

Miami Beach Rod and Reel Club

HISTORY IN THE MAKING 1929—NOW



Back in 1929 eight South Florida anglers met at the Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce to talk about organizing a fishing club. From these eight men grew the famed Rod & Reel Club of Miami Beach.

Did they expect it would last and still be going strong in the year 2004? Probably not.

Could they have foreseen on that day in 1929 that the fishing club they envisioned would have a historic clubhouse on Hibiscus Island? Debatable.



The club's exterior used to feature matching turrets and a retractable roof that opened up to the starlit sky for ball-room dancing. Circa 1934

Did they really expect it to last through the stock market crash and Great Depression? Doubtful.

But last it did and in 1934 three developments occurred. One was the purchase of the ideal clubhouse on Hibiscus Island, a posh tropical paradise located in the middle of Biscayne Bay - equidistant from downtown Miami and Miami Beach. It was a grand dame of a clubhouse. Formerly called the Club Lido, the building was a sight to see back then. It was a gigantic, two-story, turreted, Mediterranean fortress with copper domes and four massive pillars beside the impressive entrance. It was even rumored to have played host to legendary mobster Al Capone during his days in Miami.

The center of the building was the Starlight Room with a mechanical roof that rolled open exposing the dance floor to the stars—it was a

magnificent feature creating a breeze that was welcome on the warm, humid South Florida nights. Outside, the scene was one of swaying palms rustling in the bay breeze as the smell of night blooming jasmine wafted through the air on the tradewinds.

In 1931 the club issued its first magazine—a newsletter really—called the *Tips and Butt*. Edison Kipp was the editor and the publication contained eight pages of multigrafted copy with a cover illustration of a leaping sailfish.

According to an article printed by Erl Roman, former Outdoors Editor of the Miami Herald, Kipp declared that he 'planned to make it a magazine chock full of news—shocking preferred. Right or wrong, sublime or ridiculous, dignified or scalawag. Such shall be our style and custom.'

Three issues of *Tips and Butt* saw the light of day, garnering heavy criticism from the membership. In May 1931 the name was changed to The Tackler, and it has appeared nearly weekly ever since—with much less uproar.

The club eventually incorporated, adopted by-laws and started working on developing the most stringent tackle regulations ever created—eventually forming the basis for the International Game Fish Association—not surprising since several of the IGFA's founders and directors were members of the Rod & Reel Club.

In 1934 membership was limited to 400. In 1935 the club was going strong and Henry H. "Hy" Hyman, a manager for the Miami Electric Company, later to become Florida Power and Light, got an idea for a tournament to help promote fishing and tourism in Miami. He knew the best place to get his proposed tournament off the ground was at the Rod and Reel.

It is affectionately thought that club members

sat around the bar, tipped a few too many, and considered the possibilities. How big, what species, what tackle, when to hold the tournament, what to have as prizes, where to find sponsors and what to charge as an entry fee...questions every tournament group face - no matter long in existence.

Hyman's idea was a little radical. He wanted to encourage tourists to visit the little town of Miami. He wanted to utilize the beautiful and bountiful waters - they were there for an angler's pleasure. He wanted the tournament to be free. Free? No entry fee? How could they manage? Well manage they did and in 1935 the first Anglers, Inc. tournament was held.

Today - 70+ years later - the two-week inaugural tournament has grown into the huge Metropolitan South Florida Fishing Tournament.

In the MET's early years, a Rod & Reel Club Fleet Division yacht led the flotilla in the annual opening day regatta staged in Government Cut. Thousands lined the MacArthur Causeway every year



The Miami Beach Rod and Reel Club is situated beside Biscayne Bay on prestigious Hibiscus Island.

to witness this grand event. Even the Goodyear Blimp joined in the festivities from its base on Watson Island.

Throughout the 1930s the club's reputation grew as its anglers tested horizons with tackle innovations and traveled to destinations near and far.

