



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 12: The America’s Cup

While we think of the first challenge to the America’s Cup from the RSYs being in the 1960s, it appears that almost 80 years earlier, a challenge was under consideration.



WALTER REEKS
who wished to challenge in 1889
for the *America’s Cup*

Saturday, 17th November, 1888 – The Evening News

AMBITIOUS AUSTRALIA.

It is said that a challenge for the America's cup may come from a new quarter of the globe. The Australians, having won the rowing championship of the world, are now in search of other laurels, and have their eye upon the cup which America won from England, and has been able to retain in spite of British efforts to recapture it. Says the San Francisco Chronicle: - A naval architect of Sydney, N.S.W., has gone to Boston to make the acquaintance of American yachts and American waters. He has called upon Burgess, the designer of our crack sloops, who received him with much courtesy, and enabled him to see the Volunteer and other yachts of his designing in their winter quarters. Mr. Reeks, the architect in question, will not remain long in the United States. He will visit New York and other yachting centres and will return home by way of this city; and upon his return it will not be strange if there comes a challenge for the America's cup. We are in duty bound to believe that no nation on earth can build a yacht fast enough to win that cup, but none the less do we welcome Australia to the trial. And if it be that our crack yachts most follow in the wake of any other, we know of no country from which we could take defeat with better grace than from Australia. Should an Australian yacht win the cup, Great Britain would, we believe, feel more chagrined over it than would America. John Bull would regard it as a piece of impertinence if a colony should succeed in doing what the mother country has not been able to do, and so the sorrow of our defeat would be in a great measure tempered by the disgust and chagrin which we know the English would experience over such a victory won by Australia.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Tuesday, 11th December, 1888 – The Australian Star

The America's Cup.

The rumour that the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron propose competing for the America's Cup has been the occasion of two leading articles in the New York Herald. In the first, which is written in a courteous manner, it speaks of generous rivalries and "that honest competition which is the chief characteristic of the true sportsman." The Herald extends to Australians its best wishes and promises that it will not be niggardly of applause should the America's Cup be transferred after a fair contest from New York to Sydney. All this is as it should be. But the very next day the Herald's tone is faltered. It heads an article "Australian Swagger," and proceeds in a blustering spirit to comment on the idea of our challenging for the America's Cup. A "gratuitous exhibition of swagger" and "a piece of bluff" are the terms made use of by the New York Herald in this connection. It condemns the coasting craft of the country as rude and sluggish, states that the timber of the Antipodes is not suitable for yacht building, and closes with the remark that, were the raw material at hand, what Australian is there who could construct a boat able enough to sail through the Straits of Magellan, or show her stern to the Volunteer? Instead of Australian "swagger" (says a Home paper), this article of the Herald should be quoted as a specimen of Yankee "blowing." Australians are ever eager in the direction of sport, and, if so inclined, no bounce of the Herald would deter them from competing for the yachting championship of the world.

Friday, 28th December, 1888 – The Sydney Morning Herald

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE AMERICA CUP.

Sporting Life, published in London, has the following in regard to Mr. Walter Reeks, of this city, and the challenge for the America Cup: - "Amongst the saloon passengers aboard the White Star steamer *Germanie*, from New York, which arrived recently, was Mr. Walter Reeks, the Australian yacht designer, returning from the United States, whither he had been sent by a syndicate of yachting men in Sydney for the purpose of inspecting the *Volunteer* and other crack American yachts preparatory to his designing an Australian yacht to compete for the America Cup in 1890. Mr. Reeks informed our correspondent that he was most kindly received in Boston and New York, and every facility given him to inspect the *Volunteer*, *Mayflower*, *Puritan*, and other fast American centreboard yachts. Mr. Reeks also expressed himself as being well pleased with the *Volunteer*, and thought she was sufficiently large for all purposes. He believes that an 86ft. boat is large enough. 'I thought,' said he, 'that I should build an 86ft. boat, and expressed myself in that way to one of the club men; but I find on referring to the new deed of gift that it will be safer to build at the maximum, which is 90ft. on the water-line. Regarding the new deed of gift, I must say that although I have not studied it as carefully as I shall, the only objection I find at present is the 90ft. clause I don't relish building a boat larger than the *Volunteer*. She is big enough for any purpose. My real object in going to New York and Boston was to find out exactly what I had to do, and the conditions under which the races would be sailed. Every possible facility has been given me to obtain the information, and I desire to express my sincere thanks for this courtesy.

When asked if the new yacht would be a cutter or centreboard, Mr Reeks replied - 'I shall not confine myself to either cutter or centreboard. My new boat may be a centreboard, but I am hardly prepared to answer that question. Yet, my suggestion that I may receive here will be grateful for and acknowledge with pleasure. As to my lines and dimensions they are matters which at present are not in a matured state and I would prefer not to give them, even approximately. I wish to say, however,' continued Mr. Reeks, 'that I shall build a sloop yacht, and will challenge under the new deed of gift when I send my boat, which will be in 1890. I shall comply with the rules as near as possible and see that the challenge is a complete form. If any little details are omitted, I feel confident that they can be arranged to the entire satisfaction of the club and myself.



ROYAL SYDNEY YACHT SQUADRON

Mr Reeks says that when he went to America, he stated frankly the object of his visit, that he had nothing to conceal, and his preparations for designing and building the competing yacht will be open and frank.'

Notes:

- Walter Reeks was the Honorary Measurer for the club at this time and easily as famous as Alan Payne, who designed our first America's Cup Challenger, "Gretel."
- The reference in the first clipping to "impertinence if a colony should succeed in doing what the mother country has not been able to do" is hilarious. Who says we have not progressed in 150 years.
- The references in the 2nd clipping to the 'gratuitous exhibition of swagger" would make Ben Lexcen proud. The larrikin reputation of the Australians, probably from Irish roots, was upheld in 1982.