

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER

~~~~~ *Establishing a Rowing Home in Minneapolis* ~~~~~

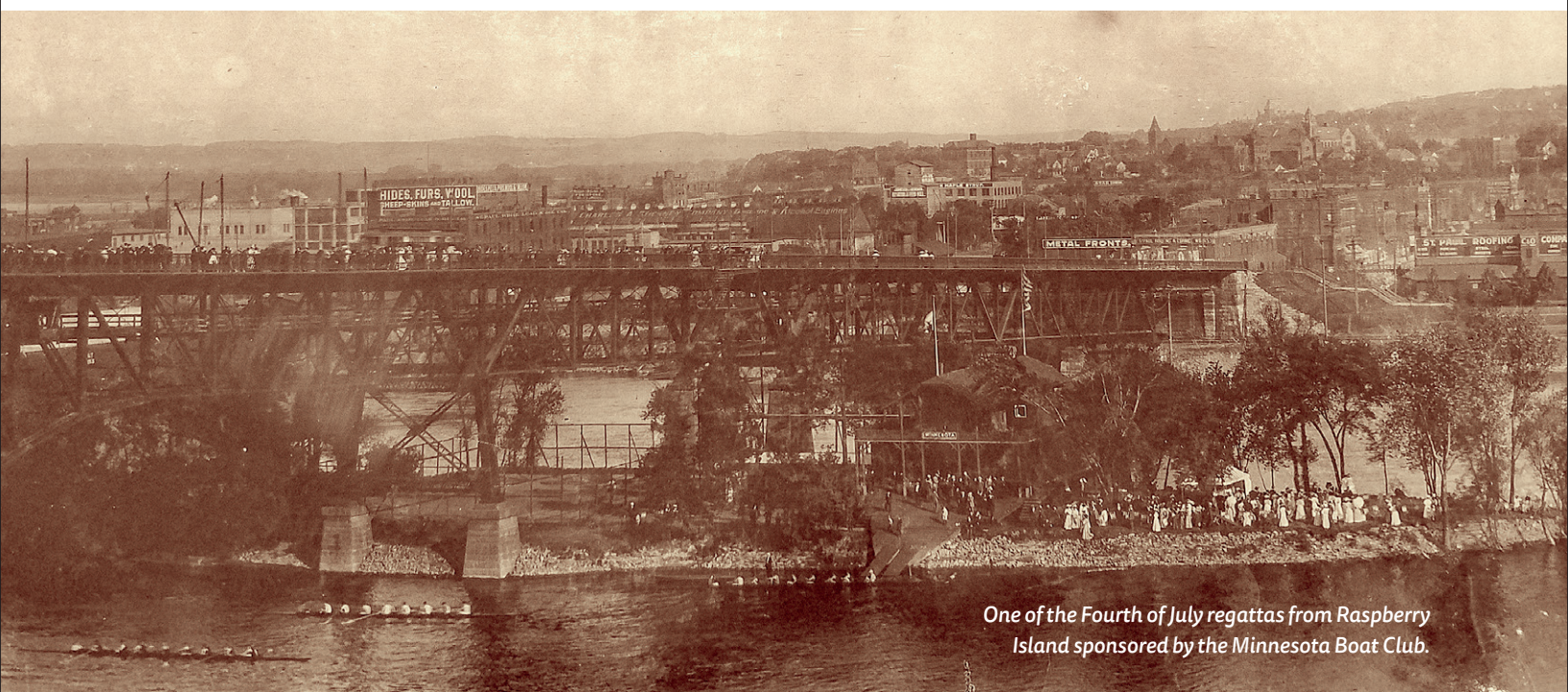
SARAH RISSE

THE SPORT OF ROWING has enjoyed a long and captivating history in Minnesota, dating to the 1870s, when a group of enterprising young men in St. Paul organized the Minnesota Boat Club, the state's first rowing and athletic club. Similar clubs were eventually founded in Minneapolis and Duluth.

In Minneapolis, unlike St. Paul and Duluth, rowing's fortunes have been significantly affected by land development and infrastructure projects as the city grew. When Minneapolis' first rowing club—the Lurlines—was established in 1877, the Mississippi River in Minneapolis was a series of unnavigable rapids, restricting rowing to city lakes. From its founding, the Lurlines were at the mercy of street railway lines and real estate developers. In the twen-

tieth century, rowing was revived in Minneapolis not by the rowers themselves but by the private Calhoun Beach Club, though that sponsorship was short-lived.

Today, Minnesota is home to at least seven amateur clubs, four collegiate clubs, and one inclusion program, with the greatest concentration of rowers training on the Mississippi River between the Ford bridge (Lock and Dam No. 1) in St. Paul and the Washington Avenue bridge in Minneapolis.¹ Yet not until the completion of the controversial Lock and Dam No. 1 (1917) and the Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam (1963) was rowing on that section of the Mississippi River possible. The dams drastically altered the river's natural character, causing water to pool into a reservoir and thus creating a relatively calm



One of the Fourth of July regattas from Raspberry Island sponsored by the Minnesota Boat Club.



Guests of the Minnesota Boat Club gather on Raspberry Island; others watch from Wabasha Street bridge.

lakelike body of water, which buried the river's original, wild rapids. Rowers have enjoyed continual and unrestricted access to the river gorge since 1965; however, the journey to establish a home for Minneapolis rowing on the Mississippi was herculean, fraught with false starts and unexpected setbacks. In recent years, the possible removal of the dams threatens to force yet another move.

By the 1860s, paid professional rowers had become America's first sport celebrities.

THE ROOTS OF ORGANIZED ROWING in the United States trace back to the early 1830s, when nine exclusive clubs formed the Castle Garden Boating Association for racing and recreation around New York Harbor. Working watermen had been plying the harbor for decades, ferrying passengers and cargo in heavy six- or eight-oared barges. Business rivalries led to races that advertised the oarsmen's strength and speed. Drawing crowds of eager gamblers and spectators, rowing quickly caught on among New York's fashionable elite.

