

PENOBSCOT MARINE MUSEUM

Sturgis Haskins Collection Brings Maine's Sailboat Racing Scene to Life

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Sturgis Haskins (1940-2012) was an avid sailor, photographer, writer, and organizer from Sorrento, Maine. He lived in New York in the 1960s and Boston in the 1970s, spending summers sailing in Sorrento before moving back to the town full-time. Haskins was also a writer, publishing articles in magazines like *WoodenBoat* and *Down East*, a prolific photographer, and a careful researcher. He was an outspoken advocate for gay rights and the gay community, founding the Wilde-Stein Club at the University of Maine and the Chiltern Mountain Club out of Boston. He was a junior and senior Maine sailing champion, a sailing instructor, an active member of the Sorrento Yacht Club, and an organizer for many one-design races in the Sorrento and Mount Desert Island area.

Luckily for Penobscot Marine Museum, Haskins was also an avid researcher of one-design racing classes and local yacht clubs—and donated his maritime archives, along with a couple of boats and other racing memorabilia to our museum. Our upcoming exhibit, *Rusticators on the Water*, draws heavily from Sturgis' collection and features several distinctive one-design boats. One-designs are race boats built from a standard design and identical in construction and rig. With the theory that everything is "identical," the first boat to cross the finish line wins!



PIXIE, a Wee Scot one-design class boat, out for a sail in Sorrento. Sturgis Haskins Collection, PMM 36-48

Sturgis had a lifetime attachment to the Wee Scot one-design class of boats. Around 1922, Thomas D. Scott designed the Wee Scot, a 15' long marconi-rigged, keel sloop. By the mid-1940s, nearly 400 Wee Scots were built for racing fleets in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. Sturgis donated the Wee Scot PIXIE, the inaugural boat with which Sorrento Yacht Club founded their fleet in 1926. Originally owned by William Jay and Louise Vanderbilt Scheffelin, PIXIE is a good example of an early marconi-rigged craft.



The Wee Scot class remained active in Sorrento into the 1980s, just after the celebration of its 50th Anniversary in 1976. Sturgis and PIXIE picked up this trophy during the festivities. By 1991, when Sturgis donated PIXIE to the Museum, no Wee Scots remained in the harbor.

Wee Scot 50th Anniversary Trophy, 1991.16.4, Gift of Sturgis Haskins



Brutal Beast FAINT ENDEAVOR on display at the Museum. Gift of Sturgis Haskins, 1991.16.1

The other boat that Sturgis donated has ties to a famous Brooklin summer resident. During the 1930s and '40s, E. B. White, author of Stuart Little and Charlotte's Web, and *New Yorker* columnist, owned the Brutal Beast on display at the Museum. White's children raced it at the Center Harbor Yacht Club in Brooklin. It is fitting the children raced it, as America's Cup yacht designer Starling Burgess created the Brutal Beast class for junior sailing in 1919. He wanted a safe boat with "zip." The class apparently took its name from Burgess's Great Dane whom neighbors called "Brutal Beast."



The Sorrento Yacht Club ran a July and August Wee Scot series and awarded burgees (the blue ones in the image) for each race, as well as an end-of-series burgee. The July series' burgees have the Zodiac sign for Leo and the August series' burgees have the sign for Virgo. The red burgees are from the Mercury and Flying Fifteen race series. Sturgis Haskins Collection, PMM 36.

No self-respecting yacht club member's boat house would be complete without winning race burgees hanging from the rafters. Our exhibit will be no different thanks to Sturgis' Flying Fifteen, Mercury, and Wee Scot flags won over decades. Sturgis belonged to the Sorrento Yacht Club, which adopted the 15' Wee Scots as their inaugural fleet in 1926. In 1935, the yacht club started a fleet of 27' Herreshoff S boats to race against the Bar Harbor Yacht Club, followed by the 15' Mercuries in 1959 and the 10' Turnabouts in the late 1950s, and lastly the 20' Flying 15s in 1961.



Sorrento Yacht Club's Flying Fifteen, Mercury, and Wee Scot racing boat photographs. Sturgis Haskins Collection, PMM 36-48

Although many of the burgees are hand-labeled by Sturgis with the boat's name and date of the race, we can further cross reference the burgees with the race results in the Sorrento Yacht Club Records that Sturgis donated. The records date from the Club's organization in 1925 though the late 1970s. In addition to the race results, the collection includes annual minutes, club by-laws and racing rules, racing rankings, lists of members and their boats, and specifications for Wee Scots, Mercury class sloops, and Flying Fifteens. To learn more about the collection, click [here](#).

Sturgis did not limit his research and collecting to just the Sorrento Yacht Club. For the exhibit, we were able to draw from the Sturgis Haskins Collection's photographs and encyclopedic research into the one-design boats raced around Frenchman's Bay and Mount Desert Island in the late twentieth century. The collection was donated after his death in 2012, and also includes photographs, harbor records, correspondence, and ephemera related to yacht clubs, sailboat racing, and architecture around the northern part of Penobscot Bay. To learn more about the collection, click [here](#).

A true Renaissance man, Sturgis Haskins research interests did not focus solely on sailboat racing. Other collecting institutions around the State of Maine benefit from his archives. Maine Historical Society's Coll. 2682 covers Haskins's interests in the history of Sorrento and Sullivan, Maine, architecture and local estates. University of Southern Maine holds LG MS 07, Sturgis Haskins Papers, which include his personal papers and his collections related to gay and lesbian organizations and issues in Maine and beyond.

Join us this season for *Rusticators on the Water* and see the boats Sturgis painstakingly preserved and researched. See you there!