

Chapter 5 - Into the 50s

As of February, 1950, the Association listed 29 fleets in ten states.

Hardy Matheson in *Thorn* had won the Winter Championships at Miami, Fla. to open the year, and Rowland Chapman's *Skua* took the South Atlantic District Championships — also at Miami — in May. *Yachting* magazine correspondent Vivyan "Solly" Hall spearheaded the developmental effort in this part of the country, and it is much to his credit that the Florida Thistle gained rapidly in popularity.

Back to Ohio. Carl Barnett of Sandusky won the Toledo Frostbite Sweepstakes in a 17-boat field with his *Great Scot*, and at Buckeye Lake Herm Hanson repeated his 1948 triumph in the Fifth Annual Regatta of the Ohio Inter-Club Y.A., at the helm of his *Coronet* against 12 other entries. Then, at the Annapolis Regatta, Eric Nordholm topped a sterling group of competitors when he sailed his *Fu Manchu* to the Central Atlantic District Championships.

Sandy decided it was about time to lend a hand at Larchmont Race Week, and a fine turnout of 22 Thistles showed up for this event. In one wild, windy race of the series, Sandy had *Paukie* planing from wave top to wave top when the waves (or Sandy!) got out of phase and his boat went from wave top to wave *middle* — and stopped abruptly; the mast, however, continued right on. Notwithstanding this, Sandy took the week's series with 66 points to Prexy Brainard's 63, and John Hartung's 62.

On Lake Erie, John Lovett bested a 37-boat field to take their District Championships. He was followed by Harvey Busch in *Nan Too* and Herm Hanson, who had two firsts and a 14th. A foul-out offset Jim Hendricksen's 1st and 2nd places to put him out of it, but Jim partially made up for it by winning the Sandusky Bay Regatta that summer.

The Association had voted to hold the 1950 Nationals at Milford, Conn., site of newly-chartered fleet 32. Again, 35 boats competed, in a three-day affair. Frank and Gene Marquardt, the sail-making Virginians, sailed their *White Shadow* (336) without a third crew in this one, and it turned out to be a smart move for them, as

Milford's reputation for good breezes went down the drain and the entire series was sailed in drifting conditions. Hendricksen took the opener and Lawson won the third race, but the rest belonged to the Marquardts who finished 5' /2 points ahead of Hendricksen. Smith and Fordyce teamed up to take third, Frank Greenman fourth, and Eric Nordholm in *Fu Manchu* (496), also from the Chesapeake, fifth. Sandy took 8th place in this regatta, indicating the caliber of the competition. There was also a consolation race for non-qualifiers, won by Tom Lloyd from New Jersey.

The turnout at the 57th Annual Interlake Regatta at Put-in-Bay had been almost as good, with 32 entries. Dick Gibbs in *High Life* won it all; Emery Kamps in *Nature Boy* took second, and Harvey Busch third.

Twenty-three Thistles appeared at the Niagara Frontier Districts, which was held at the Fair Haven Y.C. Canandaigua skippers took 2 of the first 3 places, with Frank LeBoutillier on top, George Angle from the Rochester YC second, and George Bridgman in *Nike* third. And, on Long Island Sound, Tiny Duys won a postponed District Championship series.

New officers elected for the forthcoming year were: President, Tony Herrmann of Racine, Wisconsin; 1st Vice-President, Ed Hanna of Rochester, N.Y.; 2nd Vice-President, Bob Adams of Columbus; and Secretary-Treasurer, Harry Spangenburg.

All commercial advertising concerning the Thistle was handled and paid for by Douglass and McLeod. In casting about for a new gimmick to emphasize the Thistle's versatility, the idea was hit upon of running an ad incorporating a challenge to the sailing world. The substance of the "rule" was that the boats were to start all stowed away on trailers as they came off the road. They were then to be rigged and launched by two persons, sailed by six full-sized persons, and then hauled and readied for trail-away by two persons. At the time the Thistle was the only boat light enough and roomy enough to be capable of meeting these conditions and for a long time there were no takers, despite continued reminders in the company's ads. Then one fine day someone from another class could no longer stand the taunts, and Sandy received the following letter:

August 31, 1950

Douglass and McLeod, Inc.
Box 311
Painesville, Ohio

Gentlemen:

I have been following with interest the advertisements in some of the yachting magazines of your challenge of any racing class to an open race provided the race starts while the boat is still on the trailer.

I would like to express my opinion of the advertisement I am Secretary of the Lightning Class Central Atlantic District, and have owned and raced a Lightning for the past four years. Your ads have smugly stated that the Thistle is far superior to any boat under twenty feet, which of course is untrue if you include the Lightning in that group, for if the Thistle could defeat the Lightning in any type of air you would not have to resort to the trailer-to-water type of racing which for the Lightning is impossible.

I would like to go you one better. My Fleet No. 34, consisting of our five best boats, challenges five Thistles to race in any type of air — light or heavy — on Barnegat Bay sometime this fall. It's about time the Thistle was put in its proper place.

A copy of this letter is going to Bill Robinson, Yachting Editor of the Newark Evening News, for publication.

May we hear from you soon. Thank you.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) David P. Shay
Secretary, Central Atlantic District

The following letter was sent in reply:

September 9, 1950

Mr. David P. Shay, Secretary
Lightning Class Central Atlantic District
381 Somerset St.
North Plainfield, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Shay:

I believe I can speak for Thistle sailors everywhere in saying that we are very pleased to have

received the challenge from your Lightning Fleet Number 34 to a race between your five best Lightnings and our five best Thistles. We will be at your service on Barnegat Bay and on such a date as may be mutually agreed upon.

