



Government of the District of Columbia  
Historic Preservation Review Board



Application for Historic Landmark or Historic District Designation

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name: Washington Yacht Club

Address: 1500 M Street SE

Square Number: 1080-S

Lot Number: parts of 801 and 802

Date of Construction: 1916

Date of Major Alteration(s): 1924, c. 1928, 1996

Architect(s): Unknown

Architectural Style(s): Vernacular

Original Use: Clubhouse

Present Use: Clubhouse

Property Owner: District of Columbia Department of General Services

Legal Address of Property Owner: 2000 14th Street NW, 8th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20009-4487

DESIGNATION INFORMATION

☒ Historic Landmark ☐ Historic District

☒ New Designation ☐ Amendment of a Previous Designation ☐ Interior Designation

Proposed Criteria: ☐ A. Events ☒ B. History ☐ C. Persons ☒ D. Architecture and Urbanism

☐ E. Artistry ☐ F. Creative Master ☐ G. Archaeology

Please add any clarifying information describing what is proposed for designation:

The Washington Yacht Club, which includes several buildings and structures, sits on Reservation 343-D. In 1924, the clubhouse was moved to this parcel, which is leased from the District government.

*If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.*

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Applicant(s) Name: Washington Yacht Club and the D.C. Historic Preservation Office

Address: 1500 M Street SE

Phone Number: 202-735-7505

Email: commodore@washingtonyachtclubdc.org

Authorized Representative Name: Steve Ricks

Title: WYC Commodore

Signature of Representative: *Stephen E. Ricks*

Date: Dec. 21, 2019

Author of Application: Anne O. Brockett

Phone Number: 202-442-8800

**Note: If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.**

Case number: 20-06

Date received: 2/5/2020

H.P.O. staff: TJD

Date filed: \_\_\_\_\_

Affected ANC(s): 6-B(06)

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Washington Yacht Club

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 1500 M Street SE

City or town: Washington State: D.C. County: \_\_\_\_\_

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>  <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: right;"> <b>Date</b> </div> </div> <div style="margin-top: 10px;"> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b> </div>	
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>  <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> </div> <div style="width: 35%; text-align: right;"> <b>Date</b> </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="width: 40%;"> <b>Title :</b> </div> <div style="width: 55%; text-align: right;"> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b> </div> </div>	

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☒
- Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>1</u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register           

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/clubhouse

RECREATION/CULTURE

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL/clubhouse

RECREATION/CULTURE

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete block, vinyl, asphalt

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Summary

The Washington Yacht Club (WYC) clubhouse was constructed in 1915 on the east bank of the Anacostia River. It was moved to its current location at 1500 M Street SE on the west bank in 1924. Although it includes several additions and other alterations, the core of the original frame building with gable roof and front porch is intact. The property includes the clubhouse, a workshop, shed, flagpole, docks and floats, parking lot, and part of the Anacostia River seawall.

The WYC sits within Anacostia Park, which is jointly administered by the District of Columbia Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and the National Park Service. The club leases its .33 acre parcel from the District. The site is bordered by M Street SE to the north and the Anacostia River to the south and is accessible from both. To the east and west are its fellow clubs along what is known as Boathouse Row or the Anacostia Boathouses.

### *Site and Landscape*

The land on which the WYC is located slopes steeply down from M Street SE and is accessed by either an asphalt driveway that leads to a gravel parking lot for cars or a recently constructed ramp for wheelchair users that leads from M Street to the rear door of the building. The WYC property is surrounded in part by a chain link fence, largely covered by shrubs. A sign on M Street marks the entrance to the driveway with the name "Wash. Yacht Club" in a metal arch over a propeller flanked by two anchors with chains.

The parking lot takes up much of the western portion of the lot while the east is given over to the clubhouse building, a small electric shed directly behind it, and a sizeable grassy lawn area. The

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ground banks up steeply to M Street and is also covered in grass. A concrete walk extends along the waterfront with a grass verge separating it from the seawall. Positioned regularly in this grass strip are wood posts holding a nautical rope railing. A large elm tree sits to the southeast of the clubhouse, right at the river's edge, with benches beside it.

Situated within the large side lawn is a recently constructed shelter that covers a grill and space for a few tables (non-contributing structure). The gazebo-like open structure was erected on a concrete pad with pressure treated framing and railings and a corrugated plastic roof.

A flagpole with yardarm was erected in 2017 to the southwest of the clubhouse (non-contributing object). It replaces a 1959 flagpole that was centered on and attached to the front steps.

### ***Clubhouse (contributing)***

The WYC clubhouse was constructed in 1915 and relocated to its current site in 1924. The building is set back about 15 feet from the waterfront and is raised on a concrete block foundation seven feet off the ground. The center part of the building is the original clubhouse with its front gable roof and porch overlooking the Anacostia River. It is accessed on the front (south, river-facing side) by a double staircase that runs to the east and west up its façade. The stair was constructed in 2016 of pressure treated lumber with a horizontal cable rail. The current stair is flush against the building face and replaces concrete stairs erected in the 1940s that occupied the same configuration but were separated from the building face by a small bridge. The 1940s steps replaced the original 1924 wood steps.

The upper level of the building is clad in vinyl siding that covers the original wood drop siding; the lower level is painted concrete block. At the basement level, the center portion of the building features a historic wood door with four lights over three horizontal panels. On the upper (main) level is a central metal door with four small lights framed by a wide vinyl surround. One window flanks the door to either side. Originally 2/2 sashes, the windows have been replaced with 1/1 vinyl sashes with wide vinyl surrounds. Three 1/1 sash windows face east on the side of the building. The roof is clad with asphalt shingles on both the main roof and integrated hip-roof porch. A vent occupies the gable over the porch, taking the place of a three-pane window. The porch floor and ceiling are finished with painted plywood and the railing is modern cable railing. The porch posts are 6" x 6" wood with no bases or capitals.

The original core of the building is flanked by additions on three sides. On the north (rear), an eight-foot extension was added in the late 1920s and is located under an extension of the main gable roof. On the east is a one-story concrete block addition the same height as the raised basement level. This space, with no interior connection to the rest of the building, contains the galley and was added in 1930, before which, a portion of the locker room was being used for this purpose.<sup>1</sup> The addition runs the full length of the east side and has a flat roof over its concrete block walls. A hollow metal door and sliding vinyl window punctuate the south end. Three similar windows open onto the side yard through the east elevation.

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<sup>1</sup> Shanafelt, R.L. "History of the Washington Yacht Club." April 12, 1931, p. 2.

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On the west side is a two-story addition whose concrete block base is punctuated by one front-facing and three west-facing small, single-pane, fixed windows. A single leaf hollow metal door opens at the south end of the west elevation. The upper floor features a gently sloping roof, vinyl siding, and a mix of horizontally and vertically oriented single pane picture windows. At the front, the addition extends southward the same depth as the projecting porch where a 6-panel metal door facing east now acts as the main entrance into the clubhouse. On the west, the upper level of the addition overhangs the first floor by about a foot.

The rear of the building is partly built into the slope. On the upper floor, it features a fixed pane picture window a modern 6-light door leading onto an accessible ramp that runs in a switchback configuration up to M Street. The lower level concrete block walls are pierced by a single pane fixed window at the north end, a metal casement near the center, and a vinyl sash window under the ramp.

Inside on the main floor, the original building and the addition are offset by a change in floor heights. A large opening connects the addition, which contains the entry space and a bar, to the main club room, a large open meeting and entertaining space. The ceiling was originally open to a loft storage area but has since been finished with drywall and recessed lighting. The walls are drywall and floors are floating laminate over plywood, which is believed to be over the original tongue and groove wood floors. The interior has been refinished a number of times, most recently in 2018.

The interior of the lower level is unfinished, except in the galley, which has drywall walls and ceiling and a vinyl tile floor. In the main block and west addition, the floors are concrete, the walls unfinished concrete block, and there are no ceilings. This unfinished space offers an opportunity to view some of the original features of the building, including a portion of the original drop siding and the 3-pane basement windows. Within the main block of the building is the locker room with the original wood lockers lining the walls and running back to back in the center of the room. The original 2 x 12 joists and sill plate are visible above.

#### ***Anacostia seawall (contributing)***

The seawall that borders the river on both sides predates the WYC clubhouse's location here. These walls were completed in 1922 as part of the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats, the process that created the land that forms Anacostia Park. The wall in front of the WYC is coursed stone and runs the length of the property and beyond.

#### ***Floats/docks (non-contributing)***

Two piers extend out from the riverbank providing berths facing east and west in the Anacostia and providing berths for 37 boats. The piers are accessed through two chain link gates and are connected to one another by a narrow catwalk. The orientation of the dock was changed from a single row of boats aligned perpendicularly to the shore to the current configuration in 1989. All of the pilings, floats, and decking materials are of recent vintage since these features require routine replacement.

