

Never Row

A History of the Georgetown Crew: 1958 to 1969



By Edward P. Witman '67
Illustrated by Linda Lovas Hoeschler

OF TIME AND THE RIVER

*The river where you set your foot just now is gone,
those waters giving way to this,
now this.¹*

In the Spring of 1958 the “Star-spangled Banner” had only forty-eight stars, President “Ike” Eisenhower was in the middle of his second term, and Cardinal Pacelli was in the last year of his papacy as Pius XII. Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, also in his last year of power, ordered a large scale offensive against rebels led by Fidel Castro. The junior Senator from Massachusetts, Jack Kennedy and his wife Jackie were living on N St. in Georgetown with their little girl, Caroline; it was Jack who described Washington as “a city of southern efficiency and northern charm.”

Politically, the country was engaged in the “Cold War;” and given the ominous military implications of “Sputnik,” Premier of the USSR Nikita Khrushchev was *Time’s* “Man of the Year.” Fearful of the international tensions between the nuclear adversaries some American families were building bomb shelters in their cellars, and school children learned to “duck and cover” in the event of a nuclear attack. A lively sense of patriotism pervaded the culture. It is notable that the Spring of ’58 arrived only twelve and a half years after V-J Day and only five years after the truce that ended the fighting in Korea. Despite the personal disruptions posed by the draft, young men still felt the legitimacy of serving their country. Men in uniform were respected and admired for their service. In schools every morning, students pledged allegiance to the flag and sang patriotic songs. In towns across the country Memorial Day marked the unofficial start of summer, and was celebrated enthusiastically; virtually everybody went out to march in local parades or to applaud those who did. And in 1958 Vietnam was just a small country somewhere in Southeast Asia.

In the fifties, before Pope John and Vatican-II, Catholicism was a culture of muscular faith and parochial schooling that inculcated a lively sense of sin and personal culpability. There was confession on Saturday afternoon, and the traditional Tridentine Latin mass and communion every Sunday morning. During mass the whole congregation joined in singing old familiar hymns accompanied by an organ; communicants knelt at the altar rail, and at the conclusion, everyone prayed for the conversion of Russia. Nuns were strict disciplinarians who wore black habits with long rosary beads, and priests were respected “Fathers” who wore birettas and cassocks, and faced the altar during mass. But even more than the shared theology and liturgy, Catholicism instilled the moral virtue of self-restraint (or guilt) that sustained us through the long years before the wedding day.

In 1958, the economy was in a recession. Since there were no computers, no internet, no credit cards, and no ATMs, money meant cash, cash meant “silver certificates”² and silver coins actually did contain silver. When you bought something you either paid cash or wrote a check against actual cash on deposit. A gallon of milk cost four times more than a gallon of gasoline, the minimum wage was a dollar an hour, and fifteen cents would get you a cup of coffee.

