

## The Needham Sportsman's Club Part VI

The history of the Needham Sportsman's Club through 1960s, 70s and 80s is a study of changing times, not only public interest in hunting and fishing but sporting clubs in general.

During the 1960s the Club continued the upward surge of the 1950s and was considered a leader in the sporting community. Local interest in the Club increased, membership was at its highest; with the exception of one legal challenge to Club's existence, these were exciting times.

Beginning with the 1970s a downward trend could be seen in the Club, many activities are reduced or eliminated, membership declines.

With the increase in housing development and sub-divisions came a loss of available hunting land. The licensing and carrying of firearms became more restrictive. The sale of hunting licenses reportedly dropped 30% by the 1980s. At the end of the decade shooting and hunting as an activity at the Club had all but disappeared.

By the late 1980s there was a renewed interest in fishing especially saltwater fly fishing. A surge in rod and reel technology opened the door to a new generation of fisherman. Graphite and composite materials revolutionized the sport.

About this same time things level off and the Club becomes solely dedicated to fly fishing. However a catastrophic sewer break in 1988 changes the character of the Club for the next 20 years. Unfortunately there is limited documentation to justify or explain the downward trend of the Club, may be it was just a sign of the times.

### A Well Established Foundation to Build On

Looking at the variety of active committees and member participation, one can visualize the structure and power of the Club coming out of the 1960s:

1. Buildings and Property 16
2. Conservation and Education 4
3. Entertainment 3
4. Field Trial 14
5. Legislature and Federation 5
6. Junior Activities 3
7. Membership 4
8. Publicity 7
9. Refreshments 3
10. NRA and Rifle and Pistol 6
11. Special Events 6
12. Trout Pond 14

The above represents a zenith for the Club in 1965; membership was in excess of 230. Records show, in 1955 there were slightly fewer members and only 7 committees however there was greater member participation i.e. 9 members on the Entertainment Committee vs. 3 and 32 members on the Trout Committee vs. 14.

### Club Events and Meetings

As mentioned in Part V, the Club maintained a robust meeting schedule during the 60s:

All monthly meetings were held at the Village Club in Needham Heights. Meetings consisted of a short business meeting, speaker/film, refreshments and raffle table. Speakers were authorities in their field ranging from fisheries biologist, angling and firearms representatives, sporting celebrities or destination camps. Films were very popular, always hunting/fishing related.

For several years a venison stew dinner was highlight of the January meeting. This was prepared by Sam Loomis and a couple of hunter/members however depended on a successful deer season (occasionally supplemented with a little beef, lamb and veal).

The Club annual banquet was a catered roast beef affair, always held in February combined with installation of the newly elected officers.

An annual favorite, a baked bean dinner at the April meeting prepared by several loyal members.

The May meeting was Family Night that included a film or two directed toward the youngsters and a raffle table dominated with items of interest to the fairer set.

As mentioned earlier, the traditional November turkey raffle brought in much needed revenue.

The Club's annual field trails held in April were the largest in New England and a high point of the year. It included a banquet for the participants and money making concession stand, tended by the Club members.

### A Good Start for 1960s

The May 1961 monthly newsletter makes reference to water aerators. It seems the pond committee and its chairman, Matty Mathis, was having concerns about water quality and pond's ability to hold-over trout through the summer. Gilbert Trout Hatcheries was contacted and they recommended a consultant/supplier of water aerators. One was procured and installed in July however how long it was used and what became of it remains unknown.

It didn't seem to have much effect on the brook trout, when it rained they headed up the brook in the gorge. Being late summer, most thought the brookies were just following

their instinct to span. A weir was built thus eliminating the problem and saving the Club a large sum of stocking funds.

The year closed with Sam Loomis being recognized at the December meeting for his hard work and dedication to the Club. He had spent many hours finishing the interior walls of the club house, helping to install the pond aerator and conducting the annual turkey raffle which netted over \$400.

Club dues remained at \$5 per year with an additional \$15 for those wishing to join the trout pond. Membership to the pond was limited to 100 (junior were not part of quota).

### A Challenge to the Club's Existence

The following story is well documented and part of public record. How it precipitated is questionable however the reader can draw his/her own conclusions.