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***Workshop (contributing)***

The workshop dates to sometime before 1955, when it was relocated from one side of the lot to the other. It was purportedly used originally as an oyster shed, and now serves as the woodshop and repair facility for the club's members. The frame building faces east under a shallow front gable roof with a deep eave on the south and a shed addition on the north. The siding is T-111 plywood and windows include a bank of 6-pane wood awning windows on the south side and a pair of 2-pane fixed windows on the east. Also facing east is a double wood door under a deep metal shed roof supported by full-height angled brackets. The shed roof addition on the north was built for gasoline storage and has T-111 on its front and north sides. The roof is corrugated metal.

***Shed (non-contributing)***

A storage shed sits at the far southwest corner of the property. Built in the 1960s, the outbuilding has a shed roof and T-111 siding over horizontal board on the east façade and corrugated metal on the south. A double door provides access on the east side. The shed was not historically associated with the club directly. It was built for personal storage by one of the club members and was utilized in the 1960s and '70s to house an illicit still.

***Electric Shed (contributing)***

A small outbuilding housing the electric panels for the club is located at the rear of the clubhouse atop the hill, where it is protected from flooding. The frame building sits on a concrete pad and appears to date to the 1920s or '30s. The walls are board and batten wood and the roofing is asphalt shingle with exposed rafter tails. A hollow metal door provides access on the south façade.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☒ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

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**Period of Significance**

1915

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**Significant Dates**

1915

1925

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**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

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**Cultural Affiliation**

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**Architect/Builder**

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary Paragraph

The Washington Yacht Club is significant under National Register Criterion A and District of Columbia criterion (b) for history and National Register Criterion C and District of Columbia criterion (d) for architecture. It also meets National Register Criterion Consideration B for a relocated building. It is an early example of a motorboat club and exemplifies the architectural characteristics of this building type. The history of the WYC, as embodied by its clubhouse, reflects the city's early 20<sup>th</sup> century embrace of motorized water sports as well as the development of Washington DC in relation to its waterfront.

Relevant to the evaluation of the Washington Yacht Club's significance is an understanding of several themes, including the evolution of boating as a recreational sport, particularly in the Nation's Capital, an exploration of the city's decision-making that has impacted the Anacostia River, boathouse and boat club design, and the various boating organizations in the District of Columbia.

### Historic Context

#### Recreational and Motorized Boating

Recreational boating in the Western Hemisphere has its origins among royalty and the wealthiest classes of late Renaissance Europe and Britain. Royal regattas on the Thames River took place as early as the mid-1600s during the reign of Charles II, an avid – and possibly the first to be described this way – yachtsman. As others followed the king's lead, the practical need for marinas arose. With their establishment, came a desire for interaction among those associated with the sport, which was met by the creation of boating clubs. Such institutions, which were oriented to either sailing or the emergent sport of rowing, were introduced in the United States in 1839 with the foundation of the Detroit Boat Club, devoted to rowing.

Boating for pleasure and the rise of boat clubs can be attributed to the shifting American perspective on the appropriate use of one's free time. In a nation that was largely agrarian in its early years and was founded in part on religious principles, the prevailing sentiment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was that free time should be limited. If there was any to be had, it should be dedicated to "cultural uplift and self-improvement."<sup>2</sup> These views began to relax around the same time as the nation was becoming increasingly industrialized. A manufacturing economy led many Americans to abandon agricultural pursuits and move to cities, where their repetitive indoor work only intensified the need for outdoor recreational pursuits. The greater availability – and acceptance – of leisure time and the need to escape the confines of factories and densely inhabited communities led Americans to take advantage of their rivers and lakes as they never had before.

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<sup>2</sup> Bird, Betty. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Washington Canoe Club, 1989, p. 8.2.

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The increased interest in water sports led to the creation of any number of canoe clubs, competitive rowing organizations, and sailing associations. For both sailing and rowing, even the earliest the clubs served the dual purposes of providing docks and storage for water craft and a social outlet for members. Some clubs became exclusively focused on racing, but most “dedicated themselves not so much to competition as to pleasure.”<sup>3</sup> The boathouses thus “served these clubs by offering practical shelter and a social gathering point.”<sup>4</sup> This pattern continued even as recreational boating itself changed dramatically.

Within the span of just a few years of the country’s first boat club, unmotorized boating was eclipsed as the spirit of invention and the desire for speed prevailed. Paralleling the developments in automobile engines from steam to gas (and similar developments in motorcycles and airplanes) personal motorized boats were first powered by naphtha engines (1888) and then by internal-combustion engines (1896). The popularity was instantaneous: “Following close upon the motor car, came the motor boat, and great as has been the popularity of the automobile, that of the motor boat has greatly exceeded it. Indeed, the vogue of the little power craft is little short of marvelous.”<sup>5</sup>

The historical link between cars and boats continued with the creation in England of the Marine Motor Association in 1903 as a branch of the Royal Automobile Club. That same year saw the foundation of the American Power Boat Association. These new organizations not only promoted interest in motorboating, but motivated investment in the commercial manufacture of boats and the motors built for them. Like early cars, it would take an assembly line production to allow motorboats into the financial reach of most Americans.

Racing was highly influential in bringing the concept of motorboating to the public. It connected the race teams formed by early manufacturers and investors with spectators, bringing hundreds of thousands to the shoreline to watch, bet, and celebrate speed. According to one description, “Boat races were both a technological proving ground and a social forum that helped to define what the modern power boater was like.”<sup>6</sup> The first major motorboat competition was held in 1903 in Britain, and like the America’s Cup for yachting, pitted nations against one another, rather than individuals. England’s Dorothy Levitt won the Harmsworth Trophy for the boat’s owner, setting the world’s first water speed record and pioneering the sport as an early female power boater.<sup>7</sup> She would go on to compete in and win in many more international boat and car races.

The burgeoning number of boat and motor manufacturers had a vested interest in bringing motorboating into the public eye. In addition to sponsoring racing associations and boating clubs, they held advertising and trade shows, such as New York’s annual National Motor Boat

<sup>3</sup> Beischer, Thomas G. “Control and Competition: The Architecture of Boathouse Row.” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 130, No. 3 (July 2006): 299-329, p. 303.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Comstock, William Phillips. *Garages and Motor Boat Houses*. New York: William T. Comstock Company, 1911, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> “The National Motor Boat Show.” *Antique Boat Museum*, <https://www.abm.org/index.php/exhibits/ongoing-exhibits/the-national-motor-boat-show>.

<sup>7</sup> Burt, Peter. “History.” *The Royal Motor Yacht Club*, <https://rmyc.club/about/history>.

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Show, kicked off in 1905. Magazines such as *Power Boating* (started 1905), *Motorboat* (started 1904), *Motorboating* (started 1907), and *Yachting* (started 1905) delivered the sport into the comfort of one's own home.

In 1904, there were some 15,000 motorized pleasure craft in the United States. By 1915, that number had grown to 400,000.<sup>8</sup> Put another way, in 1907, sailing yachts represented 55% of the total number of recreational boats and motor yachts were at 32%. Just six years later, the numbers had reversed.<sup>9</sup>

By 1910, outboard motors were becoming more readily available and were no longer as cost prohibitive. They provided the flexibility that allowed them to be removed for repair, transportation, or sale. They could be attached to any boat, whether new, purchased second hand, or handmade. The continued improvements and decreasing costs of the outboard motor allowed the relatively new sport of recreational motorboating to create "an entirely new class of water enthusiasts, drawn in great part from those elements of society which a century earlier had lined city water-fronts to watch the regattas of the exclusive boating and yacht clubs."<sup>10</sup>

While outboard engines were becoming more commercially accessible and affordable, boats themselves were not quite as fast to reach mass production, making them expensive. Boating's rise among the middle and lower classes was, therefore, dependent on handmade craft. Plans for boats of varying sizes and complexity were readily available in books, boating journals, and magazines such as *Popular Mechanics*. It wasn't until the 1920s that stock production of boats – with an increasing number having inboard engines – began in earnest. Those of more limited means could now have the most up-to-date technology, speed, and comfort the industry could offer.

The Great Depression temporarily slowed both the growth of the sport of boating and World War II imposed gas rationing and restrictions on materials and manufacturing. But by the end of the 1940s, boat sales soared to record highs. The development of alternate materials during the war for the construction of water vessels - such as aluminum, fiberglass, and bent plywood - contributed to the "spectacular expansion" of recreational motorboating entering the 1950s and '60s.<sup>11</sup>

These decades represented the golden years for the boating community. An estimated 6.5 million pleasure boats sailed American waters and some 30 million Americans considered themselves recreational boaters.<sup>12</sup> The pastime had expanded to include all family members and in 1957 and again in 1960, recreational boating was cited as "the nation's top family sport" by

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<sup>8</sup> Choate, Joseph E. "Recreational Boating: The Nation's Family Sport." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 313 (May 1957), p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Chapman, Charles F. "The Internal Combustion Engine in the Motor Boat." *Transactions (Society of Automobile Engineers)*, Vol. 10, PART II (1915): 3730416, p. 376.

