



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

“Read all about it!”

The origins and early history of the Squadron – as reported in the Press of the day

Part 3: A grand opening race!

Saturday, 14th November, 1863 – Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Chronicle

SYDNEY SPORTING NEWS

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)

Sydney, 6th November.

Dear Bell — The long-promised opening trip of the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron took place on last Saturday. A finer day could not have been chosen though special arrangements had been made with the clerk of the weather office. The rendezvous was Farm Cove and long before the appointed hour (eleven o'clock), Commodore Walker's noble yacht, Chance, was at her station, and soon after the Zarifa, Era, Chance, Annie Ogle, Mischief, Scud, Ida, Mazeppa and Why Not, put in an appearance. A stiff breeze was blowing from W. to N. W., and the smaller craft, looking out for squalls, judiciously took in a reef, and, at a signal from the flag-ship, got under weigh in two squadrons — one led by the Era, the other by the Zarifa — their destination being Manly Beach. As they rounded Bradley's Head, accompanied by a fleet of outsiders, they presented a splendid appearance, and, after several evolutions by the fleet, Manly was reached and the signal for anchoring promptly responded to. Each yacht had a fair freight of jolly sea dogs, who, in splicing the main brace and doing justice to the steward, acquitted themselves admirably, and no doubt would have continued to do so, had not some strips of bunting, displayed by the commodore, given warning that it was 'time for us to go.' 'Up anchor, ahoy!' was now the order, and all are homeward bound in the same position as they started in the morning. Being under sailing orders, very little opportunity offered for the yachts to display their capabilities. This being the maiden trip of the Zarifa she was, of course, the observed of all observers, and, notwithstanding the anticipations which have been formed of her wonderful speed, I imagine she will disappoint them all. She is remarkably stiff under canvas, is a fine, roomy boat, but a flyer she is not, nor ever will be, and in her match with the Chance, which comes off in the beginning of January, it is Lombard street to a China orange; it is, however, only fair to mention that on Saturday she appeared to disadvantage, not being coppered, nor rigging being newly bent, and her sails apparently too small.

I believe that, in company with the Peri, she goes to sea today for a cruise to the northward. The Chance also leaves for a cruise along the southern coast during the ensuing week, taking a select party to do justice to her hospitable owner.

Notes:

- In 1863, Farm Cove was the meeting place for all events. This was almost 70 years before the Harbour Bridge was opened and 40 years before the Club was based at Kirribilli.
- Evolutions entailed a series of manoeuvres all directed by flags usually from the Commodore's vessel, in this case, "Chance".
- Communication by flags between vessels was, of course, the only means of communication – the VHF radio of 1863 – a nod towards maritime operations and warfare.
- The prediction about the speed potential of the "Xarifa" was woefully wrong. She became one of the most celebrated racers of the decade.



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- The reference to her “not being coppered” is that she was not antifouled. A copper painted bottom was the norm right up until the 1980 when finally environmental concerns stopped it.
- Note the names of many of the vessels. The Club has used these names on their work vessels in the last 30 years – Scud, Ida, Why Not etc

Stay tuned next week for another instalment...