

125th Commemorative Presentation

ACA 2005 Annual Banquet
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American Canoe Association 125th Anniversary Commemorative Presentation

[1. Kirk Havens]

As you know by now, 2005 marks the American Canoe Association's 125th Anniversary. To mark this important occasion, we have scoured the ACA archives and compiled a brief retrospective of the significant highlights in ACA history.

Rather than make you listen to me talk for twenty minutes, I thought I would ask some of the legends of paddlesport to help me tell the ACA story. Most of these folks need no introduction, but just to be polite, I am going to introduce them anyway.

Our first guest designed his first racing canoe – the Minuteman – in 1973. Quickly, his hobby of designing boats grew and he became the 20th century's most prolific designer of human-powered watercraft. He has designed boats for Tubbs, Curtis, Loon Works, Perception, Swift and Bell Canoe. In all, he has designed more than 50 hulls in a variety of materials, and chances are you have paddled one of them. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome David Yost.

A blacksmith who loves paddling, our next guest has manufactured re-creations of Voyageur canoes and has also designed a variety of modern tripping canoes. He is an accomplished historian with over 4,000 book titles in his collection. His collection of canoes is just as impressive. It numbers 100, and when he is done with them, he plans to donate them to the Chicago Maritime Museum. We're pleased to have him be a part of the ACA's history – Ralph Frese.

Our next guest is a past commodore of the ACA who has been a member for over 30 years. This guy bleeds ACA through and through and always finds a way to lighten the mood. As a representative of past ACA Commodores, please welcome David Mason.

You all know our next legend. She's been an IT for more than 20 years, an officer in SEIC during some of its important growth periods, and currently serve the ACA as its Executive Director. Please welcome Pam Dillon.

Our next legend is a two-time World Champion in slalom C-1. He's been a dominating force in canoe slalom paddling techniques and boat design for more than 26 years. He holds a Top 10 Sportsman of the Year Award from the U.S. Olympic Committee, and he is a 2005 Inductee into the International Whitewater Hall of Fame. Please give it up for Davey Hearn.

A professional kayaker since 1989, our next guest is the current world freestyle champion and the only kayaker to win this honor three years in a row. A former Olympic athlete, he is also the Extreme Kayak champion and has been a member of the USA Canoe/Kayak Team for more than 15 years. Off the water, this legend is CEO and founder of Jackson Kayak. Please welcome Eric Jackson.

This duo came together to found Dagger in 1988 and lead an innovation boom that continues today. Their partnership helped to make Dagger one of the fastest growing manufacturers in history. We're proud to say that both these men have served, and will continue to serve, on the ACA Board of Directors. Please welcome Joe Pulliam and Steve Scarborough.

This former outdoor recreation instructor at Greenfield College left the academic lifestyle to found a technical paddling school called the Outdoor Center of New England. His theory-based presentation of paddling with an emphasis on biomechanics helped reshape modern paddlesports. Please welcome the former chair of the ACA's National Instruction Committee, Tom Foster.

As owner of Placid Boatworks, this long-time Adirondack paddler makes a living writing about paddlesports and designing high-end canoes. He helped guide the ACA through its recent strategic planning process, and currently serves on the ACA Board of Directors as past president. Please welcome, Charlie Wilson.

[2. David Yost]

In 1880, Nathaniel H. Bishop composed and printed the following announcement on a hand press in his home in Lake George, New York:

The National Canoe Congress

The following is a call issued by leading American canoeists:

A general convention of canoeists will be held at Caldwell, Warren County, New York – head of Lake George – August 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th 1880, at which it is proposed to perfect the organization of a National Canoe Club, of which local clubs now existing will be branches, and to take such further action in the interests of the pastime as may be deemed expedient.

All canoeists are invited to attend, and as a preliminary measure are requested – whether owning canoes or not – to send their names to N.H. Bishop, Esquire, Lake George, Warren County, New York, indicating their willingness to join the National Club; annual dues to be nominal.

As a result of this announcement, 23 canoeists met at Lake George on August 3rd, 1880 and together they formed the ACA.

[3. Ralph Frese]

From the start, the founding fathers of the ACA had varied interests and purposes in forming the association.