<sup>10</sup> Dulles, Foster Rhea. *America Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation, 1607-1940*. Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1959, p. 362.

<sup>11</sup> "Motorboat." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/motorboat>. See also Choate, Joseph.

<sup>12</sup> Choate, p. 109.

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both the boating industry and recreation professionals.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, a 1963 article states that boating was available to Americans from all economic levels, with 65% of boats purchased in 1956-58 by the lower-middle and middle classes. As with many other publications throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it refers to boating as originally only for the wealthy.<sup>14</sup>

The 1970s and '80s saw a downturn in recreational boating for a variety of reasons - high fuel prices, a rise in unemployment, and growing environmental concerns. At one point, the government even threatened to ban weekend boating – America's top family sport in the previous decade – to save gas.<sup>15</sup> While boating faced similar challenges in the 1990s and early 2000s, it has seen a rise in popularity in more recent years.<sup>16</sup>

### **Boating and Boathouses in the District of Columbia**

To a great extent, recreational boating in Washington DC closely follows the rise of the sport in the rest of the country. The exception is the Washington Yacht Club and its fellow Anacostia Boathouses, which have continuously sought to make boating an affordable sport.

As in other cities in the U.S., rowing was extremely popular in DC and turned Washingtonians to their waterfronts. Early rowing clubs were located on the Potomac River and included the Falcons, the Gazelles, and the Undine, which have been lost to time. The more well-known Potomac Boat Club was founded in 1859, the Analostan in 1868, and the Washington Canoe Club in 1869. These clubs not only reflect the ascendancy of rowing as a sport – both competitive and for personal exercise – but also demonstrate how recreational pursuits became an important factor in the social life of Washingtonians. Although not the originals, the clubhouses for both the Potomac Boat Club and Washington Canoe Club still exist and have played host to innumerable dances, receptions, and dinners over the years.<sup>17</sup> They are both designated as DC landmarks and listed in the National Register of Historic Places for their architecture and their role in the history of recreation in the District of Columbia.

Sailing was not as popular in the nation's capital, where bridges crossing both the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers inhibited masted vessels. Sailing prevailed in the more open waters of the Chesapeake Bay and further south along the Potomac, while motorboating became the single most popular water sport in the District.

The first club in the District to include motorboating was the Capital Yacht Club (CYC), created in 1892. At that time, their small "fleet" was moored in the Washington Channel and included at least one naphtha powered motorboat.<sup>18</sup> By 1898, there were at least 5 motorized vessels and

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Sessoms, H. Douglas. "An Analysis of Selected Variables Affecting Outdoor Recreation Patterns." *Social Forces* 42, no. 1 (October 1963): p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> "History of Recreational Boating." *Formula Boats*, <https://www.formulaboats.com/blog/history-of-boating>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Bird, Betty. National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms for the Potomac Boat Club, 1989, p. 8.3 and Washington Canoe Club, p. 8.3.

<sup>18</sup> "History." *Capital Yacht Club*, <https://www.capitalyachtclub.com/home/History>.

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some dozen sailboats, as well as a number of canoes and dinghies at the club.<sup>19</sup> After the membership outgrew its first clubhouse, created from a disused barge anchored in the Channel, they leased land at 700 Water Street SW and erected a 1½ story frame clubhouse.

The Corinthian Yacht Club formed in 1903 and was situated at the mouth of James Creek between Buzzards Point and Greenleaf Point. In the fall of 1930, the club had to relocate to Buzzard's Point and by the 1940s, had the largest membership of any Washington boat club. They have since relocated south of the city close to where the Potomac flows into the Chesapeake Bay.

In 1905, the Eastern Power Boat Club (EPBC) formed, incorporating in 1910. This was the first club to be located on the Anacostia River and is one of the oldest clubs in America exclusively for motorboat owners.<sup>20</sup> Unlike other clubs that formed around this time, the EPBC was a club of working class boat owners and has maintained its reputation of as an affordable organization.

The Washington Yacht Club was the next to form, in 1910, as described more fully below. The WYC was also for motorized boats only and provided affordable membership. Seafarers Yacht Club, organized in 1945, is one of the oldest African American boat clubs in the country. Their clubhouse sits on the Anacostia to the north of EPBC and WYC on M Street SE. The last club to form along the Anacostia was the District Yacht Club, which took over the defunct District Boat Company boatyard in the early 1950s. The clubhouse was reportedly a former Army building that was floated to the site. Unfortunately, the clubhouse, workshop, and steward's cottage were destroyed by fire in 2016. These four boat clubs – EPBC, WYC, DYK, and Seafarers – all located on the western bank of the Anacostia on a stretch of Water and M Streets SE form what is now known as Boathouse Row or the Anacostia Boathouses.

Other clubs include the National Yacht Club, identified in the 1922 Polk Directory at 6<sup>th</sup> and Water Streets SW, which later moved to Alexandria, Virginia. A club called the Columbia Yacht Club is shown on a 1959 map of boating resources at the Washington Canal as well as a number of clubs that were located just outside the District boundaries but were closely affiliated with WYC and other District clubs.

### **Politics and Prejudice on the Rivers**

The Washington Yacht Club, Eastern Power Boat Club, Seafarers, and District Yacht Club, along with the modern Anacostia Community Boathouse, form what is known as the Anacostia Boathouses or Boathouse Row. While they have always been based on the Anacostia River, their specific location on Water and M Streets was not entirely by choice. The underlying land along the District's waterfront is almost entirely government owned and each club has had to negotiate – and in some instances fight for – the right to remain on the river. Leases have been sought variously through the War Department, Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Interior, the District of Columbia Commissioners, Redevelopment Land Agency, Department of

<sup>19</sup> "Potomac White Wings: Many Swift Craft in Washington Yacht Club." *Washington Post*, 4 September 1898, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> "The Four Historic Clubs." *Historic Anacostia Boating Association*, <https://www.haba-dc.org/the-four-historic-clubs>.

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Parks and Recreation, and/or the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, depending on the location and date of the agreement.

The confusing jurisdiction and multiple transfers of ownership are due in part to the city's historic lack of home rule and its intermittent control by the federal government. Early decisions regarding the Anacostia were passed from federal agency to federal agency, most of them dedicated to infrastructure and navigation. While business interests clamored for the opportunity to develop along the Anacostia's banks, the government decided to place sewer outfalls (and later a sewage pumping station and treatment facility) on the Anacostia and provided funding to keep the river dredged only as far north as to the Navy Yard. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the untreated sewage in the river augmented the naturally odiferous mudflats and contributed to outbreaks of cholera, malaria, and other diseases.

The banks of both the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers have been altered over the years and the shorelines have moved significantly at the government's direction. On the Anacostia side of the city, the dredging activities were collectively known as the reclamation of the Anacostia Flats. The reclamation took place over several decades, carried out by the Army Corps of Engineers in fits and starts as funding allowed. The project's goals were to maintain a navigable channel, rid the eastern part of the city of the unhealthy mud flats, and create new parklands along the waterfront. The reclamation took place by building seawalls on both sides of the river, digging up the marshy flats, and dumping the mud behind the walls to create an extended and accessible waterfront. All this dredging and land creation forced the Anacostia boat clubs to relocate. For a full century beginning in the 1910s, the clubs have suffered from continual uncertainty about their futures.

Because the reclamation increased the depth of the shoreline along the Anacostia, the boat clubs would no longer sit on waterfront property. Eastern Power Boat Club, which had already moved from the west bank to the east due to the Navy Yard expansion during WWI, had to move back when the reclamation necessitated it. EPBC floated its clubhouse across the Anacostia a second time to its current location on Boathouse Row at 1301 Water Street SE. The Washington Yacht Club moved three times under similar circumstances. In 1922, the Capital Yacht Club relocated and built its "classic yacht club with peaked roof, cupola and second story balcony."<sup>21</sup> They relocated twice after that date, to a 1973 clubhouse and to their recently constructed home at the Wharf complex, both in Southwest on the Washington Channel.

Concurrent with government control over clubhouse and marina locations was the prevailing view that the Anacostia was a less important river than the Potomac. The bias was inherent from Washington's very foundations when the Anacostia was dubbed the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, not even given the identity of its own name. For a variety of reasons, including the Potomac River's navigable waters to the well-established port at Georgetown, the western location of the Washington Monument and other national memorials, agricultural policy, and planning decisions, both the federal and District governments gave priority to the Potomac River

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<sup>21</sup> "History." *Capital Yacht Club*.



