

Salem County Sportsmen's Club History

By Everett Sparks, Club Historian

The Salem County Sportsmen's Club originated shortly after World War II. A small group of duck hunters met and formed a club called the Mallard Club. They met in people's homes, in social clubs, anywhere the dozen or so could assemble. In 1947 they renamed their group as the Salem County Sportsmen's Club and were incorporated by the State of New Jersey. Charlie Sparks was the first President in 1947.

As membership in this new club grew, it was decided the members needed more space for their meetings. In the early 50's they pooled their resources and bought the 33 acre Boardman Farm off US Route 40 in Carney's Point Township. Club meetings were held in the barn located behind the family homestead.

In the early 60's Club members were approached by contractors looking for fill dirt for the construction of the divided highway section of Route 40. With the funds they were paid for the fill dirt, members decided it was time to build a permanent clubhouse. From this "watery hole" an 11-acre lake formed, now known as our Lake Hudson. As a side benefit of the excavation for fill dirt, the "hole" continues to fill with water from natural springs under the ground.

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In 1964 after several problems with original contractors who went broke and with the help of many friends, the original clubhouse was opened. As Club membership grew and years passed by, the directors were knowledgeable enough to lease adjoining lands from the DuPont Company. The use of these lands, along with their own 33 acres, provided a large area to develop.

The Club members built a garage for their vehicles, rifle and pistol ranges for the use by its membership, skeet and trap ranges for the enjoyment of many, and provided the area now used by the scouting family.

At the far end of the DuPont property, where the land reached the Salem Canal, they developed an area for picnicking. This is now known as the Charles D. Sparks Picnic Grove.

The picnic grove, which can hold up to 1500 people, has been the home of many clambakes, chicken BBQ's, local police and fireman outings and family campouts. Currently, it serves as the home of the parent-child camping weekend.

Along with the permanent clubhouse came the responsibility for a caretaker. A one-room efficiency apartment was included in the original building and member Irv Hand became the first to live on the grounds. When Irv moved to Florida, Ray Davidson became the live-in caretaker. Ray remained caretaker until his passing in 2012. We now have two residential homes with Loraine Jones and Don Crist as our caretakers.

In the early 80's the building known to everyone as the "pole barn" and aptly named the Glenn Young Pavilion, was erected and has become a gathering spot for many during the warm weather months. Archery ranges were added for those members who used that form of hunting. Membership grew and the need for additional space again surfaced.

In 1993 directors took the bold step of expanding the clubhouse to almost twice its original size. The main hall and kitchen were enlarged, a beautiful bar and captain's lounge was added and office facilities were developed. So the club could continue to prosper, a full-size basement and workshop were available for maintenance use. The caretaker's facilities were enlarged and the former small 6-seat bar became the visitor's cloakroom.

The present clubhouse facility was dedicated in 1995 and still serves as the premier Club in South Jersey. With over 1600 families in its membership, and its continued commitment to the original purpose of "Conservation of resources, Education of its membership to preserve wildlife and Respect for the natural wonder of our lands," this Club has become a landmark in Salem County.

In 2001, the DuPont Company donated a portion of the previously-leased lands to the Sportsmen's Club. The 125 acre portion must be preserved for "open space" use. It is a great addition and brings the Club holdings to over 170 acres.

Because of his long involvement in the scouting program and the club activities, the area used for scouting purposes was officially dedicated as the Joseph J. Dyer, Sr. Scout area.