By the 1840s, amateur rowing clubs were popping up along New York's Hudson River, in Boston, and in Philadelphia. In 1852, Harvard raced Yale in the country's first intercollegiate athletic event. The Harvard-Yale race soon became a popular annual competition that prompted

other eastern colleges to organize crews. By the 1860s, paid professional rowers had become America's first sport celebrities. An amateur rowing craze followed. Spurred by the development of the telegraph and railroads, which broadcast results and brought athletes and spectators together, new clubs spread from east to west.²

The sport came to Minnesota in 1868, when 26-year-old John W. L. Corning relocated from New York to St. Paul to work for wholesale drug-

gists Noyes Brothers. He had shipped his fragile rowing shell down the Atlantic to New Orleans and then by barge to St. Paul. When Corning launched his boat on the Mississippi River, a crowd gathered, delighted that the nation's most popular sport had finally arrived.³

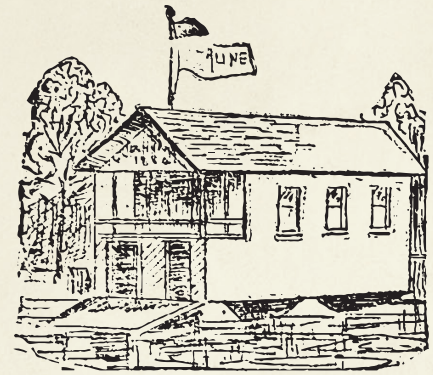
The Minnesota Boat Club was organized in 1870; over the next decade, Minnesota's first rowing club evolved into an exclusive social organization, drawing membership from St. Paul's elite. The club built its first boathouse in 1874 on the Mississippi's Raspberry Island. To showcase their new venue, the club organized its inaugural Fourth of July Regatta in 1874. Guests of the club gathered on Raspberry Island's lawn and balconies; scores of spectators without an invitation crowded the Wabasha Street Bridge and the bluffs along Third Street. Races of one-, two-, and four-man boats (singles, doubles, and fours) started near the Wabasha Bridge. The men powered upriver one mile, executed a 180-degree turn around a stake, and then raced back to the boathouse. This two-mile out-and-back racecourse was typical of the day.⁴

ROWING TAKES HOLD ON LAKE CALHOUN

BY THE TIME MINNEAPOLIS ORGANIZED its first rowing club in 1877, rowing in St. Paul had been drawing crowds for three years. Because the Mississippi River was a boulder-ridden, unnavigable series of rapids in Minneapolis, rowing found a home on Lake Calhoun. With plans for a street railway to reach the then-rural area, the lake held great potential to be developed into a resort. (Today the lake is known as Bde Maka Ska, but this article uses the name familiar during the events of this story.)



LEFT: Minneapolis, Lyndale & Minnetonka Railway train, leaving Lake Calhoun, with William King's pavilion at left, ca. 1880s.



RIGHT: Sketch of Lurline boathouse, completed in 1878.

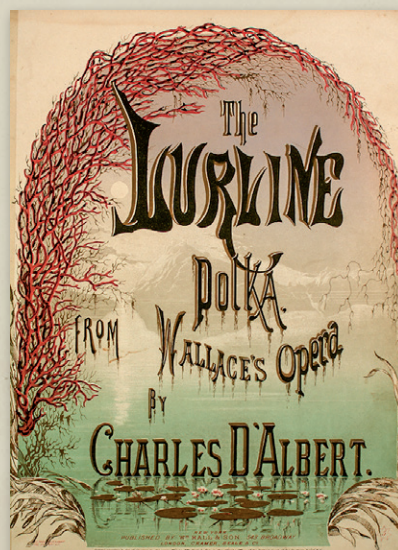
The founding secretary for the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, Colonel William S. King, owner of the sprawling Lyndale Farm adjoining Lakes Calhoun and Harriet, understood that the imminent transit connection would draw crowds to the lake, especially when coupled with the lure of a rowing club. In 1877, shortly after a group of young Minneapolis men founded the Lurline Boat Club, King completed work on a multistory resort pavilion on Lake Calhoun's eastern shore. Knowing the presence of a rowing club would drum up business, King offered the Lurlines "a perpetual lease . . . situated a short distance from the Pavilion, whose balconies will offer a fine view to spectators at future races and erected a substantial building containing boat room and dressing rooms . . . which will admit of additions and ornamentation as the club grows and the treasure likewise."⁵

The Lurlines elected Charles McCormick Reeve, known as C McC Reeve, as their first president. He had grown up on the East Coast, graduating in 1870 from Yale, where rowing was wildly popular. He was drawn to Minneapolis by his uncle, Budd Reeve, who owned a stock and dairy farm on Lake Harriet. By the mid-1870s, C McC Reeve had become a successful banker and had acquired a flour mill. As such, Reeve exemplified the 1870s American amateur rower: a successful and well-connected busi-

nessman who enjoyed the social as much as the physical benefits a rowing club offered.

The Lurlines spent their first summer, 1877, rowing casually, if at all. They focused primarily on throwing exclusive parties at King's pavilion, acquiring rowing shells, setting a racecourse, and otherwise "slumbering until next fall when the street railway to Lake Calhoun is expected to be completed." Unfortunately for the fledgling rowing club, King was financially overextended. He was forced to strike a deal with financier Philo Remington, who agreed to pay off \$120,000 in claims if King agreed to transfer control over his properties. After King was adjudicated bankrupt in 1877, Remington's agents subdivided and sold King's property. The Lurlines were suddenly homeless.⁶

Real estate speculator Louis Menage immediately stepped up to offer the Lurlines a short-term lease near his Lake Side Park Resort on Calhoun's western shore. The Lurlines retained LeRoy Buffington, one of Minneapolis's leading architects, to design an intentionally modest, \$800 boathouse on the Menage site; without a long-term lease, a large expenditure seemed imprudent. Construction began in April and was completed in June 1878.⁷



The Lurline Boat Club's name almost certainly came from William Vincent Wallace's grand romantic opera *Lurline*, which had opened in London in 1860 and had received its first fully staged American performance in May 1869 at the Academy of Music in New York. The character of *Lurline* was a beautiful nymph who lived in her father's underwater grotto. In 1878, the Lurline Boat Club christened a single rowing shell the *Sea Nymph*.¹

Note

1. "Wallace's *Lurline* (1860)," Victorian Opera Northwest, <http://www.victorianoperanorthwest.org/Operas/Lurline.htm>.



