

Chapter 4

INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

The Geelong Yacht Club moved into the 20th century with a sound base, New Rules and By-laws had been established in 1897, the Club had its own club house on the Eastern Beach (albeit subject to two bank mortgages), membership was increasing and more boats were progressively being placed on the Club's register.

Mr. T. A. Dickson, Commodore of the Geelong Yacht Club, was appointed Honorary Secretary of the Geelong Annual Regatta to be held on Commonwealth Day, January 1, 1901. The Regatta was under the patronage of His Excellency, the Lieutenant Governor, the Geelong Town Council and the Borough Councils of Newtown and Chilwell and Geelong West.

A Notice of Regatta published in the Geelong Advertiser on December 29, 1900, requested yacht owners and others interested to illuminate their yachts and display fireworks on Regatta night in order to celebrate the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The regatta was conducted in what the Geelong Advertiser described as a full sail westerly breeze but the yachting correspondent for the Australasian, who wrote under the pseudonym of "Gasket", stated that the wind was "puffy and fitful" at times. He also reported that, while most yachts carried full mainsails, many of them would have been better off with less canvas. And that during some of the angrier puffs, especially those off the high land at the back of the freezing works, the off shore "slammers" laid the competitors down to the skylights!

Two of the yachts, including the new Fyfe designed cutter Aotea, were dismasted, and the Brighton cutter, Tasma, poked her bow sprit through the Eldon's mainsail and tore a couple of cloths out of the after leech, causing both boats to retire.

Nevertheless, the regatta was declared a great success and was enjoyed by the large holiday crowd which thronged the wharfs and the foreshore. Successful Geelong yachts were Mr. C. Shannon's Thistle and W. & E. Curnow's Caress which filled first and second places in the Cruisers' race and Mr. E. Brockman's Rover which won the Open race for square sterned boats of 20 feet or under from scratch.

Evidence that the Geelong Yacht Club was active in club racing comes from two reports in the Melbourne press. One dated February 16, 1901, tells of a race sailed the previous Saturday in a fresh south easterly when Mr. Cumming's Violet 111 beat Mr. C. Shannon's Thistle home by 7 minutes 26 seconds with Mr. E. Brockman's Rover coming in one minute later. On March 16 the Rover won on handicap from the Sylvia with much interest being centred on the struggle for supremacy between the St. Kitts and Caress. In lightening conditions the St. Kitts set a jackyard top sail and finished a dozen lengths ahead of her larger opponent.

In early November 1901, the Geelong Yacht Club published its programme for the 1901-02 season which was stated by the Melbourne press as being quite in keeping with the activity displayed by executives of the Club in the season before. The card listed 10 handicap races, a cruising race to Mornington and a three day cruise in company. As a stimulus to yacht owners to compete, the Club offered a prize of 10 guineas to the yacht obtaining the greatest number of points during the season.

Prior to the opening of the season a race was planned from Portarlington to Geelong but was temporarily abandoned owing to the fact that one of the yachts could not be fitted up in time. The agreement was that there had to be five starters or no race and the withdrawal of the boat mentioned reduced the field to four.

The season was opened on November 23, with the yachts leaving their moorings at 3 p.m.. Headed by the Commodore, Mr. T.A. Dickson in Shamrock (late Violet 111), they sailed in single line along the western shore to the freezing works. After some simple evolutions they returned to the clubhouse where a "nice little spread" was laid out. Here the Season was officially opened and a number of toasts drunk. Other yachts which took part were, Minerva, Rover, Sierra, Waiwera, Sylvia, Beta and Fairy.

The first race for the season was contested on Saturday, November 30, and the following account of the race was published in the Geelong Advertiser on Monday, December 2:-

"Yachting

The Geelong Yacht Club held their first race of the season on Saturday afternoon for Mr. J.A. Strong's trophy. A steady southerly breeze prevailed 'for the first half, shifting to the south-west and west. Eight yachts crossed the lines, and the results are as follows:-

Messrs. Curnow bros' "Caress", scratch, 1; Mr. E. Brockman's Rover, 14min., 2 (8min.12sec. after first boat); Mr. T. A. Dickson's Shamrock, 9min., 3, (4 min. 53 sec. after second boat). In the case of the Sylvia, sailed by Mr. W. Libby, the spar on the lug sail was carried away, the yacht being thus forced to retire after the first round. The Minerva (Mr. W. Allard), the Zephyr (Mr. A. Watt), and she Waiwera (Mr. W. Griffiths) also gave up after sailing half the course. Captain Holland and the hon. sec. (Mr. Harry Bechervaise) carried out the starting and timekeeping.

