

THE BIRTH OF PINEY ISLAND CLUB

By:

Travis Morris

In order for you to fully understand how Piney Island Club came into being, I must go back to the mid-seventies when I was running Monkey Island Club.

I was operating Monkey Island Club on a joint venture with Mr. Frank Penn. (Mr. Penn is the son of Charles A. Penn who was one of the founders of the American Tobacco Co.) In an effort to sell Monkey Island, we opened the club to the public for the first time ever in 1974.

A Mr. Hammond from Rocky Mount brought a party to the club each year. In 1977, he called me and said he had a young man named John High that he would like to bring and would also like to bring his wife who liked to hunt. I assured him that I had no objections and asked if they would want a room with twin beds or a double bed. He said they were kind of young and would probably want a double bed.

On the day of their arrival, December 7, 1977, I met the party at Jones' dock at Waterlily. There was High with his wife and a little ole dog that looked to me like a house pet. I thought to myself, "Why in Hell is he bringing that thing?" Anyway, Hambone and I loaded all the gear, people and dog into the gas boat and headed out in the Sound for the four-mile trip to Monkey Island. We arrived at the dock and Jack Jarvis had the old truck (which was made from a Crosley chasis with an air-cooled motor) sitting on the end of the dock to carry up all the baggage. It was a pretty cold evening and, as we were walking up the dock, you could see the smoke coming out of the chimney and smell the wood burning in the big, old fireplace. High asked me where the dog kennel was. I said, "Dog kennel! We don't use dogs over here, but you can put her in the boat house, I guess." He said, "How about

the porch?" and I gave my okay.

The next morning, Mr. Charles Simpson carried John, Caroline and the dog, Ginger, to Southeast Island. It was a cold morning with a little skin of ice. When they came in for lunch, they reported a good hunt and Mr. Charles was telling me how that little dog was really retrieving the ducks. John says that night I said, "Let the dog in by the fire."

During the course of the three days at Monkey Island, John, Caroline, and I became friendly. They asked if I knew of any marsh they could buy as they had two young boys and would like for them to have a place to hunt. I told them about the Gray's Island marsh of 127 acres which I owned with two other people, and I thought one of them would sell. They bought his interest and after that until Piney Island's clubhouse was built, each season John and Caroline would stay with Frances and I and hunt at Gray's Island.

In order to make this story complete, I have to tell you about another member of Piney Island Club whom I met at Monkey Island. John Banner from Mount Airy used to come to Monkey Island and bring a party. One year he brought a young fellow named David Swain. A year or so after Monkey Island was sold to Nature Conservancy, I stopped by Poyner's Garage in Barco. Who should be there with a bad waterpump but John Banner and David Swain. I believe they had been to the beach fishing. They wanted to buy marsh. To shorten the story, I sold them the other partner's third and later David bought out John Banner.

Time passed, and one day Mildred Markert and Aubrey Midgett, brother and sister, came into my office and wanted to know if I could sell the Piney Island property. There were many heirs and I told them if they could ^{get} a power of attorney from all of them, I thought I could sell it. Aubrey did this and I got underway.

I mentioned this property to John High one day since he is in the real estate and developing business. He said, "Let's put a club together ourselves".

I agreed that might be a good idea. The next step was for John to get a group together at his home and I showed them maps of the property, etc. It is located three miles north of Coinjock bridge paralleling the Intracoastal Waterway for about a mile on the west side and Cedar Island Bay on the east. Along the Waterway, we have a lot of high, sandy land with beautiful live oaks and cedar trees. East of this is marsh around Cedar Island Bay. Back toward Piney Island road we have a nice stand of pine timber. I told the prospective members that we could combine this with the Gray's Island property and have over six hundred acres with great potential, but would take several years and that the hunting would have to come from within. We would have to build ponds on the property so we could protect the ducks. In the face of the fast bass boats, etc. on the Sound, a duck can't sit down in Currituck Sound anymore. It appears that open Sound hunting is over. At this meeting, it was decided that a group would come down to my house and I would arrange to take them hunting and show them the property.

