

# *Selected History of Rowing*

c/o National Rowing Foundation

References to Springfield, MA involvement are highlighted with an outlined box

***B.C.*** • Oared vessels were used for transport, commerce, fishing, life-saving and war, but, while there are references in classical texts to boat racing, rowing primarily for exercise, recreation or competition was not common before 1800.

***1274*** • The first reference to a "regata" appeared in Venetian documentation; Venice's dependence on water transport provided a natural venue for the evolution of medieval and Renaissance water festivals. By 1315, the Venetian regata included boat races among other forms of aquatic display and entertainment.

***1454*** • The first Lord Mayor's water procession was held in London, which was to grow to include numerous magnificent guild barges, and to continue for over four centuries, until 1856. The colorful annual event, with its pomp and ceremony and liveried watermen, undoubtedly contributed to the interest taken by Eton boys in aquatic activities and to the initiation at Eton in 1793 of the Procession of the Boats.

***1822*** • The earliest team rowing print shows a boat race at Oxford.

***1823*** • The Knickerbocker Club became the first boat club to be organized in the United States.

***1827*** • The first college boat club was organized at Cambridge University, and the first recorded contest among the Cambridge college boat clubs for Head of the River was won by Trinity.

***1829*** • In their first contest, Oxford defeated Cambridge in eight oared cutters before 20,000 spectators at Henley-on-Thames, England (June 10), where the river offers about a mile and a quarter of straight course. Ultimately known simply as the Boat Race, this fixture of the British sports scene and summer social calendar moved to the Tideway for the second contest, in 1836, where it has been an annual event, with few exceptions, each March or April since 1839.

***1839*** • The first Henley Regatta was held, establishing the "Henley" distance of about a mile and a quarter as the principal alternative to the four mile "classic" distance. The Regatta received Royal sponsorship in 1851.

***1844*** • A racing single with outriggers and an inboard keel made its appearance on the Thames [Dodd].

**1852** • Harvard defeated Yale in an eights race on Lake Winnepesaukee in the first intercollegiate athletic contest in the United States (August 3). The success of the race led to another meeting, three years later (1855), on the Connecticut River in Springfield, Massachusetts, and eventually to the establishment of what is now known as the annual Harvard-Yale Boat Race. This boat race has been held annually, with few exceptions, since 1864 and on the Thames River at New London, Connecticut since 1878.

**1858** • Brown, Harvard, Trinity and Yale boat clubs planned the first inter-collegiate regatta, to be held using six-oared boats in Springfield, MA, but it was canceled after the Yale stroke drowned.

**1871** • Amherst, Brown, Bowdoin and Harvard formed the Rowing Association of American Colleges. Massachusetts Agricultural College defeated Harvard and Brown on July 21 in a three mile race for six-oared crews on the Connecticut River near Springfield, MA. (the victorious shell is now at Mystic Seaport).

**1873** • In June, a group of Columbia oarsmen raced against crews of other colleges and universities on the Connecticut River in Springfield, MA. This marked the beginning of intercollegiate rowing at Columbia.

**1920** • The Antwerp Olympics, during which the rowing events were contested in Brussels, featured wins by Jack Kelly in the single and (with Paul Costello) double, a Navy win in the eight, and a silver in the coxed-four. The eights title began a run of U.S. victories in that event that lasted until another U.S. Naval Academy eight lost in Rome in 1960 (Yale won in 1924 and 1956, Cal-Berkeley in 1928, 1932 and 1948, Washington in 1936, and Navy in 1952), marking a domination of one Olympic rowing event by one country that has not since been equaled.

**1965** • The first Head of the Charles was held in Cambridge/Boston, Massachusetts, and has since grown to be the biggest regatta in the U.S.

**1977** • The Dreissigackers began production of light, durable composite material oars [Miller].

**1981** • The Concept II erg was put on the market; the institution of the first CRASH-B Sprints at Harvard's Newell Boathouse on January 20, 1982 gave meaning to winter training, and additional selection criteria to coaches [Miller].

**2000** • The amazing Steve Redgrave commanded huge media coverage rowing in the British coxless-four and winning his fifth Olympic Gold Medal in five consecutive Olympics, an accomplishment never before achieved in any endurance sport.