



# **The History of the ILYA Bilge Pullers**

## **Admirals of the ILYA Bilge Pullers**

1935-40	Harry G. John - Oconomowoc
1941-46	Regis Lynch - Pine
1946-47	Eugene Gluek - Minnetonka
1947-48	Frederick Chapman - Madison
1948-49	Morgan Manchester - Mendota
1949-51	Walter Sprinkman – Oshkosh/Pine/Cedar
1952-53	John Pierson – Minnetonka (Wayzata)
1953-57	Maynard Meyer – Oconomowoc/Pewaukee
1958-60	D. D. “Bud” Booth - Pewaukee
1960-61	Harold Koch - Pewaukee
1962-64	Arthur Best - Cedar
1965-66	Richard Casper – Oconomowoc/Pine
1967-68	August G. Barkow - Pine
1969-70	John Koch - Pewaukee
1971-72	John Steinman - LaBelle
1973-74	Walter F. Schmidt - Okauchee
1975-76	Thomas Sawyer - Pewaukee
1977	John Harley - Nagawicka
1977-78	Donald Williquette - Nagawicka
1979-80	Coleman Norris - Pewaukee
1981-82	J. Frederick (Fritz) Ruf - Pewaukee
1983-84	Louis J. Morgan – LaBelle/Pewaukee
1985-86	Frank Price - Nagawicka
1987-88	Ned E. F. Baldus - Cedar
1999-90	William Dale - Pewaukee
1991-92	Milton Haeger - Beulah
1993-94	William K. Keck - LaBelle
1995-96	Dr. Sander E. Sundberg – Long Lake
1997-98	Stephen P. Schmidt - Okauchee
1999-2000	David B. Bohl – Beulah/Pewaukee
2001-02	Dr. Tom Hodgson – White Bear
2003-04	Robert A. Biwer - Pewaukee
2005-06 D	David M. Sitter - Oshkosh
2007-08	Robert M. Allen - Minnetonka
2009-10 J	John F. Ruf - Pewaukee
2011-12	A. H. (Skip) Jewett - Minnetonka
2013-14	Lou Morgan, Jr. – Labelle
2015-16	Carl Zinn – Minnetonka
2017-18	A. J. Schweda – Pewaukee
2019-20	Bill Wyman - Oshkosh



## **The History of the ILYA Bilge Pullers**

For most of the first three decades of the Inland Lake Yachting Association's existence, scow racing on inland lakes was a rich man's sport, dominated by the wealthy businessmen of Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Oshkosh. Few boats were owned by laborers, teachers, or people in the service industries. As the economy emerged slowly from the Great Depression, however, cheap used boats became more widely available and local club sailing—while modest in many cases—became more of a community phenomenon. This change in socio-economic portrait had a profound effect on the enthusiasm of local fleets, but also highlighted the cultural divide that still separated the top from the middle rungs of the economic ladder.

Arnold “Bud” Meyer Jr. of Pewaukee remembered that interest in scow racing increased during this period far beyond the wealthy families that dominated sailing around the turn of the century. Sailors of modest means purchased used boats and

became active. Yet, Meyer recalled, “these newcomers did not have the social contacts with sailors other than on neighboring lakes.” In the earliest days of the ILYA, the original Interlake competition between White Bear and Minnetonka (and later Winnebago) was primarily between a limited group of people—all wealthy boat owners. The lakes of Waukesha County were similarly isolated geographically from Oshkosh, Minnetonka, and White Bear. Unless you had the means to ship your boat by rail car, a horse-drawn haywagon required about a week to travel from White Bear to



**Cuppy Goes off to the Annual Regatta.**

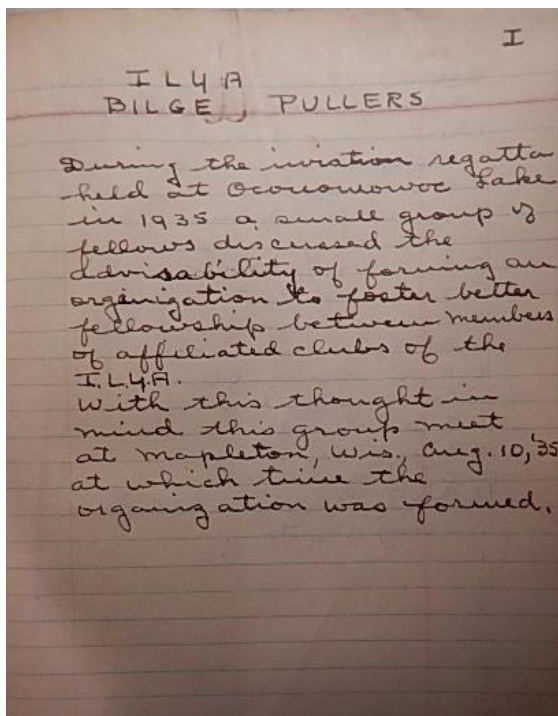
Oshkosh, adding a significant logistic barrier to the already existing socio-economic reality. But as car-towed trailers for boats became more common, and the one-boat-per-lake participation limitations at the Annual Regatta disappeared, the fleets in the

