

PREAMBLE TO PHOTO GALLERY AND THEY WENT TO SEA IN A WOODEN SHOE

In preparing the following preamble I have freely looted various historical documents in the club's possession, including Lawrie Neish's invaluable account of our club's early history. There are variations among these documents as to the actual dates on which various events are said to have taken place. Accordingly, some of the below figures may not be strictly accurate.

John Prothero, April 2007

With hindsight there is, sometimes, seen to be an unyielding logic in the course of human events - the very stuff of tragedy or farce. But here, in a more prosaic temper, this abiding sense of the inescapable has to do with the seemingly humble origins of our sailing club. Lawrie Neish, Industrial Education teacher at the Gulf Island Secondary School (GISS), had his students building model yachts. There followed, some would say inevitably, the construction (in 1968/9), by two students, under Lawrie's tutelage, of a sailing pram, specifically a Sabot (Fr. wooden shoe). The rest is history, as the scribes might say. The next year (1969/70) 15 Sabots were constructed in the secondary school shop, at the grand cost of \$100 each - for everything.

The proud builders of these spanking new Sabots next needed to learn to sail. Initial lessons were given in the basics of sailing by Lawrie and Aileen Neish in their keel boat "CLARION" and by Marshall and Nora Sharp in "SONSY". That was quickly followed by the students sailing their own Sabots. Aileen led the way in her Sabot, Lawrie following nearby in a Sea Scout "Lightning", calling out instructions.

The idea of forming a sailing club appears to have been first voiced in a conversation between Lawrie Neish and Barbara Toynbee (a school trustee) at a school 'open house'. Later, the Saltspring Island Sailing Club (SISC) was indeed formed, and subsequently wrapped itself into the welcoming arms of the Canadian Yachting Association (1969/70). Markers were put out in Ganges Harbour, and sailing races were shortly underway. Inevitable.

It has long been the practice that one-class sailboats, such as the Sabot, are made from a mold, so that all hulls, at least, are essentially identical. Likewise, the Sabots, 8' sailing prams, formerly made of wood, were here constructed of fiberglass according to the specifications given in blueprints. (See Photo 1). These blueprints allowed for tolerances in the dimensions, of which Lawrie Neish skillfully took advantage in order to tease out an improved performance, a factor which no doubt contributed to the striking success of the nascent sailing club.

The first outside venture was the 'Frostbite Regatta', held at the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, where Aileen and Robert Neish took first and second places. In the following years, the SISC sabots entered in 14 regattas a year, widely disbursed around the waters of B.C.,

and with one exception, took first place in every one. Club members won the B.C. under-13 category races for 10 consecutive years. In addition, club members did well in national competitions.

In 1973 the club accepted a group of adults (mainly parents and supporters of the student sailors) into its membership. (The real change occurred in 1975/76 with the influx of homeless refugees from Scott Point Marina sale. This marked the transition, perhaps also fated, from a solely school-based club into a public one with junior and senior members. Before the Sabot chapter of the club's history ended some 100 sabots were constructed at GISS.

It is worth here reflecting on the fact that the Sabots sailed by Saltspring sailors were built on Saltspring, that the students were taught how to sail and then to race here, that adults, including especially Lawrie and Aileen Neish, arranged for the transportation of boats and students to diverse locations in B.C., that provisions were made for the junior sailor's health, safety and welfare. It is a record of achievement and success and healthy fun that, so far as I know, has never been equaled by any other junior sailing club in B.C.

Although Sabots are no longer raced in our club, they still compete actively in annual regattas elsewhere, especially in Australia. Meanwhile, a junior program continues in our sailing club, one of excellence, following a prior history of which we can all be justly proud.