Sometime in 1963 the Club was notified, 9 acres of land in Rose Mary Glen had been acquired for the purpose of sub-division and development. At the subsequent Zoning Board hearings, Club council voiced serious objection, "The collection system of storm water imposes an extra-ordinary burden beyond the outflow of the pipe within the subdivision.....on all abutters.....down stream". Other abutters also objected to the proximity of development to the glen. Approval of the sub-division was ultimately denied.

Coincidentally, in early 1964, one of the Club officers became aware that, although the cottage had a valid occupancy permit issued January 1960, the Club, a separate non-profit entity, also needed a permit and therefore operating illegally.

Immediately upon being made aware of this situation Phil Trowbridge, Club President, submitted the necessary application to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a "special use" permit ..... "To conduct a non-profit club.....organized for the perpetuation of conservation".

At the Board of Appeals hearing on August 4, 1964 the only opposition came from council for the sub-division (abutters) ..... "it seemed obvious.....the Planning Board in denying his client's petition (to the sub-division) would protect the unlawful or illegal use of the property down stream....".

Four land owners abutting the Club spoke, offering glowing reports, the Club was a good neighbor, a benefit to the Town, its presents increasing property values.

The Club was "granted a permit to conduct a club.....for the purposes set forth in its charter of incorporation...."

(One partner in the denied sub-division, Ralph Woodcock, had been a member of the Club.)

To help offset litigation cost for the above episode, members were asked to make donations to a Club "Land Development Fund". Donations were still being accepted through 1965.

## 1970s The End of an Era

There are few if any newsletters or other documents available explaining what actually took place during the period 1966 till 1980. Membership gradually declined and Club activities noticeable disappeared.

Most alarming, the May 1975 newsletter still identified 12 committees however 5 had but 2 members per and the remaining 7, each represented by a single member.

All meetings were now being held at the “trout pond cottage” as it was called. (There is reason to believe the Village Club may have come under new management and no longer available).

The annual February banquet was now a Yankee Pot Roast dinner combined with Family Night. It was moved to the Needham Presbyterian Church around 1970, there is no reference to this event after 1976, presumably lost to history.

A few references are made of members having successful pheasant and deer hunting trips. The Club retained access to shoot at 2 local rifle and pistol clubs. On another occasion a shotgun was raffled off at one of the meetings.

By the late 1970s any reference to hunting or shooting is a mere footnote.

Noticeable missing, after 1970 is any reference to the Club mast head, Northeast Field Trials. No one seems to know why however speculation was, loss of trial venue for the second time or waning interest on the part of Club members in field trials. A more plausible explanation, Dr. W. Beard (Mr. Field Trail), the originator and man directly responsible for years of successful trials was in failing health and no one interested in taking his place.

Some time during the early 1970s opening day in the spring and fall, commenced with a hearty breakfast of ham and eggs, home fries, toast, doughnuts and coffee. This became a tradition carried on till today.

Another traditional event started about this time was a youth fishing derby, culminating with a cookout and awarding of prizes. Only the month varied, either June or October.

## Emergence of a Different Fly Fishing Club

As the Club enters the 1980s, newsletters no longer mention committees just a listing of the officers and current events. Annual dues are \$10 and an additional \$25 to fish the trout pond. Using the above figure and a treasurer's balance sheet, membership was estimated to be 130. This would indicate, although the Club had lost approximately 100 members since 1970, a new fly fishing club was being created.

The January 1981 newsletter makes reference to the Needham Exchange Club running a Washington's Birthday Flea Market and the Club was looking for donations of hunting and fishing related items to be sold as fund raiser, volunteers were also needed to run the booth.

It must have been a profitable venture because the Club participated in the Town of Needham 4<sup>th</sup> July Flea Market and volunteers were again needed.

An interesting item in the April 1981 newsletter makes reference that.... "Night fishing will be allowed on an experimental basis. You may fish until 10:00 PM..... if there is any loud noise, night fishing will be suspended". "There have also been complaints about unsportsmanlike conduct....including foul language....you may be subject to suspension." Night fishing is never mentioned again.