Championship gained a much broader demographic. In 1930, for example, only three C-boats made it to Neenah for the Annual Regatta; by 1936, there were almost 50. Yet true to tradition, sailors from competing clubs attending the Inland's Annual Regatta stayed in their own camps as they had since the birth of the ILYA in 1898. Each group regarded the others as strangers, and the "stealing" of boat and sail technology remained a constant specter. There was more suspicion than social contact. It was like a "war between tribes," according to Meyer.

It was against that backdrop that in August 1935 that the Oconomowoc Lake Club hosted the ILYA's C-

boat Invitation Regatta. On the evening of Saturday,

August 10, after a full day of sailing in 90-degree temps, a hot and tired group of fourteen sailors, officials, and spectators gathered to rehydrate, first at the home of Harry G. John, a large, affable



man with a big smile, who happened to be married to the daughter of Miller Brewing Company founder Frederick Miller.

The group then retired to the Boyer family's Mapleton Inn, a small roadhouse at the sleepy intersection of County roads that was Mapleton, Wisconsin. Some probably made the trip in John's custom-built 16-cylinder Cadillac. Present with John at that first gathering were E. A. Weschler, Walter Sprinkman, Arnold Meyer Sr., Hugo Vogel, Fred Kasten, Regis Lynch, Hermann Nunnemacher, Robert Manegold, Emory Jaeger, Armand C. Schulz, Ernest S. Sprinkman, J. P. O'Meara, and A. C. Kootz.

The conversation almost certainly covered a wide variety of subjects, including the usual war stories about the recent racing. Through the quality of the conversation, the companionship, and the camaraderie, it soon became clear to these men that the social side of racing scows was something quite special. Spurred by that realization, the discussion quickly led to ideas and suggestions that some sort of organization comprised of sailors from *all* ILYA member lakes might do much to enhance the fellowship and warmth that these fourteen men felt on that hot August night. Harry John was elected Admiral—a post he would hold through 1940. Cedar Lake's Walter Sprinkman was given the post of Secretary-Treasurer (shortly thereafter changed to "Keeper of the Log and

Lucre”), and E. A. Weschler was named Rear Admiral. Edward Reinke of Oshkosh was named Sergeant at Arms, probably because he knew more about misbehavior than anyone else present, and was therefore uniquely qualified to recognize when order begged restoration. Reinke, a wire man for the local Oshkosh electric company, was energetic, fun, and fully deserving of his nickname “Dynamite.” He pulled jib for John Buckstaff at Oshkosh, but also drove down to Pine Lake to sail with Bob Friend on Pine Lake’s Sunday races.

They would call themselves the “ILYA Bilge Pullers” (the photo on page 5 is from Page 1 of the original minutes book). Little other business was done that night, but the seed for the ILYA Bilge Pullers was well-planted. A meeting was scheduled for the Annual Regatta at Neenah, to be held

### **It Was a Memorable Evening**

The first gathering of the original Bilge Pullers at the Mapleton Inn in 1935 was memorable beyond the founding of the organization. Around 1975, Walter Sprinkman and other Past Admirals returned to the Mapleton Inn for their summer Board of Directors meeting.

It had been 30 years since Bilge Pullers had been at the Inn, but Mrs. Boyer came out of the kitchen and greeted Wallie, saying, “Mr. Sprinkman, you’re not here with your drinking friends...”

on August 21, 1935. That meeting was largely social, but a few new members were inducted. A spring meeting held at the Wisconsin Club on March 20,

1936, saw the real laying of a foundation for the new organization. Admiral John appointed a committee to work on how the Bilge Pullers would operate.

That committee would meet on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1936, again at the Wisconsin Club, and the ILYA Bilge Pullers began to take shape, formally stating their purpose: "To promote better fellowship between members of various clubs who are members of the ILYA—a social organization only."

