

Chapter 2: 1880 to 1902: The Peripatetic Years

Part 2: The First Regatta of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen

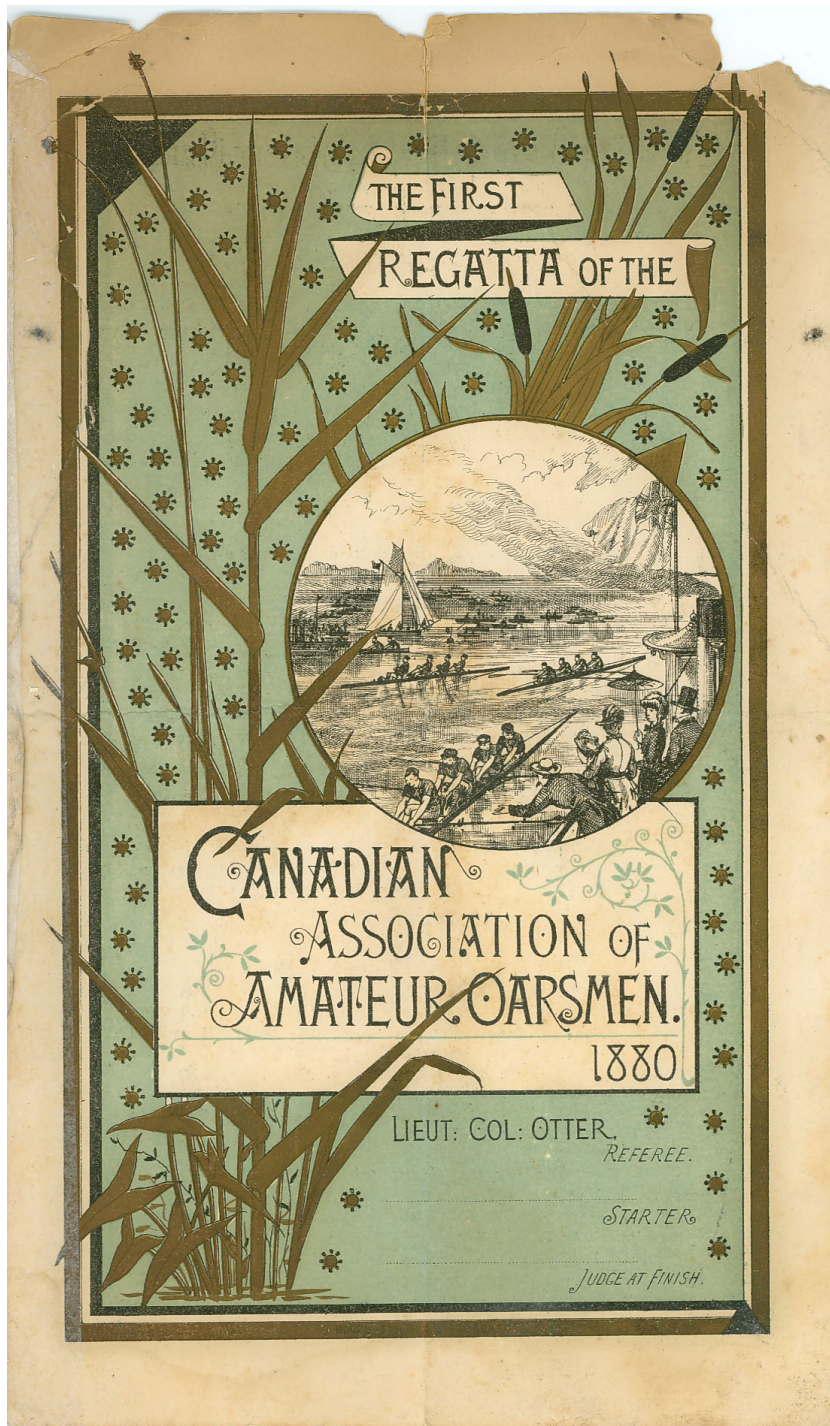


Image source: Geale-Rogers fonds. Trent University Archives.

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Although Saturday, July 31 was the date picked for the First Regatta of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen at the founding meeting of the Association on April 9, it was held on Wednesday and Thursday August 4 and 5, 1880.

