

Belmont 16ft Sailing Club – 100 Years



Lake Macquarie, in the heart of Awabakal country, is an idyllic location for open boat sailing. Belmont Bay in particular, with its prevailing sea breezes and wide expanse of flat water, has made it an attractive venue for many Australian and World sailing championships. However it is the local sailors from the Belmont 16ft Sailing Club who will mark the centenary of their club in 2022. A meeting to form the club was held on Saturday 13th May 1922 with the first race held on Saturday 7th October 1922. Whilst many will know and enjoy the 16's as a fine entertainment venue, the club's primary purpose remains the promotion of 16ft Skiff Sailing, just as it was 100 years ago.

Sailing on Lake Macquarie (Awaba)

The first regatta held on Lake Macquarie was organised by the Wallsend and Plattsburg Regatta Club for the Queen's Birthday weekend, Saturday 24th May 1879. Though these towns were not beside the lake, this was recreation for their coal mining communities. The club then held an annual regatta at Speer's Point for more than 50 years. Perhaps spurred on by the success at Spier's Point, the first regatta on Belmont Bay took place on Easter Monday, 18th April 1881. Known then as the 'Belmont and Pelican Flat Regatta', a programme of sculling, sailing and novelty events was organised. It was a significant event, with the steamer 'Giraffe' arranged to take passengers from Cockle Creek to Belmont on regatta day, returning in the evening. Belmont's regatta too was held annually, until 1899. Though attempts were made to revive the event, it was not until 1919 that Belmont's annual regatta recommenced.



Belmont Foreshore - 20 February 1896



Belmont Bay, NSW, 7 June 1905

University of Newcastle Cultural Collections

The 16ft Skiff Movement

A sailing movement, which spread around the nation, began around the turn of the century. The Port Jackson Sailing Skiff Club was formed on Wednesday 6th November 1901 and soon decided to restrict skiffs registered with the club to 16ft in length.

Length overall, 16ft., and not less than 15ft. 9in.; beam not to exceed 5ft. 6in. outside of planking, 2in. being allowed on each side exclusive of the above for mouldings; no inside gunwales; width of tuck outside planking, 3ft. 9in.; maximum depth, 21in.; minimum depth, 18in.

At their peak, 16ft skiffs competed concurrently in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria, and for a time on the Derwent in Tasmania. Clubs eager to promote regular, weekly 16ft skiff sailing also formed north of Sydney. These included the Toronto Sailing Club in 1910, a sailing club at Spier's Point in 1911 and the Port Hunter Sailing Skiff Club in 1913. The rapid growth of the 16ft Skiff class was interrupted by war from 1914 – 1918, but by 1922, Belmont too was ready for 16ft Skiff sailing.

Controversy

The decision to form a skiff club at Belmont was not without controversy. In September of 1921, the Belmont Regatta Committee called a meeting to prepare for their annual regatta. By December 1921, with the promise of significant public support, receipt of several cheques and promised donations, a successful regatta looked assured. Arrangements were made for the laying of buoys, race officials, publicity and refreshments, with the date set for Monday 2nd January 1922. There were 8 events planned, with first prize of £8 for the 16ft skiff race. Unfortunately this holiday weekend was one to remember, or perhaps forget. The headlines said it all. In nearby Newcastle, the morning of the regatta saw a consistent gale of 65 miles per hour (56.5 knots). This continued into the afternoon with gusts of up to 90 miles per hour (78.2 knots). The wind was so strong it was not possible to walk along the breakwater. The Newcastle Bar was impassable. Vessels could neither enter nor leave the harbour. All outdoor activities planned for the district were abandoned, including the Belmont Regatta, and excursion trains to Lake Macquarie were cancelled by the railway department. Not to be disheartened, Belmont Regatta Committee rescheduled the event for Easter Saturday, 15th April 1922. However, someone was about to throw a spanner in the works.



The Newcastle Sun – Monday 2nd January 1922 – page 5

Toronto Sailing Club, for decades, held its annual regatta on Boxing Day. However, at a meeting of the club in February 1922, a committee was elected to organise a carnival at Toronto during Easter. Rear-Admiral Dumaesq (commander of the Royal Australian Navy) would be asked to open their newly built boat shed, on Easter Monday.

In April 1922 two newspaper advertisements, listed on the same day, suggested Belmont's regatta was on the Saturday followed by Toronto's on the Monday. Without consulting Belmont Regatta Committee, Toronto Sailing Club decided to run a programme of events on Easter Saturday in direct competition with the Belmont Regatta..

