

## **Regatta Week**

Nothing is quite as exciting as being part of the crowd at a Super Bowl or the Olympics. That excitement must have been experienced by lake dwellers in July, 1874 when the “Great Intercollegiate Regatta” came to our community. Nine colleges – Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Wesleyan, Dartmouth, Williams, Cornell, Trinity and Princeton all entered six man shells. While each school brought their own fans to the area, most interest (especially betting interest) centered on the fierce Harvard –Yale rivalry. In a race five years earlier, Yale had beaten the boys from Harvard but were charged with unsportsmanlike conduct and disqualified. Bad blood existed between these two prestigious members of the Ivy League.

Viewed by over 25,000 people, the event caused The New York Times to state “We can scarcely remember an event not involving a war, or some vast issue in politics, which has occasioned so much excitement.” The interest was so great that John Morrissey, owner of the Saratoga Race Course, declared “There will be no horse racing during Regatta Week”.

The course was a three mile straightaway starting near Snake Hill and running due north. A grandstand was constructed near the finish line and “farm wagons, brick carts- in fact, every species of vehicle going on four wheels” were hired to provide rides from the fashionable hotels in the city. It was rumored that some local farmers were charging as much as \$50 for their carriage and team. Race fever was fed by the large sums wagered on the outcome.

Originally scheduled for Thursday July 16, the race was postponed twice due to rough waters. When it finally went off on Saturday morning, the crowd was much diminished due to social conflicts or lost of interest. Among those who missed the race because of a conflict was President U.S. Grant and his wife Julia who spent the day visiting the Methodist Camp Meeting at Round Lake.

So who won? Was it the favored Yale team or their arch rival Harvard? Neither. The team from Columbia was the winner with Harvard placing third and Yale embarrassingly last. The regatta was run in Saratoga again in 1875, but moved away in 1876 and never again captured the imagination of the sporting world.

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