



# Sailing through history

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY MEGHAN MCSHARRY

**NESTLED IN HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON AMID A NUMBER OF TOWERING, NEW LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDINGS SITS THE HISTORIC PALISADE BOAT CLUB.**

Established by prominent residents of Yonkers in 1866 as a place for community members to come together for sport, recreation and socialization, the Palisade Boat Club is proud of its heritage as the oldest boat club in the state of New York and the third oldest in the country.

With a clubhouse built atop pilings in Yonkers in late 1869, the club also holds the title of the oldest boat club in its original structure in the country. Constructed of timber beams locked together by treenails (wooden pegs), the building is in impressive condition, despite its age and decades of devastating hurricanes and snowstorms that have taken their toll on similar structures.

While the boathouse remains in its original form, the club has moved locations since its establishment. In 1910, the Penn Central Railroad needed use of the original location at the foot of Gold Street in Yonkers. Later that year, the boat club journeyed up the Hudson River on pontoons to its current home, where it straddles the Hastings and Yonkers border. The yard is considered Yonkers, while the boathouse itself is in Hastings.

Across the river loom the Palisades, which hold a fascinating history. After an important role in the Revolutionary War, the Palisades became something of a hub during the Industrial Revolution. Quarry workers blasted away at the basalt rock to form bricks used in the construction of New York City brownstones and boat docks. Steam-powered factories crushed the bones of deceased workhorses to create fertilizer for nearby fields. All that remains of these ghosts is the occasional brick found hidden among the vegetation.

As the turn of the 20th century approached, "excursion groves" began popping up along the New York and New Jersey coastlines. On the Hudson River, the land that was once home to quarries and factories became the perfect setting for day-trippers from Manhattan to take a ferry and enjoy playing fields, campgrounds and riverfront relaxation. Despite the recreation parks cropping up in the Palisades, quarries still dominated large portions of the cliffs. It was not until 1900 when the Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park was formed to preserve the cliffs. It consisted of two separate bodies, a New York Commission and a New Jersey Commission. The commis-



Roel Kunst, the Palisade Boat Club's vice president.

sion set out to purchase land from the few families settled on the Palisades in order to make way for more of these "playgrounds," and turn Palisades land into a protected park. In 1937, the two states agreed to create a single Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

Looking across the river from the second level porch of the Palisade Boat Club on a recent visit, we see little trace of this past. The boat club is a serene escape from the hustle and bustle of the

nearby railroad tracks and the city in the distance.

"It's a gem," says Roel Kunst, the Palisade Boat Club's vice president. "Something like this is really hard to find."

To maintain its status as the nation's oldest boat club in its original form, it is undergoing renovations in what will be a long process. The club awaits new composite siding to return the building's exterior to its signature blue and white colors. Next up, replacing the age-old foundation.

The boat club offers its members picturesque views of the Hudson, with the George Washington Bridge and Manhattan skyline visible to the south and the Tappan Zee and Governor Mario M. Cuomo bridges to the north. With annual dues and an additional fee, members can store their own watercraft in the historic boathouse for easy access to the dock. It's an ideal location for children and families to learn how to kayak and fish for bass or bluefish right off the dock.

In addition to being a gathering place for its members and their friends and family to enjoy the river, the club promotes waterfront and boating safety and river preservation.

"We focus on safety. The jet skis are a menace to us. They don't always pay attention to us," Kunst says. He stresses the dangers of kayaking on the river without a life jacket and insists on carrying an air horn so he can alert passing boats to his presence. In addition, he carries a radio as an extra safety precaution.

"We want to be accessible to boaters. You can use our facilities, our bathrooms, our showers. We want to be a friendly boat club. We want to promote the Hudson River." 

**For more, visit [palisadeboatclub.org](http://palisadeboatclub.org).**