Boathouses of the Minnesota and St. Paul Boat Clubs on Raspberry Island, ca. 1890.

As the rowers settled into their second venue, they watched infrastructure develop across the lake. By 1879, the Lyndale Railway Company had extended train service from Minneapolis's city hall to Lake Calhoun's eastern shore, leaving the Lurlines' boathouse on the western shore relatively inaccessible. To be closer to the hub of activity, in March 1881, the Lurlines hauled their boathouse across the ice to a third venue at the head of Lake Street. They hoisted their boathouse onto piles to extend over the water, creating space for bathing underneath. They enlarged its upstairs hall to accommodate moonlit dancing parties.⁸

During the early 1880s, boating was largely incidental to the social life the Lurlines enjoyed. It wasn't until the mid-1880s—when growing interest in rowing spawned new local and regional clubs—that their latent competitive spirit was roused. Two experienced oarsmen arrived in town in 1885, infusing the club with new talent and energy. The same year, a second rowing club was established in St. Paul when a contingent of young men, many

of whom had rowed at eastern colleges, founded the St. Paul Boat Club. They leased property east of the Minnesota Boat Club on Raspberry Island. The St. Paul Boat Club engaged architect J. W. Stevens to design a two-story, unabashedly grand structure intended to emulate the best boathouses in the country, completed in the spring of 1886. The addition of a second rowing club in St. Paul fueled the tension and excitement of local rivalries.⁹

Meanwhile, railroad magnate James J. Hill smelled opportunity on Lake Minnetonka, where he built the Hotel Lafayette in 1882, then extended his St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba rail line to the hotel the following year. To boost ridership and hotel bookings, Hill shrewdly leveraged rowing's popularity by hosting a professional rowing race featuring well-known rivals Ed Hanlan and John Teemer and running special trains to the 1883 event, which drew 5,000 spectators. Two years later he sponsored the Grand Regatta, luring the Lurlines, the Minnesota Boat Club, and the Chicago Farraguts to Lake Minnetonka with extravagant prizes—a gold watch to



Duluth Boat Club, designed in 1887—decidedly more luxurious than the Lurline Boat Club's modest structure.

each oarsman in the winning four and diamond pins to the champion single scullers.¹⁰

Amateur rowing's reach extended northward in 1886 with the founding of the Duluth Boat Club. This exclusive club granted admission to its earliest members only after they had been endorsed by two existing members and paid an exorbitant \$50 membership fee (\$1,340 in 2019 dollars). In 1887, architect Charles MacMillen designed an opulent boathouse for socializing as well as athleticism. The Duluth boathouse's grand opening was the social event of the season. By comparison, the Lurlines' boathouse was notably simple and modest.¹¹

The previous year, the Northern Pacific Railroad had completed its extension from St. Paul to Winnipeg, providing a connection to rowing clubs even farther north. On March 16, 1886, the two St. Paul clubs and the Winnipeg Boat Club formally established the Minnesota and Winnipeg Amateur Rowing Association, which opened up more formal competitive opportunities. The association's annual regatta, the most important sports competition in the region then known as the Northwest, featured six events: junior and senior singles, doubles, and fours. ("Senior" events were for crews and athletes who had previously won a race.) Sir Donald Smith, vice president of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, provided a coveted namesake silver cup valued at \$1,000 (\$26,809 in 2019 dollars)

for the winner of the association's signature event, the senior four. James J. Hill's Manitoba line secured Lake Minnetonka as the preferred venue for the Association Regatta by offering reduced rates for transporting the competing oarsmen and their rowing shells.

The association's constitution required each member club to send a senior four to each regatta. The Lurlines were not founding members of the association, almost certainly because they didn't have a competitive senior four in 1886, but they participated as nonmembers, sending brothers Hal and Lou Watson to compete in the junior single race; the Lurlines became formal association members the following year. Also in 1887, the Lurlines received coaching from their teammate H. W. Stone, an experienced former member of Detroit's Wyandotte Rowing Club. Stone taught his men to synchronize their movements so that they moved quickly and gracefully as one unit. He placed particular emphasis on the "recovery," the brief moments after the men finished a stroke, swung their bodies out of bow, and moved smoothly toward the stern on sliding seats before letting their oars drop back into the water for another stroke.¹²

Stone's efforts paid off. The Lurlines captured two victories at the 1887 Association Regatta: the junior four and the senior single, in which their fastest sculler, J. E. Muchmore, finished a jaw-dropping 15 boat lengths



Chauncy Wheeler of the Lurline Boat Club in a scull, 1890s.

