

Brief History of Ice Scooters

“Men on Long Island’s south side bays¹ since early times have fished, clamed, oystered, eeled, and set fykes, fish traps, frostfish nets and smelt nets. Years ago they built small plumb-sided flat-bottom scows and rowboats or sharpies. These made good carriers for their catches, and when winter came they placed narrow wagon-tire [metal] strips on the boats’ chines. . . ., so boats or scows could be dragged through snow over the ice. With a lot of hard labor men got these crude boats through thin ice and up on hard, thick ice to work their many sorts of fishing equipment, and to carry their numerous kinds of foodstuffs in the raw that our bay have produced over the years. It was all cold, rough, hard work...”

The evolution of the Scooter is not well documented. It did not evolve from a designer’s drawing board nor was there a class association. It evolved out of necessity. Something like this. Take an old duck puntie



and add runners. A mast, sprit sail or gaff and a pike pole to steer her. Angle the runners (bevel) to bite into the ice and to prevent the boat from sliding sideways. Add a jib to balance the main sail and

a bit of rocker (curve) to the runners to increase steerage and you have a Scooter.

By the early 1900’s the Scooter was used almost exclusively for hunting and sport. Most of the early boats had two rigs. A small sprit-sail, which was used during the work week for hunting and fishing and a larger gaff sail rig used on the week-ends for racing or taking friends out for rides. As the boats begin to carry larger and larger sails, short lee runners were added to prevent the boats hull from scraping on the ice as the boats heeled.

The scooter, unlike other iceboats is rudderless. She is steered by her jib. By trimming or slackening the jib one can

change course. To head up, ease the jib and trim the main. To bear off, trim the jib and ease the main. Shifting your weight forward or aft accordingly accelerates the process.

The first organized Scooter race occurred on February 23, 1903 off Patchogue New York. The race was sponsored by the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Capt. Hank Haff of Islip, a famous America’s Cup skipper, headed the race committee.



¹ Birth of the South Bay Scooter, Capt. Wilbur A. Corwin, Long Island Forum, January 1957



Line up of Scooter Race, 23 February 1903, at Patchogue, Long Island, organized by the *Brooklyn Eagle* and managed by Mr. Fred Flugraph

“There were nine boats ready when Sanford Weeks fired the signal to get off at noon. The start was quickly made as each boat was pushed off the line by its captain who then jumped aboard.... Several of the boats were disabled, and on the last round only the Eagle, Captain Latham of the Blue Point [Life Saving] station, and the Icicle, Captain Frank Corwin, of Bellport, finished, the Icicle a trifle ahead, but on the wrong side of the finish line. The race was awarded the Eagle, and the two pennants given by the Brooklyn Eagle were presented to

the two boats.²”

Blue Point became the center of racing activity and the meeting place for Scooters. They came from as far away as Bellport to the east and Bayshore to the west. Betting on races was heavy and many local horseracing enthusiasts turned to the Scooter races for some out-of-season action. Extensive printed coverage of the Scooter races was provided not only by the local papers but also the New York City newspapers.

In 1904 the Bellport Scooter Club was organized in Bellport, New York. 1905 saw the formation of the Blue Point Scooter Club and the Patchogue Scooter Club. In 1906 the Great South Bay Scooter Racing Association was organized.

Racing led to larger and lighter boats with more sail area. No longer could the boats sail or easily be rowed through open water. But, the water was still there. Instead, the fast new boats begin to jump the water holes and a new past time was born.

In 1922 the Bellport Bay Yacht Club generously offered the use of the club building as a winter home to the newly formed South Bay Scooter Club. Scooters and ice-boaters have enjoyed the warmth of the club and hospitality of the Village of Bellport ever since that time.

To learn more about early scootering on the Great South Bay of Long Island, we invite you to go to the [Published Articles](#) section and read through the many early newspaper and magazine stories, which can be found there.



² Patchogue Advance February 1903.