It is hoped that at the next race, which will be held on Saturday week, more of the members will roll up, as some of the yachts in Saturday's race were undermanned."

It will be noted that a competitor in this event was one, Wilfred Libby in his yacht Sylvia. As the years went by Wilfred Libby was to become one of Geelong's better known yachtsman and many members of the club were to serve their apprenticeship sailing with him. William Libby Wilfred's father had competed in the regattas of 1899 and 1900 in a boat called the Mystery. The Mystery is listed in the official programmes for those two regattas as a square sterned boat of 20 feet on the waterline. He also supported the two regattas by advertising in the programmes. In his advertisement in the 1899 programme, he made the following announcement:-

"W.LIBBY, PRACTICAL SAIL MAKER, has purchased from the Trustees the insolvent stock of OSERBERG, Tent and Tarpaulin Maker, top of Moorabool Street. All new goods to be sold at a sacrifice. Don't forget that Easter is near us and tents will be wanted. The grain season is on. Tarpaulins will be required. Now is the chance of a lifetime. Don't miss it! Come early, you will never regret it. I have also a splendid four spring builder's Wagon for sale, a bargain."

Once again, in 1902, the Annual Geelong Regatta took place on New Year's Day. The weather was fine with a fresh southerly breeze which, apart from a few hard gusts, blew steadily all day. There were only two starters in the main event for yachts of 25 feet or over. These were the Uria (L.W.L. 30'10") and the Sayonara (L.W.L. 38' 7"). And both were from the Royal Yacht Club of Victoria. On the second round the Sayonara carried away her topmast in a hard puff at the bottom of Bellarine Street.

Although the Sayonara completed the course under reduced canvas, the Uria won comfortably on handicap. The Caress won the Cruisers race and the Rover added another win to her already long list of victories by winning the Open race for square stern yachts.

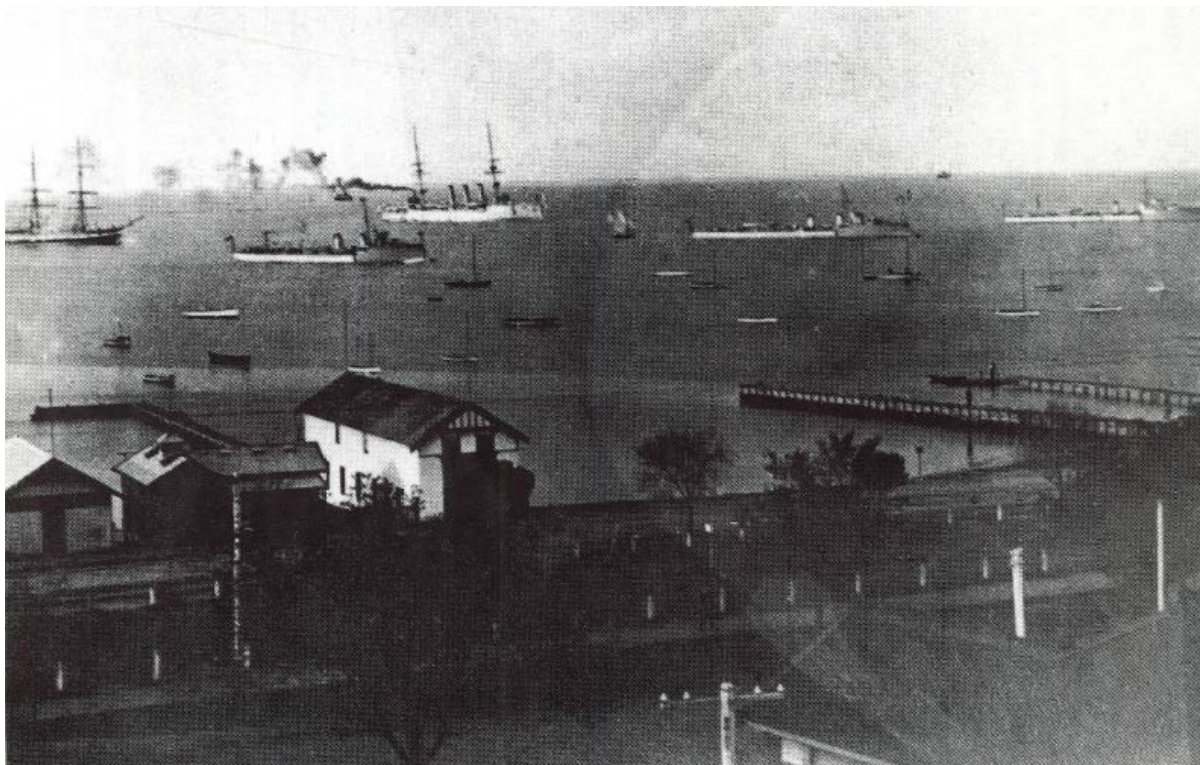
But the regatta was not a financial success with a loss of £10/4/8d. This unfortunate state of affairs was laid squarely on the shoulders of the Geelong yachting fraternity by both the press and the Regatta secretary, Commodore of the Geelong Yacht Club, Mr. T. A. Dickson. The Geelong Times reported, in part, as follows:-

