June, probably in Turner Hall at 8:00pm. As we had nothing in the treasury at this meeting, Lockner threw a buck on the table and said all of you you do the same, so we did.

Even a coupe at the bar donated: also the two city alderman. I recall we now had \$22.00 in the Treasury. Then Lockner spoke up and said "This dollar you gave was a donation, so it will cost all of you another \$1.00 for membership".

Wm Stien was appointed chairman of the rules and resolution committee because he said his brother-in-law was an attorney and thought he could get him to draw up the by-laws for nothing. We all agreed that the annual meeting should be the 2nd Tuesday in September due to Labor Day; then the next nine months, it would be the first Tuesday and no meetings in July and August.

We worked very hard that first summer. Through the Common Council we got the order from the Parks Department changed. We now had seven of the 16 Council members as paid up club members. At the September meeting, which the by laws called the annual meeting, we went over the by laws and approved them with a few minor changes. We elected the officers and four board members. The president asked that the committees that were set up last April stay the same but he added a few more to the list. The secretary reported over 600 paid up members, of which nearly 400 worked at Gisholt Machine.

The boathouse committee was working hard for the city to build a group of boat houses south of the Johnson Street bridge. The parks and pier committee had worked out an agreement with the city to keep all parking areas in city parks free from snow in the winter to allow fishermen to park. The committee also worked out a deal where the city would furnish pier material and one foreman. The club would decide where they wanted the piers and furnish the help to put them up. Elmer Tessman for years got the guys together to put up piers and I must say he never was short of manpower.

The first few years we had the boat houses built on the river at Johnson Street, then we worked for more, which we got the city to build on Starkweather Creek. Then it was boat launching ramps. Through the club we now have more free public launching ramps than any county in the southern half of the state.

We helped form the "Wisconsin Wildlife Federation" and was the only club to have two of its members serve as president for it. We helped from the start to remove effluent from the Metropolitan Sewage plant from going into Lake Waubesa. It took about five years and many court hearings before we finally had it bypassed to Bad Fish Creek on its way to the Rock River. In just 5 years we built up one of the most powerful sportsman's clubs with the membership of over 1600 members. All our money went

towards conservation projects or programs, and we were constantly trying to find a way to make some (money).

Then came the meeting in February 1952 when Lewis Du Boise, a sort of quiet fellow who operated a Standard Service Station on Park Street, slowly got up and from his chair and said "You fellows are always trying to make money. well, let me tell you what the wife and I seen last weekend. We have friends out in Prairie Du Chien, so we took a drive out there. When we stopped in Prairie to get gas, we could hear music, also someone on a public address system. When I asked the station attendant what was going on he quickly replied "Don't you know this weekend is the Fisheree"? After stopping at our friend's house, the four of us drove over to this small lake. The band was playing, they had small tents on the ice, it was like a carnival. They even had a beer tent set up on the ice. Tickets were sold for \$1.00 and you could even win prizes if you didn't fish. "

To us it would be like a heck of a lot of work. It was in January of 1953 on Lake Wingra, the club held it's 1st Fisheree. City trucks brought us out all the Christmas trees from the city lots that hadn't been sold. We got permission to set them up on the ice, we marked out an area and all fishing had to be done inside that area. First prize was a Johnson outboard motor for the largest fish. It was a bullhead that took the motor. I doubt if we broke even. In 1945 we again held it on Wingra but this time all the lake was used. By now we were slowly learning about fisherees.

It was in 1955 we changed the name from Fisheree to Percharee and we started holding it on Lake Mendota. We also started to make money. Now each year it is usually the 3rd Sunday in February. It still a lot of work but all money goes back into conservation programs and projects. I think every sports minded person should belong to the Yahara Fisherman's Club.

Keith E Ackley (hand written)

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