Emory Jaeger oversaw the design of a badge and official Bilge Puller insignia. It was ruled that the badge be worn conspicuously at all ILYA events, the penalty for violation being that the unfortunate offender must stand a round of drinks for all Bilge Pullers present. Pennants were made up and offered for sale. "to promote better fellowship between members of various clubs who are members of the ILYA; on a social basis only."



They made it clear that the Bilge Pullers was for ILYA members only, that

**The Keeper's cash box key.**

members must be 30 years of age or older, and that these members be affiliated with ILYA member clubs. Annual dues were set at \$1, and the group would meet every year during the first night of the Annual Regatta. They then collected \$12.00 in dues, and instructed the Keeper



Sprinkman to use the money to buy Admiral John a cap that he would wear at all regattas. The salute would be “from starboard to port diagonally across the face with the words, ‘Hail Puller.’”

At a 1937 challenge series with E-scow sailors on Barnaget Bay, during one of the regatta parties, Ed Reinke concocted a theme song for the group, based upon an old Civil War marching song (of which he changed all of two words). The song is still occasionally sung today before the spirits of revelry have dulled the memory of our older members.

*BILGE PULLERS THEME SONG*

*How well I remember the days of '61  
When the cannon balls were flying by the peck—by the peck,  
Along came a cannon ball a-whizzing through the air,  
And it hit (Admiral's name) in the neck—in the neck!  
Oh, up spoke the Admiral, says he: “My neck is tough,  
They're tryin' for to kill me but they can't”  
In the good old days beneath the Stars and Stripes  
When we fit for General Grant.*

*CHORUS*

*When we fit for General Grant,  
When we fit for General Grant,  
In the good old days beneath the Stars and Stripes  
When we fit for General Grant.*

Within two years, the mission of the Bilge Pullers had already expanded beyond “on a social basis only” to include service, support, and encouragement to the Inland Lake Yachting Association. At the July 8, 1938 meeting, the members voted to donate a trophy, “not to exceed

\$500.00” to be sailed for on Mondays of the E Championship. 22 members then donated \$5.00 each to the treasury, and that August, the first Bilge Pullers Perpetual Challenge Trophy—a silver punch bowl with tray, ladle, and beakers, was awarded to Albert Gallun of Pine Lake.

After an initial flurry of organizational enthusiasm, the Bilge Pullers entered a quiet period in their history, but the spirit of fellowship and philanthropy never waned. To help finance their generosity, the Bilge Pullers instituted, in 1940, an initiation fee (amount unknown). During the war years, Regis Lynch succeeded Harry John as Admiral, and while there was little activity in the Inland sailing world, Bilge Pullers quietly carried on. At the war’s end, Gene Gluek—who, with his brothers, ran Minneapolis’s Gluek Brewing Company—took over the Admiralty of Bilge Pullers.

Almost exactly one year after World War II ended, sixty-one members gathered at the 1946 Bilge Pullers meeting held in conjunction with the Annual Regatta, again at Neenah. The age requirement for membership was reduced to twenty-five, perhaps as a reflection of the maturity that so many ILYA sailors brought home from the war. Dick Casper recalls the 1946 initiation of new members: “You just wore your blue blazer, and you were called up and asked, ‘Why do you want to be a Bilge Puller?’

You prepared your answer, but as soon as you opened your mouth, you were booed.”

A. C. Swallow, Keeper of the Log and Lucre, reported a bank account balance of \$600.00, and there was initial discussion about a donation of a trophy to Class D. But that discussion was tabled, and Swallow’s minutes of the meeting end with the statement, “After much good fellowship and song, our meeting adjourned and I am sure we all had a great time.”

In this atmosphere, the Bilge Pullers succeeded in bringing sailors together from throughout the ILYA, bridging gulfs both socio-economic and geographic. Bud Meyer remembered achieving exactly that through the Bilge Pullers: “I formed some of the greatest friendships of my life, with Jule Hannaford, Jack Ordway, and Bill and Roy Mordaunt of White Bear, Fred Chute of Minnetonka, and John and Clyde Buckstaff of Oshkosh. “We never cared if they were people of great wealth, or modest means. Bilge Pullers had an effect way beyond anything . . . it brought people closer together, to talk things over in a friendly way, not a contentious way.” The minutes of the 1950 meeting captured the atmosphere of a typical meeting: Keeper Chuck Nevitt wrote, “Many speeches were given, but not much said.”