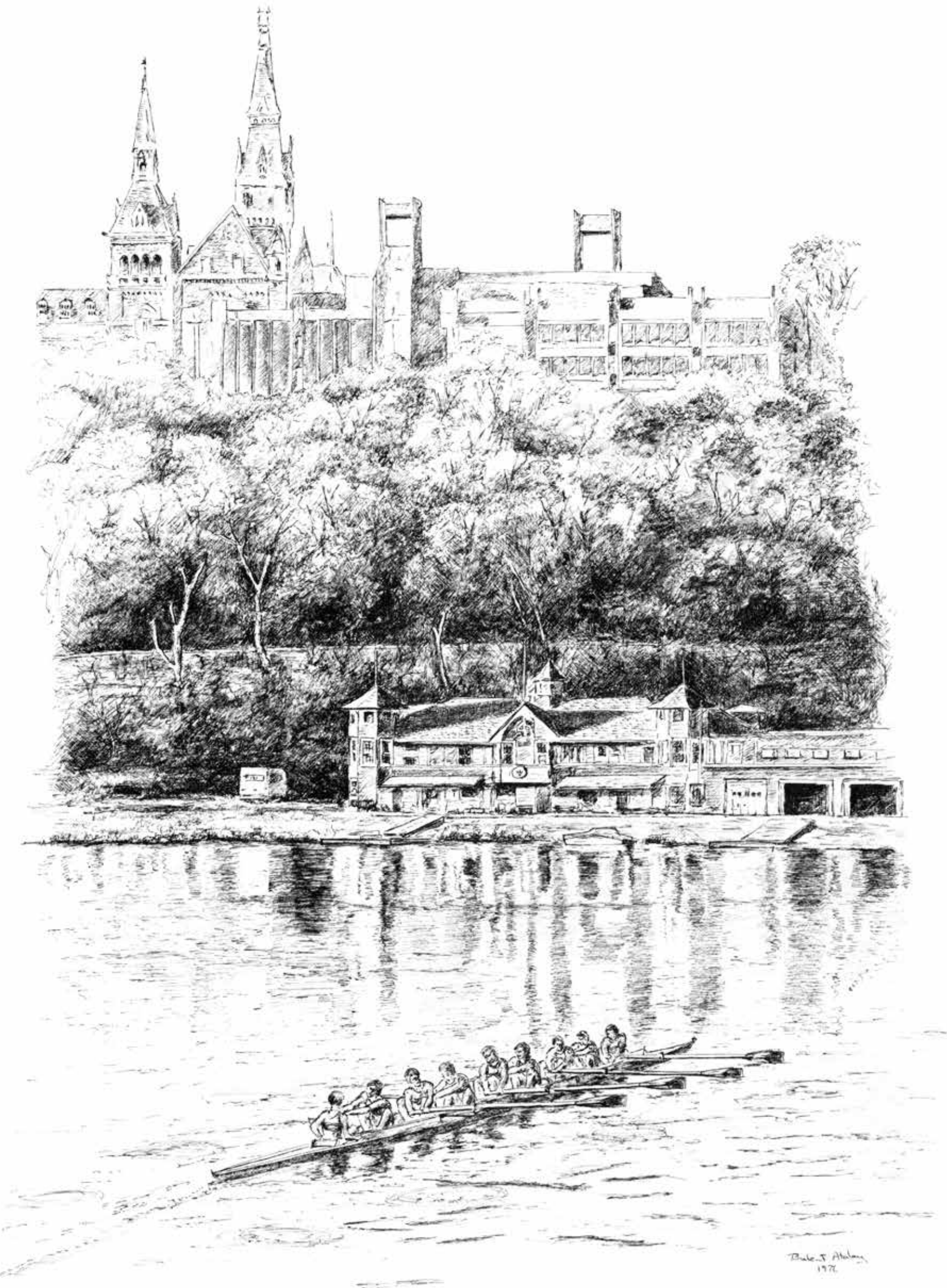
The Ford Motor Co. was going into full scale production with their new car, the Edsel, named for the son of Henry Ford himself. National Airlines introduced the Boeing 707 jetliner, and Wham-o began marketing the hula hoop. Television was black and white, telephones were all black, and had dials and wires that plugged into the wall. Music was recorded on vinyl discs. Rock ’n roll was in its



The Presidents: Eisenhower and Fr. Bunn.



John Carrol keeps an eternal vigil.





Summers rowers got very familiar with Observatory Hill.

rowing program for those willing to stay in Washington and endure two-a-day workouts. Not surprisingly – given Cadle’s charisma – there was no shortage of guys willing to sacrifice the more conventional joys of summer for the rigors that Cadle had in store for them.

Their optimism did have some solid basis in terms of the personnel at hand. Although it would prove hard to replace the power of Pat Doyle and the leadership of Dave Casey, the remaining seven members of the Varsity boat were still onboard: Vollbrecht, Hoffman, Mullin, Hoeschler, Blyberg, Allen, and Sergeant at cox. That was more than just a “nucleus,” it was an impressive crew by itself. The second place Vail Freshman boat also included a couple of big boys eager to join the Varsity.⁴⁷ So that summer Cadle had an experienced and enthusiastic crew returning after graduation to get ready for the campaign of 1964.

