

# A PLACE FOR SAILING: THE LAKE SUNAPEE YACHT CLUB



BY *KM Hurley*  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *John Quackenbos*



In the 1600s, the Dutch invented the yacht for practical purposes. Soon after, the English refined it as a recreational sport vehicle. The Irish then developed a venue for it — a place for people to convene, talk about things, have a drink or a cup of tea and a meal, see friends, play a game, take the kids swimming and dance on Saturday nights.

Oh yes, and it's a place where sailing happens, too.

What the Irish invented — they even called it such — was a yacht club.

Some say a yacht club is a place with high property taxes and the membership fees to prove it. Some

say it's a community where everyone knows everyone else. It can also be a training ground for Olympic athletes. This is what Brad Nichol will tell you.

"The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club has continuously focused on developing sailing on the lake and encouraging young sailors to enjoy a lifelong sport," Nichol says. "Without the help of the yacht club at a young age, I would never have reached the level of sailing that I am at today."



courtesy Betsy Alexander

*The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club, circa 1930 (left) and today (below)*

Nichol's level of sailing? The Olympics. In fact, Nichol will take the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club all the way to Beijing, China, in 2008. Nichol will compete as a Star class sailor with his teammate, Andy Horton, from Burlington, Vt.

### The yacht

In post Renaissance Europe, the Netherlands was becoming a formidable empire with significant wealth to protect. The low, flat, blustery Dutch landscape was webbed with canals and even sliced

► YACHT CLUB continued on page 40



John Quackenbos

**YACHT CLUB** *continued from page 39*  
 down the middle by an inland sea. The Dutch navy developed agile wooden sailing vessels to defend their shallow, often narrow, waterways. The vessels were called jachts, meaning to “hunt” or “pursue.”

Sure enough, some people — specifically, one British monarch — soon discovered the recreational possibilities of these new, sporty sailing vessels. Known for his hedonistic tendencies, King Charles II of England (1630-1685) was enamored with these Dutch “yachts.” He insisted on them as a travel and recreational vehicle.

In 1720, in County Cork, Ireland, the Irish opened the first yacht club. A yacht club then was much what it is



*Brad Nichol (left) and Andy Horton at the 2006 Rolex Miami OCR Championships*



*Nichol and Horton sailing in the Star Class of the 2006 World Championships*

## TURNING NICHOL INTO GOLD

Brad Nichol of Sunapee has teamed up with Andy Horton of Burlington, Vt., to represent the United States in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China. Meet Nichol the first week of August at Lake Sunapee. Visit the Web site to learn more about their efforts and get information on the event at [www.hortonnichol2008.com/](http://www.hortonnichol2008.com/)

today: A place to practice yachting and a place to socialize about it. The second oldest yacht club is not far from the first, also in Ireland. It opened in 1731.

The two clubs were just the beginning of a trend that spread to England and over to the American colonies. Yachting and yacht clubs became massively popular in the late Victorian era. It was during this period that Sunapee, N.H., was just finding its identity as part of the New World.

### The making of a yacht club

By 1880, Sunapee had become a hive of businesses spinning their water wheels on the Sugar River, the outlet for Lake Sunapee. In summer, steamships traversed the lake all day long. The railroad was bursting with tourists and luminaries arriving for recreation at Lake Station in Newbury. By 1893, a Regatta Association was in place to sponsor boat-related activity on the lake.

On Aug. 29, 1902, 12 sailors met at the Ben Mere Inn in Sunapee Harbor and established the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club (LSYC). The club’s first commodore (a yacht club term for president) was elected, as well as a secretary-treasurer.

The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club sponsored races and yachting-related events. For a time, fierce and exciting competition ensued between this club and the Soo-Nipi Park Yacht Club, a second club founded by New York psychologist Dr. John Quackenbos in 1907 on the opposite side of the lake.

In 1912 the two clubs became one, and the united entity was called the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club. The first clubhouse was established at Soo-Nipi Park in New London, just over the Newbury line. A Lake Sunapee Yacht Club brochure from the period promotes the wonderful facility, describing “spacious rooms, stately fireplace, extensive verandas overlooking the water...” The brochure also states that the club, “while organized primarily to promote the development of yachting interest on Lake Sunapee, it fulfills as well the requirements of a social club.”

The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club, now located at the end of an offshoot of



*The yacht club has always been a family place.*



*An aerial view, circa 1960*

Garnet Hill Road in Sunapee, sits right on the lake. This “new” clubhouse was built in 1925. It’s one of a few remaining structures designed by renowned architect Prentice Sanger and built by Albert Stocker of Sunapee — the duo who worked together on the John Hay estate in Newbury.

The clubhouse is easy to spot from the water. It is brown and is usually surrounded by boats. Its decks and docks, moorings, slips and hoists stand by, seemingly agreeable to anything that floats, available to serve its members. All summer, happy blue umbrellas line the veranda overlooking the water, spreading their wings over lunch and cocktails. Kids jump and splash within brightly colored buoy lines.

### Layers of history

The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club is a private members club, meaning that a person must be asked to join, and there are fees associated with membership.

What you get for your investment is access to the facilities plus something a little less measurable. Tenured yacht club members will talk less about the “stuff” at the club and more about the community, the history and the tradition.

“What I have found as commodore is the challenge of maintaining and promoting tradition,” says current Commodore Tom Cottrill of New

London. "The tradition, along with the club's rich history and membership, serve as the foundation of the character of this sailing club."