The Washington Post claimed "Miami Beach has what is generally considered the outstanding fishing club in the United States: the Rod and Reel Club, composed of 400 sportsmen."

During the World War II years, military uniform were plentiful at club meetings on Wednesday nights. The early '40s took their toll on the club. Gasoline was limited but club members were allowed an exemption to the restriction for such frivolous activities as attending club meeting because of member efforts for the war. The club was used for many, many training programs. Such notables as The Duke of Windsor and Governor of the Bahamas often visited the club. Guest speakers included crews of aircraft relating their experiences.

In 1946 the Club sent a team to fish in the first ILTTA in Mexico. The team of Jack Bryson, Bert Harborn and Rob Walker startled everyone with the innovative light leaders they used. In 1948, 131 club records and 13 world records were established and the Rod and Reel Club hosted the 3rd annual ILTTA tournament in Miami. Twenty-four teams and 61 anglers from around the country and the world participated. Now in its 60th year, the ILTTA tournament is still going strong and the Rod and Reel Club is duly represented by a team wherever the tournament is held.

1948 was also a year for angling rule changes. Lee Cuddy took seven months, since he was out of commission after surgery for five, to win the angling championship that year. He established

17 club records in eight tackle classes, the majority in three (9-pound) and six (18-Pound) thread divisions. Linen lines were of course being used in those days.

The Rod & Reel has always been in the forefront on conservation issues. In 1941 the Conservation Committee was created and during that year was successful in influencing the Florida Legislature to revise netting laws in Biscayne Bay. In 1944, the Club publicly condemned the City of Miami for dumping raw sewage into the ocean off Miami Beach and in August of that year made a donation to help keep the Everglades National park Association going until the end of the war. In 1948, the Conservation Committee was in the forefront of the effort to place snook on the protected gamefish list, prohibiting netting, selling, offering for sale or transportation for the purpose of selling, with daily bag limits. The Club worked diligently for the final establishment of Everglades National Park.

In 1950 members traveled to foreign destinations for big game fishing. Julio Sanchez caught a 575-pound marlin in Bimini, his second heaviest of the season. The biggest was 612. Members Eddie Wall and Lou Marron traveled to Chile and Marron caught the world record broadbill swordfish (1182 pounds) after a ticklish two-hour battle in which the triple strength 12/0 hook opened up! At the time, it was the heaviest fish of any caught on a rod and reel and today retains the world record. The impressive fish hangs above the podium in the clubhouse.

James L. Knight's 585-pound blue marlin hangs on an opposing wall. Knight was on a fishing trip which included three Boats: Knight's fishing vessel *Rerun*, his yacht *Jimiana*, and James B. Storer Jr.'s *Miami*

Marlin.

On March 28, 1964, Knight boated the marlin and returned to the *Jimiana* when it started taking on water. A Coast Guard plane dropped a portable pump, but water was coming in too fast for it to do any good. Mrs. Knight and daughter, Beverly, transferred to Storer's *Miami Marlin*. Mr. Knight and two crew members jumped from the sinking boat to the *Rerun*. The most important things were saved. The IGFA paper work and the blue marlin, Mr. Knight's golf clubs, and a beautiful box to hold the *Jimiana's* silver. (The box was later found to be empty—the silver went down with the *Jimiana*.) The marlin was a new IGFA record.

Locally, Al Pflueger Jr., Norman Duncan, John Emery, Jesse Webb, and others were experimenting with fast taper rods with stiff butt sections suitable for deep jigging. Huge fish were brought from the depths on ridiculously light lines.

World records continued to fall to Rod and Reel Club members in the 1970s and more anglers were taking their fly rods into salt water. The '70s were the decade of the broadbill swordfish off the Florida coast. Members Jesse and Jerry Webb were first specifically to target and catch these great gamesters in 1976 when they boated two over 300 pounds one July night. In 1978 and 1979, the Rod and Reel Club hosted broadbill tournaments.