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and the Anacostia was left to handle the city's sewerage and stormwater, and to silt up over the years.

The river also became a symbol of the city's racial and economic divide. Its decline mirrors the federal and municipal government's forced exodus of African American residents to its east side through planning decisions, urban renewal, race restrictive covenants, and environmental policies, all of which helped to institutionalize racial segregation in Washington DC with the Anacostia River forming the boundary. Neighborhoods such as Anacostia, Twining City, Randle Highlands, and others in Southeast, formerly white suburbs, fell victim to "white flight," as those who could afford to moved to new suburban tracts in Maryland and Virginia.

These trends affected the boat clubs and boating culture in Washington. As John Wennersten explains it in his book *Anacostia: The Death and Life of an American River*, "Recreational boating in the Washington metropolitan area reveals stark polarities of race and class on the rivers."<sup>22</sup> During the long period of racial segregation, "it was only on the Anacostia that black mariners could find boat slips for their craft."<sup>23</sup> Seafarer's Yacht Club was established explicitly because of the unwritten policy to exclude African Americans from membership in DC's boating clubs. The other clubs on Boathouse Row, including the Washington Yacht Club, would lose many of their white members who did not wish to be associated with African Americans or the suffering Anacostia River anymore. The turnover of the Anacostia clubs to mostly African American membership only reinforced the divide between the White Potomac and the Black Anacostia.

While neither river was considered clean (swimming was banned in both in 1971), the city government admits that the Anacostia had become "a near-synonym for abandonment and urban decay."<sup>24</sup> It was, in fact, one of the most polluted rivers in the United States. By the late 1980s, interest in the Anacostia waterfront finally began to pick up. After more than a decade of study, the City released its *Anacostia Waterfront Framework Plan* in 2003, which envisions the continuing use of the Anacostia boathouses, with expanded facilities such as new marinas, fishing piers, concessions, paddle boats, and more. To date, implementation of the plan has focused on improving the river's environmental health, creating the Anacostia Riverwalk and revitalizing the southwest waterfront now known as The Wharf. A 2009 supplemental plan, the *Boathouse Row Planning Study*, was released just after the National Park Service transferred the land to the District of Columbia in 2008. This plan refines the Framework's goals and encourages use of "Boathouse Row as a waterfront destination, with a continuous waterfront edge, to provide increased access to the water and recreational uses for the community." The City accounts for the presence of the current boat clubs and anticipates their expansion as well as the presence of a new marina "to encourage increased use of the river for both motorized and non-motorized users."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Wennersten, John R. *Anacostia: The Death and Life of an American River*. Baltimore: The Chesapeake Book Company, 2008, p. 223.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>24</sup> District of Columbia Office of Planning. *Resurgence of the Anacostia Waterfront: 15 Years of Progress along the Anacostia River 2003-2018*, 2018, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> District of Columbia Office of Planning. *Boathouse Row Planning Study*, 2009, p. 10.

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### **The Architecture of Boathouses and Boat Clubs**

Boathouses are by their nature service buildings, built first and foremost to protect water craft and associated gear. When designed for this sole function, they tend to be utilitarian in design. Much like car garages, they provide protection for single or multiple boats in a row of individual berths. Often built over the water on pilings or set on the shoreline with a ramp down to the water, they were historically constructed of locally available materials and could include any combination of stone, brick, wood, or metal siding. They generally featured a large opening with double doors but were sometimes open at one or both ends.

Boat clubhouses often incorporate aspects of the boathouse, but for large sailing or motorized boats, they are generally distinct from boathouses with their storage functions. While designs varied widely from elaborately detailed buildings in the popular styles of the day (Eastlake, Mediterranean Revival, Colonial Revival) to utilitarian buildings in a vernacular aesthetic, boat clubhouses share certain similar features. With their primary facades facing the water, boat clubs are built either on pilings above the water, just set back from the water's edge, or a combination of the two.

They are often found in pairs or groups at points that offer safe mooring and good accessibility to navigable waters. They are nearly always elevated, either over boat bays (more for canoe or rowing clubs), storage space, or other support facilities. The upper level serves as the main club room that almost universally features a full width or wraparound porch facing river, bay, or lake. Porches are often seen on upper and lower levels and sometimes overhang the floor below. Another integral part of clubhouse architecture is a changing room/locker room to serve members and a galley, or kitchen, to support meetings and events in the main club room.

Character-defining features outside of the main clubhouse include the pilings, piers, floats, gangplanks, and catwalks that make up the docking facilities required for any boat club. These are wood in any number of formations that provide berths in parallel or perpendicular lines near the shoreline. Historically supported by logs or barrels, floats and catwalks today are frequently set on marine engineered plastic to keep them afloat. Most clubs feature freestanding flag poles on which they can display the club burgee.

Another commonality among clubhouses and other boat-related resources is the frequency with which they are moved. Whether for real estate reasons, government decisions, a changing shoreline, or for other purposes, there is a distinct history of moving these resources about. For instance, private boathouses of various sizes are frequently relocated along the nation's lakes and rivers. Sometimes, these are simple boat sheds that are moved on top of the boats they are protecting. There are also examples of relocating larger buildings, such as a 2½ story boathouse relocated and converted to a residence.<sup>26</sup> The U.S. Coast Guard Station in Daytona, Florida was

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<sup>26</sup> Cole, Regina. "Moved Not Shaken: A Historic Boathouse Becomes a Cozy Home," *MaineBoats*, <https://maineboats.com/print/issue-141/moved-not-shaken>.

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moved in 1954 and the one in Stage Harbor, Maine in 2009.<sup>27</sup> Even an entire lighthouse was jacked up and rolled to a new location on Hatteras Island, North Carolina. More locally, the Baltimore Yacht Club clubhouse, like its Washington counterparts the Washington Yacht Club, Eastern Power Boat Club, and District Yacht Club, was loaded onto a scow and towed through the harbor from Locust Point to the foot of Light Street.

## HISTORY OF THE WASHINGTON YACHT CLUB

The Washington Yacht Club (WYC) was founded on April 27, 1910 by a group of District of Columbia boaters looking to establish moorage along the Anacostia River. The charter members included Samuel Masson, Edward Mazoula, Wilbur Jarvis, Paul E. McKinney, Charles Potteiger, and Charles Pursglove. Masson was elected as Commodore, Mazoula as Vice Commodore, and Jarvis as Secretary-Treasurer.<sup>28</sup> There had been a previous club by the same name in the 1860s and 1870s for sailing vessels, but the new and unrelated WYC was aimed at the relatively new sport of power boating.

The founders had been using public boat yards for services and could have considered joining one of the boating clubs that already existed in the Washington Channel and across the Anacostia. But they wanted their own club with amenities that was affordable and in proximity to their homes on the east side of the Anacostia River.

The WYC had no “desire to develop an unwieldy club or to compete with others having greater resources.”<sup>29</sup> Rather, the members hailed from “all walks of life, mechanics, clerks, and professional men of moderate circumstances.”<sup>30</sup> Mazoula ran a boat livery at the northwest end of the Benning Road bridge. Masson was a carpenter and contractor, who built his own water craft. Jarvis was a clerk at the Interstate Commerce Commission, while Pursglove and McKinney worked at the Navy Yard. The latter four were all neighbors in the Twining City and Randle Highlands neighborhoods. In fact, all but McKinney lived within a block of one another.

As amended over the years, the club’s constitution and by-laws give the unpretentious purpose of WYC: “to promote the sport of boating and to provide facilities for the members in connection therewith.”<sup>31</sup> The Flag Officers included, or would come to include, the Commodore, with overall club responsibility and who presided over meetings; Vice Commodore, with responsibility for grounds and roads; Rear Commodore, in charge of buildings; and Fleet Captain, who oversaw the club’s anchorage, berths, floats, gangways, boat racks, and boat hoists. The other officer was the Secretary-Treasurer, who kept minutes, the member roster, a record of all boats owned by members, and also assigned lockers to active members. The by-laws also

<sup>27</sup> Long, Jr., Lieutenant Robert B. “Relocation of Boathouse, Ponce de Leon Inlet Lifeboat Station. *The Engineer’s Digest* 89 (Nov-Dec 1954) and Fraser, Doug. “Chatham Boathouse Getting a Lift.” *Cape Cod Times*, 13 March 2009.

<sup>28</sup> “Washington Yacht Club Formed.” *Evening Star* 27 April 1910, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> “A Brief History of the Washington Yacht Club from its Beginning to the Close of the Club Year 1928-1929,” p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Washington Yacht Club Constitution and By-Laws, revised through January 1960, p. 1.

