

'68 Penn Lightweight Crew

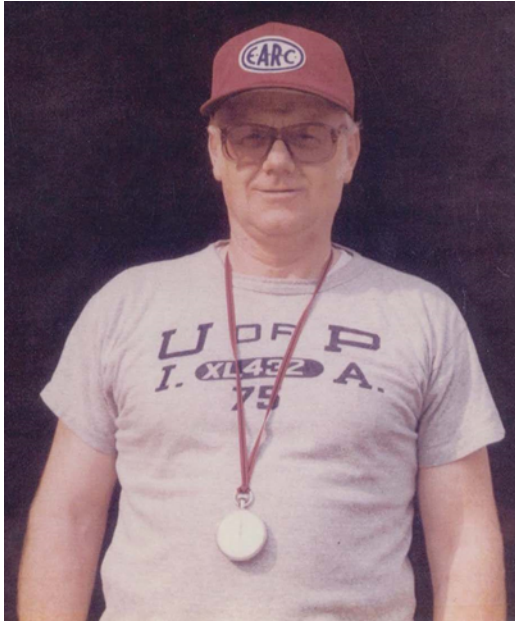
*Tom Cassel ME '68, GME '73, GR '79 Penn Lightweight Crew &
John Cantrill, Captain, W '68 Penn Lightweight Crew*



1968 University of Pennsylvania Lightweight Varsity Crew. Left to right: Peter Deekle C'68, Bob Harrison C'68, Mike Mann C'69, Tom Fisher C'68, Tom Cassel ME'68, Keith Munroe W'69, John Cantrill W'68, Pete Williams C'70, Charles Sherman C'68.

During our four years at Penn, the University of Pennsylvania Lightweight Crew became one of the top crews in the country. Credit goes to Coach Fred Leonard who took what had been a winless program prior to his 1964 arrival and coached it to national prominence in just three years. For us, this all began on a September afternoon in 1964 when the new coach walked into a room in College Hall and introduced himself to a collection of curious freshmen, most of whom had never touched an oar. Unlike today, Coach Leonard did not have the benefit of recruiting high school and prep school oarsmen. We were all “walk ons.” Coach Leonard described the intense training regimen and the need to “make weight.” Making weight, we learned, was to ensure that on race day the oarsmen on a crew averaged 155 lbs. with no man over 160 lbs. Coach Leonard continued, that while he was new to Penn, he knew all things “rowing” and, if we were interested in winning races, meet him at the Boathouse.

Over the next four years, members of the University of Pennsylvania Class of '68 who were oarsmen, coxswains and team managers of the Penn Lightweight Crew included Bill Acker C'68, Samuel Andes C'68, Ben Bachman C'68, David Buchen C'68, Dan Calano C'68, John Cantrill W'68, John Carroll C'68, Tom Cassel ME'68, Peter Deekle C'68, Geoff Farmer C'72, Henry Feinstein W'68, Tom Fisher C'68, Bob Fountain C'68, Peter Gelb W'68, Fred Gevalt C'68, Finn Glidden C'68, Mark Grant W'68, Bob Harrison C'68, Jack Howett C'68, Henry Ingersoll C'68, Jedd Jones C'68, Barry London W'68, Gene Manko EE'68, Richard Platt C'68, Charles Sherman C'68, John Smyers C'68, Steve Zipf C'68 and the late Ed Zolla W'68. Some stayed for all four years and some for fewer, but all were taught by Coach Leonard how to row, how to endure the pain of rowing (and making weight), and how to win.



Coach Fred Leonard was himself an elite oarsman and U.S. national champion in quadruple sculls. Prior to Penn, he had coached prep school teams to 12 national rowing championships. He was tough, but a trusted mentor and ultimately a great friend. His sense of humor was greatly appreciated by everyone at the Boathouse, Heavyweights included. Throughout the 100-year history of Lightweight Rowing at Penn, no coach served longer than Coach Leonard. For 27 years, his crews won 109 cup races, had numerous undefeated seasons, and won national championships. From 1964 to 1991 he helped build the character of some 500 student-athletes. Through generous donations from several of these former oarsmen, the head coach position has been permanently endowed and will forever be known as the Fred W. Leonard Head Coach of Men's Lightweight Crew.

In our freshmen year, we quickly learned that Coach Leonard wasn't kidding about the intense training regimen of Lightweight Rowing. Off the river we fought gravity with serious weight lifting, we ran miles along the banks of the Schuylkill and up the hills of Fairmount Park, and we did daily battle with the scales to stay within reasonable reach of our rowing weight. On the river, we pushed pain thresholds with daily – often twice daily – workouts and rowed well over one thousand miles annually on the Schuylkill during fall and spring practices. Coach Leonard always found a way to extract that last 10% you didn't know you had.

