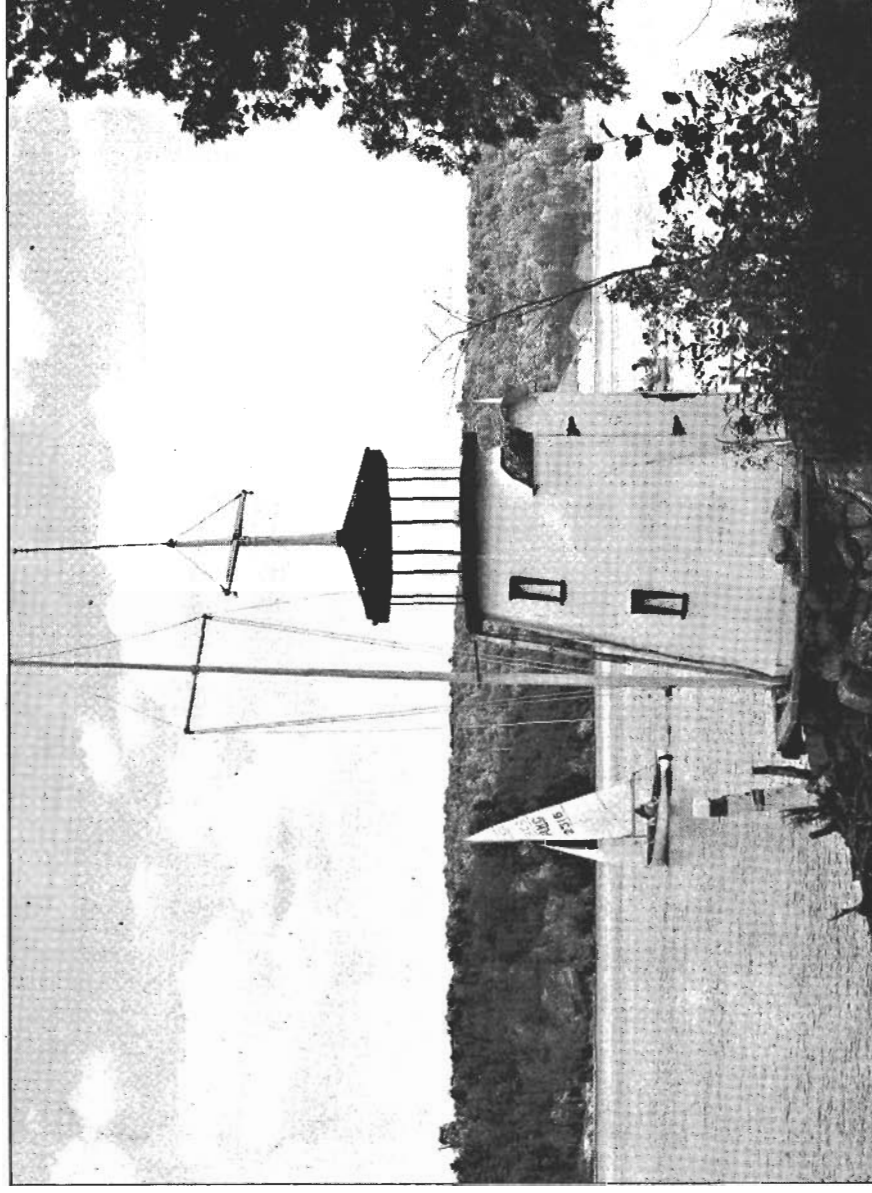


## Way We Were

# Five sailing buddies, an island and a yacht club is born



The Club's first lighthouse in the early 1960s, a starting point for boat races.

