

# Columnists

## Historical Views

### of the Rockaways

#### From The Rockaway Museum

by Emil Lucev, Curator

Dedicated To The Memory Of Leon S. Locke

Old Boat Races in Jamaica Bay Held Many Years Ago



In August of 1886, a fifteen-mile boat race was held in Jamaica Bay. It was from Miller's Place in Broad Channel, to Idlewild on the north side of Grassy Bay, then around Anchored Buoy, and back to Broad Channel. In the same year, or summer season, the windward Club On Ruffle bar marsh held boat races, which were sponsored by Captain Henry Smith, a resident of that marsh island in Jamaica Bay.

During the winter of 1888 Ice Boat Races were held in Jamaica Bay, but no location was given as to where

and from where.

Then in 1891, the newly formed Bayswater Yacht Club held races, and their course was from their clubhouse on Norton Basin to a buoy at the same Idlewild in Grassy Bay, then from that buoy in Grassy Bay South and west to a buoy at Conches Hole Point, then west to a buoy at Brant Point in Northwest Arverne's bayfront. The last heat was back to the clubhouse in Norton Basin.

Although they weren't supposed to, sidewheel steamers, at times, raced each other to the Rockaways in order to get a rise out of the passengers who loudly cheered and bet on which boat would win.

to the telegraph office with the latest news on the race, which I believe was won by the United States entry.



There were many yacht/boat clubs in Jamaica Bay many years ago, and the two biggest in Rockaway were the Jamaica Bay Yacht Club and the Belle Harbor Yacht Club. The former was founded in the last 1890's and was located at Beach 90 Street on the bay. The site was filled in during the early 1920's, so to give a better orientation. If there today – it would be between the railroad and Beach Channel Drive. The latter club was built in 1905 in the Belle Harbor area, at the end of Beach 126 Street. The club lost its dock space when the city took over the bayfront and later built Beach Channel Drive along the bay. The landlocked building is still there as a club and restaurant. But in the years that followed, the club sponsored a big race or two.

The Rockaway Park Yacht Club at Beach 117 Street on the bay was the sponsor of a lot of boat races, but stopped for lack of interest many, many years ago. During World War II, all boat clubs and owners of boats formed civilian squadrons for patrols in local waters to supplement our military.

In 1946, the well-known bandleader and boat racer, Guy Lombardo, won the race held in Detroit (the Gold Cup International race). As was the custom, the winner picked the spot or place for the race in the following year. Lombardo picked Jamaica Bay! The race had been held yearly since 1904, and the Belle Harbor Yacht Club was chosen to be the headquarters for the race in 1947. The race was co-sponsored by the South Shore Yacht Club of Freeport, Long Island, Lombardo's home club, and the Chamber of Commerce of the Rockaways.



It was given that Lombardo's boat, Miss Temp VI, with its 1700 horsepower Allison engine, could do 100 mph during competition and 145 mph on a straight course. The course laid out was on the Jamaica Bay between Beach 123 and Beach 148 Streets. There were 23 entrants to this 1947 race on Jamaica Bay. A crowd of 500 thousand was expected to attend.

The race was under Coast Guard supervision, and driftwood patrols were organized to scour the waters of the bay for driftwood, which could damage and sink a fast-moving race boat.

The race was held during the second week of August 1947 with the judges at Anchor at mid-course. After two elimination heats, there were twelve finalists – with Lombardo one of them.

Today in Historical Views, we have a map of the course, a photo of Guy Lombardo and his boat, a photo of spectators along Beach Channel Drive and a photo taken from the judge's boat.

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