



THE SQUADRON BIRDS

Captain(N) S.D. Andrews RCN (Ret)
Trustee
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The closure of the club earlier this year led to a decision by Trustees to move many of our artifacts, paintings and trophies out of our unoccupied clubhouse and into more secure, off-site storage. While these treasures were being moved out, one old artifact was moving in; after an unknown number of years hidden away in staff offices or in Trustee storage areas, it is now back in the limelight. The artifact in question is a large, handsome and, until recently, somewhat dilapidated model about which we knew little other than it depicts a Bird-class yacht originally designed by one of the Squadron's most storied former members and designer of the Bluenose, Past Vice Commodore Bill Roué. Research over the past few months has revealed a much more colourful story of a class of yachts that holds a place of pride in the Squadron's and the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club's sailing histories.





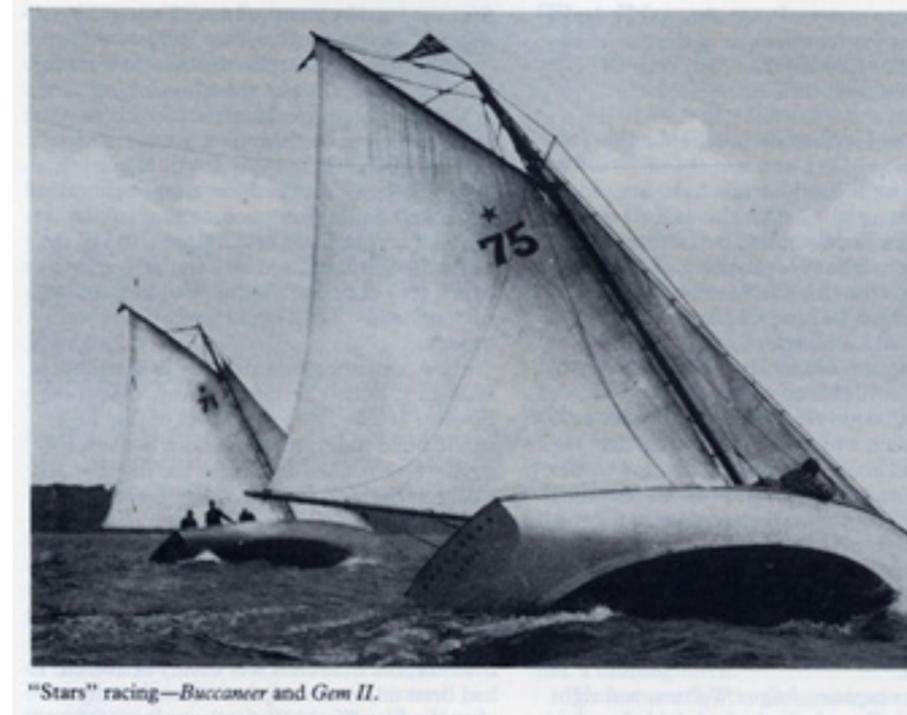
Bird model before restoration.

The model itself is 1/16th scale, un-named and believed to have been built by local craftsman Parker Beaver, perhaps in the 1950s or 60s. This past winter, Trustees took it to a local model builder, Norman Raines, for restoration and it was subsequently placed in a glass case very capably constructed by staff member Mark Parsons. It now sits on display in the lounge between the main clubhouse entry and the Sailors Bar (a.k.a. the Dining Room). A plaque, whose design and layout are courtesy of Squadron Member Ann Acland, has been placed beside the model and it will later be joined by several photographs to expand on the history of the class the model represents.

The yachts the model depicts were Marconi-rigged sloops, 47' LOA and 30' at the waterline. The class was the second of two commissioned by the Squadron and designed by Past Vice Commodore W.J. "Bill" Roué whose many accomplishments are honoured elsewhere in the club. Bill Roué merited his own chapter in Nancie Erhard's *First in Its Class* and what follows owes much to her writings as well as to information and photographs generously provided by David Williams, a member of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club whose family owned a Bird Boat, *Blue Heron*, until the 1980s.

The first of the two classes commissioned by the Squadron and designed by Bill Roué was the Star Class. They were 28' gaff-rigged sloops with a 20' waterline. Seven were built in Shelburne from the original design and, in 1922, they were towed, in a single tow, up the coast to Halifax.

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The class name was later changed to Roue 20 to distinguish it from the International Star Class and in 1937, the design was modified to carry jib-headed Marconi rigs. The class proved enormously popular and many new Roue 20s were built over the years, later models in fiberglass. They were part of an active one-design fleet until the 1990s, a fleet that is seeing a recent resurgence. With the centennial celebration of the design approaching in 2021, several are still sailing and racing in the area, including three here at the Squadron.