ahead of Winnipeg and St. Paul. Upon their return to Minneapolis, a crowd gathered at Union Depot cheering: L - U - R - L - I - N - E . . . LURLINE! A band paraded the victorious oarsmen to the West Hotel for breakfast, which was followed by a celebratory dinner with Mayor A. A. (Doc) Ames, C McC Reeve, and other luminaries who lauded their unexpected wins. As the evening wore on, Colonel John T. West, owner of the West Hotel, initiated a well-received rallying cry for a new boathouse for the Lurlines and offered his hotel for fundraising parties. C McC Reeve donated \$100 on the spot, prompting others to do the same.¹³

PROFESSIONAL COACHES

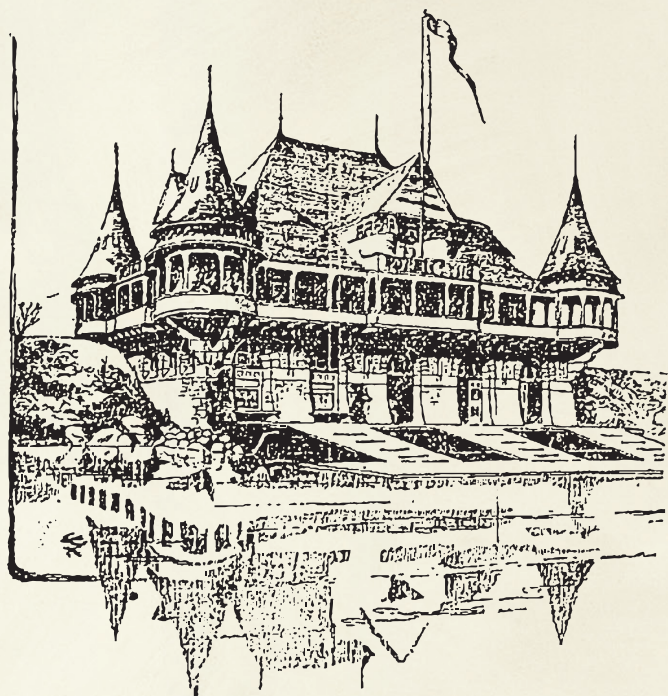
CAPTURING THE SIR DONALD A. SMITH TROPHY for the senior four became the overriding goal of the association's clubs. Hiring a professional rower to coach soon came to be seen as essential to achieving the goal. In 1888, the Lurlines retained crack oarsman Dan Breen from Boston as their coach and went on

to dominate the 1888 Association Regatta, winning five of six races and capturing the coveted Smith Cup. Emboldened, they went on that year to compete in the Mississippi Valley Amateur Rowing Association Regatta held at Lake Calumet near Chicago, finishing first in every event they entered. Giddy with newfound glory, they attended the Northwestern Amateur Rowing Association Regatta in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The press began referring to them as the Lusty Lurlines.¹⁴

The Lurlines arrived at Lake Minnetonka for the 1889 Association Regatta buoyed by their recent victories. They swaggered down to the dock to cheer on Muchmore, their fastest sculler and hero of the 1887 regatta, as he battled Winnipeg's highly regarded A. C. L. Fox down the course in the senior single. The boats were indistinguishably close, setting off frenzied cheers from the shore. When Fox prevailed, crossing the finish line a mere 1.5 seconds ahead of Muchmore, "There was a hush for a moment and then the Winnipeggers yelled like madmen. . . . The Canadians danced and screamed and howled and when [Fox] came to the dock they picked him up." The Lurlines stood in stunned disbelief before being overcome by a sense of betrayal. When Muchmore returned to the dock, his teammates had left him to carry his single scull into the clubhouse alone.¹⁵

Four-oar shell race, ca. 1880.





Long-desired but never built Lurline boathouse, designed by Minneapolis architect Edgar Joralemon

The Lurlines turned their attention to the senior four, a race in which they were heavily favored to win. At the starting pistol's shot, they pulled away with near-perfect synchronicity, easily taking the lead. By the one-mile mark, they had a comfortable two-boat-length lead over Winnipeg and felt certain of victory. But during their aggressive execution of the 180-degree turn at the halfway mark, an outrigger got caught in the buoy, causing an immediate and drastic loss of speed. As the Lurline crew struggled to extricate their boat, the other teams glided effortlessly past. The Lurlines finished a disheartening last place. They were so paralyzed with frustration that when the senior double was called, Charles Libby, who had been paired with Muchmore, refused to come out of the boathouse, effectively scratching their entry and handing Winnipeg victory by default.¹⁶

Within days of the regatta, the Lurlines leveled charges against Muchmore, accusing him of intentionally throwing the senior single race. Professional gamblers had become as much a part of the American sports landscape as professional rowers. They were known to occasionally manipulate race outcomes. Muchmore vehemently denied the charge, attributing his loss to the wake of a passing steamer. He resigned from the club before the Lurlines instigated a formal investigation, freeing members to turn their attention to their long-desired new boathouse.

Lurline boat club members.

Minneapolis architect Edgar Joralemon provided detailed plans for an elegant three-story boathouse intended to be "a vast improvement over anything . . . west of Chicago." The first story would house 36 rowing shells, incorporating every convenience for getting the shells to and from the water, and 150 lockers. Balconies would surround the second story's Queen Anne-style clubroom, reception room, and restaurant. The third story would provide living quarters for a dedicated club chef. "New quarters, new energy and new achievements is the motto of the blue and white [the Lurlines] for 1890," proclaimed the *Minneapolis Tribune* of the club's anticipated fresh start.¹⁷

In mid-July 1890, the Duluth Boat Club hosted a grand regatta on Lake Superior combining two amateur association regattas and professional races. Four professional oarsmen—Albert Hamm, Jacob Gaudaur, James Ten Eyck, and John McKaye—had formed a four-oared crew and had settled in as guests of the Lurlines a week ahead of time to train on Lake Calhoun. Hamm had arrived in early June to train the Lurlines, in exchange for lodging.¹⁸ The pros' presence drew attention.

The arms, shoulders and most of the back are bared. A little short pair of tight woolen pants about the knee are worn and a pair of legless hose. Hamm skates around barefooted most of the time. They go out for a little spin, then sit around, read, swap yarns and spin again. . . .



They handle [their shells] as a woman would pet a poodle. 'Just run the back of your hand along there' said McKay to a Tribune reporter last night as he patted the bottom of a new four-oared shell . . . 'Isn't she a beauty. Look along the bottom and you can see every rib. That's how a boat should be built.'¹⁹

Underscoring the value of a dedicated professional coach, the Lurlines captured every senior association event in Duluth, thereby restoring their reputation as Minnesota's leading club. They immediately retained Hamm to coach them again the next year. The Lurlines eagerly anticipated Hamm's arrival in early 1891, but it wasn't until June 23 that they received the news that Hamm had died suddenly of tuberculosis. Bereft and adrift without a coach, the Lurlines secured only one victory at the 1891 Association Regatta, the junior four. From that point on they floundered, unable to establish a long-term relationship with a coach or gather the resources needed to build their long-desired boathouse.

ACROSS THE RIVER IN ST. PAUL, the Minnesota Boat Club was actively positioning itself for future wins. The St. Paul Boat Club had disbanded at the end of 1890 and merged with the Minnesota Boat Club, pooling talent and resources. The Minnesota Boat Club had been working with seasoned rower and coach John A. Kennedy seasonally since 1887 and was able to retain him in a more formal capacity in 1891. With nearly 20 years' experience racing, training crews, and rigging boats, Kennedy was considered a prize. He had a reputation for coaching his athletes' physical form while instilling a sense of courage and determination. By 1893, Kennedy had coached the Minnesota Boat Club into Minnesota's most victorious team and members enjoyed a winning streak that garnered the men of the Minnesota Boat Club and their coach a national reputation.