In the ACA's first Constitution, the founders stated the ACA's purpose as "the promotion of canoeing," and said that "all persons of respectable character, of any age, who possess a true love of nature and camp life, and who are in earnest sympathy with the brotherhood of cruising canoeists, whether owners or not, are eligible for membership."

However, Nathaniel Bishop, often referred to as the father of the ACA, told others his purpose in forming the association was to "build up a body of men interested in canoe cruising who would gather information concerning America's waterways. His personal interest in the canoe was as a means of exploration."

Other early members said their interest was in conservation of natural areas. For others, an interest in paddling and sailing races were a prime reason for participation in the early days.

The original Activity Committees -- Cruising, Sailing, and Paddling – served members' needs for nearly 75 years. Since then, the association's interests have broadened, and the number of committees has grown accordingly. The list is long: Slalom, Marathon, Freestyle, Poling, Whitewater Open Canoe, Coastal, Conservation -- all reflecting the varied interests of the association and its membership.

The size of the membership has grown, too. From 23 founders in 1880, the ACA grew to 1625 members in 1889. It hovered around 1000 for many years, then increased dramatically to 2500 in 1972 and then to 4300 by 1978. The 1990s were the period of strongest growth, when the membership approached 30,000. That growth has slowed, but the ACA is fortunate to have a loyal membership that has kept us near that number until today. The Association plans to continue serving them, and continue bringing more into the fold, for many years to come.

[4. Dave Mason]

Early in its history, the Association established a tradition of annual meetings to join paddlers together to camp, canoe, race, exchange ideas and enjoy the company of old friends. This tradition continues today.

The first three “meets” or “encampments,” as they have been called, were held at Crosbyside and Canoe Islands on Lake George, near where the ACA was formed. After that, the rapid growth of the Association led to a policy of moving the encampments around to various locations. As a result, from 1883 through 1903, the encampments traveled to locations such as Ontario, Canada, Lake Champlain; New York’s Hudson River; and Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

As early as 1883, there was some sentiment to find a permanent home for the annual meets. That led to the purchase of Sugar Island, in 1901. Shortly thereafter, in 1903, the annual meets moved to Sugar Island, and with the exception of 1926 and two years during the Second World War, meets have been held at Sugar Island ever since.

[5. Dave Mason cont’d]

The founders originally contemplated a compact organization with a single structure, but the geographic distribution of the membership soon made this impractical, so the ACA’s first divisions began forming in the late 1880s.

The divisions played an important role in the early development of the association. The social events, races and meetings of the divisions were important to division members, and remain very important today, particularly for those persons who were unable to travel long distances to the ACA’s national meets and encampments.

The formation of the ACA also led to the formation of paddling clubs around the country. According to the association’s yearbooks, 35 clubs formed in the first ten years of the ACA’s existence. Many of these clubs are still around today. Since that time, many more clubs have formed, and the ACA does its best to support their on-the-ground efforts to promote paddlesports.

[6. Pamela Dillon]

Women have been a part of the ACA from the very beginning. In the early days, they could only be “honorary” members. As honorary members, they held no voting rights. Later, they were referred to as “associate” members. The archives sometimes list their member numbers starting with the letter “A.”

Despite these early limits, many women were active in the early days of the ACA. In 1902, the women joined together to develop their own flag – the “Squaw Flag” – to signify their involvement and presence at the annual encampments. Women members also cruised and camped with the men and competed in sailing and paddling races.

In 1943, 59 paddlers from the west coast applied for the right to form the Pacific Division of the ACA. Because their ranks included many active women, the group’s application said they would only form the division if women could be full members with all the voting rights of male members. After some consideration, the ACA’s executive committee agreed that women should be entitled to full membership, and extended this policy throughout the association. Shortly thereafter, the Constitution and Bylaws were changed to admit women as full governing members of the association.

[7. Kirk Havens]

While traveling home from the 1883 encampment, William Whitlock, member number 35, observed that the Thousand Islands region of northern New York and Ontario, Canada would be good place for a future meet. In an article in the *American Canoeist*, he wrote “[t]oward the Canada side there are still unoccupied islands which would serve as grounds, and supplies are near at Gananoque and Clayton.” Others agreed, and so the 1884 encampment was held on Grindstone Island, across from Clayton on the American side.