The list of competing clubs below tells us who belonged to the Association. In the parentheses are the number of entries, which gives an idea of the relative size of the club, followed by the number of wins, which suggests the relative strength of the club. Bayside R.C. was a spinoff of the Toronto R.C.. Together they had 16 entries, a number which tells us that they were the largest group in 1880, although, between them they managed only two wins, the same as the Argonaut R.C. who had six entries. Note that the Zephyr B.C. win was a row over.

A total of 82 men competed.

Argonaut R.C.	(6/2)	Toronto, Ontario
Bayside R.C.	(8/2)	Toronto, Ontario
Chatham R.C.	(1/0)	Chatham, Ontario
Forest City R.C.	(4/1)	London, Ontario
Grand Trunk R.C.	(1/1)	Montreal, Quebec
Lachine R.C.	(2/0)	Lachine, Quebec
Leander R.C.	(6/0)	Hamilton, Ontario
Leslieville R.C.	(2/1)	Toronto, Ontario
Nautilus R.C.	(3/0)	Hamilton, Ontario
Ottawa R.C.	(4/0)	Ottawa, Ontario
Peterboro R.C.	(2/0)	Peterboro, Ontario
Toronto R.C.	(8/0)	Toronto, Ontario

Five American clubs also competed:

Black Rock R.C.	(1/0)	Buffalo, New York
Ontario R.C.	(1/0)	Charlotte, New York
Pawtucket R.C.	(1/0)	Pawtucket, Rhode Island
Union Springs R.C.	(1/0)	Union Springs, New York
Zephyr B.C.	(2/1)	Detroit, Michigan

Where were the Toronto clubs located in 1880?

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Detail from the 1882 McMurrich plan. Toronto Public Library: T1882/4MIrg

T was the Toronto R.C., founded in 1865, located at the foot of Church St. in 1880.

A was the Argonaut R.C., founded in 1872, located on the Esplanade at the foot of York St..

B was the Bayside R.C., founded in 1880 as an offshoot of the Toronto R.C.. It was located at the foot of Scott St., between Yonge and Church Sts. in the first clubhouse of the Toronto R.C..

D was the Don Amateur R.C., founded in 1878. The original members briefly used a house on Vine St., owned by the Christie brothers, to store their boat. By 1880, the Don Amateur R.C. was in its second boathouse which was located on Eastern Ave.. That year, the Don River overflowed its banks, so the Club moved to Queen St., near the bridge over the river. That remained their home until 1899 when they moved to the foot of Cherry St.. Presumably, the turmoil caused by the Don River overflowing and the subsequent move to new quarters was the reason that no one from the Don Amateur R.C. competed at the First Regatta.

L was the Leslieville R.C., aka the Leslieville Amateur R.C., probably founded in 1880. They may have had no more than a temporary clubhouse in 1880, because the club was “in contemplation to build a place suitable for the purposes of a club room and boat house” [The Toronto *Globe*, August 15, 1881, p.10] in 1881. The members most likely stored their equipment at Laing’s Boat House. The boat used by Isaac Price, the first winner of the first race at the First Regatta of the CAAO was probably built there. In the spring of 1911, Laing’s Boat House would get a new neighbour; the Don R.C. would

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leave its Cherry St. location and build a new clubhouse half a kilometre to the east at the foot of Morley St.. On July 1, it burnt to the ground, but it was soon rebuilt.

More detail about the three waterfront clubs can be found in Appendix B.

There was a sixth rowing club in Toronto, the Telegraph Club, which did not compete at the First Regatta.

Below are the inside pages of the first programme.