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allowed the Commodore to appoint a Fleet Surgeon and Fleet Chaplain. A Board of Trustees assisted in running the organization.<sup>32</sup>

In keeping with their goal for a nearby facility, the club leased an unused site from the District government on the east bank of the Anacostia in the vicinity of old bridge pilings, the remnants of a river crossing that had been destroyed by the British in 1812. The parcel provided sixty feet of river frontage at the foot of Naylor Road SE at a rent of \$10 per year.<sup>33</sup> The one year lease was renewed for 1911-12.

In 1911, the Club adopted its burgee design of a triangular pennant of blue and red grounds separated by a white W. The initiation fee was set at \$2.50 with monthly dues of 50 cents.<sup>34</sup> By the start of the 1912 season, the WYC boasted a small but growing fleet at its a new wharf, built by the members. A channel had been dug from the wharf to provide access to the main channel of the Anacostia.<sup>35</sup> All work on club property and grounds has always been carried out by members of the club with very little contracted out. The by-laws actually require each member to work a certain number of hours each year. This effort at keeping work in-house has allowed the club to retain its affordability over the years and has given members a level of pride and ownership not always found at other clubs.

At the club's April 1913 annual meeting, the constitution was changed to create two levels of membership – Active and Associate. Active members received full privileges at the club while Associates could not vote on club business, only on social matters, and could not use club property. These changes were immediately followed up with a formal petition for incorporation of the Washington Yacht Club in the City of Washington on May 19, 1913. Acting on behalf of the club were L.J. Johnston, Wilbur Jarvis, R.M. Collins, R.G. Taylor, Thomas Keeley, and Kenneth Buffin. The object of incorporation was for “the mutual improvement of its members on the sport of boating, and generally to do all things necessary or proper for carrying on said object.”<sup>36</sup>

The WYC quickly established itself as a club that warranted respect from those it engaged, including the Army Corps of Engineers, the District Engineer, the Metropolitan Police Department, and its fellow boat clubs. The WYC described itself in 1913 as “an unpretentious club as yet, we have good prospects of building up and intend to conduct our club on a strictly sportsmanlike basis.”<sup>37</sup>

The Washington Yacht Club's first major challenge came early in their history as a result of the reclamation project along the Anacostia River. The work had begun as early as 1892 starting from the mouth of the river up to the Navy Yard, but funding quickly dried out. It continued in

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> “A Brief History of the Washington Yacht Club,” p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> “History of the Washington Yacht Club.” Typescript draft with handwritten edits, 1960, p. 2 and 10.

<sup>35</sup> “Anacostia.” *Evening Star* 16 June 1912, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Unsigned letter from WYC to the Honorable H.L. Johnson, Recorder of Deeds with application for incorporation, May 19, 1913.

<sup>37</sup> Unsigned letter from WYC to W.R. Adams, Secretary-Treasurer of the Corinthian Yacht Club, March 28, 1913.

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phases, as funding allowed, recommencing in 1905 on the opposite bank at Poplar Point and moving northward over the years. In late 1914, the WYC received formal notice to move all club members' boats in preparation for reclamation work in the vicinity of their leased site.

A new lease was executed between the Secretary of War and WYC on June 18, 1915. The lease provided a 50' deep swath of land with 100 feet of river frontage close to the previous club site. The location was on newly reclaimed land, located about 100 feet west of the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge pier, with a rental fee of \$50 per year for five years. The terms stated that the "lessee may erect upon this site a Club House built upon piers with piling foundation....a float in front of the site, held in place with pilings and with a runway from the seawall." The Club was permitted to add a fence of less than four feet in height and lay a boardwalk or other walkway to provide access to the site.<sup>38</sup>

Club members immediately set about making improvements. To purchase materials for a clubhouse, the WYC borrowed cash from non-members, which it covered by certificates to be paid in two years. In turn, club members bought certificates at \$25 each, payable in three years for a total of about \$425.<sup>39</sup> Construction started immediately by driving 14-foot pilings for pier foundations, building floats, and constructing a 20 x 30 foot clubhouse, all done entirely by WYC members. This 1915 building forms the center portion of today's WYC clubhouse.

A housewarming was held on January 17, 1916, followed by the Club's first dance, at the Carroll Institute Hall with 35 couples in attendance.<sup>40</sup> The average club membership during these formative years was approximately 25 with around ten boats.<sup>41</sup> The following years were "a fairly prosperous period for the Club, due to a good location and fair facilities."<sup>42</sup> Members almost always built their own boats, with about twenty cruisers and a number of smaller boats filling out the fleet heading into the early 1920s. Oyster roasts, weekly dances, and organized cruises occupied members during the boating season, along with an annual New Year's Day reception in the winter.<sup>43</sup> Summer highlights included WYC's annual Labor Day outing south to Mattawoman Creek as well as collaborative events with other local boat clubs. Many WYC members were also members and officers of the Potomac River Power Squadron (founded in 1915) and participated in their annual series of lectures on boating navigation, etiquette, and safety as both attendees and instructors. The club maintained its reputation as "a 'do-it-yourself' club, with the accent on making it possible for the boaters of modest means."<sup>44</sup>

World War I saw a temporary loss of five members who joined the military and for whom the club waived dues during their service. In 1918, the interior of the clubhouse was painted and by 1919, the Club was running its own electric plant for lighting. The WYC also sought permission

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<sup>38</sup> Signed lease between War Department and Washington Yacht Club, June 18, 1915.

<sup>39</sup> "History of the Washington Yacht Club," p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> "Yacht Club Gives Dance." *Evening Star* 18 January 1914, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Washington Yacht Club. "Golden Anniversary 1910-1960," p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> "A Brief History of the Washington Yacht Club."

<sup>43</sup> "History of the Washington Yacht Club," p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

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to tap into the Pennsylvania Avenue bridge water main, but found it cost prohibitive, so the club remained without running water.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the upheaval of war, more change was looming for the club. The Corps of Engineers had completed the reclamation the Anacostia Flats on the river's east bank and turned over jurisdiction to the District of Columbia to become part of the city's park system. Once again, the club was required to relocate. After some setbacks due to land ownership claims, the WYC and the War Department finally signed a lease on December 5, 1924 with a payment of \$100 to cover the first six month's rent.

The new – and permanent – site was situated on the opposite bank of the Anacostia at the foot of 15<sup>th</sup> Street SE. The grounds covered a third of an acre and included the land from the seawall to what would become M Street SE and running eastward from 15<sup>th</sup> Street for 200 feet. Despite its inaccessibility by car, the club found itself in good company. The Eastern Power Boat Club had also relocated its clubhouse to nearby 14<sup>th</sup> and M Streets SE earlier in 1924.

Ever thrifty, the club members opted to move their clubhouse rather than construct a new one and immediately began to prepare the new site to receive the structure. A call for estimates to move the clubhouse described it as follows:

“The building is 20 x 30 with 7 foot front porch, one story and loft, frame construction, only front sheathed and lined with paper wallboard. It is now on brick piers about 4 feet from the ground, 12 piers being under the house and 3 under the porch. It will need to be placed on a scow at proper stage of tide, towed across the river, landed on the new site and placed on posts or piers with proper footings of concrete so as to allow at least 6 feet 6 inches of headroom under floor joists.”<sup>46</sup>

Funds were quickly raised by asking active members to lend \$25 each for the relocation, with a total of \$350 collected. In February 1925, the clubhouse was loaded onto a barge and towed across the Anacostia behind Vice Commodore F. A. Keithly's 30-foot cruiser. Club members had prepared the site with a seven foot high concrete block foundation on which to set the building. Soon after, members constructed floats and fencing and installed lockers on first floor. In 1926, gas service was provided for lighting, but there was no water service and electricity continued to be self-generated.<sup>47</sup>

Although it took over two years, M Street was finally extended and provided vehicular access to the club grounds. By 1928, the WYC boasted a paved road as well as a gas station for both boats and cars. A fence surrounded the property with the main gates facing the river and auxiliary gates at the gas station and driveway entrances. Floats with stalls had been built for rowboats

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<sup>45</sup> “Golden Anniversary,” p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Unsigned letter from Wilbur Jarvis, Secretary WYC to Mr. William Halfpapp, December 8, 1924.

<sup>47</sup> “A Brief History of the Washington Yacht Club,” p. 4.