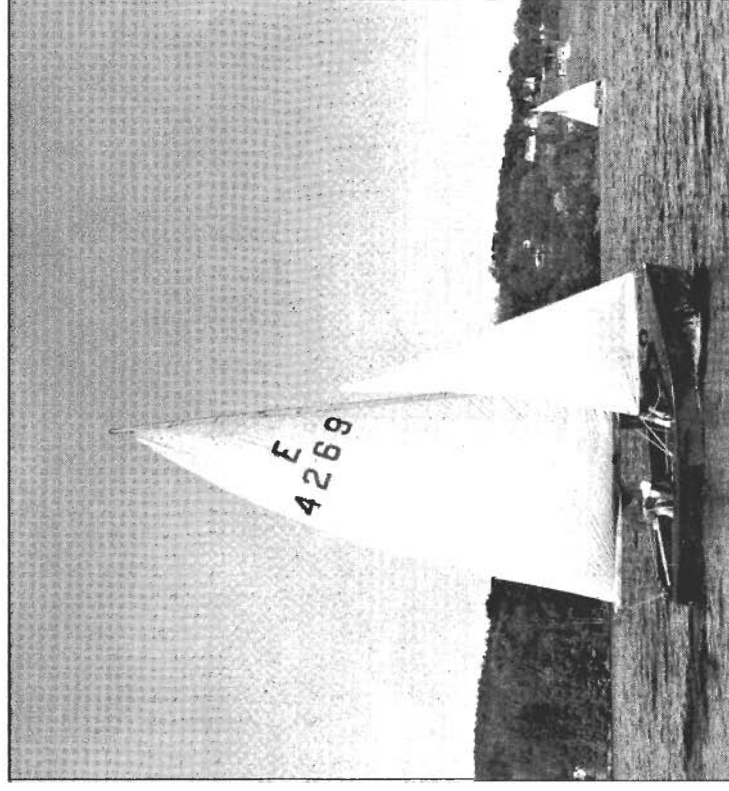
Photo courtesy Gatineau Valley Historical Society.

**By Louise Schwartz**

At one time, sailing on the Gatineau River would have been a risky business. Until 1926 this narrow river had thunderous waterfalls and rock-filled rapids. After its damming for a major hydroelectric project, the river was broader and slow-flowing.

36 years before a sailing club was formed. In September 1962, a group of five sailors met around a kitchen table in Chelsea. Gerry Byers, Pat Evans, Ivan Herbert, Allan Richens and John Winfield were all landlocked locals who moored together on a log boom in Gleneagle Bay. In one (probably long) evening, they

so popular that by the following spring some 90 members had already signed up, doubling to 181 by the end of that first season. Today, 47 years after the club's creation, membership is capped at 300 and there is a waiting list. Allan Richens is the only one of the original five left. Still a resident of Gleneagle and ac-



Above: Crew Joyce Richens with skipper Allan Richens sailing their Enterprise with Kirk's Ferry in the background, fall 1962.

Photo courtesy of Joyce Richens.

Below: (left to right) Manager Nick Anning with founder Allan Richens and member Erik Rask at the Gatineau River Yacht Club, October 2009.

Photo courtesy of Mike Beedell.



hydroelectric project, the river was broader and slow-flowing. This created ideal conditions for sailing, except for the erratic winds which persist today. However, it would be another

weeks before winter close-up.

boom in Gleneagle Bay. In one (probably long) evening, they agreed on a plan to create what would become the Gatineau River Yacht Club.

This new sailing club was

of the original five left. Still a resident of Gleneagle and active member, he escorted me and photographer Mike Beedell around the club property, a few

weeks before winter close-up.

The first clubhouse was a small cottage, rented from Rita Cross Mitchell and close to the boats' moorings. In fall 1963, local realtor and member Frank Macintyre called with news of property for sale. It was two islands just across the bay, connected to each other by a walkway. The islands had originally been part of the mainland, overlooking the Eaton's Chute waterfall. Their higher elevation left them high and dry, surrounded by the river after its 1926 flooding. A more perfect spot for a sailing club could not be imagined. Each member agreed to sign for a \$100 loan. Combined with a mortgage of \$6,000, this made up the \$12,000 purchase price for the islands.