By the late 1890s, however, amateur rowing was in rapid decline in both Minneapolis and St. Paul; nationally, the era of the professional rower was ending. Professional baseball and football were taking off as preferred spectator sports around the turn of the twentieth century. Rowing historian Robert Kelly posits that professional rowing died with the elimination of professional events in the 1896 Boston Regatta. By 1897 the Minnesota Boat Club's fleet was so dilapidated and coffers so drained that members had to let their beloved coach go. Likewise, the association suspended its activities in 1897. The Hotel Lafayette on Lake Minnetonka burned to the ground on October 4, 1897.²⁰

The Lurlines tore down their boathouse on Lake Calhoun in 1899, signifying the formal end of rowing in Minneapolis. Although the precise reason it was torn down isn't known, at this time the Minneapolis Park Board was buying up shoreline property around the lakes. The Lurlines' modest boathouse was built before the park board was established, so they may have been required by the board to relinquish the land the boathouse occupied. They sold their rowing shells—considered the finest fleet in the state—to the newly opened Minikahda Golf Club, located on the old Menage property on the west side of Lake Calhoun, and divided the proceeds among the remaining 20 members. Many of the Lurlines used their payment to join the Minikahda Club, while retaining the hope that rowing would eventually be reestablished in Minneapolis and that they could repurchase their old fleet.²¹

During the summer of 1903, Minnesota Boat Club rowers, needing shells for an upcoming race with Duluth, approached the Minikahda Club to buy the old Lurline fleet. The Minikahda Club agreed to sell the fleet for \$600. The sale offended a number of old Lurline members. The *St. Paul Daily Globe* opined, "The Lurline survivors are [said] to be indignant over the transfer, because there are boats in the layout, notably the Gaudaur four, that cost more money than is now being obtained for the entire outfit."²²

MINNEAPOLIS ROWING REVIVAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

WHEN THE LURLINES FORMALLY disbanded in 1899, they believed that rowing in Minneapolis would revive when the promised government dams in the Mississippi River Gorge were finished. A system of locks and dams that would enable steamboats to travel upstream from St. Paul had been discussed since the 1850s. Business leaders in Minneapolis wanted to establish their city as the head of navigation to secure lower shipping rates and to increase the city's prestige. Some in St. Paul also supported dams, believing the ability to generate hydropower would allow St. Paul to develop milling and manufacturing. Formally approved in 1899 and completed in 1963, the dams transformed the unnavigable, boulder-ridden stretch of the river into a miles-long, lakelike body of water that buried the rapids.²³

Just as Colonel King promoted rowing to boost train ridership and draw people to his pavilion in 1877, Harry S. Goldie, who founded the Calhoun Beach Club in 1927, promoted rowing as part of his effort to position his new venue as a vibrant sports center. The club publicized a variety of winter and summer sports to showcase Minne-

apolis's unsurpassed aquatic facilities as part of its overall marketing plan and in an effort to draw people to the city.

The beach club called on ex-college oarsmen to form the nucleus of the new Minneapolis Rowing Club. They approached the Duluth Boat Club, which had disbanded in 1926, offering to purchase its fleet, which included every type of shell from singles to eights. Duluth obliged and sent the shells by train. The Minneapolis Park Board provided space in the east wing of Lake Calhoun's refectory to serve as an ad hoc boathouse. Although the Calhoun Beach Club's sponsorship of rowing was short-lived—they withdrew support in 1930 due to repercussions from the stock market crash—the sport had taken hold again. The Minneapolis Rowing Club managed to survive with the park board's support, allowing boat storage in its old refectory building at no cost.²⁴

Over time, however, frustrations with Lake Calhoun began to surface. The oarsmen had to negotiate their slender, fast-moving shells around swimmers and sailboats, making it difficult to stage a regatta, and their ad hoc boathouse was confining. When the Minneapolis club was to host the 1939 Northwestern International Rowing Association Regatta, they petitioned the park board to hold the event on the newly navigable Mississippi River, which promised to be an unrivaled course. The Minneapolis rowers requested use of the East River Flats and a simple frame structure to house their equipment, pleading, "We have constantly hoped and presumed that someday we would be allowed a place on the river, where rowing rightfully belongs. . . . Even two warming houses

"We have constantly hoped and presumed that someday we would be allowed a place on the river, where rowing rightfully belongs."



put end to end would suffice. . . . Our most earnest hope is to get on the river."²⁵

The park board, realizing that the 1939 Northwestern International Regatta could be the first event in Minneapolis's long-range program to develop the Mississippi River Gorge into a water-sports playground, readily approved the Minneapolis Rowing Club's requests. They granted the Soo Line permission to park baggage cars carrying shells from St. Paul, Chicago, and five Canadian cities in the terminal below the Washington Avenue Bridge. Minneapolis mayor George E. Leach weighed in: "Of all the 10,000 lakes in Minnesota, the most beautiful one is right here in Minneapolis, on the river above the Ford Dam. The river now is sweet and clean as any lake in town and this lake, as I like to call it, will be the show place of America. I'm told by experts that the river here would provide the greatest [rowing] course in America and you could put a million people along the river banks to watch."²⁶

Minneapolis Rowing Club oarsmen (and a woman supporter) on Lake Calhoun.



