

Where is Lake Washington?

In 1933 that is exactly what Bill Butler and his friends Nels, Land, and Burnett wondered when someone mentioned they might prefer to sail their canoe/with sails & Snipes on a lake instead of the Sacramento River between the bridges. (Eye St and M St)

Lake Washington in 1933 was approximately 2 1/2 miles long, an oxbow of the Sacramento River. Its northern tip was at what is now the east end of the Yolo Causeway. On the west side where the bird sanctuary is, was the location of the Alaska Packers. Further north and on the west side, irrigation equipment was in place. Depending on the farming season the lakes depth varied. Access to the approximately one quarter mile wide lake was near where the Club Pheasant is.

Butler and friends set up the first clubhouse in 1934 directly across the turning basin where the current clubhouse is. "Squatters rights" were given to the club and soon thereafter the club incorporated. It is the oldest inland sailing club in northern California. The first commodore of the club was the manager of the Alaska Packers, a Mr. Ford. Bill Butler was elected as the first manager of the sailing club. Bill took his position seriously, he would measure all the specifications of the one design classes. When word got out that Bill meant business one boat captain instructed his crew to place the sail in the water in hopes of shrinking the cotton sail.

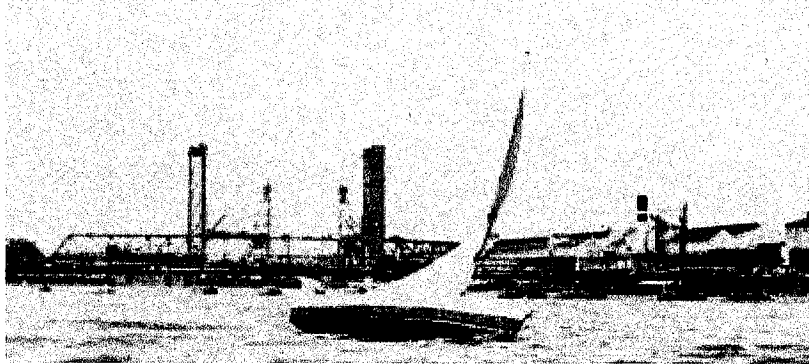
Bill's wife Gracie crewed for him but not originally. Before her and Bill married she competed against him crewing in her father's Snipe. There weren't any battery operated timers then so Bill's dad rigged up a one minute timer, needed to time the starts.

By the 1940's the LWSC was becoming a premier club in northern California. Folsom, Oroville and Natoma would not come until years later. Being an affiliate of the Small Boats Racing Association, regattas consisting of one hundred boats was common. Electrical power was brought to the clubhouse from a barn located between the lake and the Causeway.

Hoists were not used nor was there a ramp. The "locals" stored their boats in the water. On race day the crew would lift the boat out of the water and clean the bottom. Around 1940 boat houses were built. Electrical power was extended to the dock and a hoist was installed.

During the 1950's the club was relocated to Lake Natoma while the Port of Sacramento was engineered. Around 1960 the club was relocated to its present location at the now Port of West Sacramento. A "groove" was cut into the peninsula and four large slabs of concrete were laid to complete the new ramp. At that time the ramp was protected by land on each side, but after thirty years of wind, the "protective" land eroded away to leave an exposed ramp.

I obtained the information for this article several years ago. A friend and life member of the Lake Washington Sailing Club, Bill Butler Jr. His wife Gracie had been a teacher in a one room school house in Allegheny, California. Both are gone, but their history is legend at the LWSC.



SAMCC Photo

Unidentified boat on the Sacramento River just below the under construction Tower Bridge



West Sacramento Historical Society Photo

Sailboat racing on Lake Washington in 1957.