

*20 Years with*

THE CLEARWATER OPTIMIST CLUB

# PRAM FLEET



THE OPTIMIST PRAM



HEADING FOR MARK #2

**1948**  
TO  
**1968**



PART OF "A" FLEET AND SOME WELL EARNED TROPHIES



# Optimist Club of Clearwater

P. O. BOX 1031

CLEARWATER, FLORIDA



Dear Friends:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many friends of the Optimist Pram Fleet for making this book possible.

I feel that our Pram Fleet is a very worthwhile project. It gives many hours of recreation as well as teaching the children to work with others, think ahead, learn to obey rules and do things in a shipshape manner. In many cases, sailing becomes a life-long hobby.

It is hoped that our Pram Fleet, which was started twenty years ago by a small group of men and has become an integral part of the community will continue to grow and benefit the future generations.

Once again the Optimist Club of Clearwater thanks all of those who have contributed to the Pram Fleet by advertising in this year book.

Sincerely,

*Theodore F. Wilcox*

Theodore F. Wilcox  
President

TW:l

*Home of Optimist Class Pram International Racing Association*

# A Man Never Stands So Tall As When He Stoops To Help A Boy

## THE OPTIMIST CREED

### PROMISE YOURSELF

To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.

To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet.

To make all your friends feel that there is something in them.

To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.

To think only of the best, to work only for the best and expect only the best.

To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.

To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.

To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile.

To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others.

To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.

Optimist International



MARK LAPHAM — A BOY WITH  
A BOAT AND A SMILE

A wet sheet and a flowing sea,  
A wind that follows fast,  
And fills the white and rustling sail,  
And bends the gallant mast.

-- Allan Cunningham  
(1784-1842)





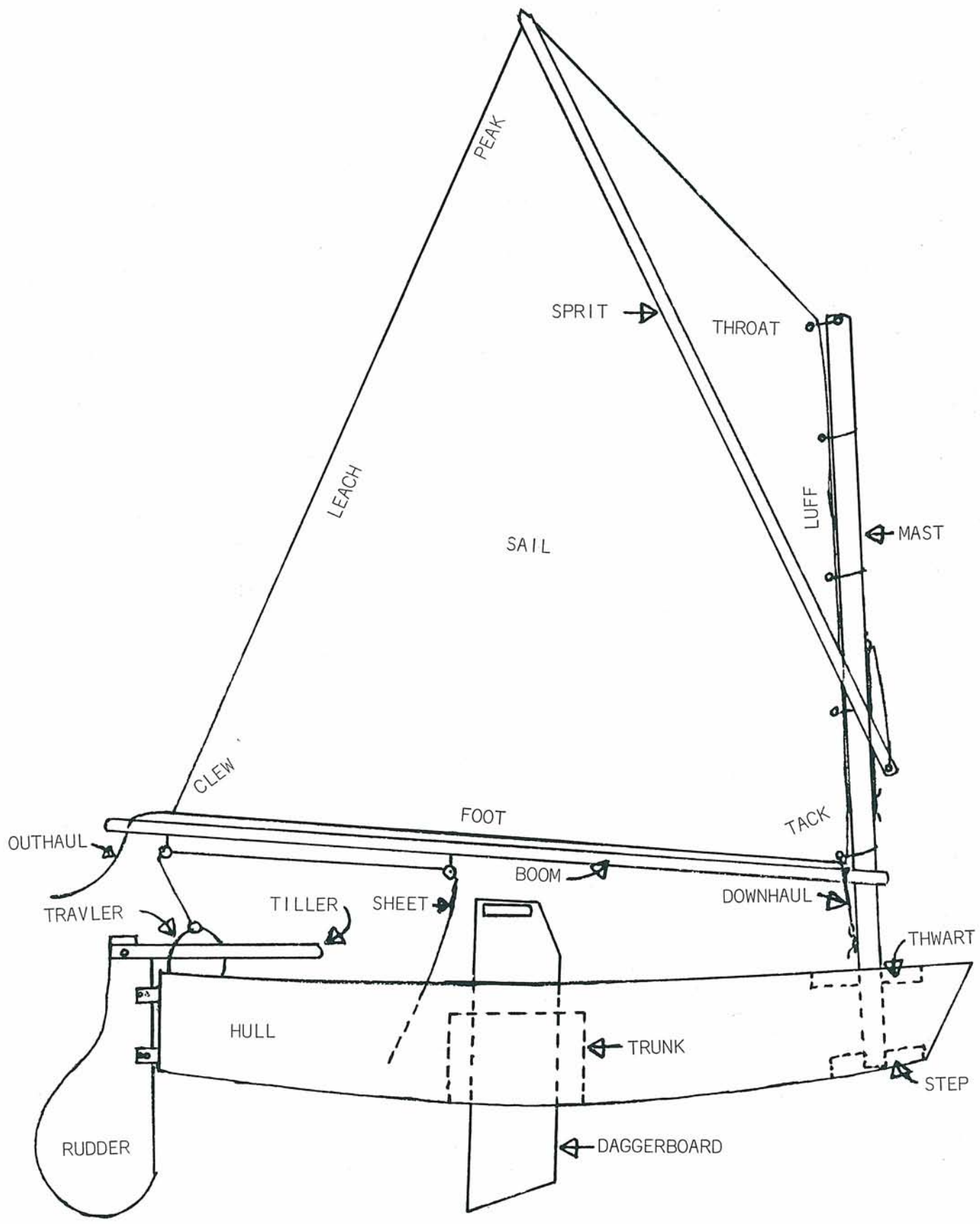
From left to right: Clark Mills, Major McKay, Ernie Green — the three wonderful guys who deserve all the credit for making the Optimist Class Pram Sailing Program a reality.