Teams were sent to represent the Rod and Reel Club in tournament in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Brazil and South Africa. Closer to home, Rod and Reelers were evident in the prestigious Masters and Gold Cup tournaments held in Palm Beach.

The Florida tarpon scene saw many club

members setting new IGFA records. Member Billy Pate was active with both billfish and tarpon (his 188/15 tarpon on 16# held for many years) and was winning the esteemed Gold Cup Tarpon Tournament in Islamorada. He has fish with Capt. Lee Baker for nearly 35 years now.

In 1989, the venerable clubhouse got a revamping. The 'south end' project opened up the south side of the clubhouse to make the most of the waterfront view.

From the beginning, competitive angling was a highlight of the club experience, with members advancing through various ranks in a 'badge' system based on standardized rules, catches and achievements. Novice anglers wear white badges, regardless of prior fishing expertise, until they have entered ten species of fish within club rules to advance to the rank of Angler, signified by a green badge. Points are awarded on a sliding scale based on the type of tackle, the line test used and the weight of the fish.

From green, members may advance to the Expert rank, denoted by a red badge. It requires the member to be skillful with spin, plug, fly and general tackle. In addition, members must submit entries from many different locations and are required to catch a billfish on a trolled flat line and many other species.

The most daunting right of passage however, may be the skish casting test. Candidates must prove proficiency with a fly, spin and plug casting outfit by hitting a 30-inch diameter target two of five times from 50 feet with spin, plug and fly casting tackle. There is also a separate test involving knots and bait rigging.

Once they've passed the barrage of angling



The magnificent Rod & Reel Club dining room—
circa 1934

tests, red badgers may then advance to rank of Master Angler, signified by a gold badge. The pinnacle of the Rod & Reel's competitive system was created in 1951.

Some requirements are a tarpon on plug and fly, a bonefish on fly, a billfish on a trolled 8# flat line - and the points for each entry have to be 200 or over citation fish.

Angling legends Lee Cuddy and Luke Gorham fought fiercely to have the #1 Gold Badge. Gorham finally succeeded with Cuddy taking Gold #2. Over the past 50+ years the difficulty of obtaining the Gold badge has kept the number of recipients low - only slightly over 80 anglers have attained the honor, including a who's who list of anglers like Luis deHoyos, Joe Brooks, Al Pflueger, Bill Mehrtens, Gar Wood, Pat Ford, Frank Inscho, Marty Arostegui,

Charlie Richter, Capt. Pete Tyson, Capt. Lee Baker, Joan Vernon and Capt. Dan Kipnis.

What does the future hold in the 2000s? Endless enthusiasm by a growing membership, continued innovation in fishing techniques and a move towards stronger conservation measures. We are already enjoying the benefits of actions of the past with increased catches of snook and redfish. Our members are in the forefront today in the move for better management of baitfish and offshore pelagic and bottom species.

Fellowship, sportsmanship and valuable knowledge on fishing techniques and conservation are what the members of the Miami Beach Rod and Reel Club can and do share with those they meet.



2004 Above: Bob Chitty, Jack Ross, Suzan Baker. Left: Mark Nicholson, Jim & Natalie Borrelli, Nell Rehberg. Below: Ed Corlett, Susan and Stan Hausman, Buddy & Charlene Yarborough



In November, 2005 we had the 'pleasure' of meeting **Hurricane Wilma**. Extensive damage was done to our beloved Clubhouse. We lost the final copper dome located on the southeast parapet, we suffered extensive damage to the interior and exterior, but with the help of members and staff our grand old dame is coming about. The roof, carpeting, draperies, dance floor, ceilings, windows, upholstery, damage to the kitchen...and more, are being replaced or refurbished.



Tom Duane (left) and Diane & Richard Pagliarulo

2004

Buddy Yarborough, Don Hansley and Lee Baker



Christmas 2005 The family of John Duvall, Member #1 (seated left) and his lovely wife, Charlotte (standing 3rd from left)



This history was compiled by
Suzan Baker and Peter Tyson and continues to
evolve!