

Boat Hauling & Railway, early 50's

At first the boats were moved by block and tackle, with human backs providing the power. Soon after the Club was organized, they purchased a small stationary engine. This five horsepower winch was replaced with the "modern" (1910 model with 1500 power) unit that we use today in the early 50's. The small winch was moved to the island where it was used to haul cradles. It is still on the island although it hasn't been used for some time.



Boat launching using the ramp.

The winch pulled a line that was reeved through blocks that could be attached to trees or deadends in any number of ways throughout the yard. The cradles rolled over the earth on 4 inch steel pipe rollers that were eight feet long. The system worked well enough that they hauled as many boats per day over the bank as we do today on the railway.

The first upgrade of this system was to use half length rollers to make faster turns (and to make the pipes easier to carry). In 1955 the Club purchased its first "dooskey" for \$125. (No, it is not one of the ones we still use!) Starting in about 1953, one begins reading several times a year references to planning and building a hauling facility. Engineers were consulted and hired, and all sorts of systems were considered. These ranged from smoothing the embankment and regrading the lot lower to the height of the Gas Dock, to building a "sea-plane ramp" to a modern "Travel-Lift" to a crane and sling, and to the eventual chosen equipment - a marine railway. After "due consideration" the railway was completely designed, financed, built, and installed within four months in 1957. ("due consideration" is a euphemism for years of argument. We must keep in mind that the Club at that time did not have any long-range funding plans or reserves of any kind. They worked strictly hand to mouth and seemed to prefer to do it that way.)



Early railway launching.

The railway when completed was received with enthusiasm. It immediately worked better than what anyone had expected of it and many congratulations were shared. Coincidentally, earlier that year the Club had designed and purchased its first set of steerable dolly wheels (yes, the same ones we use today with new rubber and bearings) which allowed the boats to move through the yard some five to ten times faster than leap-frogging pipe rollers.

Improvements were devised in the railcar and it was rebuilt in 1963. That car's superstructure was entirely replaced in 1978, and the running gear and undercarriage were replaced in 1991. She has worn at least three wooden decks, many coats of paint, and sometimes the wheels are even greased. Mainly, we take a lot of pride in noticing that the notes do not reveal any serious accidents of any kind over 50 years of hauling boats with only volunteer labor.

The casual reader might wonder by now, "How is it that all of the business of the Yacht Club seems to be about clubhouses, committees, meetings, and boat storage, with little to do with actually running boats?" The yachtsman knows, shaking his head sully perhaps, that that's the way it actually is. We have a relatively short boating season, but many many hours of work to prepare for it. There are times in fact, that many hours have to be spent just preparing for the worst that Nature has to offer. One of those times was in 1954 when Hurricane Carol and Diane hit New England. The photos tell the story of the storm (a foot of water was standing in the Clubhouse at high water) but they don't adequately describe the efforts of the members that secured the docks and boats, preventing any major loss.

The main function of the Club that directly involves boats and boating is when and where each boat will be docked. In the earliest days this was simpler. All boats were at moorings, spread all the way across the river. (Of course there were "prime" mooring locations and of course they were assigned by seniority.) Many "old-timers" felt that docks were bad for boats, that they would chafe and strain instead of being free to turn into the wind as on a mooring or at anchor. These theories must not have been universally held, because there is no record or memory of any unused dock space, once it had been built.