

**A HISTORY OF YALE ATHLETICS, 1840-  
1888: GIVING EVERY CONTEST WITH  
HARVARD, PRINCETON, PENNSYLVANIA,  
COLUMBIA, WESLEYAN, AND OTHERS IN  
ROWING, FOOT BALL, BASE BALL,  
TRACK ATHLETICS, TENNIS**

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A history of Yale athletics, 1840-1888: giving every contest with Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Wesleyan, and others in rowing, foot ball, base ball, track athletics, tennis by Richard M. Hurd

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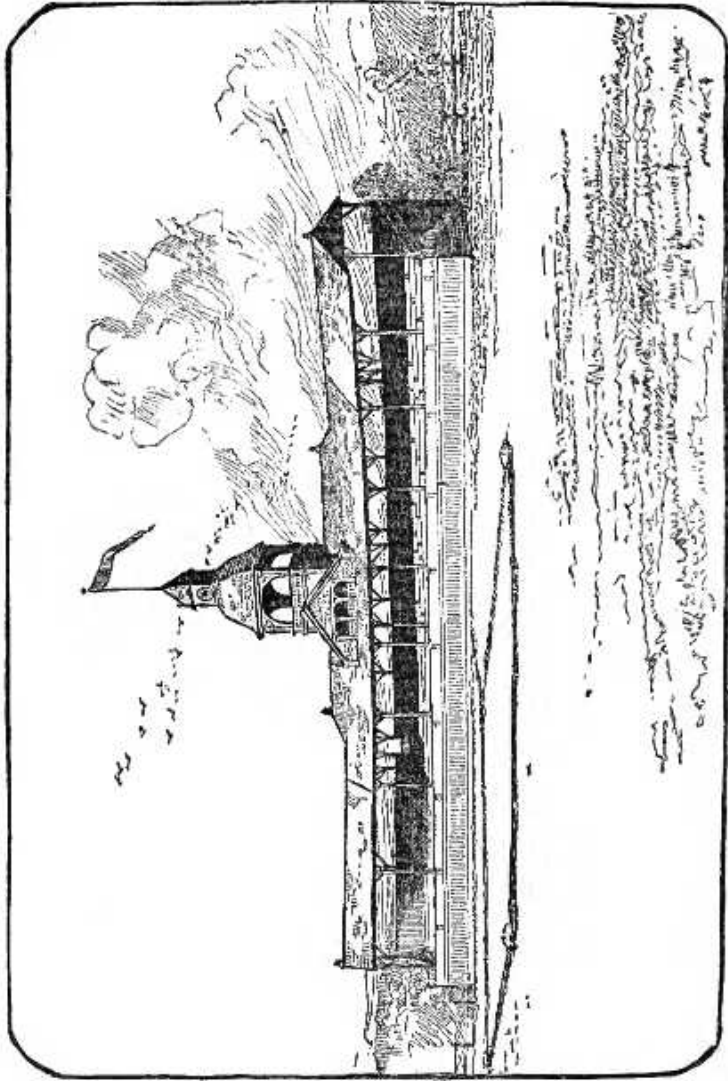
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**RICHARD M. HURD**

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GRAND STAND AT YALE FIELD.

# A History of Yale Athletics

1840-1888

GIVING EVERY CONTEST WITH

HARVARD, PRINCETON, PENNSYLVANIA,  
COLUMBIA, WESLEYAN,

AND OTHERS IN

*Rowing, Foot Ball, Base Ball,  
Track Athletics, Tennis,*

By

RICHARD M. HURD, YALE, '88.

*With Illustrations and complete Tables of Statistics.*

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## *Rowing—1843-1888.*

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### PERIOD PREVIOUS TO INTERCOLLEGIATE RACES

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1843-1852

To Yale College belongs the honor of having the oldest rowing club in America. On the 24th of May, 1843, a four-oared Whitehall boat arrived in New Haven under the charge of William J. Weeks, '44. In the ownership of this, seven men from the class of '44 were associated, the expense to each for the year's rowing being \$7.19. Stimulated by their example, the students purchased three other boats, a Whitehall boat, a log canoe and a lapstreak gig for eight oars. In these the oarsmen indulged in friendly "scrub races," and took many long pulls, the longest being across the Sound. The first Yale boat race in which stipulated agreements were made beforehand, occurred in the summer of 1844, when the crew of the dug-out canoe challenged the crew of the lapstreak gig to a race to the Lighthouse, some four miles from the starting-point. One of the conditions of the race was that the start should be made when both crews were upon the pier; so that the skill and practice of the crew of the dug-out in getting her from her moorings and on board should counterbalance the natural advantage of the light boat. Another stipulation was that neither of the crews should do anything to their boats in the meantime, in the way of cleansing or preparing the bottom in any way for the race. On the day appointed, the crews leaped into their boats and struck out into the stream. All went well with both crews while they were



in the swift current under the bridge, but when the still water was reached the gig seemed to hang strangely between each stroke. The crew redoubled their efforts, but finding this of no avail, and becoming aware that some trick had been played upon them, put for the shore. Here it was discovered that a stout ring had been screwed into the keelson of the gig and a good-sized boulder attached. It was the universal belief that neither crew had broken any of the articles of agreement, in doing anything to the bottoms of their own boat.

