

## **A Short History of the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club**

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Ottawa New Edinburgh Boathouse (1923) -- one of only four in Canada

The Ottawa New Edinburgh Club (ONEC) is one of the oldest boating clubs in Canada with a historic boathouse that is one of only four in Canada. Its history is interwoven with that of the City of Ottawa itself and continues to play a role in the social and athletic development of our community. It has long been a meeting place for Ottawa's sportspeople.

The ONEC was established in 1883 as the Ottawa Canoe Club (OCC) on the banks of the mighty Ottawa River. The first boathouse was a floating structure and was moored at the foot of the Rideau Canal locks, near Parliament Hill. Sawdust in the water from Chaudière Falls mills provided enough of a navigational deterrent that the Club relocated 2 miles downstream in Governor's Bay, near the Governor General's residence and at the foot of today's Prime Minister's residence at 24 Sussex. For 30 years the club operated in this New Edinburgh neighborhood, where OCC members stored their canoes and set forth on expeditions to adjacent rivers, raced in regattas, and swam.

Just before the First World War, the Club acquired a water lot further downstream adjacent to flat land. This semi-rural location amongst tall white pines was at the end of a streetcar line connecting it to the downtown. Tennis was all the rage and the feeling was that tennis would attract more members. Buoyed by the prospect of a new boathouse situated beside a straight three mile racing course, the members of the New Edinburgh Canoe

Club (NECC) decided to merge with the Ottawa Canoe Club (OCC) to form the Ottawa New Edinburgh Canoe Club (ONECC). Because of the Great War and construction costs, it took many years before the new structure was built.

The new boathouse was a \$50,000 marvel sunk on piles thirty feet into the riverbed. It was steel framed with a concrete foundation. Ottawa architect C.P.Meredith designed the Boathouse in the Queen Anne recreational style. Features of the structure include a magnificently proportioned ballroom that suited the "roaring twenties" and a two level deck that commands superb views of the Ottawa River at a most scenic spot across from Kettle Island where deer, moose, and fishing camp fires at night are still sighted.

The building contained a boat storage facility below, as well as a clubhouse with locker rooms for the canoeists and tennis players whose courts were situated where the Rockcliffe Driveway now lies.

It's 1923 inauguration coincided with the holding of the Canadian Canoe Championships on the adjacent course in the Ottawa River.

The Club's golden years were from 1923 to 1929. In these years, membership boomed and Club members won championship after championship, including winning the Birks Cup outright for being Canadian half mile war canoe champions for three years.

The Depression, with its Civil Service cuts, consumer belt tightening, and streetcar service curtailment, ushered in years of struggle. There were golden moments like the Canadian Canoe Championships of 1941 held at the Club, along with social events. Dances at the ballroom attracted young singles, lured to the Civil Service that had expanded due to the war effort. But in general, the Club was paddling upstream against, first, the austerity of the Depression and then World War II and later suburbanization and privatization of transport and recreation. In the mid-1950s the construction of the Rockcliffe Driveway forced the relocation of the tennis courts and physically divided the Club.

In 1965, the Club had financial difficulties and was reborn as the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club (ONEC). Dinghy sailing replaced canoeing. Laser sailing and tennis booms of the 1970s and 1980s rejuvenated the Club. At the height of the tennis boom it was difficult to book a court.

However, the Recession plagued early 1990s were tough with cutbacks and a waning of interest in dinghy sailing and tennis. Even so, improvements were made to the club and by the late 1990's the club started attracting new rowers, who understood the advantages of the club's river location and its facilities.

In late 2001, the club was joined by seasoned rowers from the Ottawa Rowing Club who also recognized the great potential of developing a rowing program out of a boathouse located on a more peaceful stretch of river. They also were attracted to a club that could accommodate social events and athletic programs in its ballroom and on its lounge decks. In 2002, the rowing membership ballooned to almost 80 members from 24 the year before and rowing became a major component of the club.

Since then, other athletic programs were added, including yoga and swing dancing in the ballroom, where guests can enjoy the sunsets on the deck, just as they had in those glory years. The focus is now towards providing a place where people can enjoy any variety of athletic and social programs in a cottage-like, natural environment close to Downtown Ottawa. In truth, the Ottawa New Edinburgh Club is undergoing a Renaissance, as we continue to write its history. Perhaps you can be part of it!

## **Current Programs**

ONEC now has three sports lines:

- Tennis
- Rowing
- Sailing.

There are sailing and tennis day camps as well as instruction in all three sports. The ballroom, including the magnificent upper deck with its sunset views, is rented for swing dance lessons, weddings, and community events. The Club is a members' Club with a volunteer Board of Directors. You can help the Club by joining, sending your child to an ONEC day camp, or renting the ballroom.