Let Darro Angelini describe the summer:

For me it was one of those “just keep putting one foot in front of the other” times...Most days involved two-a-day workouts on the water, or in the morning and a running workout on the track in the evening. We lived pretty much in a state of subdued exhaustion...The practices were long and hard. Numerous configurations were looked at but in the end we stayed with the standard port/starboard setup. We got to the point toward the end of the summer that we knew we were moving the boat, but the constant state of tiredness from the workouts muted any sense of accomplishment. Toward the last days the coaches eased up and the energy returned. We sensed a time trial coming, and shortly enough it was upon us. I don’t really remember the trial, but the boat moved well. It was a warm sunny morning and the water was relatively calm. After we crossed the finish line we eased up and looked over at the coach’s launch. There seemed to be some discussion and then they motored toward us and shouted the news.⁴⁸ The conditioning and hard work had paid off. The Olympic Trials the following summer suddenly seemed like something transforming from wishful thinking to possibility. The summer ended on a positive note.

Dinners at the Cadles’

Certainly one of the best things about the summer of ’63 were the dinners that the crew enjoyed at the Cadles’ home over in Arlington. Don and Inge would regularly host their “boys” for big family style meals that nourished their spirits as well as their stomachs. When they were off on vacation Don gave the house keys to Goose & Frank along with the understanding that they should continue to host the hungry Hoyas. And so they did. Very well in fact, until they began to run too low on their funds. After that the meals tended more toward pasta than steaks, but the spirits of the crew continued to feast on the camaraderie of sharing home-cooked meals together in a real home. And of course there was some occasional comedy, like the time that Bill McNeill leaned back in his spindle-legged chair and it collapsed under him. Bill came up unscathed, and thanks to the skills of Goose, our master rigger, the chair was soon glued back together and almost as good as new.

Among all the many things that Don and Inge gave to the Georgetown crew, these evenings around the couple’s dinner table may have been the most significant reminder of the kind of people they were: generous, warm, hospitable, loving, and wise; but here, words fail. To say they were “a class act” would understate my point because this was no “act.” They were the real thing.

The 1963 National Championships

On the weekend of July 19-21st Georgetown entered two coxed-fours and its summer eight in the Nationals in Philadelphia. This would be the Hoya’s first time rowing as the Georgetown University Rowing Association, i.e., as a “club crew,” not that the designation made any practical difference. The GURA entries were two intermediate fours,⁴⁹ an intermediate eight,⁵⁰ and a senior eight.⁵¹

The second four placed sixth in the final coming in behind Riverside B.C. 6:43.8, Lake Washington B.C. 6:47, Detroit B.C. 7:03, Vesper B.C. 7:05, and West Side R.C. 7:13.6.

The Hoya intermediate eight came in a respectable fourth (6:34.5), behind first place Detroit B.C. 6:17, Potomac B.C. 6:22, and St. Catharine’s R.C. 6:26.1, but ahead of West Side R.C. 6:39, and Vesper B.C. (no time given.)

Postscript: The Romance of Raunch

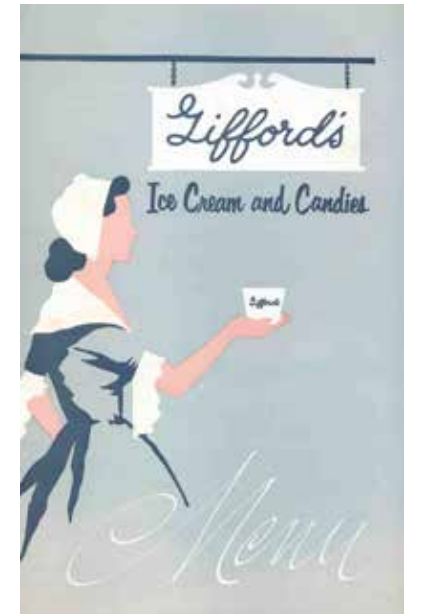
Fortunately for morale, that summer was memorable for more than grueling workouts and disappointing races. There were other more pleasant opportunities waiting the boys of summer when they weren’t rowing, running, working or sleeping. While it is true that summer in DC was a series of days that began with sunrise workouts on the Potomac, and ended in sweat-damp sheets in a stifling dorm room, it is also true that in between there were impromptu parties, road trips, pig-outs at “all you can eat” buffet tables in Waldorff, MD, ice cream sundaes at Gifford’s, and evenings spent with college and working girls looking for male companionship or even a summer romance. All this without any need to write term papers, study for tests, or visit a library. In short, staying in DC for the summer promised all the fun of college with none of the academic burdens.

