

The Wilmer Cup A Historical Perspective

Pieced together from interviews, internet, and personal memories and sailing lies.



In the beginning there was Outrigger Harbor. Jetton Road was a sleepy two lane road winding through the woods at the edge of Lake Norman. If you didn't miss the turn for the gravel and dirt road on the left you would arrive in the tall pine trees surrounding the most protected harbor on the lake. The harbor was complete with a "ships store" where you paid your dock fees and a "tiki hut" clubhouse where you could buy hot dogs and beer and members cooked pot luck dinners and held social events. The original clubhouse was also affectionately referred to as the Moron Tabernacle.

There was limited dockage and the charter sailing members started OHSA just about the same time as the Federal Government

founded the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, but ours was the Outrigger Harbor Sailing Association.

Phil Mullins, Roby McClure, Jim Hetherington and Eddie Goldman were a few of the charter members of the original Outrigger.

Phil, Hank Wilmer and Charlie Wood all had sailboats at various locations on Lake Norman and over several beers decided to float the idea of a racing and social club. People came to the meeting, formed a steering committee, and the Outrigger Harbor Sailing Association was born. Phil was nominated and elected as the first Commodore. The bylaws were adapted from the New York Yacht Club's and tailored to fit OHSA. The racers included everything from gung-ho one design to Saturday night beer can racing. Some people learned the Racing Rules of Sailing one rule at a time in protest hearings after the races. Racing programs continued to prosper on Lake Norman at Lake Norman Yacht Club, Cowan's Ford Yacht Club, Outrigger Yacht Club and finally the Peninsula Yacht Club.

Hank Wilmer was an avid sailor, who has been described as a 'Corinthian' sailor. He was a true amateur who loved sailing for the sake of competition and an active member at OYC and LNYC for many years. His first boat on Lake Norman was an O'Day 27, and he raced it regularly. He later bought a Pearson 28 somewhere around 1978 and started to race it. For several years the Pearson 28 was the "hot" boat on the lake, and there was a fleet of 8 of them. In addition to Hank, some of the other Pearson 28's were owned by Mike Narramore, Josh Chamberlain and Richard and Mike Jones. Hank lived in Charlotte, was in the insurance business, and ran as the Republican candidate for mayor of Charlotte in 1978. In 1981 Hank developed an inoperable brain tumor that would ultimately lead to his death, but continued to sail with friends until

his health would no longer permit it. Hank never lost his love of sailing.

Hank's estate included a gift to the Lake Norman Keelboat Council in the form of a Deed of Trust to promote competitive sailing on Lake Norman, and the trophy was to be called "The Wilmer Cup.

Hank wanted this to be a lake-wide championship and to have it sailed at the end of the sailing season. Because he felt short races sailed in light air often did not reward the best racers, Hank set as a requirement that the race must be a minimum of 8.9 nautical miles. He also put into place a 3-1/2 hour time limit for the race. His goal was simple: let the best sailors compete with sufficient wind to ensure luck was minimized and talent maximized. The race is designed to separate the wheat from the chaff and realistically must be run under spinnaker or extremely good wind conditions in order to be completed within the time allocation. The first several years the weather cooperated, and the Wilmer Cup became the premier, lake-wide fall event. The trophy is a half hull model of a sailboat, carved by Hank Wilmer that resides in the clubhouse of the current holder of the cup and lists all past winners. Proceeds from the Wilmer Cup entry fees go to the Lake Norman Keelboat Council to help maintain the race marks on the lake used by all clubs.

This year we are doing everything we can to revive interest in the race, and we have sincere hopes that the start will include the new "hot" one-design boats, including J-80's, Ultimate 20's and Soverell 33's along with the older time proven spinnaker boats.

This years Wilmer Cup is hosted by the Peninsula Yacht Club and we hope you plan to be there. Mark your calendars for October 31 and November 1.