

A History of the United States Power Squadrons ®

The story of the United States Power Squadrons began in Boston in the early 1900's. Most recreational boating was confined to sailing craft and a few larger steam yachts generally manned by professional crews. Yacht clubs taught and promoted the spirit of sailing and had little to offer owners of the new gasoline powered vessels.

A self-taught navigator named Roger Upton persuaded his colleagues at the Boston Yacht Club to allow him to organize a club within the club for the "gasoliners." Upton was elected rear commodore in 1912 and placed in charge of the unofficial power boat division of the fleet. He kept the division's 36 members busy with studies, cruises, races and drills modeled after naval maneuvers so that they would be of possible use to the U.S. Navy in time of war.

The power boat division's quest for recognition received a boost that summer when 20 power yachts accompanied the sailing yachts on their annual cruise to Portland, Maine. During the cruise a screeching nor'wester dismasted or disabled many of the sailing yachts. Under Upton's command the power yachts towed all disabled sailing yachts safely to port. *Motor Boating Magazine* reported in a six-page photo story, "The fellows of the Powerboat Division provided meritorious service and emerged from the ordeal crowned with glory."

In January 1913 the executive committee of the Boston Yacht Club voted to officially establish the power boat division and named it "Power Squadron." Squadron members were required to pass an examination of advanced piloting subjects in order to join and fly the new squadron pennant above the yacht club pennant.

The power squadron idea grew, and in February 1914 representatives of many yacht clubs met at the New York Yacht Club to join together in a national organization to be known as the United States Power Squadrons. Two months later the Governing Board approved the bylaws, divided the Atlantic Seaboard into six districts, and appointed

boards of instruction and examination. Members were required to participate in at least three on-the-water drills yearly in addition to knowing the rules of the road, the compass, buoys, chart bearings, etc. In March 1915 the present USPS flag was adopted.

The squadrons grew and the educational program was developed to keep pace. On-the-water drill requirements became subordinate to courses of study which included Navigation by 1917. One of the principal objects of the squadrons was to be of service to the Navy in time of emergency. So as World War I approached, Charles F. Chapman approached Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt volunteering the entire USPS instructional program to train men for naval coastal defense. Secretary Roosevelt accepted and local squadrons organized schools which trained over 5,000 men who entered the armed services. Squadron members used their nautical education to serve the U.S. in many capacities during World War I.

Interest in both yachting and the squadron ebbed following the war. Many yacht clubs went out of business. In 1919 the squadrons had dwindling membership, were \$450.00 in debt and its leaders considered disbanding. Vice Commander A. B. Bennett believed the squadrons could be revived and he proposed three changes to the constitution: (1) making membership in the national organization primary and local squadron membership secondary; (2) eliminating all boat drills and maneuvers; and (3) eliminating membership in a yacht club as a requirement for membership. Elected to Chief Commander in 1920, Bennett worked tirelessly to invigorate the membership and education program and at the end of four years there were over 400 members, \$400 in the treasury and no debt.

The advanced grade program was established in 1932 with the introduction of Advanced Piloting. By 1938 there were 4,406 members and the Governing Board established seven divisions, later changed to districts. The U.S. Power Squadrons celebrated their 25th anniversary with a dinner-dance at New York's Hotel Astor. President Roosevelt sent a letter of congratulations and, later that year, accepted honorary membership in USPS.

Less than 24 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 Vice Commander William Sayers sent a telegram to President Roosevelt and to the Secretary of the Navy offering USPS support for America's war effort. For the second time in 24 years, President Roosevelt accepted this support with appreciation. During World War II over 3,000 USPS members entered the armed forces. USPS developed courses in first aid, signaling, motor mechanics, air navigation, weather, seamanship and instruction techniques. Classes provided instruction for both service personnel and civilians. Thousands of squadron members served with the Red Cross, Merchant Marine and other war-related services.

USPS grew rapidly after World War II. Recreational boating was booming. That growth required paid staff, office space and changes in administration and organization. The first USPS office was a three-room apartment in Englewood, New Jersey. By 1974 USPS membership had grown to more than 70,000 in 425 squadrons. The next year the Governing Board voted to move squadron headquarters from New Jersey to Raleigh, North Carolina. Construction on a modern office and warehouse began in 1978. Today it includes a library and up-to-date computer system to handle all requirements of USPS, including membership and inventory control.

By 1982 the Governing Board recognized that boating was a family-oriented activity and changed the constitution and bylaws to permit women and other family members to become active members. By 1995 women made up 27% of USPS membership. Boating Safety, a program for youngsters ages 10–16, was launched in partnership with U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

In the following decades, education continued to drive USPS's mission and success. Public courses included the Squadron Boating Course, Boat Smart and Chart Smart. Advanced and elective courses included: Seamanship, Piloting, Advanced Piloting, Junior Navigation, Navigation, Weather, Cruise Planning, Sail, Engine Maintenance, and Marine Electronics. Other courses were developed: Skipper Saver, USPS Video Boating Course, Instructor Development, Leadership Development and Operations Training.

New services were offered to members. A marine insurance program offered comprehensive coverage with discounts for educational achievements. A no fee credit card with cash-back incentives which benefit local squadrons was made available. A Port Captains Program developed a network of experienced boaters who could provide local knowledge to squadron members traveling in unfamiliar waters.

Financial benefits of USPS membership grew. BoatU.S. offered U.S. Power Squadrons members discounts for membership, towing services and other important services. USPS members also received discounts for airline travel and automobile rentals.

New times called for new ways of doing things. During the 1990's the constitution and bylaws were streamlined into new USPS Bylaws. USPS updated the pledge. Squadrons were offered the option of adding "Sail and" to their squadron name to more accurately reflect their members' interests.

USPS members worked with NOAA to keep nautical charts up to date through a Cooperative Charting Program. Some squadrons took responsibility for specific charts and received credit on the chart.

The United States Power Squadrons and United States Coast Guard Auxiliary partnered to educate outside the classroom and developed the computer-based America's Boating Course. USPS members were trained to perform vessel safety checks in cooperation with USCGA.

Change is the one constant in the life of the United States Power Squadrons but the mission remains the same: to promote safe boating through education. USPS's 60,000 members in 450 squadrons are dedicated to that mission.

Source: USPS Operations Manual 2005
USPS web site