The very first Optimist Pram on the day it was launched with Skipper Clifford McKay, Jr., at the tiller.

Besides the three men pictured, we certainly wish to acknowledge the efforts and countless hundreds of hours put forth by these and many other men . . .

HIL MORRIS	DR. GEORGE CARLTON
HARRY NAYLOR	ED ERGMAN
PAUL RETTIG	JOE FLAHERTY
WALLACE SKINNER	TOMMY GRAHAM
FRED WALBOLT	HOWARD HARTLEY
	BEN MAGREW



OPTIMIST PRAM

*Note: In 1968 the Optimist Club of Clearwater, Florida sold advertisements in The Clearwater Pram Fleet Story – 1948 – 1968 as a fundraiser for fleet refurbishment. The following document has been exactly retyped from the original material, with the exception that paragraph headings have been added.*

## **THE CLEARWATER PRAM FLEET STORY -- 1948 – 1968**

### *1947 - A Boat Instead of an Orange Crate*

In mid-August of 1947 the last race of the “Orange Crate Derby” had been run and the winner had been declared. This competition was a Clearwater version of the nationally known “Soapbox Derby” and was sponsored by the Clearwater Optimist Club. Ed Erdman, then president of the club, and other club members felt that a more ambitious project, which would permit service to youth more than one day a year, was in order.

By chance – Major Clifford McKay was asked to speak to the club on the subject of “Juvenile Delinquency.” Also by chance – the Major’s son had taken part in that “Orange Crate Derby” and – like the Optimist Club, the Major had given some thought to having a year-round activity to replace that once a year coast-down-the-hill event. During his talk he suggested that any boys and girls who were out on Clearwater Bay in a small sailboat weren’t likely to become juvenile delinquents.

Major McKay had earlier made this observation to local boat builder Clark Mills. The timing was perfect – Clark had some ideas along this line too and within a few days they had worked out the design and built that first Pram.

Optimist Ernie Green had been promoting the idea of a WATERBORNE “Orange Crate Derby” using small boats activated by paddles. Clark’s small sailboat proved the answer to the design problem and when the offer was made, the Optimist Club gratefully accepted the plans. The Club quickly voted on using the Pram for their youth project and so was born the OPTIMIST CLASS PRAM.