Full details and Time-tables on application. No increase in fares. Ample transport arranged.

Stockton, 38, Night.
Tel. New. 354, Day.

GILLAM and MATHIESON, Agents.
Head Office, Tyne Road,
Telford-street, Newcastle.

Toronto Sailing Club

Grand Aquatic Gala and Regatta

ALSO
OFFICIAL OPENING OF CLUB HOUSE BY
Rear-Admiral Dumaesq, C.B., C.B.O., R.N.

EASTER MONDAY, 17th inst at 2 p.m.

Naval Band in Attendance (by kind permission of Commander Mutton).
Post entries for all shore events.
Special Trains.

SELECT DANCE AT NIGHT.

C. TONKS, Treasurer; G. W. GOFFET, President; E. ENGERT, Secretary

IMPERIAL STADIUM

Belmont Annual Regatta

WILL BE HELD ON
VILLAGE BAY BELMONT,
ON
SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 1922.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS.

SAILING RACES.
KEEL BOAT RACE. Prizes, £2/10/-, £1/10/-, and 10/- Entrance fee, 5/-.
NOVICE SKIPPER. Prizes, £5, £2, £1, 10/-, and 5/- Entrance fee 5/-.

16FT. SKIFFS. Prizes, £10, £2/10/-, £1/10/-, and £1. Entrance fee 10/-.

ALL COMERS. Prizes, £10, £3, £1/10/-, £1, and 10/- Entrance fee 10/-.

MOTOR LAUNCH RACE. Prizes, £2, £1, and 10/- Entrance fee, 3/-.

OUT-BOARD MOTORS. Prizes, £2, £1, and 10/- Entrance fee, 2/6.

DOUBLE SCULLS (Amateurs, own boats). Prizes, £2, £1, and 10/- Entrance fee, 2/- a thwart.

PUNT RACE (for Children 14 years and under). Post entries, free.
All boats will be re-handicapped on the morning of race.
Further particulars from Secretary.
J. A. WILLIAMSON, President. TOM HAWKES, Hon. Sec. and Treas.

Both advertisements from The Newcastle Sun – Thursday 13th April 1922 – page 4

One week out from the regatta, Belmont Regatta Committee called a meeting to deal with 'Urgent Business'. Correspondence received by Belmont's secretary, Tom Hawkes, outlined the circumstances behind Toronto's actions. A decision was made to go ahead with the Belmont Regatta, in the belief the prize money on offer would be sufficient to entice enough competitors to make for a successful event.

The Belmont Regatta proceeded in favourable weather conditions however participation was quite low with less than a handful of boats participating. As one newspaper put it, 'counter-attractions had the effect of diminishing the number of entries and spectators customary on similar occasions'.

In contrast, Toronto had fourteen 16ft Skiffs participating in Saturday's races including visiting skiffs from Sydney. This was such a large event the committee decorated the area from Toronto Railway Station to the new club house with bunting and foliage. A number of flag-staffs were erected for the occasion along with marquees and stalls. In the evening a plain and fancy dress ball was held in the Hotel Toronto Pavilion, with the pavilion packed to capacity. The opening of Toronto's new club house on the Monday saw about 1000 people assembled at Toronto railway station on the Sunday night to welcome Rear-Admiral Dumaresq. Monday's weather was ideal and thousands of spectators lined the shores at Toronto.

Belmont's New Sailing Club

The Belmont Regatta Committee paid its prize money in the School of Arts on Wednesday evening 26th April 1922. Whether the conflicting regattas was a factor is not clear, however an advertisement was placed in the 'Newcastle Sun' one week later. Under the heading 'Belmont Sailing Club' the notice read: 'PERSONS interested in the formation of a SAILING CLUB at Belmont are requested to attend a Meeting to be held in the Belmont School of Arts, SATURDAY 13TH INST., at 8 p.m. ' A young man from Marks' Point named Albert Smith was listed as *Promoter*.



The Newcastle Sun - Wednesday 3rd May 1922 - p4



Belmont Memorial Hall and Literary Institute/School of Arts, Main Rd. Belmont (June 1923) Photo John Faviell

'The Sun' included a brief column the following day, extolling the value of forming a sailing club in Belmont.

'The movement in the direction of forming a sailing club for Belmont is worthy of all commendation. The township has got the boats, the men, and every advantage for the promotion of aquatic sport. The meeting convened to be held in the Literary Institute on Saturday night should be well attended.'