Many of the prospective members weren't able to come, but the ones I remember coming were John High, DeWitt McCotter, John Williams, Sandy Thorpe, Jack Winslow, David Swain and Bill Woltz who is a friend of David's from Mount Airy. I told the fellows that I could get Jimmy Markert (Mildred's son) for the caretaker. I think it is appropriate that I tell you a bit about Jimmy. He was in his thirties at the time and never married. He has been around the world seven times in the Merchant Marines, got his fill of that and started spending a lot of time around my Father's racetrack. (Daddy bred and raced Standardbred horses as a hobby.) Somehow Jimmy started shoeing horses and travelled the racing circuit up north for a time. We caught him at a time when he was ready to come home for a while. I asked him to help me show the property since he knew the lines better than I did.

Some of us climbed a tree on a hill and decided that was where the clubhouse should be. The weather turned real bad and David Swain's plane could not come in for him and Bill Woltz. They spent another night and I took them to Norfolk to get a commercial flight.

Following this trip, the Charter members met in DeWitt McCotter's office one afternoon and signed the corporate papers. John High had a plan for the house and we drew lots for the rooms. My roommate turned out to be DeWitt and so far, we have gotten along very peaceably.

The Charter members were:

1. Don Bulluck, Jr. - Owner of Don Bulluck Chevrolet in Rocky Mount;
2. Howard Cliborne - Owner of King's Grant Realty in Nags Head and a developer;
3. John High - A real estate developer and owner of a little of everything in Rocky Mount;
4. E. B. Chester - Started Tar River Communications. He is the only member of the club who flies his own jet and docks his own 72' Hatteras;
5. David Smith - Started Tar River Communications;
6. Lanny Roof - At the time, was an executive with Golden Corral Corp. Now I don't know if he calls himself retired, but he is always busy;
7. DeWitt McCotter - Senior partner in the law firm of Spruill, Lane, Carlton, McCotter and Jolly. They have had several mergers and is now the fourth largest law firm in the state. DeWitt once told me he couldn't believe he was roommate with Chester Morris' son. He started practising law about the time Daddy retired. Daddy had the reputation of being a hard, but fair, judge and DeWitt said he was scared of him; THIS TURNED INTO POYNER-SPRUILL - SECOND LARGEST LAW FIRM IN N.C. OVER 100 LAWYERS/DEWITT WAS MANAGER UNTIL HE RETIRED A FEW YRS. AGO
8. Jack Winslow - An oral surgeon and investor;
9. Lindy Dunn - CEO of the Guardian Corp. and a sailor;

10. John Williams - CEO of United Federal Savings and Loan at the time. Now he just looks after his investments and makes more;
11. Sandy Thorpe - President of Thorpe-Ricks Tobacco Co.;
12. Bill Woltz - President of Perry Manufacturing Co. which makes ladies apparel for many large department stores;
13. David Swain - Developer of shopping centers and housing subdivisions;
14. Jack Laughery - Chairman of the Board of Imasco USA which is the parent of Hardee's; and
15. Travis Morris - local real estate broker.

We decided to leave the sixteenth place open for now.

We closed the transaction for the property at 3:30 PM on April 18, 1983. We started construction on the road to the spot where the clubhouse was to be built that same spring. We needed nearly a mile of road. I just knew this was going to be a big mess for many a day. However, with John High's luck, when we started digging the ditch to get the material, the prettiest white sand you ever saw emerged. We have a great road. One major problem with the road was about 150 feet of marsh nearly to the clubhouse site. While we were trying to get a permit to make a way across this, we laid out old plywood and anything to get the trucks across. We were lucky again to have a dry summer. John High was determined to have that road ready for the first day of hunting season. One day when I was not there, John had a pond dug and the dirt put into the marsh. The next day the CAMA plane flew over and saw this. Since I was the one who applied for the permit, I was immediately contacted and given so many hours to get that dirt pushed out of the marsh or go to jail. You can rest assured I got a bulldozer in there and pushed out the dirt John had just pushed in! From this point on, CAMA, Corps of Engineers, and all kept a watchful eye on us.