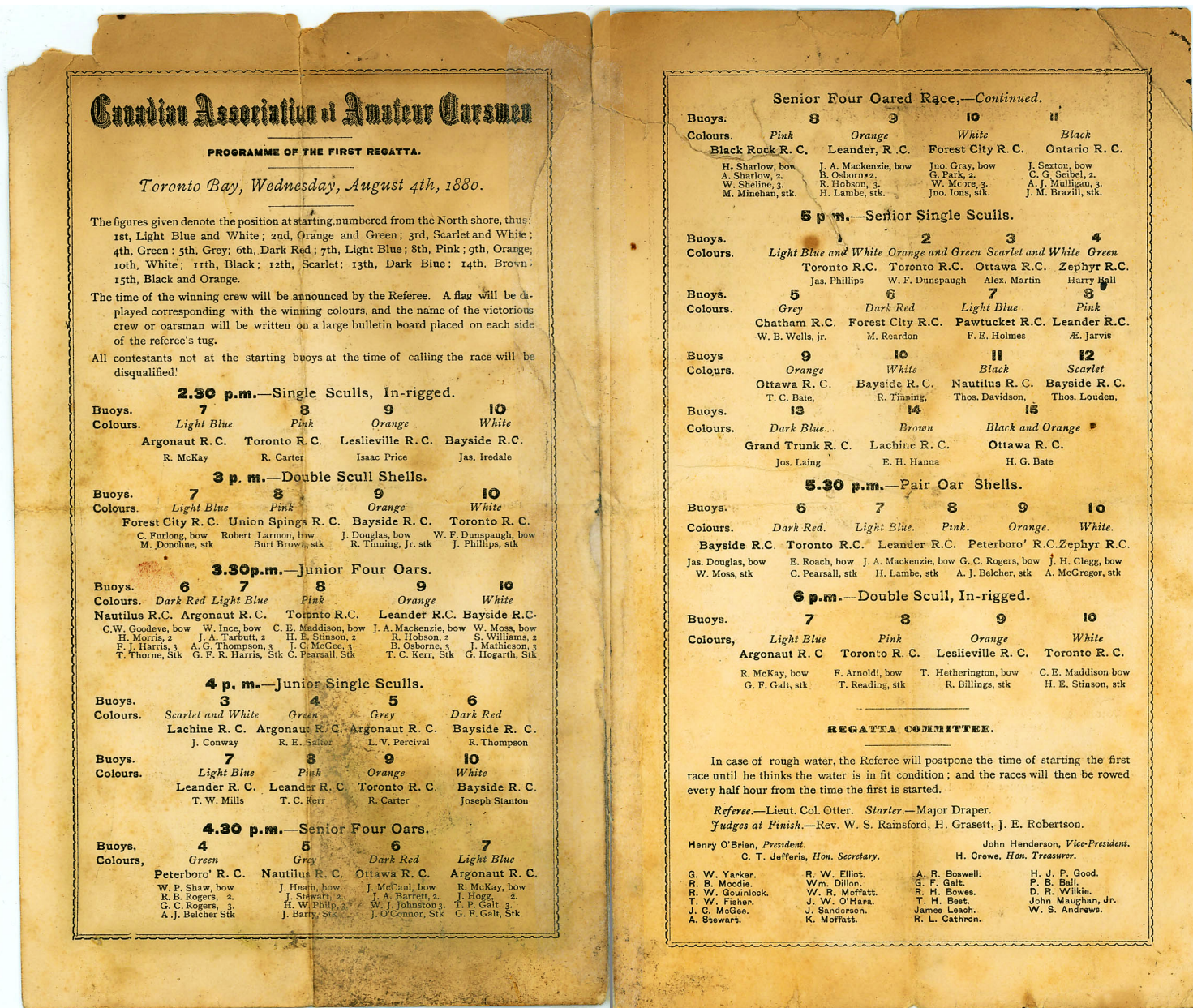


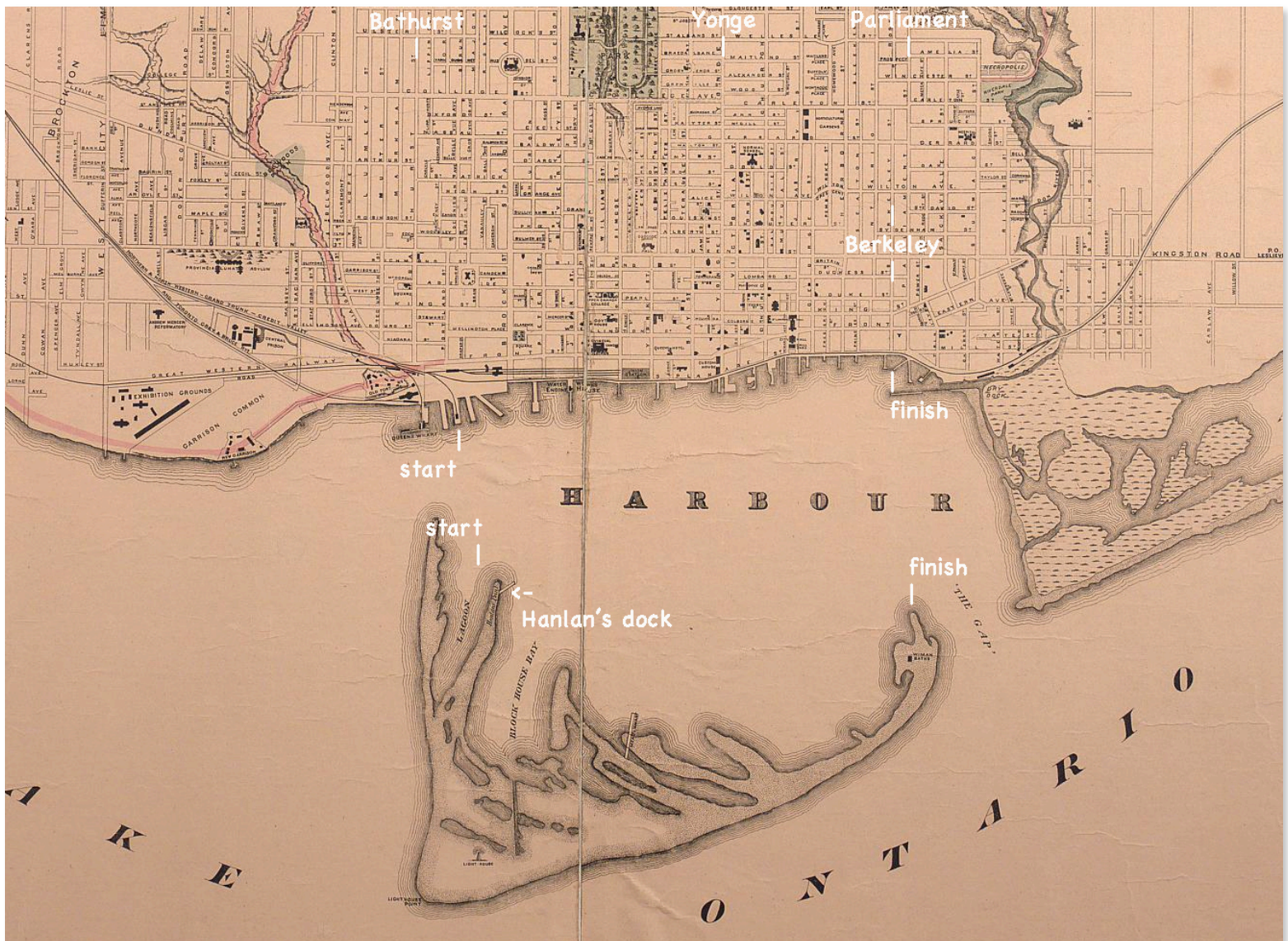
Image source: Geale-Rogers fonds. Trent University Archives.

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The Bay had been the scene of rowing races since at least 1848, so the vagaries of that body of water were well known. As a result, two courses were laid out. The hope was to use the course close to the city to accommodate the spectators. The second course was close to the Island.

At the Association meeting on August 3, 1880, Mr. H. Crewe, who was in charge of laying out the courses,

made some interesting statements. The Island course will be laid out from a starting point about 100 feet from Hanlan's dock, thence east to a line with the ice-house at the east end of the Island. The course on this side of the Bay will be from a starting point off the Northern Elevator, thence to a point off the long crib work at the foot of Berkeley street. The courses will be laid as near the shores respectively as possible. [The *Toronto Globe*, August 3, 1880, p.8.]