And then there was the undeniable romance of raunchiness itself. According to the survivors of that summer of ’63, there was nothing quite like the squalid ambiance of the rooms on the second floor of McDonough Gymnasium. (That summer the crew was granted these rooms above the gym; for reasons to be described, no one else would be interested in occupying them.⁵²)

The gym lay in the open sunshine on the western edge of the lower field and lacked air-conditioning to deal with the cumulating summer heat. By noon on a sunny June day the temperature in the eastern-facing rooms could average in the mid-nineties, and the roof over the gym absorbed and retained the day’s heat throughout the muggy night.

For readers who’ve grown up in air-conditioned homes, schools, shopping malls, and cars, the madding effects of such relentless heat are difficult to appreciate. Of course there is the constant sweat, the clothes that cannot dry, and so are never fresh; the resulting thirst, and the continual quest for cold drink in a landscape devoid of water coolers. On those too frequent days when the temperature was matched by Washington’s notorious humidity the atmosphere in those rooms can hardly be imagined unless you can picture the infamous “black hole of Calcutta” with the lights on. Let a few details from those who endured⁵³ suffice to set the mood.

First, there was the plumbing. As Bill McNeill explains, the water main supplying McDonough was not only set at a relatively shallow depth but ran under the old parking lot and adjacent athletic fields to the west of New South (in the area now occupied by the Jesuit residence and the Southwest Quadrangle). Since there was minimal demand for water in the deserted gym during the summer months, the water in this main moved only sluggishly, if at all; and being covered by the superheated asphalt of the lot and the dry grass of the field, the line delivered water to the “cold” taps that was well above 100°. This meant that the denizens of the dorm could not even enjoy the momentary relief of a cool shower.



Ice cream – and lots of it – was a way to beat the heat.



For IRA Regatta

Confident Hoya Crew Shovels Off to Syracuse

By Doug Lamborne
Staff Reporter

The Georgetown University crew is plotting to "shovel" its way to national prominence this weekend.

The Hoyas hope to make a couple of inches go a long way by using unique oars in the Intercollegiate Rowing Association's Regatta in Syracuse Friday and Saturday.

Harvard, Cornell, Penn and Washington will have similar equipment but Georgetown can claim an edge in added gadgetry.

The ruckus in Syracuse will be about the oars, especially the type the world champion Ratzberg Rowing Club from Germany used last year in beating the top American college crews.

Georgetown was the first to use the German technique— from many boat lengths astern—and became the first in the country to import the "shovel" oar. It is six inches longer and the blade is three inches wider and bowed to spoon the water more effectively.

Sandy Sanborn, who stepped down as the Hoyas coach a couple of weeks ago, tinkered with the new oars early in the spring, adding aluminum apparatus in place of leather buttons. The button is that portion of the oar shaft that fits into the oarlock.

The result is an adjustable fulcrum point, a simple innovation almost exclusive to Georgetown. The Hoyas can insert their oars to accommodate the size of each oarsman as well as the water conditions.

The shovels also caused the Hoyas to adopt the Teutonic technique with less layback, or backward lean, at the end of the stroke. With the shovel goes a higher tempo — 38 strokes per minute in the

body of the race and as high as 40 in sprints.

The Hoyas took to the German style so well they won the small college championship in the Dad Vail Regatta last month and an invitation to the IRA.

Co-coaches Bob Remuzzi and Frank Barrett, the Hoya shell and crew left for Syracuse yesterday. The bow man will be Fred Vollbracht and with him will be Mark Pisano, Bill McNeil, Darro Ancejlu, Jack Kocochlar, Pete Blyberg, Bill Allen, stroke Mike Mullin and coxswain Doug Sergeant.

