

A Brief History of Gulfport Yacht Club

By Mike Joyner

The original Club was founded in 1902 ostensibly under the name "Gulfport Yachting Association," however, State of Mississippi archives of 1902 evidence the actual name recorded with the State to be "Gulfport Yacht Club." Regardless of the name disparity, just like today, the Club was commonly referred to as Gulfport Yacht Club.

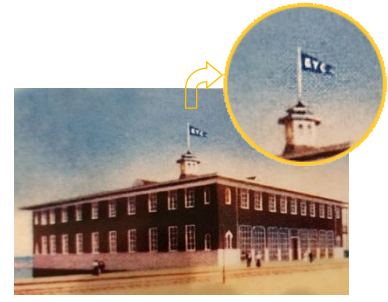
The Club's first Commodore was Joseph T. Jones, who is considered the Father of the City of Gulfport.

Other founding Flag Officers were:

- Vice Commodore: John C. Kennedy
- Rear Commodore: J. R. Pratt
- Fleet Captain: A. Catchot
- Fleet Surgeon: Dr. J. B. Kilgo
- Secretary: R. W. Ship
- Treasurers: George P. Hewes & Thomas Favre



Gulfport Yacht Club Burgees - 1902 through Present



Gulfport Yacht Club Circa 1903

The 1902-09 clubhouse was a large two story pavilion of the Great Southern Hotel located at what is now known as Whale Point just south of our present location. The Club burgee was an elongated solid blue field swallow tail with white letters 'GYC' and the Club's first regatta was held in 1903. There still exist at least one photo of the Club burgee flying above the Great Southern Hotel pavilion in the early 1900s. It should be noted that the photos of that epoch are of poor resolution and reproduction has further degraded the media therefore it's possible the original burgee displayed GYA. However, 1902 State records of incorporation seem to support GYC.

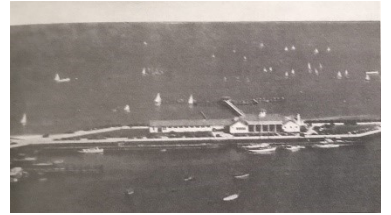


Several hurricanes, a yellow fever epidemic, conflagration of the Club's pavilion, World War One, and the Great Depression all contributed to the Club's gradual decline in activity. The devastating clubhouse fire of September 17, 1909 catalyzed the decay and over following years Club affairs waned under pressure of the times.

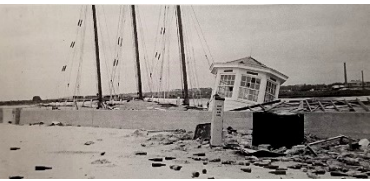
In 1932 the sailing spark once again ignited (*no pun intended*) among avid local sailors and in 1934, under the leadership of Dr. Arvah St. Clair Hopkins, Gus D. Alfonso, Leonard Hardy, and others, the Club reorganized and officially chartered the name "Gulfport Yacht Racing Association" doing business as "Gulfport Yacht Club." Remarkably this new Club charter was recorded on September 17, 1934, 25 years to the day after the great fire. The Clubhouse was located at the southeastern end of what is now the Gulfport Small Craft Harbor and was leased, land and building, from the City of Gulfport.

The unnamed Hurricane of 1947 destroyed the clubhouse leaving nothing but the concrete slab. Not to be defeated by Mother Nature an unused building from the local U S Navy Base was moved in and served as a temporary clubhouse until May of 1950 when the City of Gulfport rebuilt the structure on the slab left by the hurricane.

In 1955 members decided it was time to design and own their own clubhouse and end the practice of leasing from the City of Gulfport. Through bonds sold to the members, the Club leased land across the harbor on the West side, again from the City, but built their own Clubhouse structure. The first GYC owned clubhouse opened in 1958. The Club prospered and constructed a large swimming pool adjacent to the clubhouse in July of 1960.



Gulfport Yacht Club Circa 1936



Remains of Gulfport Yacht Club after the 1947 Hurricane



Gulfport Yacht Club 1957

Because business and clubhouse utilization was booming the Club's first general manager was hired in 1963. A busy club and increasing membership forced expansion of the structure and In 1965 and the Club's first official barroom, the "Chart Room," was established. The bar had only 4 barstools and Winston Jones, previously a part time maintenance laborer, was advanced into the position of the Club's first full time bartender. In 1965 the Club had 500 active members, and in 1967 the clubhouse was fitted with its first air conditioning and heating system.

On August 17, 1969 Hurricane Camile, still the strongest hurricane to ever strike the United States with winds in excess of 200 miles per hour, flattened the structure leaving only structural pilings. For the second time the members rose from the rubble and devastation and rebuilt a new clubhouse on the same footprint. The new clubhouse opened on July 9, 1971.

On March 30, 1981 the membership, after considerable negotiations with the City of Gulfport, finally realized their dream of owning land and building by purchasing the property which the Club still occupies today. In 1983, being 838 members strong, expansion was once again required and the kitchen and Chart Room were enlarged to accommodate the growing membership.

In the early years of the 21th Century the Club was at its zenith. Boasting around 900 members the clubhouse was lacking room to accommodate the blossoming and active membership. Approved in 2003 and begun in 2004, the clubhouse experienced another renovation to modernize, add more square footage, and add an Olympic size swimming pool. The extensive makeover was completed in July of 2005 but the membership reveled in their new clubhouse only to be disillusioned a brief month later.



Gulfport Yacht Club 1967



Gulfport Yacht Club 1969 after Hurricane Camile



Gulfport Yacht Club after a thorough renovation in 2004 - 2005 .

By the evening of August 29, 2005 Gulfport Yacht Club existed no more. Hurricane Katrina rocked the Mississippi Gulf Coast leaving behind only a sand washed skeleton of the beautiful multimillion dollar renovation.

For the third time the membership was faced with the task of rebuilding. The new Olympic size pool having submerged early under Katrina's 28 foot storm surge had sustained only minor damage and repairs began within a month of the devastation. By December of 2005 the pool was clean and working and a double wide trailer had been moved onto the property next to the repaired pool. Inside the trailer extensive modifications were underway. Through heroic efforts of many GYC members, four months after Katrina's wrath, under a tent erected in the parking lot, the Club held a New Year's Eve celebration with over 400 members in attendance. Hurricane Katrina was no match for the soul and spirit of Gulfport Yacht Club.

Throughout 2006 plans were developed and in 2008 a new eight and a half million dollar plus clubhouse rose from the ruins Katrina had left in her wake. Today the three story facility overlooking the mouth of the Gulfport Small Craft Harbor boasts a panoramic view of the Mississippi Sound and still serves as GYC's home where a Gulfport Yacht Club burgee has been flying since 1902.



Gulfport Yacht Club 2021