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and boats with outboard motors.<sup>48</sup> Most importantly, the club finally connected to the city's water service by laying pipes under the Pennsylvania Railroad's tracks. Club history reports that the work was paid for and carried out by club members and that the pipes provided the only water supply east of the tracks until at least 1960.<sup>49</sup> A telephone line was installed in 1931.<sup>50</sup>

By this time, the successful club had hired a steward to look after the property. It hosted some 200 guests at its annual oyster roasts and expanded its Labor Day cruise to a three-day event with rowing and swimming competitions. On the return from the long weekend, "the fleet assembled in Mattawoman Creek and made the run thence to the club anchorage in double-line formation for the entire distance. This feat gave us all a great thrill, and it created considerable interest on the part of other boatmen along the route."<sup>51</sup>

WYC's renown reached outside the DC area, encouraging the Ohio River Yacht Club in Cincinnati to inquire about the operations of the club. They wrote in 1929 that forthcoming improvements to the Ohio River "has awakened our people to the possibilities of river recreation." They asked WYC to share information on annual dues, number of members and a picture of the clubhouse so they could consider ways to expand their organization and erect their own building.<sup>52</sup>

The WYC complied, explaining its levels of membership and dues and describing the clubhouse thusly:

"The building is a rectangular affair, 20 by 38 feet. The ground floor is of cement block construction and contains a row of lockers on each side and a double row along the center. The upper floor is of frame construction and serves as the assembly room to which are attached quarters for the steward. There is a loft above the upper floor which serves as storage for spars, sails and other gear too bulky to be put in the lockers."<sup>53</sup>

Secretary-Treasurer Lisle Pursel went on to describe the grounds as 200 feet wide along the waterfront by 125 feet deep, which provided owners ample space to haul out boats for service. There were three landing floats with water service, each measuring 14 x 20 feet and an additional float at the adjacent gasoline station. Berths for the club's fleet were on one side of the landing floats in the main stream; space for tenders was provided between the floats and the seawall.<sup>54</sup>

Pursel's description indicates the clubhouse length had increased by eight feet by 1929, to provide a room for the steward. Men's and women's restrooms were added above this extension

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> "History of the Washington Yacht Club."

<sup>50</sup> "A Brief History of the Washington Yacht Club," p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Edwin McHugh, Commodore, Ohio River Yacht Club to L.J. Johnston, Commodore, WYC, November 20, 1929.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Lisle W. Pursel, Secretary-Treasurer, WYC to Edwin McHugh, Commodore, Ohio River Yacht Club, December 27, 1929.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

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in 1930, as was the concrete block galley, occupying the full length of the building along the east side lower level.<sup>55</sup> The club reported a membership of 79 that year.<sup>56</sup>

In 1931, the city considered removal of the Washington Channel boat clubs, resulting in the WYC leasing an additional 100 feet of water frontage to the east to accommodate the vessels of those boaters threatened with eviction.<sup>57</sup> By 1932, the grounds had been cleared and graded and the WYC borrowed a pile driver belonging to Corinthian Yacht Club (one of the clubs located on the Washington Channel) to install 35 new pilings, work which wasn't completed until 1948 after the Depression and Second World War. The 1930s also saw improvements to the parking lot, a new roof on the galley, and the purchase of new oil drums for the floats. In 1939, a shower was added to the ladies' room and in 1941 a boat hoist was installed.<sup>58</sup>

News of the attack on Pearl Harbor came during a WYC oyster roast. Club members readily complied with wartime requirements that all boats register with the Harbormaster and submit to routine checks by the Coast Guard Auxiliary. However, the Club faced significant challenges during the war years relating to loss of members to military service, gasoline and materials rationing, and an effort by the government to put a temporary bridge through the club's leased property (which was then under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior). Members were successful in convincing the Army Corps of Engineers to shift the bridge 50 feet to the west but had to relocate some of its moorings to allow the installation.<sup>59</sup> While gas rations meant limited boating opportunities, the club also lamented that "sugar rationing hampered the activities of the Entertainment Committee."<sup>60</sup>

The only known change to the clubhouse during WWII was the replacement of the wooden steps with concrete. In the immediate post-war years, the club connected to the power grid and no longer had to generate their own electricity. During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, WYC and other boating clubs experienced an era of contentment. Membership was high and recreational boating was popular. The *Washington Star* ran its "Fore and Aft" column from the 1930s through the 1950s, recognizing boating as mainstream activity.

In 1955, an old oyster shed was carried intact by club members from the east side of the lot to the west, where it was converted to a workshop and where it stands today. Around this time, the club members also built forms and poured a concrete parking lot on the west side of the clubhouse and added an outdoor fireplace and swings on the east side. In 1957, a new TV Room was added at the lower level west side with air conditioning, gas heat, a television and picture windows. This room was later removed and the current two story addition built in its place. The Ladies Auxiliary, which had formed in 1951, held meetings here while the men met upstairs. All

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<sup>55</sup> Shanafelt, R.L. "History of the Washington Yacht Club for the Club Year 1930-1931." April 12, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Shanafelt, "History of the Washington Yacht Club," p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Shanafelt, R.L. "History of the Washington Yacht Club for the Club Year 1931-1932." April 10, 1932, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> "Golden Anniversary," p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20-21.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.



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gathered afterward for refreshments in the galley.<sup>61</sup> This year also saw the floats and catwalks rearranged in order to allow additional smaller boats to dock.

At the April 1959 annual dinner, the WYC dedicated a new flagpole. It featured a plaque bearing the inscription “Dedicated to the memory of our departed members – Washington Yacht Club – April 1959. Donated and erected by Sea Explorer Ship 81.” It is believed that the *Sea Explorer* was a vessel of the Sea Scouts, for whom the club had built floats in 1934 on club property.<sup>62</sup> In September of that year, the Club rolled out its monthly publication *Signals*, providing both practical information and humorous anecdotes to club members.

In 1960, the club’s 50<sup>th</sup> year, there were 54 members, all of whom helped remodel the galley and paint and reappoint the main club room. Late in this decade and in the 1970s, the club began to see its first women members. Previously affiliated with the WYC through their husbands, women boat owners were welcomed as members, the first of whom was Peggy Appellis. Owner and captain of the 39-foot *Dawntreader*, Appellis served as the club’s first female Commodore in 1977-1978.<sup>63</sup>

Also in the early 1970s, the club experienced the trials and rewards of racial integration. John “Sonny” McLean is believed to be the first WYC member of color and broke ground for future membership. He suffered the indignity of not being allowed in the clubhouse except for meetings or major events despite being an equal dues-paying member. His situation wasn’t uncommon as other clubs in the area also remained whites-only well into the 1980s, if not longer, Seafarers being the notable exception.<sup>64</sup> The membership at WYC dropped in response to integration, but today remains proudly welcoming of members of all backgrounds.

A feature article in the *Washington Post* in 1984 identified the WYC clubhouse as “the most appealing of the marinas” on the Anacostia. At that time, it was described as a “white wooden building on top of a cinder block base with a sign announcing its birth year as 1910. The door to the club was wide open. Inside we found a pool table, a stuffed dolphin, and a cola machine that dispensed beer rather than soda.”<sup>65</sup> Four years later the *Post* called WYC “a weather-worn, gray-and-white Victorian bungalow.”<sup>66</sup>

In the 1990s the club began reconstruction of the lower level TV room with new concrete block walls to replace the corrugated metal. Construction was significantly impacted by flooding in 1996, which brought the Anacostia into the lower level of the clubhouse and damaged boats, docks, and buildings on the property. In addition to the reconstruction of this room, the club expanded on top of it, adding to the main club space on the upper level. Changes to the clubhouse in 2016-18 include interior renovations, adding vinyl siding, replacing the concrete front steps with wood, replacing the flagpole, and constructing a gazebo.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> “The History of Washington Yacht Club,” 2014.

<sup>63</sup> *Merchant Vessels of the United States 1977, Volume 1*. Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1977.

<sup>64</sup> Personal interview with WYC Commodore Steve Ricks, October 22, 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, Denis. “Anacostia River: Sad Songs Say It All.” *Washington Post* 20 November 1984, p. E3.

<sup>66</sup> Sklansky, Jeff. “Anacostia Boat Clubs Just Keep Rollin’ Along.” *Washington Post* 28 July 1988, p. B1.

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### **Social Activity, Civic Responsibility, and Stewardship**

While the club no longer makes its annual excursions to Mattawoman Creek, it hosts several major events a year, including the Flag Raising ceremony in May, a crab feast in June, and a holiday party. The WYC participates in the Blessing of the Fleet event with other boat clubs on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

The WYC has traditionally combined its social events with its strong work ethic and dedication to the club's upkeep. Virtually all of the site work and building and amenity improvements throughout the history of the WYC have been accomplished by club members, as corroborated by club records and newspaper articles.<sup>67</sup> The WYC "used sweat equity in lieu of a large bank account to continue its boating traditions"<sup>68</sup> and has maintained the club, docks, and grounds consistently. The ongoing maintenance and replacement of pilings is one of the most important but also most difficult tasks. The club described the work as "costly both in materials and manpower. Many methods have been tried, some cleaning out the Club Treasury, some of them causing back-aches at work parties, but one way or another the berths have been kept usable over the years."<sup>69</sup>

Although always understood by as part of membership, the requirement to put in work hours at the club was codified by 1960. The revised by-laws "call on all members to attend work parties for the maintenance and repair of the Club building and grounds."<sup>70</sup> These work parties continue to combine a hefty dose of labor as well as an opportunity for members to socialize, as noted in the club's receipts for food and beer purchases for the work parties.

