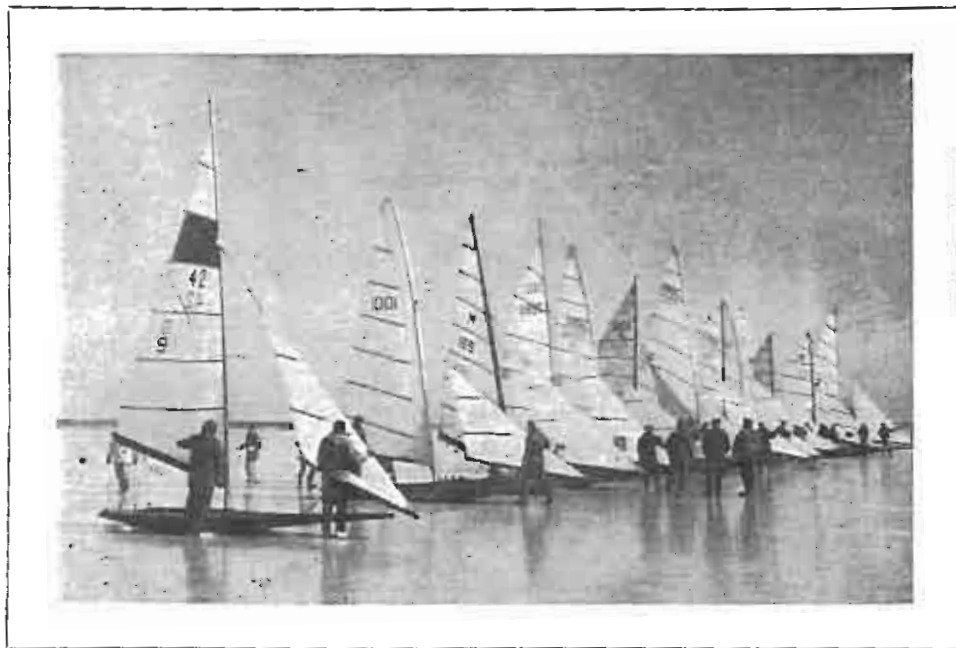


# LONG ISLAND FORUM



Part of 1970 Great South Bay Scooter fleet lined up for start of Commodore Cup race. Scoot 101, fifth from right, won the race. See "Rudderless Rig" by William H. Harless in this issue.

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Rudderless Rig:

## The Great South Bay Ice Scooter

WHEN I first came on the ice in the winter of 1920 the Scooter Club was well organized as the most unique Ice Yacht Club in the world. And it still is for even now the annual membership dues are only two dollars. Try to beat that!

No story of the modern Scooter would be acceptable to the historian without some mention of the men and the boats that have gone before and founded this unique Ice Yacht Club. So I hope you will give a thought to these men and their boats, for we owe them much and I personally will salute some of them at the end of this story.

By 1920 the Scooter was so far advanced as to rig and runners, and the hulls to carry them, that they were able to beat the best of the rear steerer Ice Boats, as can be verified by the number of cups won years ago in boat for boat competition with the Ice Boats.

At that time most of the rigs were gaff mainsails and mastheaded jibs. A few Marconi rigs began to appear on the ice but no Marconi rig was ever an outstanding performer. One rig that showed some promise was the Sliding Gunther.

This rig used later on the *Little Ida A.* was in effect a high peaked gaff rig, and even her record of wins was mainly due to the skillful sailing ability of Bill and Lee Colson. And maybe a little, too, to the rest of the fleet being just ordinary.

This was all before the introduction of stainless steel rigging and Dacron sailcloth. With what those Old Timers had to work with they got marvelous results. But then they were Scooter Men. Sailing on the bay all summer in their fast yachts, when in the winter they stepped in a Scooter they were doing what came naturally.

William H. Harless



A remarkable racing photo of the *LITTLE IDA A.* No. 35, showing most-headed jib and long main boom then in favor.