Action was taken to immediately copyright the plans, with the Optimist Club and Major McKay putting forth their efforts to promote the class. Local merchants were approached to sponsor a fleet. In return for paying the \$75 purchase price for a boat (we wish they were only \$75 today) a merchant and his trade name were placed on the sides of the hull as an advertising medium.

#### *1947-48 Pram Fleets Are Started Throughout Florida*

Soon a fleet of 29 boats were sailing on Clearwater Bay and the Optimist Club found themselves with a youth project that was workable every weekend the year around. Ernie Green and Ben Magrew were named co-chairmen of the project and took great delight in staging races and supervising the young skippers.

Word of the fleet spread rapidly. The nearby town of Dunedin started a similar fleet, and others soon followed suit. Major McKay traveled around the state of Florida extolling the benefits any community would gain by providing their youth with a fleet of Optimist Prams. Ernie Green frequently loaded part of the fleet into one of his moving vans and transported them to neighboring towns where the Clearwater skippers put on demonstration races for interested parents and potential fleet sponsors. As a finale – the Clearwater skippers invited the new prospects to accompany them as passengers for the last turn around the race course – it's no wonder there were soon over twenty fleets in Florida alone.

#### *1949 - The Clearwater Fleet Burns and is Rebuilt*

In one of the biggest demonstrations of public sentiment ever seen in Clearwater, 42 new Prams joined the Optimist Pram Fleet in a launching ceremony on July 2, 1949. Had it not been for a disastrous fire in April which wiped out the original fleet, this wouldn't have happened. Of the original fleet of 29 boats – 9 were saved from the flames that leveled the Sea Scout Base where they had been stored. The ashes had hardly cooled when announcer Howard Hartley launched an appeal over local radio station WTAN.

All the Optimist Club wanted to do was replace the destroyed fleet, but when the avalanche finally stopped, the wonderful people of



Clearwater had responded with donations to replace the 20 boats and add 22 more. (These and the nine boats saved from the fire totaled 51 boats – the number still maintained as the Optimist Club Fleet.)

In fact – the response in cash and building materials helped the City to build the present Maritime Youth Center.

The contributors to this rebuilding of the fleet were many and included names still well known in the Clearwater business community – The Pelican Restaurant, Palm Pavilion, Seavy Lumber, Clearwater Beach Hotel, St. Petersburg Independent, Clearwater Sun, Bruce Taylor, The Letter Shop, WTAN, and many, many others who joined the Optimist Club in being “A FRIEND TO THE BOY”.

*Ernie Green – Fleet Commodore*

Any story that chronicles the years that followed this rebirth of the Clearwater Optimist Pram fleet must dwell on the role that Ernie Green played. Certainly many other Optimist Club members and skippers’ parents helped, but it was Ernie Green who was out there on the seawall every Sunday afternoon for over 14 years.

It was Ernie Green telling them how—  
It was Ernie Green painting the boats—  
It was Ernie Green starting the races—  
It was Ernie Green mending a sail—  
It was Ernie Green nursing a scratch or bruise—  
It was Ernie Green with a cheer for the loser—

The youngsters of Clearwater—and the rest of us too—are indeed indebted to Ernie Green—the permanent “Commodore” of the Clearwater fleet.

*A Sport with a Purpose*

During these formative years the operational plan for the fleet developed—how often to sail—the training program—safety—supervision and above all the purpose and genuine philosophy of the program was established.



The Pram Fleet is unique as a youth activity in that it is a year round program. Unique too is the fact that boys and girls compete as equals and ask any boy in the fleet—the girls can be rugged competition. Seldom can a nine year old youngster compete with a fourteen year old in sports but with Pram sailing the lightweight of the younger skipper can help him keep “mast abeam” of the smarter but heavier 14 year old.

Through this medium many young skippers find identity for themselves in their community and with their peers. The little fellow who didn’t quite make the baseball team may really shine at the tiller of his own sailboat—he’ll learn good sportsmanship and benefit from the discipline of living by the rules in a self-policing sport.