In the November 1982 newsletter, member's attention was drawn to recent improvements to the Club, namely 2 new aerators at a cost of \$3,000.

To off-set these cost and provide a badly needed transfusion to the treasury, George Giunta, popular member and Club Secretary, recommended the Club sponsor a Country/Western Night dance at the Needham Village Club. He also offered to make all the necessary arraignments.

Club dues were raised to \$15 and pond dues up to \$35 in March 1983. In the same newsletter announcement is made, the fall dance was such a success (\$1,310), George is planning another for the end of April.

An unusual item appears in the April newsletter referring to the board of directors voting to retired Sam Loomis's trout pond number.... "He was a great asset to the Club and will be missed". However there is no mention that he was in ill health or possibly deceased.

A short note in the May 1983 newsletter, George Giunta is recognized for raising another \$1,135 from the spring dance and for all his dedication and hard work.

In a move to save money, the November 1983 newsletter announced, starting in January "Newsletter will only be sent out quarterly, regular meeting notices (post card) will be sent monthly." There was even a recommendation to do away with the monthly meeting notice and call each member by phone. The latter was not well received.

Another unusual reference appears in the January 1984 newsletter.... "It appears there is an oil leak coming from someplace and infiltrating the area around the pond. A complaint has been lodged with the Fire Marshall." A very unusual announcement, and even more disturbing, no further explanation made of this situation in the Club archives.

At the March 1984 general meeting, Harold Hines is honored for his many years of exemplary service to the Club when he is ..... "elected to the distinguished office of Director Emeritus. Harold joins Archie Friswell and Dick Gilfoy in what must be considered the most honored office in our Club".

In September 1984, in attempt to raise needed funds, the Board of Directors vote to offer a limited number (10) life time memberships for \$250. Records indicate only 6 taking advantage of the offer.

During the late 1980s there are numerous newsletter foot notes referring to member's fishing trips i.e. Grand Lake Stream, Cape Cod stripper fishing, bass fishing on local ponds, even West Coast salmon fishing.

Fly tying becomes a popular venue giving new members an opportunity to learn another part of the fly fishing experience. Many Club members were experts and always ready to help the new comer. This has become a tradition carried on for many years.

Although there is no reference, sometime during 1986-1987 time frame, one set of dues was established, \$60/ adults and \$25/ juniors.

### Postscript

This concludes the six part history of the Needham Sportsman's Club. Initially as I started writing, it was a narrative based on my personal memory. At that time there didn't appear to be a Club file of documents or achieves. I asked some of the older members if they knew of such documents and was led to believe most if not all may have been lost or destroyed.

I tried to bolster my memory with research at the Needham Public Library. The librarian directed me to the Microfiche of old town newspapers and history books. She researched library files for any reference of the Club, to no avail. It appears the library has a long standing policy to maintain documents submitted by town organizations i.e. annual reports, newsletters, etc. Unfortunately none had ever been forwarded by the NSC.

A short time after submitting my first two narratives, Don Michael, a long time member and past secretary/treasurer, came forward with a box of old records and newsletters. There was no table of contents for the box; it appeared to be a spares collection of old documents i.e. original Club charter, by-laws, deeds, hand written secretary reports, etc. About the same time Rollie Johnson, the longest standing member and past president (1975-76) provided a few newsletters from that period. My next stop was the Norfolk County Deeds Office for information regarding the Club property. That data was all factual and well documented as described in my writing.

Although as the history evolved there were months and in some cases years, void of any data, enough was pieced together keeping the story interesting. What made it most difficult was checking as many facts as possible for accuracy. It was near impossible at times to cross reference important points, numbers and dates.

The Club history ends in the late 1980's because the fall of 1987 was a precursor of events leading up to a massive sewer line break under the Club pond. This devastating event took more than 20 years to resolve and is explained in detail in a separate document, "A History of The Needham Sportsman's Club Water Problems" dated 2012. This has been placed in the Club archives, available from the Club secretary and eventually through the website.

There are only 10 newsletters to cover the 10 year span of the 1990s; an insufficient number to prepare a worthwhile historical representation. Of the 100+ members today (2012) as many as 30 have been members thought out this period. Possible at some point in time, one could interview those interested members and create a historical piece of value.

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