By now, the club was the proud owner of a 1946 Ford tractor that John found somewhere. This old Ford would not even navigate that 150 feet of

marsh. The only way across was Ned Markert's 4WD Allis Chalmers or hip boots. Since that time, the Rocky Mount Republicans got enough political clout from Washington to get the "bears off our back". Now the best part of the road is across the marsh.

That first year after the hunting season, the members decided to have the wives down for the ACC weekend. It has been an annual event ever since. My first glimpse of Helen Laughery was on this weekend. I had just come across the marsh with the tractor and here sits this woman in a red Cadillac convertible in a full length fur coat. She introduced herself and I loaded her up on the tractor and carried her to the clubhouse. (Seems this was some kind of joke on John High.)

Now, I need to tell you about our cook, June Twiford. June is employed year round, the same as Jimmy. June's grandfather-in-law was the caretaker at Monkey Island Club for the Penn family for at least thirty years. In fact, June's husband's name is Wayne Penn Twiford. I tell you this so you will understand that June is familiar with how the old hunting clubs were run. June's cooking has been a big factor in the success of Piney Island Club. This group likes to eat good food and there are not so many ducks in Currituck anymore.

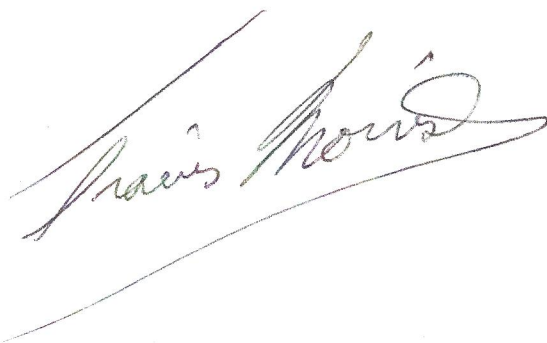
We are trying to do something about the duck situation, however. Each year we raise and release more ducks than we kill.

At our meeting in 1984, we decided to take in another member, thanks to the second of a motion by McCotter. I suggested Billy Brumsey, a local attorney, who is a good friend of mine and had expressed interest in joining the club. Billy was accepted and stayed in about a year. He bought a farm and started his own impoundments and duck improvements. His interest was sold to Hugh Sherin of Rocky Mount. About this time, E. B. Chester decided he didn't have time for the club and his interest was sold to Fred Dunstan, who is Lindy's "right-hand man" in the Guardian Corp.

As time has passed, we have been steadily making improvements. We made several impoundments at the north end of the property and one at the south end. We also have five woods ponds, one natural and four we dug. We have built a boathouse that has a stall for each member's boat. In 1986, we built a brooder house which leads out into a large pond and covered pen. This way, we can keep our own birds and feed them without feeding the released ducks at the house.

With the exception of Hugh Sherin, Don Bulluck, John High (who has just joined the "over-50 fraternity") and myself, we have a young group of men. I enjoy seeing them bring their sons to hunt with us. For them, to come down, kill a duck, come in to a roaring oak fire, and sit down to a big hot meal is duck hunting. They will never miss the flocks of canvasback and redheads coming in to a big stand of decoys in the middle of the Sound as I do because they have never seen it. In my opinion, they never will in Currituck again. Maybe this is just as well. What it is all about anyway is the fellowship of those who love the outdoors regardless of their station in life.

There have been many guests to enjoy the hospitality of Piney Island Club. The hospitality, fellowship, and facilities are the things they have enjoyed because there haven't been that many ducks to kill. The people I have met at Piney Island Club are what we call "quality people" because we wouldn't invite any other type guest.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Travis Morris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the main body of text. It features a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.