Detail from the 1882 McMurrich plan. Toronto Public Library: T1882/4Mlrg

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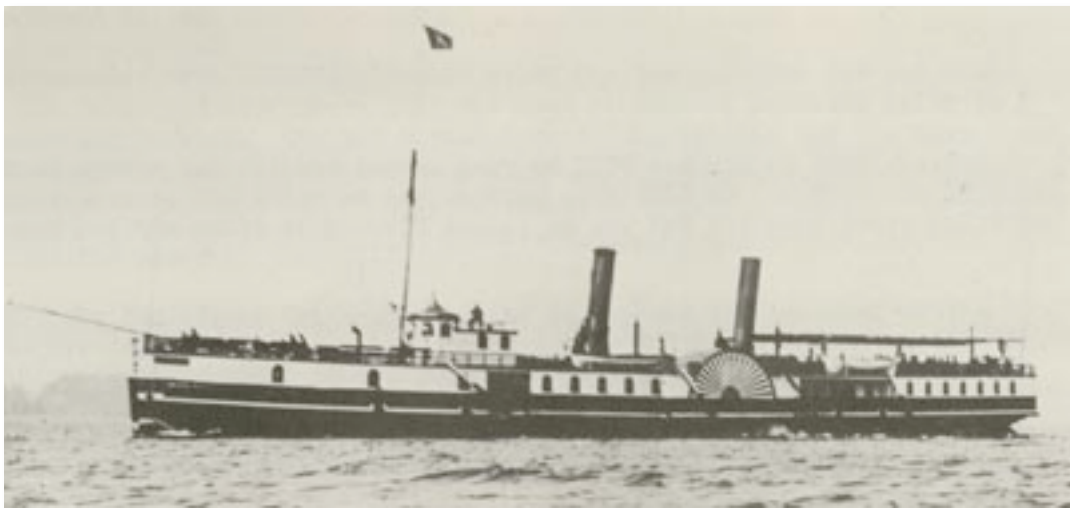
Using the details mentioned in the *Globe*, I have tried to plot the courses on the 1882 map of Toronto Harbour above. The City course ran “from a starting point off the Northern Elevator, thence to a point off the long crib work at the foot of Berkeley street.” The Island course is a bit more difficult to plot, because it is not clear where the “starting point about 100 feet from Hanlan’s dock” was located, and I have made an assumption that “the ice-house at the east end of the Island” was located on the eastern tip of the Island. I have also marked three major north-south streets to help a modern viewer to get his/her bearings.

Both courses were one and a half miles straightaway (2,414 metres) and had buoys at the start that the shells would line up with. Each course had 15 lanes to accommodate the 15 entries in the Senior Single Sculls. They numbered from the north (city) side, and the lanes were 20 yards (18.3 metres) wide. Buoys were placed every quarter of a mile (402.3 metres) to mark the lanes.

All the effort which was expended in the courses paid off, because the one thing no regatta organizers have any control over—the weather—became a factor.

A south-westerly breeze was blowing on the day of the regatta, so the officials opted to use the Island course which offered some shelter from the wind. Unfortunately, most of the spectators were on the north shore, opposite the Island.

Much disappointment must have been felt by the many thousands who had assembled on the wharves to witness the races under the auspices of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen. The wind blowing fresh from the south necessitated an adjournment to the Island course. What was their loss was the gain of the couple of thousand people who were afloat and ashore at Hanlan’s Point. Still there must have been seven or eight thousand on the wharves who were debarred from the pleasure of seeing the contests. The steamers all had crowds of passengers, especially the *Southern Belle*. Perhaps 3,000 were afloat. [*The Evening Telegram*, August 5, 1880]



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The *Southern Belle* from *The Scanner*, v.7, n.6 (March, 1976), The Monthly Bulletin of the Toronto Marine Historical Society.

The *Southern Belle* was what we might call the “hospitality boat.” Among its honoured guests were the Ontario Lieutenant-Governor, John Beverley Robinson and his wife Mary Jane, the Mayor of Toronto, James Beaty, the Chancellor of the University of Toronto, Edward Blake and “six hundred well-dressed ladies and gentlemen.” [The *Toronto Globe*, August 5, 1880, p.8] Because the races were scheduled at half-hour intervals, to fill the time between races, “[t]he band of the Queen’s Own Rifles was on the promenade deck to play sweet music.” [The *Toronto Globe*, August 5, 1880, p.8] Unfortunately, things did not go to plan. The intent was to have the *Southern Belle* follow alongside the races, but a flotilla of boats, large and small, lined the course, so the *Southern Belle’s* passengers did not get a good view.