I got my first Scooter ride in Commodore Fred Thurber's *Little Elmer*. This was, as far as I know, the only Scooter that grand old Master Boat-builder Gil Smith ever built.

Commodore Fred Thurber sailed her boat for boat against the Orange Lake Ice Boat fleet on Orange Lake for a reputed side bet of \$2500 and won easily.

My first regatta against the Ice Boats was when in the mid 20s the Lake Hopatcong Ice Boat Club challenged the Scooters to race against their Ice Boats on Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey. There was some talk among their members of how much of a handicap to allow the Scooters. They thought there wasn't anything that could beat their Ice Boats. This offer was declined with thanks. The Scooter Men declared emphatically, "we sail you boat for boat or not at all." And the Scooters gave the Ice Boats a thorough beating.

To show how much Scooter sailing in those days was so much a part of Long Island, when the Scooters beat the Ice Boats you might have thought

it was *Mardigras* time on Long Island. The Pathe News had special news reels of the races on Lake Hopatcong. Mike Glynn announced the films were to be shown as a special Scooter night at the Patchogue theatre. I believe they were shown continuously for two weeks, but I don't remember Glynn ever giving a Scooter man a pass.

In those days of the late 20s, more than now, whenever there was ice all work came to a halt, and everybody threw buckets of water into their Scooters to swell them up after a long summer dry-out and took to the ice. I had built a few boats in an attempt to develop a Scooter of my own design but without much success. But I was always on the ice no matter what.

About that time the depression was beginning to build up and work was scarce. We used to hang around Bailey's lumber mill to see where a load of lumber was going and follow it to see if we could get a job. But there just was not any to be had. My favorite hope for a job as a carpenter was to go down early in the morning and hang around the corner of Patchogue's Ocean Avenue and Main Street and hope somebody would see me and give me a job.

Every morning I used to watch a little Jewish jeweler leave his store on Main Street and go around the corner to Ocean Avenue to get his morning paper. His name was Mr. Smitan and he had to pass a Greek green grocer by the name of Mr. Chumas. When he passed Mr. Chumas he always greeted him with "Good morning Mr. Chumas—it's a nice morning Mr. Chumas" and Mr. Chumas would always answer with "Good morning Mr. Smitan—it's a good morning Mr. Smitan". After Mr. Smitan got his paper and not two minutes later it was always again "Good

morning Mr. Chumas — it's a nice morning Mr. Chumas" and Mr. Chumas would always reply "Good morning Mr. Smitan—it's a nice morning Mr. Smitan". They always reminded me of that great old vaudeville team of Galliger and Shean whose theme song was "Good morning Mr. Galliger, how are you Mr. Shean", only I think Mr. Smitan and Mr. Chumas were funnier.

One morning Mr. Smitan asked me if I wanted a job as a carpenter. I said yes, if it was a good job. You had to say that as a stall otherwise they would beat you down from 75 cents an hour to 50; times being what they were.

Mr. Smitan had some old second-hand paneling he wanted to put up behind his store window as a background for his display of brass plated jewelry. I told him I would be on the job when he opened in the morning.

Next morning I got started on the paneling. He only had a narrow ten foot and my tools and his stuff took up about all of the floor space, so that nobody could have gotten in to buy anything even if they had wanted to.

I was working on a saw horse out on the sidewalk when Gil Clark came by with his Scooter, the *Marjorie L.*, on a truck. This was about a quarter to ten and he had to stop for a light. When the light changed I was on the truck with him headed for Bellport. It was five o'clock before I got back to Mr. Smitan and the job.

To put it mildly Mr. Smitan was like a wild man. He shout-



**LITTLE SCOOT**, flying the Commodore's broad pennant as she crossed the channel at Lake Hopatcong in 1938.

ed at me "Look at my store —my business is ruined, where were you?". Now at a time like that you can't just stand there—you have to say something. So I said I had to go get a piece of moulding.

That must have been the wrong thing to say because that's when Mr. Smitan hit the ceiling. Really I couldn't blame him because in the first place I didn't need a piece of moulding and it wouldn't have taken me seven hours to get it if I had.