While the Stars proved to be quite popular, they were never designed to compete for the *Prince of Wales & Wenonah* trophies in open races against larger yachts from other clubs, in particular Chester Yacht Club (in the nine years from 1923 to 1931, CYC yachts won the *POW* eight times and the *Wenonah* at least six times, although one of the Stars, *Crea II*, skippered by Past Commodore N.E. MacKay, won the *Wenonah* in 1927).

With CYC dominating the Squadron's premiere trophies, action was required to put the Squadron back on the map. Commodore McIlreath threw down the gauntlet in 1927 and by 1928, Bill Roué had come up with a design for Marconi rigged sloops, 47' overall and with a 30' waterline ('Q Class' under the Universal Rule). Five were built in Shelburne for Squadron members during the winter of 1928/29 and they were rigged & ready for the 1929 sailing season. They were each given the name of a bird and a distinct hull colour: *Swallow* (light blue), *Hawk* (black), *Blue Heron* (royal blue), *Gull* (light grey) and *Albatross* (dark grey).

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The original owners were:

<i>Swallow</i>	Lieutenant Governor J.C. Tory
<i>Hawk</i>	A. Montgomerie
<i>Blue Heron</i>	Past Commodore E.A. Bell, et al
<i>Gull</i>	Past Commodore J.H. Winfield
<i>Albatross</i>	Past Commodore N.E. MacKay



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The Squadron's un-named model is painted light blue so it might depict Swallow, owned by Lieutenant Governor J.C. Tory and skippered by Past Commodore H.G. "Harry" DeWolf, but the possibility remains that the model builder, Parker Beaver, may have simply liked the colour.



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In their first season, the Birds were presented with a trophy of their own: the *Nova Scotian Cup* (later renamed the *Thornton-Balshaw Cup*) presented to the Squadron in 1929 by Sir Henry W. Thornton, KBE, president of the Canadian National Railway from 1922 to 1932 and the man responsible for a railway radio network that would become the CBC. (His immediate connection with Halifax and RNSYS is not yet known, although a plaque in his memory stands at the CN railway station in Halifax.) With a brand-new class of yachts at the club and a brand-new trophy in hand, hopes were no doubt high that the Birds would find success on the water during *POW* and *Wenonah* competitions in the years to come. Sadly, such hopes were dashed by another yacht that came on the scene in the same year that the Birds appeared, 1929, and in a cruel irony, it was also a Bill Roué design. The yacht was *Highlander* owned by Squadron member and famed photographer, Past Commodore W.R. MacAskill. In addition to his talents with a camera, MacAskill was a skilled sailor originally from St Peter's, Cape Breton. His *Highlander* became the most decorated yacht in Squadron sailing history, much to the disappointment of those who had invested in the Birds.

While Commodore MacAskill's *Highlander* certainly brought an end to Chester Yacht Club's domination in the *POW* and *Wenonah* competitions of the 1930s, the

Birds never succeeded in bringing either trophy home (with only the winners recorded, it is unknown how well they placed in the field against other competitors). Near the end of the decade, a mere ten years after their inaugural race, the Birds hit another hurdle: World War II. A prohibition on recreational sailing in Halifax Harbour throughout the war led to the sale of all five Birds to owners in other provinces where sailing was unrestricted. *Gull* was on her way to Hamilton, ON, when she wrecked in heavy weather off Cape Breton. The other four were sent by rail to Vancouver where they found a second life at the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club.

According to David Williams of RVYC, *'Legend has it that three of the rigs were cut down to accommodate the 60-foot flatcars of the day, but the canny McPherson had Hawk's mast lashed to the top of a boxcar so her 70-foot mast arrived intact!'* The four Birds that made it west were, from 1945 until 1955, *'the pride of the Pacific International Yacht Racing circuit, revitalizing the rivalry between Seattle Yacht Club and RVYC.'* David Williams' family owned *Blue Heron* until 1981 when she was sold to an artist who restored her and then travelled between wooden boat shows for a number of years. She's still around although now on the hard near Vancouver and, in appearance, far from her days of glory. David last saw *Swallow* in 1978 and *Albatross* (renamed *Buccaneer 3*) is on the hard in West Vancouver but much altered from the original design. The last of the Birds in its original state is *Hawk*; she remains alongside at RVYC's Coal Harbour marina and is represented by a beautiful model that sits in the RVYC Jericho Clubhouse.



Model of Hawk at RVYC

Hawk, 2017 and back in black (David Williams on the left)



While the Birds never matched the competitive aspirations of Commodore McIlreath and their Squadron owners, they were beautifully designed yachts and they eventually found their stride on the other side of the country. We can be thankful that at least one of these iconic Roué yachts is still on the water, 91 years after it appeared at the Squadron.

I wish to express my appreciation to David Williams of RVYC for providing insights into the Bird's second life on the west coast and for all the photos of *Hawk*.

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Hawk, 1997 in new white livery