One year after the advent of the *Pioneer*, the first Yale boat, a thirty-foot, six-oared craft, called the *Excelsior*, was launched, which was the first race boat built for Yale. This, being manned by a crew of strong and good oarsmen, gave a great impetus to racing and good boat building at Yale. In 1845, the *Augusta* was bought for \$170, which had cost to build some years before, \$300. In 1847 also the eight-oared, thirty-eight foot *Shawmut* was purchased, in which the first race against Harvard was rowed. In 1851 three boats were bought, in 1852 two boats, and in 1853 two more, making in all fifteen boats owned by class clubs of Yale undergraduates during the first ten years of the existence of rowing as a recognized pastime at Yale. Of these six were eight-oared, six four-oared, and three six-oared, and all but four were bought second-hand.

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#### INTERCOLLEGIATE PERIOD

1852

In this year Yale sent a challenge to Harvard, a short time before the summer vacation, and on August 3d, Harvard defeated Yale at Centre Harbor, Lake Winnepisaukee. The race was rowed in eight-oared barges on a calm day over a course about two miles long. In the

morning of the same day an informal or practice race was rowed over the same course, with the same result.

Some idea of the amount of preparation for this race may be had from the remark of one of the Harvard crew, that "they had only rowed a few times for fear of blistering their hands." The only idea of training was the avoiding of pastry and sweets on the day of the race. The fittings of the boats used were very much like those of a man-of-war's gig now-a-days, each seat having a baize-covered cushion, the thole-pins being flat and fitted into the gunwale, and there being gratings at each end of the boat.

The effect of this race was to lead the Yale boat clubs to the idea of racing among themselves, and with this end in view, the six active boat clubs in June, 1853, adopted a general constitution, by which they were known collectively as the "Yale Navy." The chief officer of the "Navy" was the Commodore, whose duty it was to make arrangements for an annual regatta. This office was first conferred upon Richard Waite, brother of the late Chief Justice of the United States, in recognition of his being the originator of the "Yale Navy." The introduction of systematized racing tended to a uniformity in the style of boat used, and the six-oared soon became the prevailing type.

1855

A challenge was again sent by Yale to Harvard in this year, and a race was rowed on the Connecticut River at Springfield, July 21. The day was showery with a light breeze, but with smooth water. The Yale crew rowed a short, jerky stroke, more than sixty to the minute, and although they had the better boats were no match for the powerful physique and real skill of the Harvard men. This race was watched by thousands and the excitement was very great.

1858

In May of this year a proposal was made in the *Harvard Magazine* to establish an annual Intercollegiate Regatta, and for this purpose delegates from Harvard, Brown, Trinity and Yale met at New Haven. This convention decided upon holding an annual regatta, the place for that year to be Springfield, and in future to be named one year in advance. The other stipulations were that the course should be three miles, either straight-away or with a turn, according to weather; that each college should enter as many boats as it pleased, with or without coxswains, and of any description it pleased, and that an allowance of 11 seconds per extra oar should be made in favor of the smaller boats.

The sad accident of the drowning of Mr. George E. Dunham, '59, of the Yale crew, six days before the time appointed for the race, prevented the contest of this year. The work of the Harvard crew this year consisted in walking, running, gymnasium work, tossing 12 lb. cannon ball, etc. Their diet was severe, no vegetables but rice being allowed, no fish, only beef, mutton, stale bread, oat-meal gruel, and small quantities of milk and water. The most trying part of the training was the endurance of thirst.

1859

A meeting of delegates from the four colleges met at Providence, February 23d, at which it was voted that the next regatta should be held July 22 at Springfield or Worcester, but later the place selected for the race was changed to Lake Quinsigamond, and the date changed to July 26. On this day four boats competed, two from Harvard and one each from Brown and Yale. An encroachment by the Avon, Harvard's second boat, compelled Yale to steer a wide course and Harvard's first boat getting a winning lead, Yale finished second. The