The first race, Single Sculls, In-rigged scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m., got off an hour late. Not an auspicious beginning for an annual event which continues until today. While the wind and two false starts contributed to the delay, another contributing factor was the difficulty in getting the shells from the city to the starting line at Hanlan’s Point. Two boats were used: The *Luella*, the referee’s boat, and the *J.H. Doyle*, the press boat, under the command of her owner, Captain James Murray, of St. Catharines. The *Luella* was able to transfer her cargo without any difficulty, but the *J.H. Doyle* was a tug with a deep draught and was prevented by shallow water from getting close to Hanlan’s Point, so her cargo had to be transferred to the *Luella*.

For those who enjoy trivia, the first winner of the First Regatta of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen was Isaac Price, from the Leslieville R.C., in a time of 12:30.8, 43 seconds faster than R. McKay, from the Argonaut R.C. who finished second. Two other boats stopped and did not finish.

The second race, Double Scull Shells, scheduled for 3:00 p.m. began at 4:25 p.m.. An astute reader should see a pattern developing. Although the programme lists four boats, only two appeared at the start: Bayside R.C. and Union Springs R.C.. The Bayside double of J. Douglas and Richard Tinning, Jr. won the race, and were the first recipients of the Hop Bitters Challenge Cup, a trophy which is still presented annually for the Senior Men’s Double at the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta.

The Junior Four Oars race, scheduled for 3:30 p.m., did not begin until after 5:00 p.m.. All five entries made it to the start. The wind had subsided and the water conditions were nearly perfect. It was a close race with the Argonaut R.C. four beating the Leander R.C. by a mere two seconds.

The winning Argonaut R.C. four appears below in a photo obviously taken in a studio. From stroke to bow they are: George F. Harris, A. Graham Thompson, J.A. Tarbutt, and William Ince, Jr..

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Ann Shelton et al., *Perseverance and Glory: The History of the Argonaut Rowing Club*. (Toronto: Argonaut Rowing Club, 2022) p.13

Six out of eight entries for the Junior Single Sculls appeared at the start. Joseph Stanton of the Bayside R.C. won, in a time of 10:34, two minutes ahead of J. Conway of the Lachine R.C..

The fifth race, Senior Four Oars, billed as the premier race of the day, was scheduled for 4:30 p.m., but started about two hours late. Seven out of the eight entries started the race. Argonaut R.C. won the exciting contest in a time of 9:11.2. Peterboro R.C. was second in 9:29.

The Senior Single Sculls was next, scheduled for 5:00 p.m.. At about 7:00 p.m., 11 of the 15 entries began the race. "The scene at this time was a very pretty one. The Bay was as calm as a mill pond, and was perfectly studded with small craft, and all the steamers were still on hand." [The Toronto *Globe*, August 5, 1880, p.8] Joseph Laing of Montreal's Grand Trunk R.C. won in a time of 10:00.4, beating Harry Ball of Detroit's Zephyr B.C. by 1.6 seconds. The margin would have been narrower, but "some idiots in a canoe fouled Ball just before crossing the winning line." [The Toronto *Globe*, August 5, 1880, p.8]

Because of the late hour, it was decided to postpone the last two races until the next morning.

However, the day was not over.

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Later that evening, about 600 guests gathered at the Pavilion of the Horticultural Gardens (now Allan Gardens) for the presentation of prizes. Music was provided by the Band of the Queen's Own Rifles. The 25¢ admission fee was roughly two hours' wages for a labourer in 1880, or roughly one hour's wages for many skilled tradesmen. Put another way, the advertisement immediately above this one in the newspaper was for a holiday cruise from Toronto on the *Empress of India* for 25¢. There were two, day-long choices: Monday in Whitby, or Tuesday at the Grimsby Camp. Children were 15¢.



HORTICULTURAL GARDENS.

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
OF
AMATEUR OARSMEN!**

WEDNESDAY, 4th AUGUST, 1880

**GRAND CONCERT BY THE BAND OF THE
QUEEN'S OWN RIFLES.**

The prizes won at the regatta will be presented
by the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.

ADMISSION, . . . 25 CENTS.