The river gorge rowing course was featured at the first two Aquatennial celebrations, in 1940 and 1941. The rowing club glorified the venue: "Here we do not have troublesome crosswinds, tides, or currents. The area between the two bridges being 800 feet wide, offers space for sixteen shells to race abreast."²⁷

Finding a new home for the Minneapolis Rowing Club became imperative in April 1958, when the park board approved a parking lot along Calhoun's north shore, necessitating the removal of the old refectory. The board agreed to provide a site on the river if the club would build any needed facilities. To ease the club's financial strain, the park board sold the refectory to the Minneapolis Rowing Club for one dollar, allowing the club to salvage materials. Club member Ollie Bogen described the demolition: "The flat roof was covered with layer upon layer of heavy felt and tar, with another thick layer of small stones imbedded in the tar. Only oarsmen could have pried this loose with the oversize crow bars and ice chisels we used. It was like rowing a 4,000-meter race at a 2,000-meter pace while breathing a mixture of dust and air superheated by the flat tar roof."²⁸

For the next six years, Minneapolis Rowing Club members worked with tenacity and determination. They trucked salvaged lumber from storage in Mendota to East Thirty-Sixth Street and West River Road in Minneapolis. To clear the site, they hauled a bulldozer by barge from St. Paul's Lower Landing upstream to Minneapolis through Lock and Dam No. 1. They acquired granite paving blocks from Fourth Street in downtown Minneapolis; then bartered their labor for the use of a truck to move the blocks.²⁹

By the summer of 1962, homeowners on West River Road became concerned that boat launchings, parties, and excessive noise would compromise the neighborhood's aesthetic. The West River Road Area Improvement Association launched a letter-writing campaign, contending that the City of Minneapolis (the landowner) had not issued a permit and the project must stop. Under pressure from the improvement association, the Minneapolis city attorney issued an injunction calling for an immediate halt to construction and questioning the legality of the club's permits.³⁰

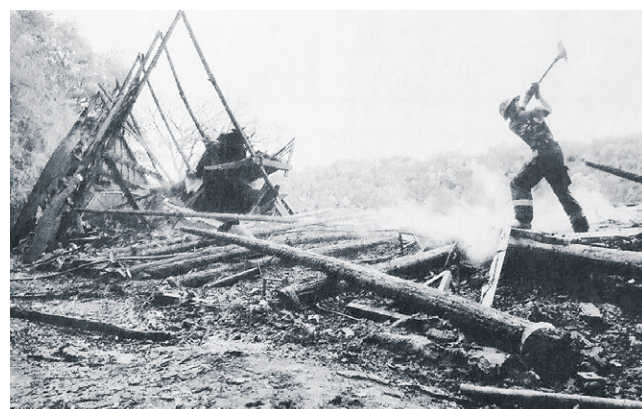
The Minneapolis Park Board's attorney, Robert M. Austin, eventually prevailed in his opinion that ownership and control of the land was vested in the Minneapolis Park Board of Commissioners. Thus, building rights were restored to the Minneapolis rowers, but the decision came after the club had already resigned itself to relocating. Members appealed and received immediate approval from the park board for a site just north of the Lake Street Bridge at East Twenty-Ninth Street.³¹

Today, many Minneapolis Rowing Club members remain deeply attached to the Mississippi River Gorge while others have taken a renewed interest in city lakes.

By this time, the Minneapolis Rowing Club had been unable to row from a home base for three years. Members spent 1963 clearing the new site, laying a foundation, and making jigs and bolts. In January 1964, they erected the frame for their A-frame boathouse, designed by club member Ralph Darr, who was an industrial designer. Each 108 × 35-foot section weighed over a ton and was raised by winch. Establishing a home on the river had become a years-long, herculean effort. The club had been homeless for six years when the Duncan-Miller Boathouse opened in early spring of 1965. It was named for H. R. Duncan, president from 1958 to 1965, and Lee Miller. Both men had been instrumental in the club's successful relocation to the river.³²

Ironically, as the Minneapolis Rowing Club moved rowing shells from storage into the new boathouse in the spring of 1965, the much-lauded river gorge surged with floodwater, forcing another weeks-long delay. When the waters calmed in June, members finally took to the river.

The club continued to enjoy decades of peaceful, uninterrupted rowing until the early morning of September 28, 1997, when 20-foot flames shot from the Duncan-Miller Boathouse. Firefighters arrived before dawn, unable to tackle the blaze until they had stretched more than a quarter mile of hose through thick underbrush from hydrants



News photo of fire that destroyed Duncan-Miller Boathouse, 1997.



New home of Minneapolis Rowing Club, designed by Vincent James, 2001.

on the bluff to the boathouse below. The fire destroyed more than 30 boats and reduced the club's beloved home of 32 years to a pile of smoldering timber and debris. The loss was devastating, but for the first time in their history, rowers in Minneapolis were positioned to design a boathouse befitting their community.

The Minneapolis Rowing Club retained award-winning architect Vincent James to design a contemporary boathouse inspired by the sport's aesthetic beauty. Clerestory windows create the appearance of a beacon at night. Completed in 2001, the boathouse was named for rower Lloyd Ohme, who spent six decades advocating for the sport, was a staunch supporter of women's participation in rowing, and was instrumental in helping the club secure its home on the river. The boathouse won three architectural awards and has inspired increasing numbers of masters (anyone 21 years old or older), collegiate, and junior (high school) rowers.³³

Today, many Minneapolis Rowing Club members remain deeply attached to the Mississippi River Gorge while others have taken a renewed interest in city lakes. To avoid the disruption of frequent spring flooding on the Mississippi, longtime rower and coach James Dundon



established 612 Endurance rowing club on Lake Nokomis in 2014 to train athletes in small boats. Without a boat-house, his scrappy team stores boats on a trailer and trains aggressively in the early morning, before other recreationalists arrive. Other clubs also have spun off from the Minneapolis Rowing Club to train on lakes, including Long Lake Rowing Club, Twin Cities Youth Rowing at Bryant Lake Regional Park, and North Star Rowing Club.

