

THE HOLLISTER TROPHY

1953

The Hollister Trophy is one of the more unusual traditions at the Santa Barbara Yacht Club. Each year, a small treasure chest — often containing a bottle of rum — is awarded to the winner of the 17-mile Hollister Race. The trophy was presented to the Club in 1953 by California State Senator John Hollister Jr. in memory of his brother, Joseph Steffens Hollister, who died that same year at age 49 from an aggressive brain tumor.

In Santa Barbara, the Hollister name carries the same historic weight as Cabrillo, De la Guerra, or Cota. The family helped shape the region through ranching, public service, and civic leadership, leaving an enduring mark on the Central Coast and the history of California itself.

Joseph Hollister was, by any measure, an accomplished man. Educated at Yale and later earning a doctorate in geology from the University of Göttingen in Germany, he worked internationally in oil exploration and geological research, including projects in the Philippines and Chile. Back home in California, he became involved in groundwater and drilling operations during a time when water development was critical to the region's growth. He also coauthored an influential work on the structural geology of Southern California and the Channel Islands that was used for years in California universities. Despite these achievements, friends noted that he was modest and disliked being called "Doctor."

Both Joseph and John Hollister were members of the Santa Barbara Yacht Club, though the History Committee was unable to locate records describing the original presentation of the trophy itself. Perhaps, in the end, the Hollister Trophy is simply the story of a beloved brother lost too soon, and of another brother who hoped his memory would continue to sail on for generations to come.

So, the next time the little treasure chest appears, it may be worth imagining a quiet toast of rum to Joseph Steffens Hollister — born in 1903, gone in 1953, but still remembered on the waters off Santa Barbara.