

Norfolk and the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club

Everything Much Improved Since 1793!

by

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CITY AND CLUB HISTORY.

My great-g-g-grandfather Reverend and Judge Harry Toulmin arrived in Norfolk at nine in the morning on 20 July 1793, aboard the vessel *Sisters*. Even though he had been driven out of England for his Unitarian religious beliefs and came to love the United States, he disliked Norfolk. He wrote that the heat was intense, the water bad, the people indolent, the lodging and land was dear, the cattle “give little milk,” the countryside had a “very discouraging appearance,” the city had been burnt down by the British in the late war, and now all the recently-built accommodations were stuffed with French aristocrats fleeing the slave revolt in Haiti. Harry urged his parishioners in England to pass through Norfolk quickly and go on to Kentucky, where beautiful, fertile land could be had for only seven shillings per acre.

Things were not much better in Norfolk a century later, when the city was known as “Hell’s Half Acre” and “the wickedest city in America.” A reform movement in 1894 finally led to an improvement in city administration and the crime rate.

In 1896, reform-minded municipal leaders decided to form the “Country Club” north of town, to have a sanctuary away from city life. The Club moved to a larger location in a few years, then sold that property, so it could be used as the site for the 300th anniversary of the founding of Jamestowne.

The Club relocated in 1909 to its present site on the Lafayette River, on the northwest side of the city, and acquired but then sold off land that was to have been used for an 18-hole golf course. The land went to create an upscale subdivision, and what is now the huge Norfolk International Terminals, one of the busiest ports in the nation. In the 1920s yachtsmen built a marina on the river as part of the Club, which then became known as the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club (NYCC).

In the 1990s the present large club buildings were erected.



The Norfolk area has markedly improved since 1793 and 1896, with the top attractions including the superb Chrysler Museum of Art, the USS *Wisconsin*, the Norfolk Botanical Garden, etc. The beautiful Hermitage house museum and garden is just a few blocks from the NYCC.

CLUB FACILITIES. The NYCC is located on about ten acres on the north bank of the Lafayette River, near the Hampton Boulevard Bridge, about seven miles west of the Norfolk International Airport and five miles north of downtown. The Club has excellent views over its marina to the city to the south, and to Norfolk Harbor, which opens into Hampton Roads beyond.

The club facilities are housed in two large buildings, the main clubhouse and the athletic building. The buildings are blocky and non-descript in their “international” architectural style, but contain excellent facilities inside.



The main clubhouse building has 50,000 square feet in two levels, with a formal dining room, casual Grill Room, bar, and The Dock for casual family dining on the upper level. The lower level holds a grand ballroom with sunken dance floor, and five other meeting and event rooms. The décor is simple, international style, with yacht club burgees and photos of members. The clubhouse is usually closed on Mondays.

The clubhouse also contains three king-bed and three two-double-bed rooms. Three of these rooms have excellent water views, and all sleeping rooms are available for rental by reciprocal members. The cost is \$144 per night per room including tax. This price is a considerable savings over, say, the Norfolk Waterside Marriott, which is about \$200 per night including taxes and fees. There is no limit on the length of stay at the NYCC for members or reciprocals. We did not stay in the bedrooms, but did inspect one, and it was comparable to a city Marriott bedroom. Rooms include free Internet access, iron, refrigerator and full access to Club dining and athletic facilities.

The impressive Club athletic facilities are housed in a very large separate, three-storey, airy building (about 250 x 150 feet) equipped with circuit training equipment, free weights, indoor pool, squash courts, sauna, whirlpool, cycle spinning room, massage rooms, table tennis, and various meeting and exercise rooms. In addition, there are three other swimming pools, a lap pool, as well as ten tennis courts. Classes are offered in tabata, PiYo, Zumba, etc. The marina has slips for 200 yachts, and a full-time Harbormaster runs the marina.



The NYCC has numerous events during the year, including numerous sailing regattas including Friday night keelboat racing, and the longest running free

maritime festival in the country.

Dress code throughout the NYCC is generally business casual, except in the gym and pool areas, where athletic and swimming attire is of course acceptable. Also, “jeans and tennis attire are not acceptable in the main clubhouse, except in The Deck and The Grill.” Cell phone usage is prohibited “in all areas of the Main Clubhouse where others might hear the conversation.”

The NYCC has a reciprocal network of 125 yacht, city and country clubs, of which 100 are domestic and 25 international, including the East India Club of London, the Yale Club of New York, the Marines’ Memorial Association of San Francisco, etc.

FOOD. In March 2016 we had a good lunch at the club, consisting of a cup of homemade split pea soup, which we rated as an A-; a somewhat dry burger, B; avocado and seafood salad, A-; and salted caramel ice cream, B+. Our meal for two including one soft drink, service charge and tax, was \$40.13. Portions were very large. Service was very attentive and friendly.



Other typical dishes on the menu include a Key West seafood entrée salad with shrimp, scallops, crab and mango, for \$15; grilled steak and asparagus, \$12; and petit filet with shrimp, \$26.

MEMBERSHIP. Prospective NYCC members must be proposed by one and seconded with letters of support by two active members, none of whom can be Board members. Membership is by invitation only. The names of prospective members are posted for four weeks, reviewed by the Membership Committee for suitability and service to the community, and then passed on to the Board of Governors for final approval. There is no requirement for publications.

There are three levels of regular membership: A (family), with an initiation fee of \$10,000 and monthly dues of \$245; B (single), \$7,500 initiation fee and monthly dues of \$190, and Senior or Military Service, \$4,500 initiation fee, and monthly dues of \$214 and \$245 respectively.

Members aged 18 to 29 pay about 40 percent of the normal initiation fee and pay \$125 in monthly dues. “Legacy” children or grandchildren of active members pay about 20 percent of the normal initiation fee if they are aged 25 or younger, or about 40 percent if aged 25 to 29. Non-resident members must have their primary residence at least 50 miles from the Club for at least nine months of the year. They pay an initiation fee of \$1500 and annual dues of \$864.

At present there are about 1800 members, most of whom are leaders in the political, professional, business, medical, military, maritime and financial sectors of the community. Women and all minorities are admitted and welcomed as full members. Norfolk does not have any other “city,” university or intellectual club, only pure country clubs. So the NYCC serves as the de facto city club for Norfolk, and is the most prestigious club in the Norfolk and Hampton Roads area.

SUMMARY. The Norfolk Yacht and County Club is an interesting hybrid of a city club, yacht club and country club. It is the most prestigious club in its region, has terrific athletic facilities, excellent sleeping rooms at a reasonable price, good food and friendly service. The architecture and location are not as attractive as the other features, but overall this is a club that is well worth a visit. I think even my great-g-g-g-grandfather would be impressed!