In a parallel development, members of the ACA’s executive committee had been talking about finding some sort of permanent home for the association’s annual encampments. After some delay, the ACA appointed a committee in 1900 charged with the task of obtaining a permanent campsite on the St. Lawrence River. The Committee consisted of Charles E. Britton, a Canadian member residing in Gananoque, and Robert Wilkin of

New York. In 1901, the committee succeeded in acquiring St. Lawrence Island, later renamed Sugar Island, for the sum of \$1000.

In 1903, Sugar Island became the permanent home for the ACA's annual encampment. Since then, members from all over North America have traveled to the region to spend time at the island. The encampments at Sugar Island have featured paddling and sailing races, social activities and instruction for new paddlers. In the 100+ years that encampments have been held there, several generations of Sugar Islanders have grown up with fond memories of the event, and with close ties to the people they have met. The island and its community of people remain a valued part of the ACA tradition.

[8. Davey Hearn]

Paddling competition, in various forms, has always been part of the ACA. The first encampment featured races for both paddling and sailing canoes, with competitors using both single and double bladed paddles. Early craft were the traditional Rob Roy and Peterboro-style boats. However, the early 1900s saw the development of specialized craft. These new boats made competitive racing a major part of the ACA's activities between the first and second world wars.

In 1924, the Washington Canoe Club, part of the ACA's Middle States Division, joined with the Canadian Canoe Association in putting on a demonstration of canoeing at the Olympic Games in Paris, France. Shortly thereafter, the ACA joined the U.S. Olympic Committee, and began working to get canoeing recognized as an olympic sport. Olympic paddling debuted at the 1936 games in Berlin, and eight years later, ACA legends Stephen Lysack and Stephen Macknowski won a gold medal in the 10,000 meter C-2 competition. In 1952, Frank Havens won a gold medal in the 10,000 meter C-1 event, bringing home the medal his father Bill Havens had hoped to bring home 28 years before.

[9. Eric Jackson]

In 1953, a new kind of competition reached American shores: Slalom racing, in which competitors race through a course that simulates the natural hazards and obstacles present in the whitewater river environment. The ACA's paddlers struggled in the early years of international slalom competition, but when the first World Championships were held on U.S. soil in 1979, ACA members took gold in five events, and the U.S. Team was declared the overall winner.

Although the ACA is no longer the National Governing body for olympic paddling, it has continued to actively support U.S. athletes in international competition. The ACA has also continued to support a wide range of competitive paddling programs and events here in the U.S., some of which attract the world's best athletes, and others that are just for fun. Paddlesports competition is part of the rich history of the ACA, and will be for many years to come.

[10. Joe Pulliam]

Since early in its history, the American Canoe Association has had an interest in conservation and stewardship of our natural resources. Our early leaders recognized that paddlers, by the very nature of the sport, have an in-the-field vantage point from which to speak out about the health of our waterways. From the beginning, the ACA has been urging its members to do so.

The archives document action taken as early as 1915 in defense of natural areas, citing their value to canoeists as enjoyable paddling and camping destinations. Since then, ACA members, usually working as volunteers, have stopped the construction of unnecessary dams, eliminated harmful discharges into our waterways, saved wetlands, protected watersheds, and educated the public about the need to preserve our water resources. ACA members have testified on important policy proposals, and also joined with other organizations in forming American Rivers, one of the most effective environmental organizations in the country today.

[11. Steve Scarborough]

In recent years, the ACA has taken on a direct role in the enforcement of the Clean Water Act. We've successfully litigated cases all over the country, forcing states to develop total maximum daily load limits, reducing point source discharges and toxic releases from wastewater treatment facilities, and eliminating combined sewer overflows.

Today, the ACA's stewardship program has both conservation and policy components. The ACA's Water Trails initiative supports and celebrates efforts to develop safe, enjoyable, low-impact paddling opportunities throughout North America. Our public policy efforts support clean water, preservation of our natural areas, and easy access to paddling opportunities without unnecessary government regulation.

Stewardship is an important part of the ACA's mission. The ACA will continue this important work until every river, lake and coastal mile is an enjoyable place to paddle.

