

# CHARLES AMIEL CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

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*(written by Dick Turnbull and Barbara Fenner)*

Charles's rowing career started with Mercantile Rowing Club, a long two story wooden shed 80 meters east of ARC and closer to the river's edge. The balcony of the clubhouse had the best views of the Torrens regattas as it overhung the footpath only recently replaced by river's edge path as part of the Adelaide City Councils splendid development along the Torrens. Charles said in an interview that he thought he started rowing in 1927-28. The 1928 Henley on Torrens regatta program shows him rowing 2 in the third heat of maiden tubs, fixed seats. A pencilled entry in the program shows Mercantile, beating an ARC crew. Charles was 21 years old and weighed 71 kg at the time and rowed



actively until 1936. His interest in rowing did not stop there. Charles admits he rowed well at a club level but was not a contender for state squads. Some of his best rowing was at the Port, boating out from the original Port Adelaide Amateur Athletic Club (later the Port Adelaide Rowing Club) located just east of the Birkenhead Bridge. Races on the Port River in the 1930's started either at the Quarantine Station jetty (3 miles), Osborne power station (2 miles ) or Snowden Beach (1 mile), finishing an the swing basin in the upper port.

After retiring from active rowing Charles immediately joined the Union of Old Oarsmen. At his retirement from the union he was presented with an award for exemplary service. Like all of us at some stage of our lives rowing has to give way to career and family. He started his working life at the old State Bank where there were a number of rowers, all members of Mercantile. A colleague at the bank, Bob Fraser initially enticed Charles into rowing. He remained with the bank until his retirement in 1973 finishing as manager of the loans section.

With the outbreak of war, rowing activity in South Australia declined, however 400 people still managed to attend opening day in October 1940. Charles enlisted that year. His days in the CBC cadet unit must have marked him out as he was selected for officer training, graduating as a first lieutenant. Like John Sheppard he was too old for service outside Australia and was posted to the 101st Antiaircraft Battery. His 40 mm bofors gun was on top of the south eastern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Charles may have not had the best view on the war but certainly would have had one of the best views in the war, overlooking Sydney Cove, Bennelong Point and Australia's largest naval base beyond. Before the war he married Irene Phelan, which was the beginning of a very successful marriage, which produced three girls one of whom still lives nearby in Prospect.



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C W Amiel is first mentioned in the SA Rowing Association Annual Reports in 1937/38 when he was listed as club delegate for Mercantile RC and “*attended 13 meetings in the year equalled only by TRC’s C Baumann the head of the Regatta Officials.* Charles also served on the SARA Regatta Committee until the start of the war. After the war Charles soon involved himself in rowing again and served many years on the Regatta Committee including the hey day of the Henley on Torrens Regatta when huge crowds attended.

In 1947 he was appointed manager of the 1947 SA King Cup crew, rowed in Perth on the wide expanses of the Swan River. The race had to be shortened to 2 ¼ miles, from its usual length of 3 ½ miles, due to prevailing weather conditions on the day. Charles earned the ire of the RSL and the good burghers of Perth for organising a training session on Anzac Day, just prior to the day.

Charles was awarded Life Membership of SARA for his contribution to rowing SA and appointed as Vice President in 1950. He spent over 50 years continuously as a Vice President and only retired in 2003 at the age of 96. In 1954 his beloved Mercantile Rowing Club had to be dissolved as the shed was slowly sinking and had a distinct tilt. As the main footpath along the Torrens passed directly under it long balcony, the city council decided it was a hazard to the public. Along with a number of other members he then joined ARC and has been a member ever since.



All through his life Charles collected local, national and international newspaper and magazine articles about rowing. In the mid 1990’s he handed his 90 volumes collection



of scrapbooks to the Mortlock Library, covering the period 1913 to 1979. The library now has 8 meters of scrapbooks on rowing including the six volumes from ARC (1885 to 1951). This must stand amongst the best collection of rowing memorabilia in Australia and a great contribution to the history of rowing in Australia. Charles has been the main contributor to this collection and his volume covering the 1956 Olympics has to be seen to be believed. Until only recently Charles was a familiar face at regattas with Margaret Lord, the widow of another noted SA rower, Phil Lord.

**Thank you Charles for your contribution  
to ROWING & Happy Birthday!**

Thank you for joining us in the  
100th Birthday Celebrations of

# **CHARLES AMIEL**

Sunday 11th Feb 2007

SARA Clubrooms  
100 Military Rd, West Lakes Shore

12:30 - 2:00pm