The strong work ethic of the club and the overarching attitude of members to pitch in whenever and however needed extended beyond the physical elements of the WYC. A civic-mindedness and concern for members and their families pervades the history of the club. In its earliest years, the club petitioned the police every spring and summer for assistance in curtailing the activities of local youths, who repeatedly "borrowed" the club's rowboats, entered moored yachts, damaged property, and used the wharves for nude swimming and sunbathing. Because boating was a family activity for many club members, propriety was demanded. Occurrences were ongoing, particularly during the warmer months, and the police relied on the WYC to help them enforce the law.

Even the appearance of propriety was important. In 1916, a boat owner, who was not a member of the WYC but moored his vessel near the WYC floats, was gently reprimanded. After reports of drinking and gambling at night and on Sundays on board, the club sent him a letter. Because people assumed the boat belonged to a WYC member, "the repute thus gained seriously

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<sup>67</sup> For example, see "Fore and Aft." *Evening Star* 18 April 1941, p. D-3.

<sup>68</sup> "The Four Historic Clubs."

<sup>69</sup> "Golden Anniversary," p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Constitution and By-Laws.

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interferes with the real purposes of the club.” To “protect ourselves from adverse criticism,” the WYC asked the owner to remove his boat.<sup>71</sup>

The club’s interest in civic-mindedness extended to other activities, from reporting unpermitted dredging and dumping to the City’s Engineer Commissioner and the Army Corps of Engineers to volunteering “any possible assistance” to the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia in a series of robberies from WYC and other club boats.<sup>72</sup> The WYC also actively sought the assistance of the Harbor Master to enforce speed regulations.

Most importantly, members of the WYC have consistently served as stewards of the Anacostia River. In part, their efforts have been to protect property from damage, but their accomplishments have brought attention to and assisted in the clean up of the river. In 1923, the WYC advised the Washington Gas Light Company, which operated on a nearby parcel, that it would report the company for polluting the Anacostia and damaging property if they didn’t cease dumping a tar-like substance into the river.<sup>73</sup> By 1931, the club had formed a Pollution Committee, which worked independently for WYC and in collaboration with other boat clubs and the Isaac Walton League to clean up the river, noting the “disgrace to the city’s water courses.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1943, the WYC alerted the city’s Engineer Commissioner to oil leaking into the Anacostia from tank cars unloading at the L. P. Steuart Co. storage tanks at 13<sup>th</sup> and M Streets SE. With gallons upon gallons seeping into the river per day, the club reported “the damage to and defacing of the many yachts and other pleasure craft anchored in the Anacostia River, the docks and landings places being continually covered with black oil, the black oil covering on the pillars of Sousa Bridge, the Anacostia Bridge and the sea wall of Anacostia Park.” The WYC appealed to the city to abate the nuisance and “hazard to the citizens and yachtsmen of Southeast Washington.”<sup>75</sup>

Just three years later, the WYC held an “indignation meeting” over an additional 200 gallons of spilled oil. This time, a significant sum was paid to 31 members for damage to their boats.<sup>76</sup> Club members continued to take on responsibility for the river, reporting another oil spill in 1970, which earned two boaters an unsolicited \$1250 reward.<sup>77</sup>

Throughout its history on the west bank of the Anacostia, the WYC has aided the cause of the river, protecting both it and the city from it in times of high waters. There is much documentation of the significant environment impacts that past reclamation projects, elimination of wetlands, sedimentation, and other development projects have had on the impact of flood

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<sup>71</sup> Unsigned letter from WYC to Mr. C.W. Stansbury, October 26, 1916.

<sup>72</sup> Unsigned letters from WYC to Col. William. V. Judson, Engineer Commissioner of D.C., May 8, 1912 and to U.S. Attorney Ralph D. Given, June 11, 1917.

<sup>73</sup> Unsigned letter from Wilbur Jarvis, Secretary, WYC to Washington Gas Light Company, July 14, 1923.

<sup>74</sup> Shanafelt, R.L. “History of the Washington Yacht Club (For the Club Year 1931-1932),” April 10, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Paul R. Donley, Commodore, WYC to Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia, March 16, 1943.

<sup>76</sup> “Yachtsmen Plan Protest Over Oil Damage.” *Evening Star* 22 November 1942, p. A-2 and “Golden Anniversary,” p. 21-22.

<sup>77</sup> “Oil Spill Alert Earns \$1250.” *Evening Star* 14 October 1972, p. 7.

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waters on the Anacostia River. Yet the club has triumphed over these challenges that threaten not only its property, but its very livelihood. In August 1933, an unnamed hurricane caused the Anacostia to rise over the seawall. In 1936 and 1942, the two storms that flooded the Potomac River and led to the authorization of the National Mall levee also flooded the Anacostia River. During all three of these major flooding events, the Washington Yacht Club was located in its current position on the west bank and was directly impacted.

In 2003, Hurricane Isabel decimated the Anacostia River shoreline. The storm surge pushed the river over the seawall and flooded many buildings, including the entire ground floor of the WYC clubhouse. Fortunately, the steep hill behind the building served as a flood barrier for the rest of the city, and the gravel parking lot and unpaved lawns acted as effective drainage and runoff control. As with the aftermath of every storm since their move to the west bank in 1924, the members of the club served as stewards of the land and the river, cleaning up the entire area and repairing damage to the clubhouse, grounds, and docks. The existence of the Washington Yacht Club property, in its current form, continues to serve as a natural flood barrier and is a benefit to the city and its residents. The environmental outreach efforts of the WYC are ongoing the club has maintained its certification by the National Park Service and District Department of the Environment as a Clean Marina since 2003.

In other club activities, WYC took the lead in organizing its fellow boating organizations, including Capital Yacht Club, Eastern Power Boat Club, Old Dominion Boat Club (Alexandria), and the Gunston Cove Inter-Club Committee, to petition for speed limits. WYC members were active members and officers of the Potomac River Power Squadron, devoted to training and education, and led courses on various aspects of boating safety and navigation. During WWI, the Squadron was tapped to provide special services to the Navy on an as need basis, but it is unknown if any action was required.

The various Anacostia and Washington Channel boat clubs were socially active and frequently invited one another to events. They also looked out for one another. For instance, the WYC was quick to offer assistance in October of 1929, extending “the courtesies of this Club” to the Corinthian and Capital Yacht Clubs when their moorings were threatened by icy hydraulic fill. The boats were welcomed at WYC, where they were assigned a berth by one of the officers. The WYC reassured their fellow clubs that since 1917 there was “never sufficient ice in this anchorage to cause damage.” The Capital Yacht Club urged its members to accept the offer, expressing that the “fine spirit of generosity and sportsmanship manifested by the officers and captains of the Washington Y.C. will not be forgotten.”<sup>78</sup>

## **SIGNIFICANCE AND INTEGRITY**

The Washington Yacht Club is significant under National Register criteria A and C and District of Columbia criteria b and d for history and architecture, respectively. The history of the WYC closely mirrors the rise of recreational boating in the United States and the District of Columbia.

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<sup>78</sup> Special Notice to Members from C.S. West, Recording Secretary Corinthian Yacht Club, October 9, 2919.

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Stemming first from sailing, then the canoeing craze of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, through a somewhat experimental steam and naphtha-powered phase, to today's in-board motor cruisers, motorboating has become a recreational pursuit that crosses economic and racial lines, as demonstrated by the Washington Yacht Club.

Represented by its clubhouse, boating facilities, and outbuildings, the WYC is an early example of a boating club devoted specifically to the sport of motorized boating, particularly to affordable boating. Largely considered a pastime of the wealthy, motorboating was made available to Washingtonians of more limited means by the WYC and its fellow Anacostia River boat clubs. Still battling this stereotype, the club's pride in its blue collar history was noted in 1988, when it was reported that "Anacostia boaters take exception to the popular image of caviar cruisers, yachters with clean hands and air conditioned cabins."<sup>79</sup>

For over a hundred years, the WYC has supported, encouraged, and provided facilities to its "highly motivated and somewhat undercapitalized membership."<sup>80</sup> Early club members built their own boats by hand, and the membership has held sole responsibility for constructing, maintaining, and resourcefully repurposing its buildings, materials, and facilities over the years.