THE FUTURE OF ROWING ON THE MISSISSIPPI GORGE

ROWERS WHO FEEL A PARTICULAR attachment to the Mississippi River Gorge look to the future with a degree of trepidation. The dams that prop up the course no longer serve their original purpose for navigation or commerce. They are maintained at the taxpayers' expense. The US Army Corps of Engineers is conducting a disposition study and actively considering the removal of both the Lower St. Anthony Falls Lock and Dam and Lock and Dam No. 1. Moreover, American Rivers, with a mission to protect healthy rivers and restore damaged ones, recently listed the Mississippi River Gorge as one of the country's most endangered. They, along with a number of local environmental groups, believe that removing the dams is a unique opportunity to restore the original rapids, which would

enable the return of many long-absent species, including black buffalo fish, paddlefish, northern long-eared bats, 11 species of mussels, and Blanding's turtles.³⁴

Those members of the Minneapolis Rowing Club who believe rowing should take precedence have appealed to the corps through a vigorous letter-writing campaign to preserve the dams and their beloved rowing course. In 1961, MNHS's curator of manuscripts, Lucile M. Kane, highlighted an important irony about past relationships with the Mississippi: "Neither Minneapolis nor St. Paul has been as dependent on the river as they once thought they were. Without water power until the 1920s, St. Paul had developed its manufacturers nonetheless. And Minneapolis, deprived of navigation until the twentieth century, had acquired a wholesaling business which overshadowed that of St. Paul. Both were the commercial-industrial cities they had dreams of becoming."³⁵

The same may hold true for rowers' attachment to the Mississippi. While the Mississippi River Gorge is, unquestionably, a beautiful place to row, it is possible that, should the dams be removed, Minneapolis Rowing Club and collegiate crew athletes, passionate about their sport, will continue to find a way to thrive—if not on the Mississippi, then on another of Minnesota's many bodies of water. The quest for a rowing home in Minneapolis may not be over yet. ▣

Notes

1. These clubs include: 612endurance, Duluth Boat Club, Long Lake Rowing Club, Minneapolis Rowing Club, Minnesota Boat Club, North Star Community Rowing, and The Rochester Rowing Club. Twin Cities Youth Rowing caters to junior athletes and North Star Community Rowing works with athletes with physical disabilities and under-resourced youth. The University of Minnesota, St. Thomas, Macalester, and St. Johns offer club programs. The University of Minnesota also has a varsity women's team.

2. Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, *The Harvard-Yale Boat Race 1852–1924: And the Coming of Sport to the American College* (Mystic, CT: Mystic Seaport Museum, 1993), 15. The Harvard-Yale race of 1852 was initiated by James Elkins, an aggressive young conductor of the faltering Boston, Concord, and Montreal Railroad, in an effort to increase ridership, a common theme in nineteenth-century rowing history. Thomas Corwin Mendenhall, *A Short History of American Rowing* (Boston: Charles River Books, 1981), 21.

3. *The Bellman*, July 31, 1909, 909; *The Razoo* 1, no. 3 (Feb. 1903): 9.

4. Sarah M. Risser, "Upholding the Amateur Ideal at the Minnesota Boat Club," *Ramsey*

County History 53, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 22. In singles and doubles, one or two men, respectively, would propel the craft, or scull, holding an oar in each hand. In the four, each rower handled just one oar, sweeping the water on either side. Larger six- and eight-oared boats were popular collegiate racing boats during the 1870s and 1880s, but Minnesota wouldn't see its first eight until 1893.

5. It appears that Colonel King's title is likely a nickname rather than an official military rank: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_S._King. The Lyndale Farm, originally located in Richfield Township, was annexed to Minneapolis in 1867. In 1870, when the property was at its largest, about 1,400 acres, it extended from Lyndale Avenue on the east to Lake Street on the north to Lakes Calhoun and Harriet on the west and south sides. King's Lyndale Farm was the largest individually owned property in the history of Minneapolis.

David A. Lanegran and Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Lake District of Minneapolis: A History of the Calhoun-Isles Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 14; Richard S. Prosser, *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Rail-*

road Atlas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 95; "Lurline Boat Club," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 30, 1877, 1.

6. "Gossip About Town," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 19, 1877, 4; Loring Staples, "The Decline and Fall of Louis Menage," *Hennepin History* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 6.

7. "Gossip About Town," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 19, 1878, 4.

8. "Society," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 24, 1881, 3; Prosser, *Rails to the North Star*, 97; "Gossip About Town," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 1, 1881. To showcase their new boathouse and fleet, the Lurlines held their first intraclub regatta Grand Review on July 4, 1878. The Lurlines hosted Lake Minnetonka's first rowing regatta and first competed with other clubs on July 22–24, 1879, as part of an opening celebration of the Harrow House. The regatta was attended by the Minnesota Boat Club and the Burlington (Iowa) Boat Club. The Lurlines would not engage in formal competition again until 1885. That same year, the Lurline Boat Club welcomed new members Preston King of Yale and 29-year-old H. W. Stone, from Detroit's Wyandotte Boat Club.

9. "The St. Paul Boat Club," *St. Paul Daily*

Globe, Nov. 22, 1885, 5. During the early 1880s, collegiate rowing was rapidly expanding and gaining popularity. In 1878, Harvard, Brown, Amherst, and Bowdoin had formed the Rowing Association of American Colleges. By 1883, Columbia, Cornell, Penn, Princeton, Rutgers, and Wesleyan had also joined.

10. "Minnetonka—Hanlan and Teemer," *Daily Minnesota Tribune*, Aug. 2, 1883, 2; "Minnetonka Sports," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 30, 1885, 4: The Hotel Lafayette's first Grand Regatta was held at Lake Minnetonka on August 29, 1885, with the Minnesota Boat Club, the Lurlines, Stillwater Rowing Club, and the Farraguts of Chicago. "Chicago Out-Rowed," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 27, 1887, 5: The second Grand Regatta, on August 26–27, 1887, included the Minnesota Boat Club, St. Paul Boat Club, and the Pullmans, Delawares, and Farraguts of Chicago.

11. Historical Currency Conversions, <https://futureboy.us/fsp/dollar.fsp>. *Duluth Daily News*, July 14, 1887; Michael J. Cochran, *Invincible: History of the Duluth Boat Club* (Brookfield, MO: Donning Company Publishers, 2008), 12–13. The first Duluth Boat Club boathouse was located at Seventh Avenue West on the Northern Pacific slip.

12. The St. Paul Boat Club was the first of Minnesota's rowing clubs to engage an out-of-state professional oarsman as their coach, retaining top-notch sculler D. J. Murphy from Boston for the 1887 competitive season.

13. "The Lurlines Pass Resolutions Expressing Their Gratitude to Col. John T. West," *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 14, 1888, 4. The *Daily Globe* reported the Lurlines hosted a benefit ball at the West Hotel on October 26, 1887, at which "the munificent sum of \$2000 was realized as a nucleus towards the building fund of the new boat house."

