

## SPORTS HISTORY

# *For Rowing's Stars, a Hall of Their Own*

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March 30, 2008

## Mystic

ROWING has been an Olympic sport since 1900, and the annual Harvard-Yale Regatta in New London is the nation's oldest intercollegiate sporting competition, having been held 147 times since 1852.

But until now, the sport never had its own Hall of Fame building. Earlier this month, the National Rowing Hall of Fame opened in a 1,600-square-foot section of the former library at Mystic Seaport. One room displays the names of all 500 members. Two others house items like a 12-foot wooden oar used by the American eight-man team with coxswain, which won gold at the 1956 Olympics, and glass cases chock full of trophies, medals, photos and trading cards.

"This is great. It's nice to be able to go in there and relive what happened," said Robert Morey of Tiburon, Calif., a Hall of Fame member who was part of the winning 1956 Olympic team, made up of Yale rowers. "What's in there is very personal for me and unique to our sport."

The Hall of Fame organization has existed since 1956, and the National Rowing Foundation, which was founded 10 years later and provides financial support for the national teams, took over its management in 1975. Until then, the Hall had been overseen by the Helms Athletic Foundation, which had a rowing exhibit in a Los Angeles museum. For years the Hall's induction ceremony was tacked onto the annual meetings of U.S. Rowing, the sport's governing body in the United States, and Power Ten, a rowing group in New York City.

For more than 35 years, Hart Perry of North Stonington, the foundation's executive director, dreamed of rowing having its own Hall of Fame building, as baseball and basketball do.

Fifteen years ago, Mr. Perry approached J. Revell Carr, then the president of Mystic Seaport, and offered him a collection of 300 books on the history of the sport. "But there's a string attached. You get the Hall of Fame with it," Mr. Perry told him. Mr. Carr accepted the gift of the books, which were made available to researchers, but for years had no place for the Hall of Fame. Last fall, Mr. Perry heard that Mystic was moving its library to the Collections Research Center, a separate building across the street. He asked museum officials if the foundation could use some of the old library space. The museum agreed, and since November, Mr. Perry and 20 volunteers have been transforming the rooms into the Rowing Hall of Fame. The work was completed in time for the foundation's annual symposium on March 8.

"I still don't believe we did it," Mr. Perry said. "We couldn't have a more ideal location and a more perfect place. We're part of maritime history here." A Mystic Seaport spokesman, Michael O'Farrell, said the Hall is a natural fit for the museum, which has a vast collection that spans American maritime history.

"It also helps take away the misconception that we're only about the Charles W. Morgan and whaling," he said, referring to a whaling ship on display.

Mr. O'Farrell said there are few more dedicated athletes than rowers, and he said the Hall of Fame exhibit will attract that niche audience and give the museum's 300,000 annual visitors another attraction. Each September the foundation also sponsors a weekend of racing that draws the nation's top rowers.

Mr. Perry, a rower at Dartmouth who coached at the Kent School for years, said the foundation plans to hold its induction ceremony in the museum's Seamen's Inne restaurant.

Without the Hall of Fame, Mr. Perry said an incredible amount of history would have disappeared. "If young people who get involved in this sport can't learn about its history, that would be a shame," he said.

Kent Mitchell, a Palo Alto, Calif., lawyer who won bronze and gold medals at the 1960 and 1964 Olympics in the pair with coxswain and was a founder of the foundation, said that until now rowers kept the sport's history "in boxes and drawers."

"As rowers we dwell in anonymity. You get used to it and accept it and don't worry about it. But then someone says, 'You've been inducted into the Hall of Fame' and you realize someone out there does care," he said. "Now with a Hall of Fame there's an indelible record."