

Chapter 7 - the Mid-1950s

Miami again welcomed a nice turnout of 16 Thistles in January, 1954, with Frank Greenman (622) of Alexandria, Va. finishing ahead of Dick Brainard by 3 points, and the then-youthful Ding Schoonmaker by 5. This event was followed by the Sunshine Regatta, with Shep Smith of Atlanta the victor, whilst Brainard and Schoonmaker again ran two-three. In southern waters, at least, Brainard was a perennial bridesmaid.

By this time a firm beachhead had been established in Atlanta, where Thistles were running rampant. Their Fleet, #48, had a big Dixie Regatta scheduled for April, and the time seemed ripe to go one step further. The Class was at a stage where quotas were being added to the Nationals and some District Championships. Needed were some large prestige "blue chevron" events combining quantity and quality. Why not inaugurate an Atlantic Coast Championship Series at Atlanta that year? The idea found fertile ground, was implemented, and 32 Thistles participated on Lake Allatoona under warm sunny skies. Four races were scheduled, but the first one was cancelled in mid-course due to very faint airs. Local ace Shep Smith battled it out with New Jersey's Howard Robins all around the course on the next go, and finally triumphed over Robins and the fluky light air to get the gun. The Sunday morning race proved to be even more frustrating, but Sinny Sinclair managed to untangle the maddening zephyrs to post a victory, while Smith slipped to sixth, again under trying conditions, while club-mate Bill McKelvy was winning it, with Brainard second. This still gave Smith enough breathing room to best Atlanta's Bill Timmis by 2 3/4 points, with McKelvy and Sinclair trailing.

Later in the year, Bill Nexsen took the Lake Erie Districts, and good old Sinny Sinclair - referred to as *paterfamilias* of the Atlanta fleet, broke a tie with Shep Smith to win the South Atlantic District Championships at Chattanooga. Sindle, natch, won the Central Atlantics and Jack Meyer of Nyack, NY copped Larchmont Race Week.

Leo Wubbe took the Michigana Districts and Al Williams won the L.I Sound Districts at Sayville, L.I. Harvey Busch triumphed at Put-In-Bay and Will Libby #257 topped a 24-boat field in the Niagara Frontier Districts on Lake Cayuga.

Dick Brainard had selected Fenwick, Conn. for the Nationals, and a huge turnout of 55 boats showed up to try their luck against the strong currents which lurked in the area. This time Boston was not to be denied, as he came out on top of Harry Sindle (yep, same guy!), who took the last two races to finish second. Boston's finishes were unspectacular perhaps, but remarkably consistent: 7,7,2,5, and 4. Bob Gallagher of Boston, MA led off in the curtain-raiser, which was punctuated by a violent line squall, by sailing his *Kelpie* to 1st after the blow had subsided. Hank Wheeler of Detroit took the second race, and Dave Minton of Columbus, Ohio the third; then Sindle got hot, but not enough to offset a 19th in the second race. Sam Merrick of Alexandria, Va., Toni Herrmann, Jr., and Jack Fordyce followed Sindle in the standings, with Brainard 8th and Sandy 14th. Sandy's poor showing deserves some elaboration. There comes a time of course when even the most parsimonious of Scots must - if his sailing rep is to be preserved - consider replacing his old, tired sails with a new set. After all, it had been quite a spell since Sandy had last won a Nationals. So he went to his favorite sail maker, who shall remain nameless, and shelled out for the "latest and greatest". Well, **latest** anyway. The results were catastrophic; Sandy found himself down with skippers he rarely saw except ashore, and in the first 3 races took a 25th, a 31st, and a 19th. *Sic transit...*

In desperation, he finally switched back to his old suit for the last 2 races, and promptly picked a 4th and 2nd. One may assume that he held an earnest discussion with friend sail maker after that one!

Yachting magazine scheduled its third One-of-a-Kind Series for Riverside, Ct. that fall, and Howard Boston trailered *Manawaca* east for the event. The entry field was loaded: A-Scow, E-Scow, International 14, FD, Highlander, Raven, S-Class, 210, 505, Fireball, and a host of others. Harry Sindle and Sandy crewed for Howard in this one, but even that group of experts got trapped at the start, and over-stood the weather mark in the first race to make it also their worst, so they finished 13th boat-for-boat out of 27 entries, and 9th corrected. In the next one, they atoned with a fine start and found themselves fourth at the weather mark, astern of the A-Scow, S boat, and Buccaneer. On the second leg they passed the Buccaneer and caught the S. The S finished second on the final beat, while our heroes edged the 505 at the line. The I-14 won the race on corrected time, and *Manawaca* corrected to 4th. In the third race they hung around 4th place all the way, correcting to third.

Lack of hiking straps hurt a bit in the windy finale, and poor visibility hurt worse, as they got lost in the rain and finished tenth, correcting to fifth. In the final standings, the 505 took corrected-time honors, with the Thistle runner-up, and an 8th place standing boat-for-boat - a very handsome showing.

Sindle remarking afterwards, "I can't seem to get better than second in anything lately". Not a bad year, though! Especially for Howard Boston...his success in the Nationals in the OOAK's served to emphasize another example of a skipper who compiled an enviable record in the class. Through the year none had been more active than this genial sail maker from Mt. Clemens. He appeared in innumerable top-drawer regattas and won more than he lost, piling up an impressive string of successes along the way. Along with his family - a veritable legion of true salts all of them - Howard was invariably to be found at virtually any major Thistle regatta. It was a standing joke that the Bostons not only usually out sailed their opponents - they outnumbered them as well. So hats off to Howard and his clan - a real force in the TCA over many, many years.