"The entries for the various events on the programme were good, but the starters were few. And just here it seems to be necessary to point out that if the Geelong Yacht Club wishes to thrive and attain anything like the standing of the Melbourne clubs, considerably more patriotism will have to be shown than was apparent yesterday. Looking through the entries in the programme we find that there are 25 altogether for five races and of these 11 came from Geelong. There is no secret about it that several owners did not enter their yachts for certain races, simply because they did not think they had a chance to win. It was very justly pointed out yesterday to our representative, by a couple of leading officers of the Club that yachting is not a money making game at any time. The man who buys a yacht with the idea of making money out of it by winning races always makes a most egregious blunder, because it is odds on that he comes out on the wrong side of the ledger. Yachting is a fascinating pastime, but the man who takes it up must be prepared to put his hands in his pockets and 'weigh-out' from time to time. Fortunately yachting, as a pastime or as a sport, stands above the breath of suspicion in the matter of straight going. And that is saying a lot, for there is scarcely any sport in which men are engaged at the present time (with the notable exception of cricket), in which barefaced swindling is not carried on. However the foregoing reflections are suggested by the remark of the Commodore that there ought to be more patriotism amongst the members of the Geelong Yacht Club, and that when a regatta is got up, the success or otherwise of the show should not be left to the Melbourne clubs -with all of which, of course, we heartily agree. The Geelong Yacht Club has advantages which few other clubs enjoy, and the members ought to be patriotic enough to stand by the club when a regatta is being carried out such as that yesterday."

And in his report to the public meeting held on January 6 to wind up the affairs of the regatta, Mr. Dickson stated that he had made up his mind to resign office because the meagre support which he received, even from Geelong yacht owners at the regatta was not encouraging to a secretary. However, at the instigation of the chairman, he was persuaded to remain on but stated that if matters did not improve by the next regatta he would relinquish his post.

The Geelong Yacht Club conducted a race for members on February 15, which was won on handicap by Mr. H.P. Douglass' Mayflower, with Shamrock second and Caress third. At the same time it was reported that E. Brockman's Rover had won the race for yachts under 22 feet L.W.L. at the Victorian Yachting Association regatta on the same day. On this occasion the Rover was sailed by Mr. Charles Blunt.

Another race was held on Saturday, February 22 and this time Caress was first with Shamrock second and Mayflower third. The press report of this event also stated that a cruise to Portarlington was planned for the following Saturday and that it was hoped there would be a good number of Geelong yachts participating as several Melbourne clubs were cruising to the Port on the same day to meet the Geelong yachts. So even in those early days Portarlington was a rendezvous for yachts from both sides of the bay, just as it is today, although recently to a lesser extent.