Lake Sunapee Yacht Club tradition is about families getting to know each other over years: Seeing each other at that annual formal party; racing each other in a sailboat competition and buying dinner for the winner; the shared bond of unforgettably freezing swimming lessons on a cold August morning; and, of course, the crush across the table at Sunday brunch.

Skip Nolin, former commodore and lifelong member of the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club, describes this phenomenon well. He points to a slope by the water. "See where that picnic table is? Well, imagine the low hill without the table. My parents would sit there, with the neighbors, and watch the kids while we learned to swim and water ski," the Sunapee resident says. "Then my wife Wendy and I sat in that same spot with the neighbors our age and we watched our own kids learn and grow up. Now I watch my kids watching their own with their friends and their friends' kids. All happened right there. Layers of history. It's wonderful."

But change is inevitable. Cottrill sees the changes at the yacht club as parallel to broader cultural changes. "Today there is a lot of competition for people's time. The hours of the day are more structured than in my youth, when we would spend many timeless afternoons traversing the lake for the sheer pleasure of it. Sailing was just what we did; it was how we spent the day," he says. "Now, sailing lessons are the only time kids sail. Then it's off to the next scheduled activity. The way of living is just...different."

Cottrill says that the trick is not to resist change but to "engineer change, to allow for the most benefits for all involved."

#### A lifelong sport

The Lake Sunapee Yacht Club has five tennis courts, a full kitchen and a snack bar. It has a lofty main room with huge stone fireplace, a wonderful glassed-in porch, and beautiful swimming and diving areas. It's a great place for children

➤ **YACHT CLUB** continued on page 42

# MORAE Jewelers



On Site Jewelry Repairs ✧ Watch Repairs  
Custom Work ✧ Estate Jewelry ✧ Consignment

#### Winter Hours

M-Th 9:30 – 5:30 Friday 9:30 – 6  
Saturday 10:00 – 5:00

428 Main Street, New London, NH  
526.2029

[www.moraejewelers.com](http://www.moraejewelers.com)

# Sunapee Cruises



#### MV KEARSARGE RESTAURANT SHIP

There is no better view of the lake than from one of our tables! Enjoy a relaxing dinner or stroll the outer deck while enjoying a cocktail.

[www.mvkearsarge.com](http://www.mvkearsarge.com)  
603.938.6465

#### MV MT SUNAPEE II TOUR BOAT

Open top deck for sun and relaxing; enclosed lower deck for liquid sunshine.

One of our captains will be your guide as you cruise the lake... fish stories included!

[www.sunapeecruises.com](http://www.sunapeecruises.com)  
603.938.6465





# Artisan's

Since 1975

Where people plan their outfit...  
Around their jewelry.

Fine Jewelry, Handcrafted Items, and Fanciful Gifts!

195 Main Street, P.O. Box 124, New London, NH 03257 Ph: (603) 526-4227  
Fall/Winter Hours: Sun&Mon 12N-7, Tues-Thurs 11am-8pm, Fri&Sat 11am-9pm



## Don't let your **A.R.M.** get you stuck in a trap.

For the past few years the low initial payments for A.R.M.'s or **Adjustable Rate Mortgages** have helped many people buy new homes, but the "A" in A.R.M. stands for Adjustable, and those rates are likely to go up.

Fortunately, today rates are still relatively low and for most people this is a good time to convert to a fixed rate loan.

The best way to find out if converting could help you, is to sit down with me or one of my associates at Mascoma Savings Bank for a free consultation. Whether your current loan is from here or a bank on the other side of the country, we can help you understand the options and save you from a serious trap down the road.



Leslee Swett  
leslee.swett@mascomabank.com

Call today and take some of the worries out of tomorrow.



**MASCOMA  
SAVINGS  
BANK**

Member  
FDIC

888-627-2662 | [www.mascomabank.com](http://www.mascomabank.com)



YACHT CLUB *continued from page 41*

to learn to swim or serve a tennis ball. It's a place to learn how to babysit, how to behave at a formal event, how to belong to something that has an identity larger than just you or your family. It's good, clean fun.

Brad Nichol agrees, then points out that the yacht club is, actually, sometimes about the sailboats.

(Oh yes, the sailboats!)

The Lake Sunapee Star Fleet — a group of sailors at the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club who sail Star Boats — organizes local regattas and races on the weekends. The LSYC hosts events like the 2002 Star North American Championship, where 50 Star class boats representing five nations convened at Lake Sunapee to race for the crown. At about 23 feet long and 1,500 pounds and bearing a main sail of almost 300-square feet, a Star boat is known for its powerful acceleration and deceleration. It's also known for the control the crew has over what parts of the sail make contact with wind at any given time. The result: Speed and control. These two things make the Star class boats an excellent competition vehicle.

"Growing up on Lake Sunapee is an unlikely start to becoming a Olympic yacht racer, but the unique combination of challenging sailing conditions, motivated organizations such as the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club and the Lake Sunapee Star Fleet provided me with the base I needed to become one of the nation's top sailors," Nichol says.

Suddenly those fun little blue umbrellas on the Lake Sunapee Yacht Club veranda seem to stand up a little straighter. The yacht club is about serious athletic achievement.

Ah well, "Nichol" isn't a very Irish name, anyway. **K**

*KM Hurley is a freelance writer living in New Hampshire.*

*Professional photographer John Quackenbos is the sixth generation of his family to summer on Lake Sunapee. He is the athletic photographer for Boston College and Quackenbos splits his time between Sunapee and Boston.*