The program may well provide a common bond for lasting friendships as the youngsters compete with skippers from other communities and other walks of life. It builds character in our youth by providing healthful recreation under proper supervision. Besides teaching the basics of sailing, it will hopefully the start of a pleasurable lifetime recreation for many of the participants.

How can we measure the benefits of a program with furnishes such great opportunities for father and son (or daughter) get-togethers. Maybe to varnish a hull or to discuss sailing tactics. And frequently it is the youngster who is the expert.

Barring inclement weather—the Prams sail every Sunday afternoon. The vari-colored hulls and vari-colored sails of these mini-boats make a striking sight as they dart over the waters of Clearwater Bay.

The beginners have had basic instructions at “Ground School” using model sailboats on a magnetic board. They can be seen close to the beach and within hailing distance of the instructor. The rest of the skippers are divided into “A” fleet and “B” fleet with the “A” fleet skippers being those with the most experience.

The Race Committee Boat—manned by Optimist Club members—sets out marker buoys for two separate race courses. Each fleet—with separate starts—has a three race series to determine their own first, second and third place ribbon winners. This means that six

ribbons are awarded every week. The committee boat is on hand to give a word of advice to the stragglers and to haul in the occasional wet and chagrined skipper who has capsized. Life jackets or ski belts are a must and are furnished by the skipper.

There are more than twenty active Pram fleets in Florida, and each of them try to host one or more regattas each year. All the other fleets are invited—friendships are renewed and past rivals are sized up in hopes that they have grown taller and heavier since the last regatta. The Prams are transported by trailer, car topped and even stuffed in car trunks as they crisscross some part of the state nearly every weekend.

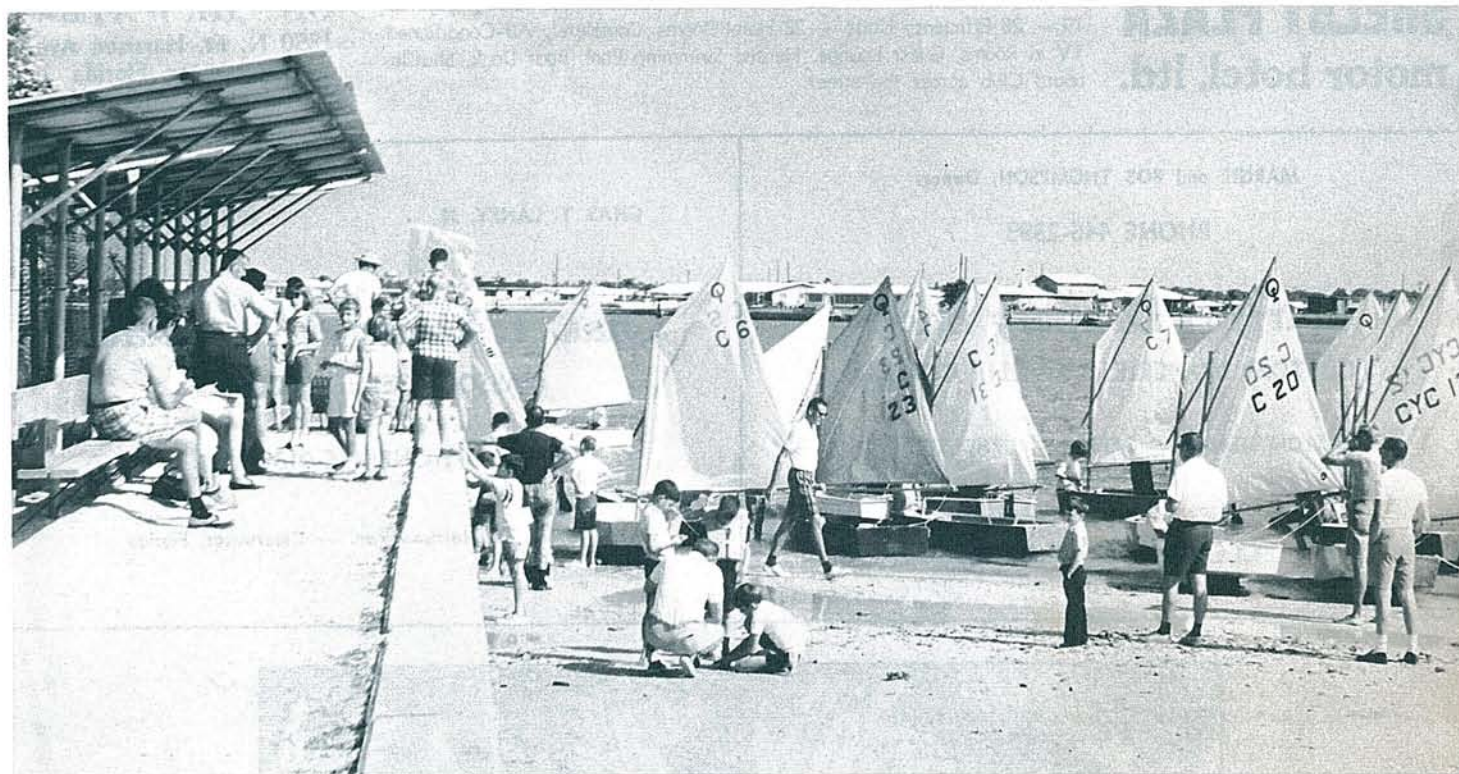
The two major regattas each year are the International, which is held every March in Clearwater, and the Florida State Pram Championship, which alternates from an East Coast host fleet to a West Coast host fleet each year. Stimuli for stiff competitive sailing is provided at regattas by an array of handsome trophies for individual skippers and massive-if-not-handsome team trophies.