While Bilge Pullers began with a decided Pine Lake flavor, it quickly moved to fulfill its stated goals of uniting sailors from around the ILYA. Morgan Manchester, owner of a fire department supply store

in Madison, became Admiral in 1948, and was succeeded by founding member Fred Kasten of Pine Lake in 1951. John Pierson of Minnetonka followed Kasten, and then the position of Admiral was served by southern Wisconsin sailors (until Tom Hodgson of White Bear Lake became the first northern Admiral in almost a half-century).

Throughout this “quiet” period, it was Keeper Walter Sprinkman who provided the glue that held Bilge Pullers together. He served as Keeper of the Log and Lucre from 1935 to 1949, when he became Admiral. Without question, he was the driving force behind the Bilge Pullers’ first decade and a half. Even after the end of his long tenure as Keeper of the Log and Lucre, ascent to the position of Admiral was often the result of a sudden form of democracy not unknown in Bilge Pullers.

Dick Casper remembers becoming Admiral in 1965 without ever serving as Keeper. He was nominated by Maynard “Mike” Meyer, and, as he recalls, “Boom,

bang, ‘Here’s the job.’” Casper credits Meyer, along with Sprinkman, for ensuring the long-term success of Bilge Pullers. After a series of Admirals who served largely as figureheads (John Pierson, for example, was removed from membership for non-



**First Keeper of the Log  
and Lucre  
Walter Sprinkman.**

payment of dues only five years after serving as Admiral). Meyer, in contrast, served four years without missing a meeting, save one: for his wife Dede's birthday. Meyer's efforts strengthened the organization, which gathered momentum and membership during the 1950s and '60s. The 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, held at the Cuba Club in Madison on August 22, 1960, saw the awarding of badge numbers 312-326.

In 1948, a second trophy (at right) was presented to the ILYA for the winner of the fourth race in the new D class's Annual Regatta. The trophy was re-donated to the M-20 class in 1969, and then to the I-20 class in 2003. Thus began an almost uninterrupted string of contributions to the ILYA and



related causes, among them, an MC Trophy (at left) and a trophy donated to the winner of the National E-Scow Championship.

Bilge Pullers has given a significant amount of administrative and race management equipment—everything from radios to buoys--

to the ILYA. Race Officers wear jackets donated by Bilge Pullers. Proper naval architect drawings for classes E and C were drawn for the ILYA Rules Committee through support of Bilge Pullers.

One of the more enduring symbols of Bilge Pullers generosity is the Bilge Pullers Cannon, donated in 1982 to recognize an outstanding volunteer from the ILYA's race management corps.

### **Bilge Puller Cannon Winners**

John Hunt – Minnetonka	1982
Ed Malone – Oshkosh	1982
Art Best – Cedar	1983
Maynard Meyer – Pewaukee	1984
Roger Herbst – Pewaukee	1985
Don Williquette – Nagawicka	1986
Jack Schneider – Nagawicka	1987
Charles Schneider – Nagawicka	1988
Bill MacNeill – Green	1989
Bill Treul – Pewaukee	1990
Herman Barkow – Nagawicka	1991
Jim Fitzgerald – Okoboji	1992
James Klauser - Mendota	1993
Martin Ford – Geneva	1994
Terrence Bischoff – Pine	1995
Dr. Tom Hodgson – White Bear	1996
Sander Sundberg – Long Lake (IL)	1997
Charles Kilander – LaBelle	1998
Craig Caslavka – Clear	1999
Jock Irvine – White Bear	2000
Fritz Ruf – Pewaukee	2001
Bill Dale - Pewaukee	2002
Bob Pegel – Geneva	2003
Milton Haeger – Beulah	2004
Chip Mann – Cedar	2005
Mike Sherin - Geneva	2006
Gloria Melges - Geneva	2007
Russ Ackley - Pewaukee	2008
Jeff Butzer - Nagawicka	2009
Jeff LaBonte - Beulah	2010

Sue Weston - Green	2011
Mark DeGuire - Pewaukee	2012
Phil Petersen - Okoboji	2013
Larry Krause – Pewaukee	2014
Mark Tesar – Clear Lake	2015
Charlie MacNider – Clear	2016
Mark Prange - Oukachee	2017
Bruce Martinson - Minnetonka	2018
Rick Roy - Pewaukee	2019

The philanthropic power of Bilge Pullers has always been impressive, given its modest dues and initiation fees. But, remarkably, in 2000, with the simple inclusion of a space on the banquet invitation that said "additional donation for Bilge Pullers good works," the pace of philanthropic giving accelerated exponentially. In the space of one dues cycle—2000-2001—donations jumped by a factor of ten. A 2003 Keeper's report featured more than \$14,000 in donations over the previous two years. This level of giving has continued—even accelerated—thus cementing Bilge Pullers place as a major philanthropic force within the ILYA.