New officers for the forthcoming year: Bill Heintz, President; Jack O'Shea, First Vice President; Harry Sindle, Second Vice President; Howard Robins, Third Vice President and Publicity Director; and Jack Beachem, of Atlanta, Secretary-Treasurer.

The winter championship moved to Sarasota, FL in 1955, and Bill Mangold skippered *Hot Canary* to first place in this one, ahead of Mrs. Peri Ranny in *Lochness Monster*. In June the Atlantic Coast Championships shifted sights to Lavellette, NJ, with 25 entries. Again Sindle got his second place, bowing to Bill Nexsen, with Sam Merrick's *Whimsey*, #361, of Bay Head, NJ in third. And, down there in 16th place, but on his way up, was a name some of you may have heard around the circuit: Ingenuous Ed Walsh sailing *Dan-E-Boy*, #818, another of the real greats of the Thistle Class, and starting on the long climb to the heights.

The success of the Atlantic Coast series inspired the Class to look for more events of this nature, and it was decided to follow it up with the Great Lakes Championships, now a feature, inaugurated by the Rochester Canoe Club on Lake Ontario in July. The weather conditions were ideal, providing a nice range of

breezes, and 38 boats attended. A wind shift after the start of the first race robbed the fleet of a beat, and Toledo's Dick Gibbs took advantage of a good start to put his *Rainbo* into the lead which was never threatened. Dede Wilson of Geneva in *Drambuie*, #297, and Jim Holewinski of Toledo trailed him across the line, and class prexy Bill Heintz, sailing a borrowed local boat, fifth. In the second race, things were badly scrambled by the leader's steadfast insistence on ignoring the race committee's announced bearing for the second mark, and Harm Strong capitalized on this goof to beat the socks off the whole fleet. Heintz took second and Bill Brewster third. At this stage, Heintz had a one-point bulge over George Angle. Angle lost any hope of picking up any points in the final when his stick broke. Bill Allen won it, Dede Wilson was second and Sandy Douglas was third. Heintz' fourth put him five points up on Sandy in the totals.

George Butts and Harvey Busch, there's that man again!, finished one-two in the I.L.Y.A. Regatta and Put-In-Bay; Earl Gilman won the High Sierras Series out on Lake Huntington in the scenic Sierra Nevadas; and Dave Minton won the Ohio Inter-Club YA Regatta at Atwood Lake. The Central Atlantics went to the Marquardts, Sindle having gone onto an Olympic quest; and Butts was a winner again that year, this time at the Lake Erie Districts, over Charlie Williams. Jack Meyer repeated at Larchmont Race Week in a regatta which sprung another new name on the gang, Dennis Posey, in second place. Dennis was destined to win a lot of Thistle silverware before he finally decided to two-hull it. Sam Merrick won the New Jersey Districts, with Walsh second, and Tony Herrmann took the title on Lake Michigan. John Hartung's *Love Her* was tops among the 31 boat field, beating Wally Lineburgh's *Maid of Pligh* (603) in the L. I. Sound Districts, and Bill Allen defeated a strong group in the Niagara Frontier Districts at Niagara.

In August all roads led to the Crescent Sail Yacht Club, on Lake St. Clair in Detroit, for the Nationals. Perhaps his disastrous experience the previous year had Sandy all psyched up for this one, or maybe he was just plain overdue, but in any event he had his sail situation all straightened out, and his powder was dry. Dave Minton's *Hoot Mon*, #28, drew first blood in the series, crossing the line ahead of the defending champ, with Nexsen and Douglass following in that order. In stronger breezes in that afternoon, Sandy poured on the coal to take the winner's gun, Tony

Herrmann followed, Jim Hendricksen was third, and Boston came in fifth. This placed Sandy and Howard one-two in the standings, only 2 1/4 points apart.

In the third race, Link Wheeler sailed *Sphinx* to victory, Sam Merrick's *Whimsey*, #361, followed across the line, Sandy racked up a solid third and Boston finished seventh.

The fourth race tightened things up again. Herrmann finished first, Dick Gibbs in *Rainbo*, #636, took second, George Devlin in *Skirl*, #108, third, Boston took another fifth, and Sandy sagged to tenth. Now, with one race to go, Sandy's edge over Boston was a scant 3/4 point. With the two of them watching each other in the final race, Dave Minton took another victory, Wheeler posted a second, Herrmann was third, and Sandy grabbed a game-saving fourth to Boston's seventh, and once more was perched atop the Thistle world. Herrmann, Minton and George Butz trailed Howard in the standings, with Ed Walsh down in 33rd spot, but not to stay! This was the first year that chartered Thistles were eligible for the Nationals. And finally, the departed Sindle had his way: hiking straps were legalized.

Officers elected for the following year were as follows: President, Jack O'Shea; First Vice President, Jack Beachem, both from Atlanta; Second Vice President, Arthur Arms; Secretary-Treasurer, Marsden Tuthill, both from the Niagara Frontier.

Well, we'd gone full cycle, starting with Sandy as top banana in the Thistle racing circuit, and ten nationals later - right back where we'd started. If it was getting monotonous for the competition, it didn't appear to be troubling him much, and it seemed to most of us at the time that he'd go right on winning forever. There is a bit more to the tale though, and in the next segment we'll tell you something about the next couple of Nationals and quite a few other big events which made news in those years, so onward.....