The meeting was a success, with a decision to start a sailing club at Belmont under Port Jackson sailing skiff rules and eight skiffs committed to compete with the club. Work began immediately on fundraising. A 'Grand Euchre Party' and Dance was arranged for June 9th, to be held in Belmont's new Soldier's Memorial Hall. A good orchestra was promised. Another public meeting was called for the following day, June 10th, in the School of Arts.

During the following month, quite some work was done to establish the club. 'The Sun' newspaper noted the meeting, held on 14th July 1922, fell on France's National Day. This was pertinent because the meeting's chairman was Mark C. Reid (Club President) and it was announced that his older brother John C Reid had accepted the role of Patron to the club.

The Reid brothers were prominent Newcastle businessmen. John was formerly Mayor of Newcastle and Mark a former Alderman on Newcastle Council. The family company, 'John Reid Pty Ltd', acted as a shipping agency responsible for much of the trade in and out of Newcastle Harbour. Complementing this role, John C Reid was well known as the French Consul in Newcastle, responsible for the welfare of French Sailors visiting the port. The Reid's were well connected politically, their uncle being Sir George Houston Reid, fourth Prime Minister of Australia from 1904 to 1905 and Premier of New South Wales from 1894 to 1899.

In addition to the Reid brothers, present at the meeting were Mr. Howard Ash, manager of the building supply firm, Fredc Ash Pty Ltd, Mr. James Parker, Mr. Henry Turnbull, Mr. S Rayfield, Mr. George Johnson (Club Treasurer) and Mr. Albert Smith (Club Secretary). Rules were framed for the running of the club and a number of social events were foreshadowed.

A rule book was produced. The front cover displayed the title 'Belmont Yacht Club' and the club burgee. The inside front cover listed the office bearers for 1922 then divided the rules into General Rules and Sailing Rules. The first rule however stated: 'The Club shall be called the Belmont Sailing Club.' As the club began to conduct racing, newspaper reports would sometimes refer to the club as Belmont Yacht Club and at other times, Belmont Sailing Club. Note: This should not be confused with Lake Macquarie Yacht Club which formed 7 years later in 1929.



Albert Smith
(Secretary)



George Johnson
(Treasurer)



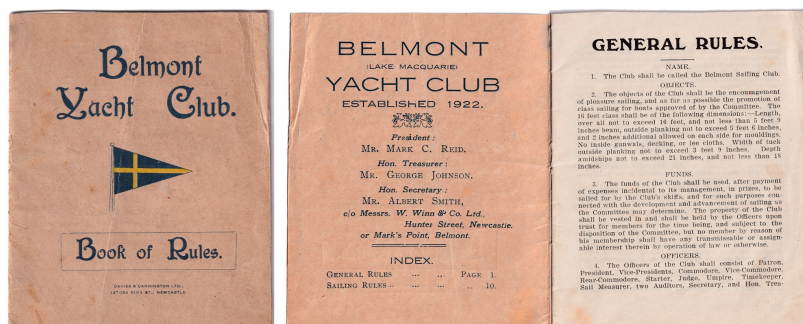
Mark C. Reid
(President)



John C. Reid
(Patron)

Some of these new rules were innovations intended to benefit sailing. Rule 18 required all registered skiffs be allocated a unique number. This number was to be sewn or dyed onto each side of the mainsail and be at least '2 feet in height and 3 inches broad'. Using numbers instead of traditional ensigns was intended to make skiffs easier to identify by spectators.

Rule 19 asked each boat's crew to wear a uniform 'sailing costume' and Rule 17 specified the club's registered burgee would be a blue triangular flag with a yellow cross.



George Johnson's copy of the first rule book – Beecham family collection.

Other club officials elected included Tom Moran (Assistant Secretary), Prosper Johnson (Handicapper), John Marks (Umpire) and Alex Young Snr. (Starter). It was noted some of the sailing officials were former members of the Port Hunter Club. Particularly notable was the club's first Commodore, Mr. J.Arthur Wood. J.Arthur Wood was the son of Joseph Wood Senior of Newcastle's Castlemaine Wood and Co. Brewery. A local solicitor himself, J.Arthur Wood had long been a supporter of sailing, both on the lake and harbour.