*The Optimist Class Pram International Racing Association*

Racing, rather than just day-sailing, is emphasized in the Pram program. Experience has shown that this provides the most interest for the skippers and that the character building aspects are better realized when competition is involved. The organization which governs racing in the class is known as the OPTIMIST CLASS PRAM INTERNATIONAL RACING ASSOCIATION.

The OCPIRA is provided continuity by the Clearwater Optimist Club. A fleet charter is obtainable upon approval by the Clearwater Club and payment of a \$10 annual fee. Fleets must have a minimum of five boats and are entitled to participate in all regattas sanctioned by the parent organization. Information is sent free of charge and frequently ten or twelve letters a week are routed to the Optimist Club. Plans for the Pram are sold for \$5.00 per set. For information or plans write—

THE CLEARWATER OPTIMIST CLUB  
BOX -----

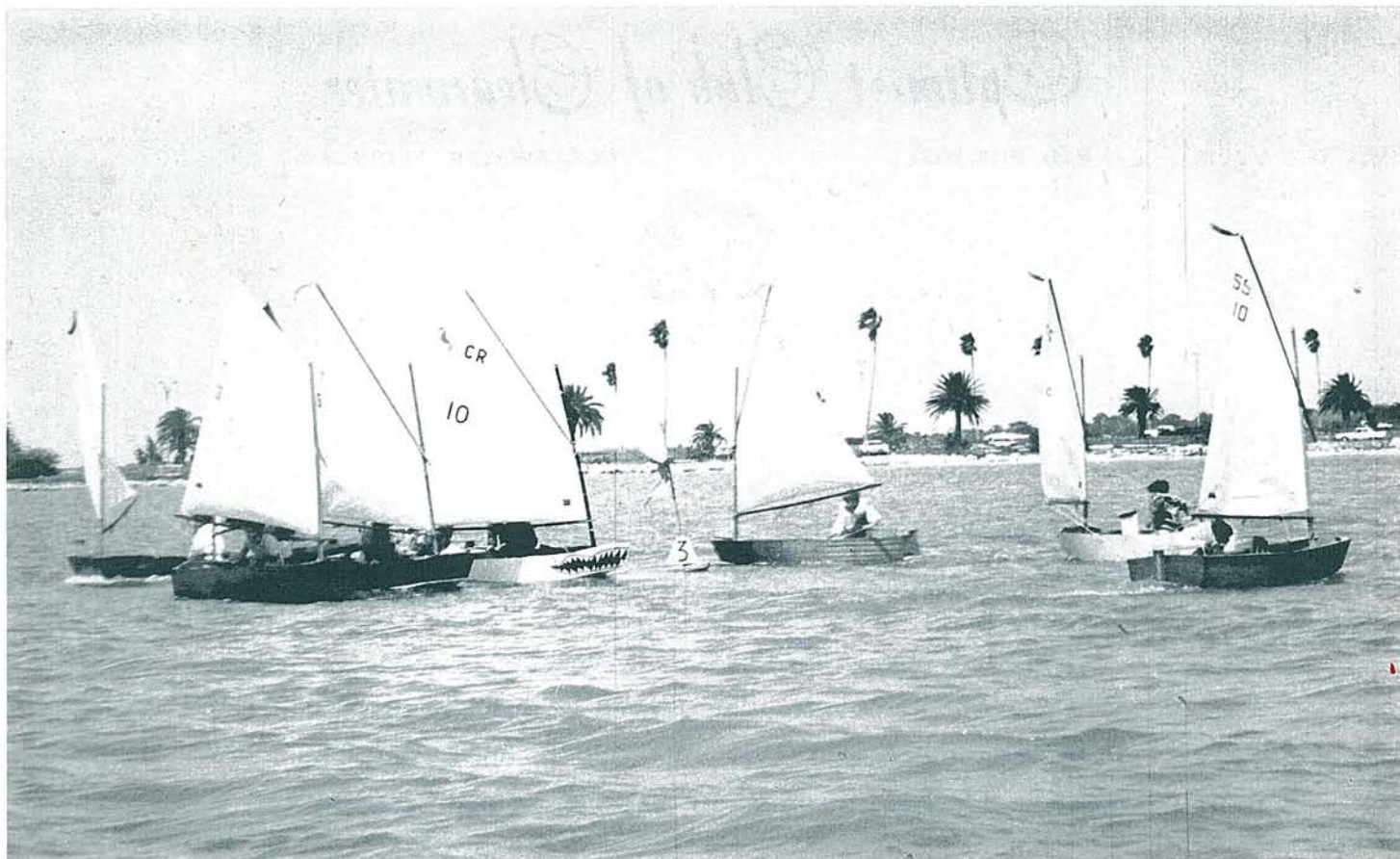


ON THE BEACH — and waiting for the Skippers Meeting that precedes each race.  
The course and any special instructions are given to the Skippers at this time.



PART OF OUR FLEET HEADING NORTH ON CLEARWATER BAY





THE ACTION AT MARK #3 — 1967 INTERNATIONALS



