

EIGHT METERS



THISBE and QUEST in the 1930 Canada's Cup.

In 1929 the 8-Meter burst upon the RYC just as the financial world was experiencing its "bust" and for the next five depression years the 8's provided the Rochester area with a unique and unparalleled yachting show.

The spark which ignited this "Golden Age" was, of course, the Canada's Cup Races of 1930, 1932, and 1934; and, although the Cup is covered in another section of this history, it would be impossible to write on the 8's without reference to the reason for their being.

One who remembers only vaguely the actual races of four decades ago but who peruses the history, pictures, and newsprint of the time, can only be in awe at how completely the Cup races dominate RYC, the Rochester scene, and the general public.

To pay for these not inexpensive boats in a time of financial depression, syndicates were formed; to find appropriate Indian names for the boats, the newspapers ran contests and hundred of names were received. At the time of the races both East and West piers were "standing room only" just to get a glimpse of the boats going to and from the race courses. "Extras" were run daily to report the latest results and all the major papers across the country carried the news. The New York Yacht Club and the Atlantic Coast may have had their J's and the America's Cup but RYC and Lake Ontario had our 8's and the Canada's Cup and were second to none.

The boat which attracted all this attention was, and still is, a racing skipper's dream and a crew's challenge. Extremely sensitive to sail trim and demanding of the best in crew and skipper coordination, they are ideal for two boat match racing. Built to the Metre Rule, which allows for variations in hull design within specified limits, the boats of the 1930's are typified by the *Conewago* where measurements are 49' LOA, 30' LWL, 8' Beam, 6-1/2' Draft, and 16,600 lbs. displacement. Later boats, such as *Iroquois*, have shortened ends similar to the modern 12's. The two spreader wooden rigs with short fore triangles have been replaced with the modern aluminum masts, streamlined

rigging, and large foretriangles. Unless converted, the racing 8 sails without benefit of auxiliary and have a meagre cabin and little accommodations. To quote from Uffa Fox:

There is no doubt the small cabin on a 8 Metre is useful, for in strong winds it forms a shelter, while on light days with strong sunshine it forms a fine place for lunch where the butter does not melt and run off the bread.

The 1930 boats *Cayuga*, *Conewago*, and *Thisbe* were all involved in the Cup trials and all but *Cayuga* raced for the Cup. At LYRA regattas the Rochester 8's joined with the Canadian Cup boats *Invader* and *Quest* and their sister ships *Norseman*, *Vision*, and *Bangalore*. Skippers who were active during the period were Bill Barrows and Bart Sharp on *Thisbe*, John VanVoorhis and Rooney Castle on *Cayuga*, and Walter Farley and Rooney Castle on *Conewago*.

With the lapse of the Canada Cup races and the introduction of the 6 Meter, interest in the 8's waned and, except for the RYC, active racing disappeared until the revival of the Cup in the mid 50's. *Thisbe* was brought back and *Iskareen* acquired to mount our unsuccessful defense of the Cup. Active in this period were John Odenbach, Howard Klitgord, and Herb Wahl.

When the Cup races were again revived in the late 60's and 8's were dropped from the competition, many thought that they had seen the last of this super racing machine but the final chapter has yet to be written. Through the efforts of Eugene Van Voorhis and his *Iroquois*, there is renewed interest on the lake and it is possible that there may be a fleet in Rochester once again.

It is probably safe to say that no boat will ever be so much a part of RYC as the 8 Meter. Not only did it provide the best in Club and International competition, but also provided an escape from the troubled times of the Great Depression and the pressures of the work-a-day world — which is really what this sailing is all about anyway.