J.Arthur Wood – Belmont's First Club Commodore

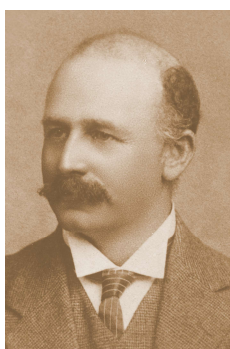
Nearing the start of the sailing season, the club had attracted some 50 members and several new boats were being built in anticipation. It was reported Mr. Jones and Mr. 'Ab' Menzies were building a new 16ft skiff at Belmont, to Dearing class design, with a christening ceremony planned for early September. Rumour had it at the time, the Toronto Skiffs 'Aeneas' (Tom Humphreys) and 'Newcastle' (Fred Rayfield) were severing their ties with their club to sail with the club at Belmont.

The Reid brothers were throwing their full support behind the new club. John C Reid (Snr) and Mark C Reid purchased the current state champion skiff, 'Arlene'. 'Arlene' had been sailing out of the Port Jackson club. She was the club champion of the Port Jackson club and had represented New South Wales in Brisbane. Charlie Newton, brother of legendry sailor Fred Newton, agreed to skipper 'Arlene' at Belmont for the coming season. John Reid's teenage son 'Jack' (John C Reid (Jnr)) was to crew on 'Arlene'.

Just 10 days out from the season opening, Mark C Reid chaired another club meeting. The programme for the season was completed. The season opening would be a handicap race on Saturday 7th October and the first Club Championship race was set for Saturday November 4th. An advertisement was placed in the Newcastle Herald, proclaiming the opening day and inviting entries for the new club's first race. The race was set for 3:15 pm with Mr. David Watkins M.H.R. (Federal Labor Member for 'Newcastle'), scheduled to perform the opening ceremony.

Opening Day at Belmont

Opening day at Belmont (Saturday 7th October 1922) was a great success. Around 400 people gathered along the foreshore to witness events. Local parliamentarian David Watkins (MP) was unable to attend, so in his place J.A. Cadell conducted the opening ceremony.



John Alexander Cadell

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The Newcastle Morning Herald – Friday 29th September 1922 – page 3

John Alexander Cadell had, for many years, been a prominent banker in Newcastle. He was likely asked to perform this task because of his close connection to club Patron, John C Reid. However it must have been a highly emotional task for John Cadell to open a sailing club, ostensibly for young men. Just seven years earlier he lost his only son Tom who, at the age of 19, was wounded in action at Gaba Tepe, Gallipoli and later buried at sea.

The seven 16ft skiffs, (one actually a small yacht) and their crews, were ready in uniform. Club President Mark C. Reid congratulated the crews on their 'splendid appearance'. Mr. Cadell addressed the gathering, reminiscing about his sailing days and telling stories of daring feats by old hands like Podgy Newton, father of Charlie and Fred Newton. Describing Lake Macquarie as a splendid sailing venue, he remarked how impressed he was by the quality of the club's 16ft skiffs, in particular 'Arlene'.

He expressed his hope Arlene and other Lake skiffs would compete at the state championship in Sydney and anticipated top Sydney skiffs would visit the lake during the Christmas break. Mr. Cadell expressed a view of sailing as a clean, healthy sport he would commend to the youth of the country. Three cheers were given for the success of Belmont Sailing Club. Mr. Cadell concluded the ceremony by ordering the boats to start the race.

Club Point Score - Race One

Seven entries were received for the opening day race, handicaps were allocated, and they all participated on the day. The race began as a handicap start, with the skiffs getting away on time. The limit boat, a small yacht named 'Rip', started first, followed 4 minutes later by the 16ft skiff 'Pastime'. Each 16ft skiff started

in turn until the scratch boat 'Arlene' started, 10 minutes after 'Rip'. Accounts of the race appeared in both the Newcastle Herald and Newcastle Sun in the week that followed.

The starter was Alex Young (Snr), whose son Alex (Jnr) skippered 'Rip'. The race began with a run from the starter's boat, near the end of Macquarie Street, to Mark's Point. All of the skiffs used extras (i.e. a spinnaker or a balloonier), though 'Linnet's' spinnaker carried away, leaving her to rely on her jib for the rest of the race.

On the first round, competitors held their places but closed up on one another. 'Rip' was not headed until the thrash to the starter's boat, toward the end of the second round. Rounding the buoy to start the third and final round, 'Clift', 'Pastime', 'Aeneas', and then 'Linnet' squared away within 10 seconds. 'Rip', 'Newcastle' and 'Arlene' followed in that order.

