

Rowing the Hook

By Peter Klöse



Derek Rubin and Peter Kingston at the Directors Cup race.

To the uninitiated, the early morning stillness of the Hudson is a distant, disconnected part of life in our river towns - just scenery. To the initiated, the early morning stillness of the great gray river is the coveted holy grail of rowing, an opportunity to connect to the river, to hear the sound of oars pulling through the water under human, non-motorized power; to escape the often overscheduled life we lead. Until one has experienced the sound of a rowing shell slip through the water, felt the surge of power from fellow oarsmen and tasted the slightly salty brine from the river (or your perspiration), one has not been initiated into the cult of an early morning rower, and cannot fully comprehend rising in the darkness to participate in the pre-dawn ritual.

Such early morning celebrations of water, oars and sweat are becoming increasingly frequent in the river villages as rowing has returned as a popular sport in the Hudson Valley. The communities of Piermont and Nyack host shells in their public parking lots, each waiting for the next foray into the wide part of the river, the Tappan Zee. With

Hook Mountain to the north and Piermont Landing to the south, the River Rowing Association (RRA) has enjoyed two full seasons rowing from the municipal boat launching ramp located at the foot of Burd Street, Nyack.

Founded in 2003, the RRA offers community rowing programs to people seeking a chance to connect to a sport enjoyed around the world. At present, the shells, ranging from 25-foot long singles to 60-foot long eights, await more permanent boat launching facilities in either of the river towns. Boat house facilities, while rudimentary at present, could, if history repeats itself, mean a return to a grand history of rowing in Nyack.

In 1881, Julian O. Davidson, a local artist and marine painter, founded the Nyack Rowing Association (NRA). On May 2, 1881, the NRA held its first meeting

The Hook

34 *Jan/Feb 2008*

in the old Nyack Armory where 25 charter members agreed to create a rowing association dedicated to the sport of sculling (two-oared rowing) and immediately set to work planning a grand boat house.

Construction commenced in January 1882, and was completed at an estimated cost of over \$8,000 on May 30, 1882, opening to a gala reception on June 14, 1882. Designed by William Smith and built in the "Stick Style" architecture found in many river homes in the village, the boat house contained the latest amenities, including running water, gas for heating and lighting, and electricity. The building consisted of three levels, including a 34/60-foot ballroom, two huge fireplaces, a central ventilating cupola and a four-story tower. In addition to rowing races, which were held to great fanfare and newspaper adoration, the NRA pursued other athletic endeavors, merging with the "Outing Club" in 1892.

Inspired by the past, encouraged by the growing interest in a revitalized Nyack waterfront and wishing to share the many lifetime benefits of rowing with local area residents, today's RRA envisions creating a permanent community rowing and paddling center in Nyack where people from all walks of life can enjoy access to the Hudson River. To accomplish this goal, the RRA has hired two full-time employees - Catherine Henny and Josh Gautreau (both competitive collegiate rowers) - to coach what has become a year-round program.

While it initially focused efforts on its increasingly successful youth rowing for high-school-age kids (13-18), the RRA offers a number of rowing programs for many age categories. There is a "learn to row" program which offers beginning rowers of all ages the chance to try the sport. It has a competitive masters program for adults and is in discussions with some local colleges to offer collegiate rowing in 2008. Looking forward to this coming summer, the RRA is hoping to start an adaptive rowing program for athletes with physical disabilities - adaptive rowing is a growing part of the sport and will be featured at the 2008 Beijing Paralympics.

For more information about the programs and how to join, visit the RRA's website www.riverrowing.org.

RRA Seasonal Program

Winter Rowing: Think rowing is for warm weather only? Rowing enthusiasts stay in shape during the cold winter months by training on rowing machines called ergometers, or ergs for short. The RRA has rented space in the large building at Nyack Beach State Park (Hook Mountain) and installed 20 rowing machines that are used for group workouts. A different type of "spin" class.

Winter Trip: RRA plans a winter trip to Columbia, South Carolina to get on the water for some rowing. The hope is to give competitive rowers an edge once the spring racing season starts.

Spring Season: High school, club, masters and, hopefully, collegiate rowers will be heading back onto the Hudson River as soon as the weather permits - typically by April. RRA is planning on running a "camp" for high-school rowers on Lake Sebago in late March / early April while waiting for the Hudson waters to warm up. Several "sprint" races are on the schedule for competitive rowers.

Summer Rowing: The water's warm, the Hudson is beautiful and the RRA programs continue through the summer with several weeklong and weekend learn-to-row programs as well as continued racing for all rowers.

Fall Rowing: The water's still warm and the RRA travels to compete in "head" races around the northeast, including the Head of the Harlem, the Head of the Housatonic and the Head of the Charles. The last race on the water in 2007 was the "Snowflake" regatta in Riverhead, Long Island.



Peter Klose and Cat Henny, Coach with Hook Mt. in background.



New boathouse of the Nyack Rowing Association circa 1882.



Boats at Village lot.