I promised to work all night if I had to get his window done. He gradually began to simmer down and by nine o'clock he began to thaw because I had been telling him about Scooter sailing and how when there was ice we just had to be on the bay.

Mr. Smitan had an annoying habit of picking up bent nails and handing them to me

to use again. Normally I would have told him to cut it out but I figured I owed him something for the way I had let him down by going to Bellport so I just took the nails. But instead of using them I dropped them down the leg of my overalls and let them fall out on the floor.

Pretty soon he began to recognize some of them as old friends. I had to tell him a carpenter never picked up a dropped nail even if it was a good one because the cost of time and labor lost was worth more than the nail. So after that he put them in a box and kept them for his own use.

By ten o'clock Mr. Smitan said, "You know, Bill Harless,

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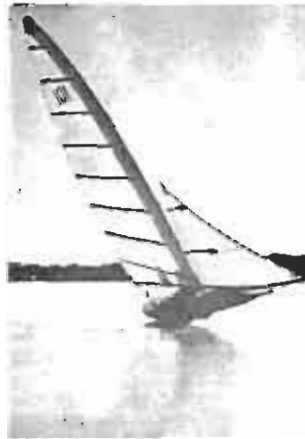
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**SCOOT** numbered 101 because Bill Harless believes she is more than 100 percent perfect. He also believes "the boat will never be built that can beat her".

I never had any fun like that Scooter sailing and I envy you, come on down to Fogerty's lunchroom and I will buy you a cup of coffee". So over coffee and doughnuts I told him a lot more about the fun the Scooter men have. When we said good night the last thing Mr. Smitan said was "Bill Harless, I envy you". And ever after "I envy you" was always a part of his good night.

Now here was a highly intelligent man who owned his own business, yet he envied me, an unemployed carpenter, because I had an exciting hobby, something he had always missed. As long as I lived in Patchogue Mr. Smitan was one of my best friends.

And that's the way it was in the 20's. Whenever there was ice everything else came to a standstill.

I was still trying to build a

Scooter of my own design and it wasn't until 1936 that I won my first cup in *Little Scoot*. But by then I knew I had what I wanted, and *Little Scoot* came on the ice with the first of the Hook Rigs. She was good enough to get her name on some of the big cups, in competition with the best of the big Scooters, besides winning in her own small class.

In 1941 when for the first time the Scooters sailed in the Eastern Ice Yacht Racing Association regatta at Lake Hopatcong *Little Scoot* won in the small class and *Big Scoot*, another Harless built boat won in the big class. Currently both cups are held by Harless built Scooters, *Little Scoot* and *Captain Scoot*.

Of all the boats I have built *Little Scoot* is still my favorite. *Scoot* and all the others that were to come later were just refinements of *Little Scoot*. And she is still winning her share of trophies every winter after forty years of hard racing.

When I built *Scoot*, No. 101 in 1946 I knew the peak had been reached in Scooter design and that was why I numbered her 101, because she is more than 100 percent perfect and I know the boat will never be built that will be able to beat her.

When Nelson Ackerly, a nephew of the greatest Scooter Man of them all, first saw *Scoot*, he said "Some day I am going to own that Scooter". And today he does own her and she couldn't be in better hands. Something of the great Alfred Ackerly is being carried on in his nephew

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Nelson. With Nelson sailing *Scout* she is unbeatable.

With all we owe to the old time scooter men I would like to add my tribute as something of them to be remembered. If I have overlooked some it is only because these were the ones I was most in contact with, as I was trying to develop my design of a Scooter that eventually turned out to be *Scout* No. 101.

No. 35, the *Little Ida A.*, the greatest of all the double enders, and named for Alfred Ackerly's Mother, a Clipper in her own right.