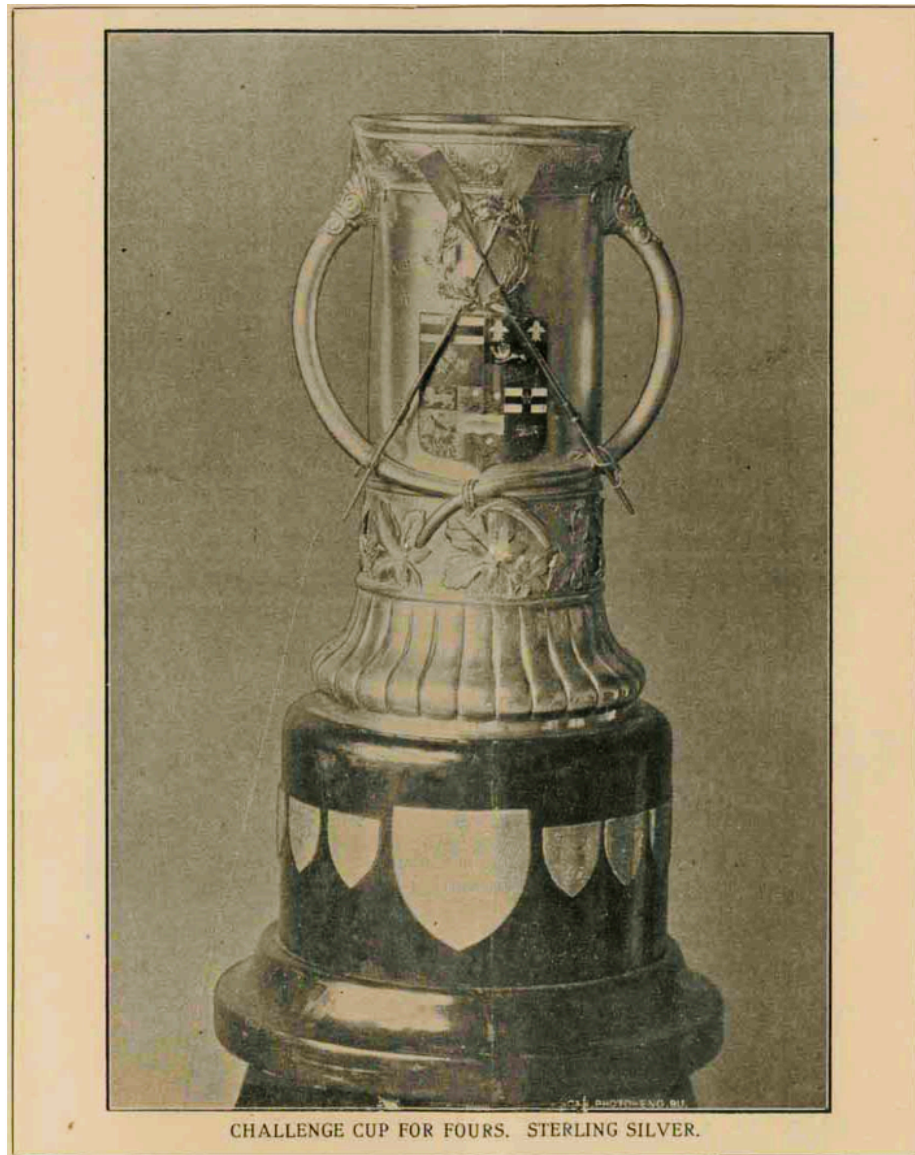
Gates open at 7:30. Concert to commence at 8.
Prizes to be presented at 9:30.

The Toronto *Globe*, August 2, 1880, p.2

After some speeches, His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor John Beverley Robinson assisted by his daughter Augusta Louise made the presentations which included three challenge cups.

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One of those, the the Challenge Cup for Fours, has been lost. When it was purchased, it was valued at \$600.



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Another, the Challenge Cup for Single Sculls, valued at the time at \$300, was found in a box of bits and pieces of trophies in 1984. A year later, it was incorporated into the new People of Port Dalhousie Trophy and in that form continues to be presented at the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta.