THE PRESENT PRAM COMMITTEE OF THE CLEARWATER OPTIMIST CLUB  
DALE LAPHAM — STAN MITCHELL — BOB PULLING — TEDO WILCOX

---



"B" FLEET AT THE TROPHY TABLE

---



## OPTIMIST PRAM + CLARKIE MILLS = WINDMILL



Daysailing or racing, the Windmill sloop means fun and excitement for every member of the family . . . A fast, high performance planing boat, yet she's easily handled by sailors of all ages and experience.

Designed in the early '50's by Clarkie Mills, of Optimist Pram fame, the Windmill Class has stood the test of time, and as a result of the WCA's constant and energetic promotion of the sport of sailing, the Class now numbers well over 2500 boats . . . and recent adoption of fiberglass for construction of the Windmill has added new growth impetus.

Many of us at Morgan Yacht Corporation have been interested in and followed closely the growth and activities of the Windmill Class for years; and now that adoption of fiberglass for construction is a reality . . . we are happy to be among the first to offer Windmill in molded fiberglass.

WRITE OR CALL TODAY FOR FULL DETAILS, PRICES AND SPECIFICATIONS



**M M M M M**  
**24 30 34 41 45**

2501 - 72nd ST. NO., ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA  
TELEPHONE 813/345-0115



**MORGAN**  
**YACHT**  
CORPORATION