Then there was the weather. Coach Leonard had his "Character Building Days." We'd just finished an exhausting 6 or 10-mile workout. It was near dark, the wind was strong, and it was raining, snowing or sleeting, or sometimes all three. Coach Leonard would bring us tantalizingly close to the Boathouse and its warmth ... and then, through his megaphone came, "Character Building Day!" The coxswains would turn the boats up river for a few more painful miles. Rowing in sub-zero wind chill with ice on the oars was memorable.

But it all paid off when the 1965 racing season got underway in the spring of our freshmen year. In the first race against Rutgers, Penn's Lightweights swept all three races: freshmen, JV and varsity. The program that had been losing prior to Coach Leonard's arrival, now tasted winning. This was the beginning of change in Lightweight Rowing for the Red and Blue.

Skimmer - Our Sophomore Year
Saturday, April 23, 1966



Remember it? We were that crew apparition out there on the Schuylkill -- as far from the river bank as possible -- with oars slapping floating beer cans and bottles as we raced, and defeated, Yale and Columbia. If you remember it, you probably weren't there!

Coach Leonard took a losing crew in 1964 and built it to championship caliber in just three years, a remarkable achievement by any standard. At the culmination of the 1967 racing season in our junior year, Penn's Lightweight freshmen, JV and varsity crews combined to win the Jope Cup at the Eastern Sprints Rowing Championships, symbolic of National Team Supremacy. Members of Penn's Class of '68 who rowed on those crews were John Cantrill, Tom Cassel, Peter Deekle, Tom Fisher, Bob Fountain, Peter Gelb (manager), Bob Harrison, Henry Ingersoll and Charles Sherman (coxswain).



Coach Leonard had been a life-long member of the venerable Undine Barge Club, one of the rowing clubs on the Schuylkill River's historic Boathouse Row. In the summers of 1965, 1966 and 1967 several members of Penn's Lightweight Crew followed in his footsteps and joined the club's racing team. Whereas at Penn, collegiate rowing had been in 8-oared shells, summer club rowing gave us the opportunity also to race in singles, doubles, quads and fours. While at Undine, several members of Penn's Class of '68 – Cantrill, Cassel, Deekle, Fisher, Fountain and Harrison -- raced to silver and bronze podium finishes in the U.S. National Championships.

In the wake of our Jope Cup victory, members of the Penn Lightweight Crew from the Class of '68 returned to campus in the fall of our senior year with enthusiasm and high expectations. Coach Leonard was likewise optimistic and the weight training, running and on-river workouts increased in intensity. We had several "Character Building Days." But as the racing season approached in the spring of 1968, Coach Leonard faced a dilemma: after trying countless seat changes and combination adjustments, he found he had two equally matched eights, both were fast, and selecting one as the JV and one as the Varsity was a problem. For the first half of the racing season we had race-offs on Thursdays to see which boat would row as the varsity that weekend. It was not until mid-way through the season that the varsity boat was settled. Going into the Eastern Sprint Championships, Penn's Lightweight varsity had beaten Rutgers, Georgetown, Yale, Columbia, MIT and Navy and lost only to Cornell and Princeton (both close races), the JV crew was undefeated, and the freshmen crew had lost only to Princeton by a few feet. Penn had not faced Harvard, the #1 seed, during the regular season. Anxiety was high as we boarded the bus to Lake Quinsigamond.

In the end, Harvard swept all three Lightweight races at the Eastern Sprints. Penn was second in all three. But, as reported in the *New York Times*, the Lightweight Varsity race was not without controversy. In the morning trials, Harvard's #4 man lost control of his oar during the start ("caught a crab" in crew speak) and their boat came to a stop. After getting restarted, they failed to catch up with the field and were disqualified from the six-boat afternoon finals. Harvard appealed to the referee and, for reasons unknown, Harvard ended up in the final in a make-shift and sheltered lane 7 by the shore. As the *Times* reported, much criticism was voiced by all of Harvard's competitors, but that did not change the outcome. Penn's Lightweight Varsity finished second, outracing the Cornell and Princeton crews that had beaten us during the regular season. As we rowed back to the dock we knew who we were and what we had accomplished during our tremendously rewarding four-year rowing career as the Lightweight Crew from the University of Pennsylvania Class of '68. Today, some 50 years later, we all consider ourselves very lucky to have been a part of the 100-year legacy of Penn Lightweight Rowing and to have made such close lasting friendships along the way.