14. "Bravo, Lurlines!" *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 15, 1888, 2. At the 1888 Association Regatta, the Lurlines captured the senior and junior four, the junior double, and the senior and junior single. The Lurlines also captured three victories at the Mississippi Valley Amateur Rowing Association Regatta: the junior and senior single and the senior double.

15. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 3, 1889.

16. *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 4, 1889. Winnipeg's Fox and Turnbull were to race against Lurlines' Muchmore and Libby in the senior double sculls.

17. When the Lurline Boat Club was founded in 1877, its colors were blue and gold. By the 1880s the Lurline colors were blue and white. "Lurline Boat Club," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 30, 1877, 1; "Off for Winnipeg," *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 14, 1887, 2; "Lurline Boat Club," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1889, 12.

18. The July 1890 Duluth Regatta combined, over the course of one week, the Minnesota and Winnipeg Association Regatta, the Mississippi Valley Amateur Rowing Association Regatta, and professional races.

19. "The Lurlines," *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 16, 1890, 2.

20. Robert F. Kelley, *American Rowing: Its Background and Traditions* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 45. The Minnesota Boat Club (MBC) borrowed the Lurlines' prized Gaudaur Four—the boat the professional four-oared crew raced at the 1890 Association Regatta in Duluth—to enable their participation in the 1895 Association Regatta. Weeks later, the Duluth Boat Club loaned MBC their new eight so they might compete at the National Regatta in Saratoga. After leaving MBC in 1897, Kennedy went on to have a successful coaching career at Yale, a source of pride for MBC men. After suspending activities in 1897, the association did not resume until 1906.

21. "Lurlines Disband," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 16, 1899, 5. The Lurlines sold to the Minikahda Club five four-oared shells, four doubles, one double gig, two single gigs, one four-oared working barge, one pair-oared barge, two rowboats, and a large assortment of boat equipment.

22. "Shells are Sold," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Aug. 1, 1903, 6; "Minnesota Club Buys the Remains of Old-Time Rival," *St. Paul Globe*, Aug. 2, 1903, 14. While the rowing clubs of Minneapolis and St. Paul struggled to persevere as the 1800s drew to a close, the sport of rowing was thriving in Duluth. The Duluth Boat Club continued to put boats on the water, train athletes, and host regattas. Moreover, the Duluth Boat Club's finances were flourishing to such an extent that they were able to draw up plans for relocating from the slip to Park Point (the Great Northern was causing undue congestion on the slip), where they proudly opened an even more spacious boathouse on June 29, 1903.

23. John O. Anfinson, "The Secret History of the Earliest Locks and Dams," *Minnesota History* 54, no. 6 (Summer 1995): 254–67.

24. Cochran, *Invincible*, 102. The Duluth Boat Club disbanded in 1926 due to a localized economic depression that occurred immediately after World War I. The opening of the Panama Canal caused Duluth's burgeoning trade with Asia to disappear, prompting the relocation of railroad operations from Duluth to Minneapolis and St. Paul. Moreover, by the end of the war, Duluth's lumber industry was in rapid decline. The City of Duluth could no longer fund the club as part of the municipal park system. "Movement to Revive Rowing," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Feb. 23, 1927.

25. Richard G. Foertsch (Minneapolis Rowing Club president) and L. E. Brophy Jr. (Minneapolis Rowing Club secretary) to Minneapolis Park Board of Commissioners, Apr. 5, 1939, Hennepin County Library Collections. The Minnesota and Winnipeg Association that had disbanded in 1898 was revived in 1906 as the Minnesota and Western Canada Amateur Association, which in 1910 was renamed the Northwestern International Rowing Association.

26. "Rowing Club Asks Park Board for River Flat Space and Shelter for Shells," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Apr. 6, 1939.

27. Robert Traynham Coles, architect, and Minneapolis Rowing Club, *A Boathouse and Clubrooms for the Minneapolis Rowing Club* (Minneapolis Rowing Club, 1952), 4. The first two Aquatennial celebrations featured River Day Shell Races (1940) and the National Association of Amateur Oarsmen Regatta (1941).

28. Ollie Bogen, *Minneapolis Rowing Club News*, 1964, Minneapolis Rowing Club folder, Minnesota Boat Club Records, manuscript P1851, Gale Family Library, MNHS. In 1958 Bogen was coaching University of Minnesota rowers out of the Minnesota Boat Club on Raspberry Island. He was an active Minneapolis Rowing Club member and instrumental in the move from Lake Calhoun to the Mississippi River.

29. Traynham and Minneapolis Rowing Club, *A Boathouse and Clubrooms*, 5; *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 25, 1965. The park board and the Minneapolis Rowing Club considered three Mississippi sites: (1) the East Bank Flats, ruled less suitable due to swift currents resulting from the narrow, deep channel at that point and because commercial craft moored there while waiting at the locks; (2) Meeker Island south of the Franklin Bridge, ruled out because it was inaccessible; (3) the site between East Thirty-Third and East Thirty-Sixth Streets.

30. The Minneapolis Park Board, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the State of Minnesota had issued permits.

31. "Park Board Ruled River Site Owner," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Sept. 6, 1962.

32. "Rowing Club Back at Oars After Walking Planks," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 25, 1965, 1.

33. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Feb. 10, 1999; "Obituary: Lloyd Ohme, Rowing Competitor and Coach," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Apr. 29, 2014. Architect Vincent James achieved this sense of dynamism by slightly rotating each roof truss as it was put into position. He won the Progressive Architecture Award in 1999, the American Institute of Architects Minnesota Honor Award in 2001, and the Wood Design Awards Honor Award in 2003; see <http://www.vjaa.com/sports-recreation#/minneapolis-rowing-club-boathouse-2/>.

34. Olivia Dorothy, "Now Is the Time to Restore the Mississippi River Gorge," America's Most Endangered Rivers series on the Mississippi River Gorge, June 28, 2018, <https://www.americanrivers.org/2018/06/now-is-the-time-to-restore-the-mississippi-river-gorge/>.

35. Lucile M. Kane, "Rivalry for a River: The Twin Cities and the Mississippi," *Minnesota History* 37, no. 8 (Winter 1961): 309–23.

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