[12. Tom Foster]

Since the beginning, the ACA has been at the forefront of paddlesports education. In 1929, Fred Mills, an ACA member and executive with the Boy Scouts, organized a committee to establish a uniform canoeing vocabulary, so that the many diverse organizations involved in paddlesports instruction could provide more consistency in their educational programs.

In the 1930s and 1940s, longtime ACA member Wally Claussen served as Assistant Director of Water Safety Services for the Red Cross. In that capacity, he set up canoe instruction programs for the Red Cross and Boy Scouts, and published the canoeing handbooks for those organizations.

The ACA's own efforts at paddlesports curriculum development began in 1949, when the Western Division, then based in Chicago, published "Know your Canoeing," a booklet that provided essential skills and safety information to paddlers.

Then, in 1973, the newly formed Canoe Instruction Certification Committee, later renamed the Training Committee, began developing the ACA's instructor certification programs. The committee's efforts were led by people whose names may be familiar to you: Gail Cowart, Don Jarrell, and Bunny Johns.

By 1980, the Instructor Certification Committee had developed an instructor's manual and a complete program of certification for basic skills in canoeing and kayaking. Since then, these programs have been expanded, so that they now serve every paddlesport discipline and skill level.

[13. Charlie Wilson]

Meanwhile, the ACA's Safety Committee, then a separate committee, was working to analyze paddlesports accidents and develop effective safety programs. Like today, the committee partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard to develop safety education materials targeted at paddlers, in hopes of preventing excessive regulation of the sport.

By any measure, the ACA's Safety Education and Instruction program has been a success. In 1980, the ACA had certified 500 members as ACA canoe and kayak instructors. The ACA now has 3250 certified instructors. This growth is a tribute to the quality of the instructional programs developed by our Safety Education and Instruction committee and its ancestors, and to the talent of teachers in our ACA instructor corps.

No instructional program that rests on its laurels will remain healthy and relevant for long. However, as the ACA looks to the future, it can be confident that the ACA's role in paddlesports education is secure, so long as the organization continues to do its best to provide programs that enable everyone who is interested in paddlesports, whether they be novices or experts, to develop their skills and enjoy paddling safely.

[14. Kirk Havens]

One hundred and twenty five years is an incredible accomplishment. Just think about what was happening in the world when our band of paddlers gathered together in the 1880's. Mark Twain was writing *A Prince and the Pauper* and *Life on the Mississippi*. Sitting Bull was preparing to surrender. Billy the Kid was shot by Sheriff Pat Garrett. Wyatt Earp and his brothers gunned down the Clanton gang in Tombstone, Arizona. Clara Barton was forming the American Red Cross. Kansas passed prohibition legislation and became the first state in the Nation to 'go dry'. Which explains why Dave Mason refuses to this day to travel there. And Congress passed the Edmunds Law, making polygamy a federal crime. Actually these two pieces of legislation are complimentary since I suspect that if you had more than one spouse you would need a drink.

Our Legends of Paddling remind us of the ACA's vision and that we cannot move forward without understanding our past. We are reminded that when we push off the bank into the water the path that we travel is endless and ever-changing. We understand the famous Greek saying "it is not possible to step twice into the same river." Our Legends of Paddling tie us to our past but it is us – it is you here tonight- that hold the legacy of the ACA in your hands. And while I was not there when the band of 23 gathered on the banks of Lake George in 1880, I am willing to bet alcohol was, so let's take a moment to toast those who went before us. [Raise glass] We here tonight highly resolve that their work shall not have been in vain; that this American Association of Paddlers, by our efforts, shall have a long life of success; and that paddling, as a clean sport, as a true sport, as the best sport shall not perish from the earth. Hear! Hear!

But let us not stop with a celebration of the past. Tonight, let us recommit ourselves to the work of the future. Let us rededicate ourselves to the task of serving the paddling community with high quality, easily accessible paddlesports education. Let us renew our determination to be leaders in sustainable stewardship of our natural environment. And let us resolve to work together to find new ways to make paddlesports recreation opportunities available to everyone, everywhere.

With this renewed commitment, and the incredible talent and energy of our instructors, our members, our volunteers, and all the people in this room, we can make the ACA's second 125 years just as successful as its first 125 years.

Congratulations to all of you and Happy Birthday ACA!

Thank you.