While the scratch boat 'Arlene' had given the new leader, 'Clift', 4 minutes start, she was now just 2 ¼ minutes behind 'Clift'. However 'Clift' held her lead to the finish line, one minute ahead of Aeneas. Next, separated by just eleven seconds, came 'Linnet', 'Pastime' and then 'Arlene'. Thus the first handicap race winner at the new Belmont Sailing Club was a skiff named 'Clift', skippered by Jim Parker. Insufficient information was reported to determine the scratch winner or the places of 'Newcastle' and 'Rip'.

Given the race began with a run to Marks Point, the wind was likely the prevailing breeze from the North East. The skiffs sailing out of Port Hunter club, at the same time, reportedly raced in a light Nor' Easterly.



Belmont Sailing Club Opening Day (7th October 1922) Albert Smith and the crew of Linnet, Skiff No. 4, in the foreground. Other skiffs, Clift, Skiff No 1 and Newcastle, Skiff No.2 in the background.



Belmont Sailing Club Opening Day (7th October 1922) Albert Smith and the crew of Linnet. – Albert Smith family collection



Belmont Sailing Club Opening Day (7th October 1922). 16ft Skiffs - No.1 'Clift' in foreground, No.6 'Aeneas' in middle ground and No.4 Linnet furthest away. - Club Archives

The payment of prize money was fundamental to the clubs purpose. Rule 3 of the club's rule book dealt with club funds.

'The Funds of the club shall be used, after payment of expenses incidental to its management, in prizes, to be sailed for by the Club's skiffs, and for such purposes connected with the development and advancement of sailing as the Committee may determine'.



The First Fleet – 7th October 1922 - Club Archives

The club held a social with a presentation of prizes, in the soldier's memorial hall, the following Wednesday, 11th October 1922. First prize of £12 was presented to Jim Parker who skippered 'Clift' to victory, 2nd prize of £6 went to Tom Humphreys who sailed 'Aeneas' and 3rd prize of £2 went to Albert Smith who sailed 'Linnet'. The first prize of £12, was a significant sum in 1922. The Board of Trade had set the basic wage for an adult, male employee in N.S.W. at £3/18/- per week. For many, first prize would have been a month's wages.

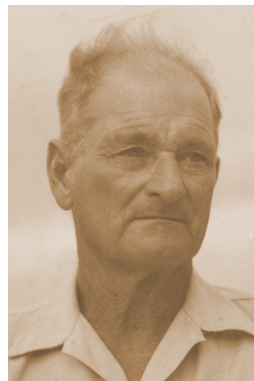
RESULTS - Point Score Race 1 - Belmont Sailing Club					North Easterly Breeze
Handicap Start		Saturday 7 th October 1922			7 Competitors
Hcp. Place	Skiff Name	Skipper	Owner	Handicap	Sail No.
1 st	Clift	Jim Parker	Tom Carpenter	4 minutes	1
2 nd	Aeneas	Tom Humphreys	Tom Humphreys	1 ½ minutes	6
3 rd	Linnet	Albert Smith	J. West	5 minutes	4
4 th	Pastime	George 'Ab' Menzies	George 'Ab' Menzies	6 minutes	7
5 th	Arlene	Charlie Newton	John and Mark Reid	Scratch	5
Not Known	Newcastle	Fred 'Doc' Rayfield	Fred 'Doc' Rayfield	3 minutes	2
Not Known	The Rip	Alex Young Jnr.	Alex Young Jnr.	10 minutes	3

Inaugural Sailing Season

A successful season of sailing followed, with 'Arlene', skippered by Charlie Newton, the first Club Champion. Handicap racing was also important. Most races saw the skiffs start at different times, based on an allotted handicap, with the faster skiffs chasing the rest of the fleet to the finish. The first Yearly Point Score winner (i.e. on handicap) was 'Aeneas', skippered by Tom Humphreys.



Charlie Newton (Club Championship 1922-23)



Tom Humphreys (Yearly Point Score 1922-23)



16ft Skiff Arlene (Club Championship 1922-23)



16ft Skiff Aeneas (Yearly Point Score 1922-23)

[A Club House on Brooks Parade](#)

Sufficient funds were raised in the first year to build a club house over the water on Books Parade in Belmont. Built with volunteer labour, the club remained in that location for 30 years, before relocating to its current location on Mill Creek, Belmont in 1952. The opening ceremony saw Mr. David Watkins M.P. and his family in attendance to open the club house, on Saturday 6th October 1923-



Club House Opening Day – Brooks Parade – Saturday 6th October 1923

The club was up and running. Apart from a brief disruption during the Great Depression in the early 1930's, the club has continued proudly for 100 years.