The work to adapt the property was considerable. The then Gatineau Boom Company donated lumber for a walkway over to the island. Members provided the labour (and often donated the supplies). Trees and bushes were hacked out to clear an approach. The existing cottage and sleeping cabins were converted to suit clubhouse requirements. A lighthouse (since replaced) was built by Ed Quipp and Pat Evans and delivered by pontoon barge. In 1978, a new clubhouse replaced the aging and cramped former cottage. Architect member Jim Strutt designed an unusual structure with a series of

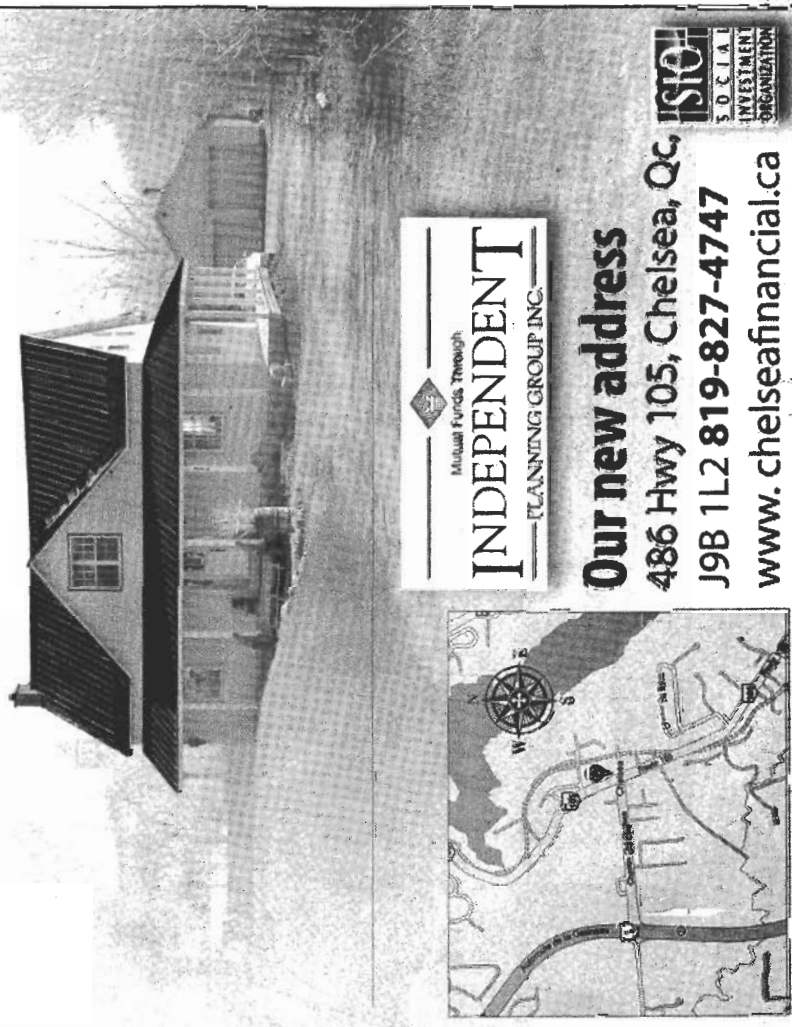
as the present clubhouse.

An unintentionally amusing account of social activities for 1964 is found in the second annual report. The social committee chair noted things started out very poorly but steadily improved. The first event was a sleigh ride attended by only 17 members, mostly women. A tea and fashion show at the Beacon Arms Hotel suffered the same fate. No one seemed to observe that these might be somewhat unusual events for a sailing club. However, things looked up that summer with a successful CJOH Regatta, a Box Social organized by Joyce Richens, the club's Commissioning Day, and a Hawaiian Luau. Today the club is thriving, running a popular junior program and a variety of races. Our tour ended at a point of land marked with a plaque announcing "Richens Point". This acknowledges the club's appreciation for the founding role of Allan Richens. No doubt members also silently thank those four other original members for their foresight and hard work in creating the Gatineau River Yacht Club.

*Information for this story was obtained from Joyce Richens, Volume 27 (Allan Richens) of Up the Gatineau! published by the Gatineau Valley Historical Society and the GRYC website at <http://www.gryc.ca/index.html>*

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