The Original Clubhouse of the Geelong Yacht Club, circa 1910

In the year 1902, both overdrafts were liquidated and paid off. The Geelong Yacht Club was in the proud position of having a club shed free from debt, a credit balance in the bank and over 100 financial members on the roll.

Office-bearers of the Club for the season 1902-3 were as follows:-

Commodore:	T.A. Dickson
Vice-Commodore:	H. Fielder
Rear-Commodore:	W. Griffiths
Captain:	F. Roadnight
Hon. Secretary:	E. Bechervaise
Hon. Treasurer:	Harry Bechervaise
Committee	C.M. Poynter, P. Neilson, A. Morris, E. Brockman, Rev. N. Kelly, H. P. Douglass

The programme of events for the Season 1902-3 was as follows:-

No. 1. Nov. 22 1902	Opening of Season Trophy
No. 2. Dec. 6 1902	Trophy
No. 3. Jan. 1 1903	Geelong Regatta Trophy
No. 4. Jan. 17 1903	Trophy (To Portarlington)
No. 5. Feb. 7 1903	Trophy
No. 6. Feb. 28 1903	Trophy
No. 7. Mar. 21 1903	Trophy

Note: The Club will present a cash trophy of £5/5/- to the yacht obtaining the greatest number of points in above races, points allotted as follows:-

1st boat	4 points
2nd boat	3 points
3rd boat	2 points
Starters	1 point

All starters to complete half the course. Points obtained in the Geelong Regatta not counted. The Committee reserve the right of altering this programme.

RULES

1. All races to be sailed under G.Y.C. Rules.
2. Entries must be in the hands of the Hon. Sec. not later than the Monday previous to the race.
3. Handicap on performances.
4. No restriction as to sail except when specified.
5. Crews to consist of members of the G.Y.C. only, except paid hands allowed in proportion to tonnage.
6. Course will be twice around, unless otherwise specified.
7. Races to start at 3 p.m. from the end of Yarra Street pier.
8. Flag A will be hoisted 5 minutes before starting and lowered at starting. Flag B hoisted to mean race postponed until further notice. Flag M Hoisted means race finishes with round about to be completed

The opening of the 1902-03 season took place on Saturday, November 22, 1902 in fine conditions. Although some of the larger yachts were not yet in commission a fleet of 18 boats took part in the manoeuvres under the general ship of Commodore T. A. Dickson. After the evolutions the yachts sailed across to the lagoon, where they were welcomed by Mr. Frank Austin, the owner of Avalon Estate. During the evening, at the invitation of the Commodore, the crews assembled ashore, where a large marquee, lent for the occasion by Mr. Libby, had been erected. Several items of instrumental and vocal music were given by members and there was a plentiful supply of liquid and solid refreshments.

Toasts were drunk to the Commodore, the Vice-Commodore, Mr. H. Fielder, the Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Bechervaise and Mr. Frank Austin. and thanks were tendered to Mr. Libby and Mr. Rooke, who had done a great deal to make the evening a success. Captain Voss, of the Tilikum was present and gave a few brief notes of his adventurous voyage.

The first race of the season was sailed on December 8, when Mr. H.P. Douglass won his own trophy in the Mayflower. Mr. McPherson's Ariel was second and Mr Brockman's Rover third.

The Geelong Annual Regatta was held on January 1, 1903 in fine conditions, which suited the large crowd which assembled to watch the events. But although the light south easterly wind did not suit some of the larger craft, it did give the yachts the opportunity to set their largest spread of canvas. With their spinnakers flying for the run down the western shore they were likened by the Geelong Advertiser reporter, to "huge white butterflies".

There were only two entries, both from Melbourne. In the main event, the Yacht Race for boats over 25 feet on the waterline fell through, following the withdrawal of one of the entrants. Mr. Barry's 27

foot White Wings, from the Royal Yacht Club, won the Cruisers race and E. Brockman once again won the Open race for square-sterned yachts. Commodore Dickson gained second place in the 12 mile race for yachts under 25 feet in the Shamrock.