A recent and very ambitious Bilge Puller project has been the ILYA Hall of Fame. The brainchild of Admiral Dick Casper, the Hall has—to date—

### **Eight Bells**

Perhaps the most poignant moment at any Bilge Pullers meeting or banquet is the recognition of those members who have passed from our ranks during the past year. Eight bells are rung, which signifies both the "end of watch," *and* the beginning of the next for our friends.

honored 35 outstanding ILYA contributors and competitors. In 2015, the Hall of Fame found

permanent home in the Buddy Melges Sailing Center on Lake Geneva. Again, due to the spectacular generosity of Bilge Pullers members, the Hall of Fame room at the BMSC has interactive video displays with biographies of the honorees, but also a decade-by-decade history of the ILYA. In addition, there is a display of wonderful artifacts commemorating the honorees, along with related ILYA memorabilia.

### **The ILYA Hall of Fame**

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Lake</u></b>	<b><u>Inducted</u></b>
Bill Allen	Minnetonka	2016
Peter Barrett	Pewaukee	2006
Bill Bentsen	Geneva	2008
Art Best	Cedar	2004
Gordy Bowers	Minnetonka	2008
John Buckstaff	Oshkosh	2004
Andy Burdick	Geneva	2018
Dick Casper	Pine	2010
Bill Freytag	Geneva	2012
Jule Hannaford III	White Bear	2008
Dr. Tom Hodgson	White Bear	2008
John Hunt	Minnetonka	2006
Jerry Huse	Okoboji	2008
John O. Johnson	White Bear	2004
Harold Koch	Pewaukee	2006
Gordon Lindemann	Pine	2008
Ed Malone	Oshkosh	2004
Buddy Melges	Geneva	2004
Harry Melges III	Geneva	2018
Maynard Meyer	Pewaukee	2004
Arnold Meyer	Pewaukee	2009
Lou Morgan	LacLaBelle	2014
Jack Ordway	White Bear	2004
Jane Pegel	Geneva	2008



Bill Perrigo	Pewaukee	2004
John Pillsbury	Minnetonka	2004
Edmund Pillsbury	Minnetonka	2006
Nat Robbins	Minnetonka	2006
Ernst Schmidt	Geneva	2004
Dr. Otto Schmidt	Geneva	2004
Walter Schmidt	Okauchee	2010
Bob “Boober” Schneider	Okoboji	2013
Charles “Snuff” Schneider	Nagawicka	2010
Jack “Snake” Schneider	Nagawicka	2010
Walter Sprinkman	Cedar	2006
John W. Taylor	White Bear	2004
Donald Williquette	Nagawicka	2016

## Legend vs. Legislation

In 1950, the first dues increase doubled the cost of membership to the princely sum of \$2.00 (It would increase to \$3.00 in 1960 and to its present stratospheric level, \$5.00, in 1979.) But the most important piece of legislation passed by the Bilge Pullers that year was one that has gone almost unnoticed behind the shadow of the legendary rule it replaced.

For the first 15 years of the Bilge Pullers existence, any member caught without his badge was required to stand a round of drinks for all in attendance, an onerous penalty. But at the 1950 meeting, the officers reduced the penalty for a member being caught without his Bilge Pullers badge to a fine of \$5.00 and the required purchase of a new badge. Yet in the minds of many Bilge Pullers, the penalty of standing a round of drinks for all members present at the time of transgression still holds sway—at least, that’s the myth perpetuated for all newly minted Bilge Puller initiates—and anyone else ignorant of the fine points of the Bilge Pullers bylaws.

The growth of the Bilge Pullers can be tracked through its tradition of marking their anniversaries. By 1984, 340 members of Bilge Pullers celebrated the organization's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1997, the ILYA's centennial year, the membership badge number of Bilge Pullers reached 1,000, with the majority of members still active in ILYA sailing. Tag number 1000 was awarded to the City of Oshkosh—for many years, the home of the ILYA Annual Regatta. The tag was framed and presented, appropriately, to Oshkosh Mayor Bill Castle.



Little has changed since the first badges were handed out to the first 14 members, now 80 years ago. In 2014, the number of active members now totaled nearly 600, and the assistance to the ILYA has increased exponentially.

And when the Past Admirals meet annually at the Mapleton Inn for its summer board meeting, or when members meet at the Spring banquets, or the Annual Regatta Banquet and Initiation, it is abundantly clear that the founding notions of fellowship, philanthropy, and fun still define this remarkable organization.