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The third, the Challenge Cup for Double Sculls, commonly known as the Hop Bitters Challenge Cup, is still in annual competition. The names of the first winners, the Bayside R.C. double of J. Douglas and Richard Tinning, Jr. do not appear on the trophy that is presented today, but it is possible that their names were inscribed on the lid which has been lost.

For more details about the histories of these and all the Henley trophies which are currently presented, plus many of the retired trophies, go to the Trophies page on my web site: <http://goldmedalphotos.com/trophies.html>

On the morning following the awards presentations, the water was smooth, so it was decided to use the city course. "Notwithstanding the early hour, there were a good many people on the wharves and at the boat-houses." [The Toronto *Globe*, August 6, 1880, p.8]

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Only one crew answered the call for the Pair Oar Shells race, Zephyr B.C., so the officials decided to have them do their row-over with the four Double Scull, In-rigged competitors. Forest City R.C. [misidentified as Toronto R.C. in lane 10 in the programme] won easily in 10:48. The pair finished in 11:20.

All the winners, their clubs, times and trophies can be viewed in tabular form on the Records page of my web site which lists all the winners of all the regattas from 1880 to last year: <http://goldmedalphotos.com/records.html>

All the results from all the races in all the Regattas from 1880 to 1902 appear in an appendix at the end of Chapter 2.

In spite of all the tribulations, the First Regatta of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen was deemed a success. The *Globe* declared: "on the whole it may be said to have been a very successful affair." [The Toronto *Globe*, August 6, 1880, p.8] *The Evening Telegraph* agreed: "[I]t may be said that the regatta has been a success, more especially in the quality of the racing and the unexpectedly fine quality developed by the men from whom even great things were expected." [The Toronto *Evening Telegraph*, August 5, 1880]

In a year-end review of rowing during 1880, the *Globe* includes this nice synopsis:

Last year it was talked about and this year it was determined on to found a "Canadian Amateur Association of Oarsmen." The members of the prominent rowing clubs met in Toronto and the Association was formed, Mr. H.J. O'Brien, President of the Argonaut Rowing Club, being elected President, and with him, as Vice-Presidents, and a committee were associated most of the prominent amateur oarsmen of the country. One of the first things which the Association did, and which had been sadly wanted in Canada, was to define an amateur, and this was successfully done; in fact, so successfully, that during the past season there has been hardly any dispute on the subject. Other matters engaged their attention, all of which were admirably handled, and the climax was reached in the splendid regatta given on the Bay in August, when everything was well carried out, the only drawback being the weather, which rendered it necessary to row the race under the Island shore instead of along the wharves. However, the steamers benefitted so that "it is an ill-wind that blows nobody good." The prizes were handsome, there were no disputes, and what is more, thanks to the untiring exertions of the Secretary, Mr. C.T. Jeffries, the finances came out all right. Under the fostering care of the Association, or rather, perhaps, encouraged by its formation, we find the following clubs in a flourishing condition, some only having been recently established, viz.:—Argonauts, Toronto, Leslieville, Bayside, and Telegraph (Toronto); Leander and Nautilus (Hamilton); Lachine Boat Club, G.T.R. Boat Club (Montreal); Godrich, Prescott, Peterboro, Ottawa, Pembroke, Forest City and London (London); Ingersoll, Bay of Quinte, Longueuil, Chatham, and if we mistake not, another established in Hamilton late in the fall. Most of these clubs, if they were not able to turn out good fours, had nearly all some good individual men, and the rowing at the Association Regatta was far above any that had been shown by amateurs, taking the number of entries, before. [The Toronto *Globe*, December 16, 1880, p.12]

The third Hamilton club alluded to was the Hamilton R.C.. The Don Amateur R.C. is not included on the list.

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I have devoted a lot of space to the First Regatta of the Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsmen because it *was* the first and the start of a regatta which, except for a hiatus during the First World War (1916, 1917 and 1918), and a suspension during COVID-19 restrictions (2020 and 2021), has been held every year since.

PLEASE NOTE: This History is a work in progress. I will post chapters as I finish them and I will make changes to chapters which are already posted as I become aware of new information, or have errors pointed out to me. This version was completed on April 6, 2024. If you find errors or omissions, use the Contact link at <http://goldmedalphotos.com/> to point them out to me. Stan Lapinski.