At a meeting of subscribers to the Geelong Regatta, held on January 12, 1903, it was revealed that a small profit of £5/5/2d had been achieved. At this meeting a letter was received from the Comunn Na Feinne Society pointing out that their annual fixture for their sports clashed with the Annual Regatta. As it was considered that this was prejudicial to both fixtures, it was hoped that the Regatta Committee would see the advisability of selecting a date other than January 1 for future regattas. This letter was referred to the incoming committee.

In the next Club race conducted on January 17, Vice-Commodore H. Fielder won his own trophy in Clytie. The weather for this event was reported to be "half a gale" blowing from the north-west and the six starters crossed the start line under greatly reduced sail.

On February 7, 1903, the Geelong Yacht Club sailed a cruising race to Portarlington, with yachts starting on their time allowance and the finishing line to the east of the Portarlington pier. Nine yachts competed in favourable conditions. The Sylvia, with 50 minutes handicap, was first home but was disqualified for failing to keep outside of a buoy near Portarlington and the race was awarded to the Minerva, sailed by W. Allard. Scratch boat, Charles Shannon's Thistle, completed the journey in 2 hours 4 minutes, 45 seconds, to gain third placing. This must have been considered a most respectable time for those days.

At a meeting of the new Regatta Committee held on Monday, October 26, 1903, the letter from the Comunn Na Feinne Society, relating to the clash of fixtures on January 1, was again ventilated. In deference to the Society, who had held their sports on January 1 for 47 years, it was decided that the next regatta would take place on Monday, February 1, 1904.

In the meantime, evidence that the G.Y.C. was still active is provided by a report in the Geelong Advertiser of January 25, 1904, of a race conducted by the Club on January 23. This event was won by the Thistle with the Mayflower second and W. Libby's Sylvia third. Once again, we see virtually the same yachts as for previous seasons in that era featuring in the results; clearly indicating that although the Club was strong in membership, it was not strong in competitive boat numbers.

This is further emphasised by a Geelong Advertiser report of the regatta held about a week later, on February 1, which stated in part: "On a sheet of water like Corio Bay the best regatta in Victoria should be witnessed, but if the movement does not receive support from local boat owners, it will never reach the dimensions desired."

The weather was fine on this occasion but the very light breeze from the north west did not induce good racing, and it would seem that most of the interest of the 3000 odd spectators centred around the water sports, adjacent to the wharfs. There were only two entries in the main event, the 20 mile race for the larger yachts. Both of these boats were from Melbourne and the race was won by the Salacia, from the St. Kilda Yacht Club. The only other starter, the Bonnie (P.M.Y.C.) was out-distanced in the first round and retired.

Only six yachts in all made the trip from Melbourne to participate in the regatta and this prompted the Regatta Committee, at its meeting on February 8, 1904, to pass the following motion; "That a letter be sent to the V.Y.R. Association, the Royal Yacht Club and the Brighton Yacht Club, pointing out the very poor entries accorded the recent Geelong Annual Regatta and expressing the hope that if a regatta be again held on Corio bay that, in the interests of yachting, a better support be given".

At this meeting it was also decided that the Committee be at liberty to loan any surplus money to the Geelong Yacht Club, if so desired, at 3 1/2% interest. At this stage the balance sheet revealed a surplus of, £61/16/1d.

The opening of the G.Y.C. 1904-5 season took place on Saturday, November 5, 1904. Owing to a very heavy westerly wind blowing in the afternoon, it was not considered advisable to hold any evolutions on the bay. The yachts therefore made straight for the lagoon where a tent had been pitched on the Avalon Estate, by the permission of Mr. Frank Austin. During the evening members were entertained by the Commodore, Mr. H.P. Douglass, who had led some 10 yachts and about 40 members across the bay in his yacht Mayflower, despite the stiff three reef breeze which was blowing. An enjoyable evening was had by all, and as the weather had moderated by the following day, a pleasant sail home was experienced. One cannot help but wonder how the yachtsmen's wives enjoyed the weekend!

It would appear that support for the regatta from Melbourne, and indeed, from the local club was not forthcoming for, at a public meeting, held on February 2, 1905, it was unanimously decided that NO regatta would be held in that season. It was further determined that funds at present in hand be left in the hands of the Geelong Yacht Club as a loan at 3% interest.