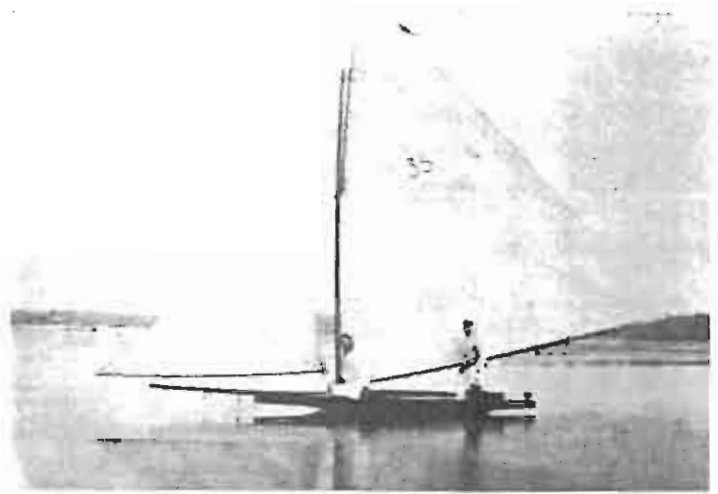
The remarkable racing photograph shows the mast headed jib and long main boom then in favor, also how the double ender hull gave a good lead to the main sheet.

In a winning boat credit due is seldom if ever given to the Sheet Tender, although no boat was ever a consistent winner that did not have a good Sheet Tender. In the *Little Ida A.* the sheet tender has to keep her down on the ice, as she has no bilge runners. And yet, with all the work he has to do, he is still laying out to windward farther than the ballast man, and probably hollering to Dutch to "Drive her, Dutch, drive her!"

The *Little Ida A.* sold to Bill and Lee Colson and rigged with the Sliding Gunther Rig off the old *Sunshine* is seen in broadside photograph. A very consistent winner, the *Little Ida* was fortunate throughout her career in having on board the best crews on the ice. Sailing as ballast and watching this crew work was an education in how a Scooter should be sailed.

Bill never looked astern—he didn't have to. Lee's quiet "Let her luff, Will" or "Keep her off, Will" was all either had to say, each knowing what had to be done and how to do it.

Some Scooter men were good, but these and a few others were great. Like Commodore Fred Thurber who gave the Ice Boats such a licking at Orange Lake in the *Little Elmer*. And Ike Ruhland, sail-



The *LITTLE IDA A.* No. 35, rigged with Sliding Gunther, when owned by Bill and Lee Colson.

ing Jack Bason's *Real Stuff*, who did the same thing to the pride of the Lake Hopatcong Ice Boat fleet. And Dutch Ackerly, who had no equal in sailing a Scooter to windward—or to leeward for that matter.

These men were great in a competitive sport that called for exceptional skill. They are all gone now, but I was fortunate in knowing them before they sailed that last long leg over the horizon. Their equal will be missing from the ice for a long, long time. Maybe forever.

When for the first time the Scooters sailed in the Eastern Ice Yacht Racing Association this tribute to their uniqueness appeared in the April 1941 edition of *Yachting Magazine* with a photograph of *Little Scout*:

"This year's regatta was featured by the presence of the South Bay Scooters and their salty crews. The clever tacking, reaching and running done by these entirely rudderless craft was a source of constant amazement, and drew more than one compliment to the skill of their crews. Furthermore, the rigs of these 1941 Scooters have outdistanced even the modern ice boat in mast-sail efficiency. They use a sail completely enveloping the mast, hoisted by being zipped onto the spar."

"Herb Edwards, regatta committee chairman, got

things started immediately after lunch on Saturday, January 11th, (1941) when he sent three of the big scooters away on their first heat. All races were run the same distance, ten miles, around a 2½ mile triangular course. The big scooters sailed three close heats, William Harless's *Big Scout* finally nosing out *Ida II* and *Friday 13th* for first honors. Harless then repeated in the small scooter class with *Little Scout*."

Bill Harless lives on Hart Road, north of East Moriches, and he has a new boat "Commodore Scout" hanging up in his shop. He's put a price of \$5,000 on her so that nobody will buy her: "I just want to look at her".

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