

Construction of the Club House - as told by Dennis Burchill



Clubhouse 10

Memories of the Brisbane 16ft Skiff Club

1947 to 1954

By Dennis Burchill

I started my sailing career as bailer boy on the 16ft skiff "Joy V" in 1947 with Ron Wright as skipper and immediately joined the Brisbane

Skiff Club. There were about fifteen skiffs registered with the club at that stage.

I used to attend the meetings of the club, which were held in the Bulimba School of Arts every Monday night. There seemed to be an element of unrest in the club with the secretary, Harry Clark, the target. Harry held the position for twenty five years and some of the members wanted fresh blood in command. As a young 18 year old innocent I was nominated to the position of secretary and was duly elected.

The prime mover for the change was Jack Hamilton Snr. He immediately went about trying to raise funds for the club by purchasing a fairy floss machine. The idea was to take the machine to various fetes and sell the product. The machine required plenty of sugar and heat and we used to practice under the Hamilton's house in Wordsworth street. I used to go home from these practice sessions covered from head to toe with pink sticky sugar floss. We never did get to make the machine work properly!

In 1950 the club was offered a property in Byron Street, Bulimba for use as a clubhouse. The land consisted of 48 perches of river frontage which was owned by the Griffiths family of Toowoomba Foundry fame. The property is presently the site of Byron Boat Yard. We had some rather heated discussions on this matter, but in the end we chickened out. The purchase price was 6000 pounds. The RQYC had members with more foresight than we had and purchased the land for their sailing headquarters.

In the early 1950s the club was offered the use of the sail loft on Bob Dath's shed in McConnell Street for our meetings, rent free, an offer that we quickly accepted. We had always dreamed of having a club of our own, and Col Johnson and I used to stand on the outside deck of Cloudland Ballroom looking at the land on Bulimba Point and discussing the possibility of building a clubhouse on this land. This prompted me to write to the Brisbane city Council seeking their help as to the right way to go about obtaining a parcel of land. The wheels turned slowly, however my letter turned up in the hands of Owen "Cookie" Davis who worked in the Lands Department. Cookie was an old skiffie having sailed a skiff called "Alveen" prewar.

He immediately started the wheels in motion by having a survey done on the land that we wanted. It turned out that most of the land that we were after had been eroded into the river. We had a chap in the Brisbane City Council who was a great friend of Vic Lucas and between him and Cookie Davis they worked out a deal to allocate enough land to build a clubhouse, incorporating the land we originally applied for.

The next move was to draw up a set of plans for the clubhouse and have them approved by the Council. At long last our dream was to be realised. We decided to build the club on a voluntary basis. We were lucky enough to have in the club a builder by the name of George Marks who sailed with Vic Lucas. George was in partnership with another builder called Cyril Hines. They both agree to take

command of the project on a voluntary basis and organise the labour required. The bank agreed to finance the project and we were away and running.

The club was built entirely on weekends over a period of 12 months. The average turnout for a weekend was about twenty. Cyril Hines was the brains and was a very hard taskmaster. He was there every weekend for the entire time. We received wonderful financial support from the old skiffies, for example we had a stump capping fete on the grounds and several members including Bob Dath and Doug McDonald donated the sum of 100 pounds for the privilege of having their name written on the underside of the stump cap. I wonder if anyone noticed the names when the building was raised?

The original building was two feet off the ground with a hall the size of the present clubhouse and a committee room about twenty feet square on the golf club side of the building. During the construction we received wonderful help from former members. Victor Campbell who owned and sailed skiffs prewar donated all the windows, doors and joinery for the complete building. Blair Kerr donated all the plywood for the internal lining of the club. Help came from all directions when it was realised that our dream was about to be realised. Some of the tradesmen involved in the building besides Cyril Hine and George Marks were John Thorburn (plumbing), Col Johnson (bricklaying), Nev Buckley (patternmaking), Gordon and Eric Yates (furniture making) and myself (electrical).

Some of the willing workers who turned up every weekend were Eric Holstock, Horrie Crouch, Tom Frazer, Frank Buckley, John Lappin, Jack Watson, Bert Walker, Eric Robinson, Bob McIntosh, and many more whose names escape me. Just before the clubhouse was completed, Bob Dath donated a large solid cedar table to the club to be used in the committee room. The Yates brothers offered to restore the table to its former glory. The night before the table was to be delivered, their furniture factory burned down and the table was lost!

The day that the Club was officially opened was a day to remember. The club was opened by the Premier of Queensland, Vince Gair. The club conducted a fete as part of the opening ceremony. As the premier was having a cup of tea after the opening, members of the police vice squad were raiding our fete. It seems that Tom Frazer, our treasurer was running a game of unders and overs, which was illegal. This news made the front page of every newspaper in Australia so the whole country knew that our clubhouse was open.

After we opened, the next task was to pay off our debts as soon as possible. This we did by holding a variety concert once a month. We were not licenced but we sold refreshments? at all our functions. We had a tieup with a chap called Cliff Davis who worked for the Dunlop Rubber Company. At the time Dunlop would come to your club with a movie projector and show sporting films free of charge. Cliff turned up at the club soon after our opening with a copy of the first Round Australia Redex Trial and the Davis Cup tie against America which Australia had just won. We were the first in Queensland to see these films and on the night of the showing 300 people turned up. As we charged a fee for admission and the films were free we made quite a bit of money that night.

I have many happy and fond memories of the clubhouse, I had my wedding reception there and I have seen the club prosper under the control of many good people since then and I am glad that I was able, in some small way, to help in making the Club what it is today.

Dennis Burchill

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