Our published challenge to any and all boats to a race from trailer to trailer is intended to convey the idea that the Thistle is at the same time a light boat which two men can carry, yet roomy enough to handle a crowd. This does not mean that we have to "resort" to that type of racing, and we still believe the Thistle to be the best boat under 20 feet in length.

Our team will be made up largely of boats from the Chesapeake Bay fleets. They will be busy with the President's Cup Regatta on September 23rd and 24th, but I believe that any week-end thereafter will be acceptable. We suggest a series of 3 races, in the hope of finding a variety of weather conditions, and would think it desirable that team racing tactics be used. I think it only fair to advise that our team will be made up of some of the best boats in the Thistle Class.

Inasmuch as you have sent a copy of your challenge to Bill Robinson, Yachting Editor of the Newark Evening News, for publication, and in view of the national interest which will be aroused by such an event, we are sending copies of the challenge and of our reply to *Yachting* and *Motor Boating*, as well as to Mr. Robinson. Yes, we agree with you that it's about time for the Thistle to be put in her proper place.

Looking forward to the racing, I am
Very truly yours,
(Signed) Gordon K. Douglass

The battle lines were drawn on Saturday, September 30th, under the auspices of the Lavellette (N.J.) Yacht Club, between seven-boat teams of Thistles and Lightnings. Perhaps unfortunately for the Lightnings, Dave Shay was in the hospital at that time, with pneumonia, and the results of racing couldn't have been exactly the best recuperative medicine for him. Two races were held in about an 8-knot breeze (a velocity, incidentally, which could hardly have exploited the Thistle's planing or ghosting abilities); Jack Smith and Frank Marquardt came in 1-2 in both races. Billy Heintz took third in the opener, and Sandy third in the second race. In the first race Sandy went back to help Bill Elmer, got in a luffing match with the first Lightning, and they finished in a dead heat. Final score: Thistles 151 1/2 points. Lightnings 58 1/2 points. (At this stage, a third race was not considered necessary). *The Bagpipe* commentary from Frank Greenman stated that "Frankly, the competition afforded by the Lightnings was not brilliant." This aroused the dander of one of the Lightning skippers, Harry Sindle, who subsequently bought and campaigned his Thistle *Vim. II* for several seasons, demonstrating in the process

that, whatever the merits of the boats, he was one crackerjack skipper!

The results of this affair silenced comment from that quarter for the moment. However, "there's never a horse what can't be rode, there's never a rider what can't be throw'd". The one thing about a rule, as our ocean-racing friends know only too well, is that the name of the game inevitably is: Build a Rule-Beater! Since Sandy's 'rule' was relatively simple, it was not particularly hard to design to. Thus, whether in an effort merely to knock off the "top gun" or whether inspired by the notion that this was the proper approach to the whole matter of yacht design is not known, but in any event the challenge was finally picked up. A new boat from Texas — Jay Bludworth's *Rebel 22* — came up to take on the thus-far undisputed trailer-to-trailer queen. This craft turned out to be a sort of Star-boat type with a centerboard, and the promoters did not come to lose! Exhibiting a fantastic set-up not only for launching but for rigging the boat as well, they had the boat in the water and under sail before the *Thistle* even was off the trailer! The race was won right then and there.

Sandy took his defeat like a gentleman, publicly doffed his hat to the victors in his advertising and then, his original point having long since been made, turned to other means of extolling the *Thistle*'s manifold charms. Curiously, although the *Rebel 22* subsequently showed up to advantage in the next One-of-a-Kind series also, she never became popular, and today there can't be more than a handful of them still active.

It was inevitable, though, that in the period covering the late 40's and early 50's, other designers would hop aboard the planing-hull concept. The *Raven* made quite a splash at Larchmont, her long waterline length and tremendous spread of canvas making her very powerful and quite fast — at times she did beat the *Thistle*. The door was open by now, and new boats began to pop up all over, some good, some atrocious.

Dick Brainard, with his new *Br'er Fox* (545), beat out John Hartung's *Love Her* in the 1951 Larchmont Race Week, with 20 boats attending, and Herm Hanson came out on top of a 25-boat field in the Lake Erie District Championships at Mentor, ahead of Carl Barnett. At the Inter-Lake Y.A. Regatta there were 24 racing, and

here Howard Boston bested Harry Spangenberg (yes, both these men could sail!). Brainard also took the L.I. Sound District Championship, beating out Hugh Johnson in *Malolo* and John Hartung in that order. Johnson's sister-in-law, Tiny Duys, was still up there in 4th place out of 16 boats. And there were 20 racing at Canandaigua in the Niagara Frontier District Championships, again won by Frank LeBoutillier by a quarter-point margin over Don Beverage in *Duggan's Dew*; George Bridgman was third, terrific performance for a skipper in his late 60's!!

The Marquardts had designated the Miles River Y.C., St. Michaels, Md. as the site for the 1951 Nationals. For those who liked lots of wind this was a capital choice, for it blew hard on this occasion. Prominent among the entries was Harry Sindle, who made his presence known with a fourth place in the final standings. Individual race winners were George Collins (twice) of the Potomac, Sandy, Dick Gibbs, and Hendricksen. Sandy put two 4ths, a 2nd and a 10th together with his second-race victory to maintain control all through the regatta and win by $9\frac{1}{2}$ points over the Marquardts, who demonstrated in turn that they were not merely light-air sailors. Hendricksen, however, was only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a point astern of them; that hardware was starting to pile up in the Hendricksen household, and it seemed only a question of time 'til he took home the national championship . . .

New officers for the forthcoming year were elected: Ed Hanna, President; Harry Spangenberg, 1st Vice-President; Ron Small, 2nd Vice-President; Bob Adams, Secretary-Treasurer; and Carl Barnett, Chief Measurer. At the same time the Association adopted a motion that the defending past champion be eligible to compete in National Championship regattas without further qualification.