Asked about competing against 18 "big" college crews, Remuzzi said: "We'll put on a pretty good show."

And Sanborn promised: "If the water and the boys are calm, Georgetown will be a lot closer than last year."

- 1 With Linc Hoffman at stroke, the Varsity prepared for Georgetown's first trip to the IRA Regatta since 19...
- 2 The spare four at the 1964 IRA. (l to r: Jim Hanna, Pete McGrath, Ben Domenico, Linc Hoffman, Art Charles — cox).
- 3 News coverage of the crew in 1964 was frequent.

Athletic Club's facilities at Travers Island in Pelham, close by the NYC park at Orchard Beach. The parks department had dredged the lagoon and set out a 2000 meter race course complete with lane markers and a spectators' area set aside on the last 500 meters of the southern shoreline.¹⁶

The Georgetown eight fared no better at Orchard Beach than it had on Lake Onondaga. Whether it was the loss of Dan Ebert and/or the higher level of competition (Harvard, U. of Washington, and Detroit B.C.) the GU eight was badly beaten in the first heat on July 8th.¹⁷ The next day in the repechage, GU again trailed behind Laconia R.A.'s "A" and "B" crews; the times: 6:17.3, 6:20.4, and 6:26.7. It was a learning experience for us all.¹⁸

With Georgetown eliminated, the main interest in the Trials was focused on Harry Parker and his undefeated Crimson Cantabs of Harvard, the boat *Sports Illustrated* had recently compared to a Rolls Royce¹⁹, and which a Navy coach said was "flawless, every move they make is perfection." Having led all the way in defeating Cornell at the Eastern Sprints, and then easily beating Yale in their 99th annual race on the Thames, the '64 Harvard Varsity²⁰ was considered certain to win the Trials and represent the USA in Tokyo. Like his fellow American coaches Parker had seen the future of crew the previous summer when the 1960 Olympic and reigning World Champions of Ratzberg Rowing Club toured the U.S. and introduced the new higher stroke and their tulip blades. He immediately ordered the new oars for his crew and as soon as the ice melted on the Charles he set them to interval training.²¹

The regimen must have worked some special magic because I have never seen any crew row as beautifully as Harvard did in the final on the July 11th. Looking up the course through binoculars I could clearly see the six white splashes as other boats took each catch, but in Harvard's lane I saw only the oars square up and disappear — no splashes because their blade-work was flawless. As they went past me in the last 100 meters they did indeed look like the rowing equivalent of a Rolls Royce motoring smoothly down the course: perfect swing, perfect finishes, everything exactly as it should be, except for one thing. They were in second place.

Unfortunately for the Cantabs, a race is not a beauty contest — no points are awarded for style. Although aesthetically, they had rowed a splendid race with absolutely perfect form, they were decisively beaten by the not-so-pretty but considerably faster crew from Philadelphia's venerable Vesper Boat Club.²² California and Yale trailed. In October, Vesper went to Tokyo and won back the Olympic gold for the United States with an open water victory over the mighty Ratzberg crew: 6:18.23 over 6:23.29.

Disappointed but undaunted, Goose pressed ahead with Cadle's plans and split the eight into fours and sent the faster boat²³ to the Nationals, and the second round of Olympic Trials in late August.

That summer the GU heavy Varsity finished last in: the IRA, the Independence Day Regatta, and now the Olympic Eights Trials. The dismal string continued in the four-with at the Nationals, and the August 27-28th Olympic Trials for small boats.²⁴

At the President's Cup Regatta, August 16th, the results were a little better. Georgetown entered the senior coxed four that came in second (7:30.2) behind Schuylkill Navy (7:24.2), but ahead of Potomac (7:37.) and Penn AC. In the intermediate eight race Potomac won (6:57.3), and GU came in second (7:07.3).²⁵ In the senior eight event, Vesper (not their Olympic crew) placed first (6:43.2), but again GU²⁶ came in second (6:47.2), ahead of Penn AC (6:56), and Potomac BC (6:57).

We could not foresee it at the time, but the Dad Vail championship of 1964



Vesper Boat Club won the '64 Trials.