The WYC has contributed to the growth and popularity of motorboating through outreach, education, and membership in regional and national organizations. WYC members have served as instructors on boating safety, navigation, and other maritime topics and taken the lead on important maritime issues like speed regulation and pollution of the Anacostia River. The WYC has maintained its collegial relationships with other boating clubs, offering and accepting services when needed, and joining in competitions and celebrations together.

Further, the WYC provides a landmark example of the city's eastern transition from a largely white populous to a majority black and to the boundary that the Anacostia River came to represent in Washington DC.

Architecturally, the WYC is a representative expression of a vernacular clubhouse. It possesses the character defining features of a boat club with its river-facing façade, front porch overlooking the water, elevated main level above a locker room, a mix of masonry and frame construction, large meeting room, galley, and of course, docking facilities for members' boats. In addition, a workshop shows the self-contained nature of the members and their commitment to building and maintaining their own boats as well as the clubhouse.

The WYC clubhouse has been altered over the years with additions to expand its service to club members. A historic galley addition sits along the lower level of the east side and a non-historic addition is located on the west side of the building on both levels. Vinyl siding covers its original wood and the windows have been replaced. The original building, however, is still evident and is clearly expressed as an elevated, gable roofed, porch fronted, frame cottage that retains its original form and appearance between and above additive alterations.

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<sup>79</sup> Slansky, 1988.

<sup>80</sup> "The History of Washington Yacht Club." 2014.

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The Washington Yacht Club also meets National Register criteria consideration b for relocated properties. While moving historic resources may disqualify them from designation, marine facilities are an exception. Boathouses, boat clubs, and other water-related buildings have a long history of being moved. It is largely because of their location on the water that moving these resources is made both necessary and practicable. Loading a building onto a barge and floating it to its new destination across a smooth body of water is simpler than either dismantling it for reconstruction at a new site or bracing a building for loading onto a flatbed to be towed along city streets. Because of this context of moving boathouses and boat clubs both in the District of Columbia and elsewhere, the relocation of the Washington Yacht Club does not diminish its integrity.

As one of the Anacostia River boathouses, the Washington Yacht Club epitomizes the character of Anacostia boating, and to some degree, the people of Washington. The WYC has survived multiple moves, uncertainty with leases, infrastructure issues, racial segregation, the dichotomy of federal-city relations, the blind eye long cast toward the eastern part of city, and the newer threats of development and gentrification. And yet, after 110 years of facing these challenges, the Washington Yacht Club proudly sits on Boathouse Row displaying the club's burgee yardarmed under the U.S. flag and alongside the District of Columbia stars and bars.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See footnotes for all references. Most information comes from the paper files of the Washington Yacht Club, including correspondence, unpublished histories, copies of *Signals*, receipts, membership information, the constitution and by-laws, member rosters, etc.

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### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

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**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☒ Other

Name of repository: Washington Yacht Club Clubhouse

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**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** .33 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927    or    ☐ NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |



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### Verbal Boundary Description

The property is not situated on a single lot, but straddles two assessment and taxation lots, 801 and 802 within Square 1080-S and the larger, federally owned Reservation 343-D. Its location is at the foot of a now-closed section of 15<sup>th</sup> Street SE. The site has been leased throughout the tenancy of the Washington Yacht Club, and the lease area has fixed and dimensioned boundaries, fronting on the Potomac River a distance of 200 feet, extending inland from the mean high-water line 100 feet on the east side of the parcel and 150 feet on the west side, with the north boundary completing the irregular quadrilateral and measuring 206 feet, as depicted on the original lease's boundary map below.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the parcel historically used by the Washington Yacht Club, and its extent was established by a 1924 lease and platted.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Anne O. Brockett  
organization: D.C. Historic Preservation Office, Office of Planning  
street & number: 1100 4<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
city or town: Washington state: DC zip code: 20024  
e-mail anne.brockett@dc.gov  
telephone: 202-442-8842  
date: January 6, 2020

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### Additional Documentation

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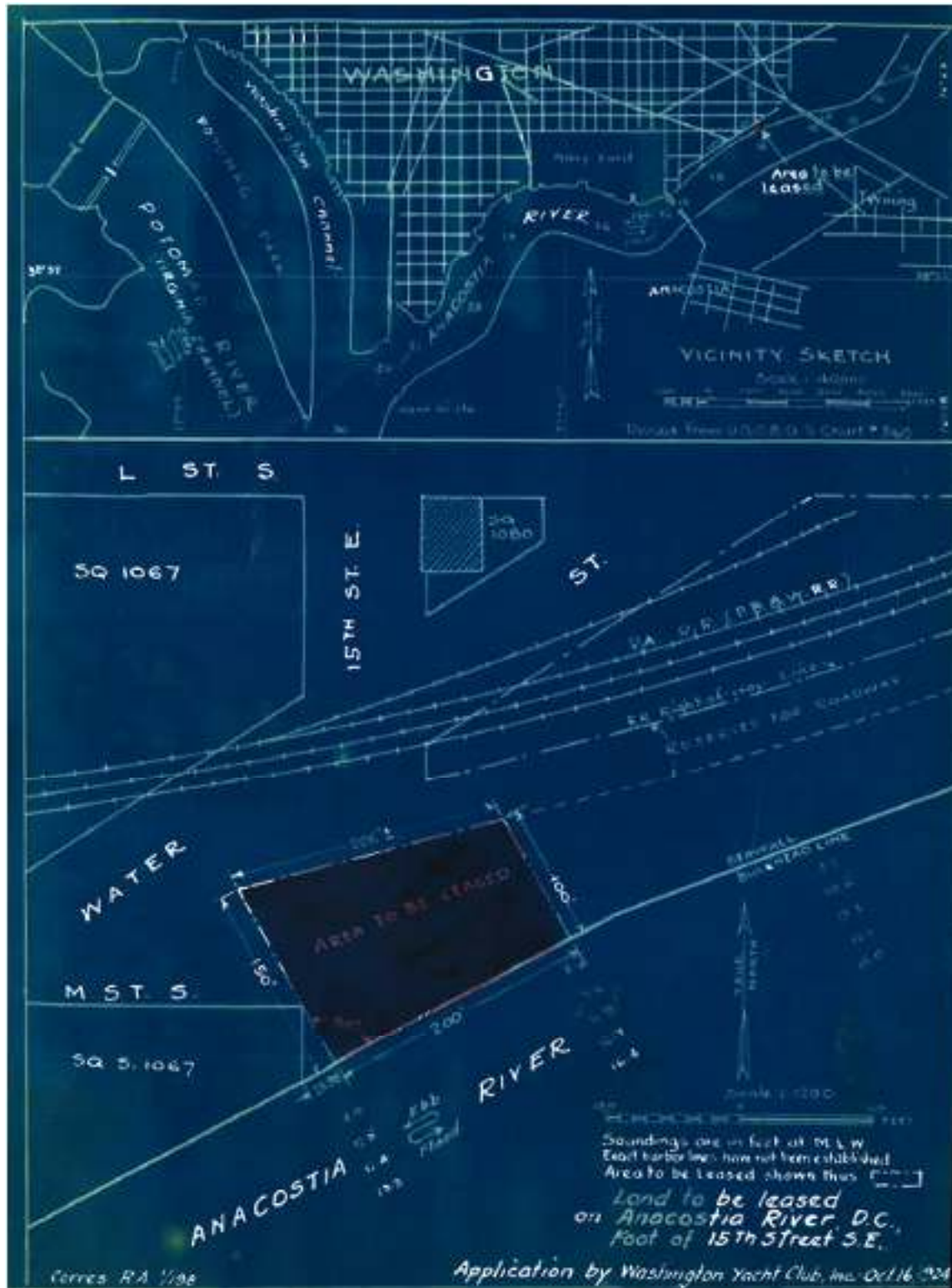
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Location map.

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Location of Washington Yacht Club 1925-present from lease documents between WYC and Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, November 22, 1924.

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Clubhouse →  
Workshop →  
Shed →





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Location of Washington Yacht Club 1915-1925 from lease documents between WYC and Secretary of War, June 1, 1915.



1919 Baist's Real Estate Atlas, vol. 4, plate 18 showing location of WYC from 1916 to 1925 on south bank of Anacostia River

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## Photographs



WYC Clubhouse, south façade



WYC Clubhouse, south and east sides



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WYC Clubhouse west and south sides



WYC Clubhouse, east side

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WYC Clubhouse north side



WYC Electric Shed west side (L) and south side (R)





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WYC Storage Shed (L) and Workshop (R)



WYC Workshop

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WYC catwalk and docks



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WYC Clubhouse interior views of main club room  
Looking south (top) and north (bottom)

