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## The Huntsville Country Club Celebrating 93 years

By Marjorie Ann Reeves

From playing golf in a cow pasture owned by Dallas Manufacturing company to having a country golf course was a dream come true for several Huntsvillians in 1925. Fifteen men dreaming of a real golf course became the founders of the Huntsville Golf and Country Club. The founders were Robert Allen, J.F. Chambers, Robert Chase, Charles, Dillard, W.P. Dilworth, Shelby Fletcher, Frank Ford, Lawrence Goldsmith, William Hall, Willard, Hutchens, Herbert Johnson, Quincy Love, George Mahoney, Tracy Pratt, and Augustine White. The Huntsville Country Club preservation through growing pains, down times, and bankruptcies continues to survive changes.



***13th Fairway***

Huntsville's population was at 10,000 civilians in 1925 and growing slowly. Mr. W.L. Williams came from Missouri in 1925 on a contract to build Highway 231 section up Mono Sano. He

contributed his heavy equipment to build the first nine holes for the country club making it possible for he and his wife to play daily golf. The last nine holes course built on the northside in 1926 was on bare, hard ground difficult to play on. That portion of land was sold in 1942. The Club bought the Clay property in 1950 and the Prince property in 1955 making the eighteen-hole course complete, opening it up in 1959. The Huntsville Country Club no longer dwells in the country since the property became annexed by the city of Huntsville in 1956.

Huntsville's leading businessmen participated in the growth of the Club such as Leo Schiffman, Robert Lee Schiffman, L.B. Goldsmith and others who became charter members when the Club first organized. One of the first golf pros at the Club was Robert Lowry, Sr. in 1932 who conducted the annual Tennessee Valley golf tournament.



***Barbara Chapman and Lane Nichols***

He resigned in 1933 to regain his amateur status. He won the Orchard Place (the name of the clubhouse) Club championship in 1938 and 39. Later Senior had to share winnings with his son, Robert Lowry, Jr, until 1957, then

Jr. continued wining until 1979. Women golfers championships at Huntsville Country Club did not come about until 1964. The Huntsville Country Club has hosted the Women's Alabama Golf Association Championship (WAGA) several times. The last hosting event was in 2000 where the 68<sup>th</sup> state tournament was held while Huntsville Country Club celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The state computation included 128 players from around Alabama.

It is said that Robert Lowry, Sr. enjoyed the Club and was there so much that his spirit still hasn't left. He and John McLain's spirit are felt to be still partying at the Club though their bodies rest in a cemetery. Golf Pro Milton Ward had a pet Parrot "Pete" who would announce Ward's arrival by screeching "Get my practice balls!" Bill Hendricks came to the club everyday becoming nicknamed "Boss Hogg" from the *Dukes of Hazzards*. He was known for his storytelling and entertaining ways to the extent a statue of him was placed in the Pro Shop. The oldest member to date is 93-year-old Claude Dorning who comes to the Club regularly. Over the years, members have earned nicknames and left legions.

Several charter members, such as H.K. Doak, Edwin Jones, Raymond Jones, and Harry Sugg, besides top golfers, were top tennis players leading to add tennis courts to the Club property on the original layout. The Country Club hosted local tournaments and was home for "Mr. Tennis" Cecil Fain for three years before he became a team member of the Huntsville Tennis Club.

Jean Spencer excelled at tennis and golf; she did well as partners with Cecil Fain in both sports. The club no longer host tennis computations. A swimming pool was not built at the Country Club until 1952. After problems developed with the first pool, a new pool was built in 1968. The best year of swimming competition was in 1985, the team won the “C” division. The pool is mainly a popular spot for families during the summer now. A young man who worked as lifeguard for three summers stated he enjoyed his job at the Club.



***Club Swimming Pool***

Huntsville County Club became the place to socialize. Proms, birthday parties, wedding parties, christenings, reunions, celebrations of all kinds and are ongoing events at the Club. Socializing after a game of golf could take up the afternoon, one could join a game of cards that brings members together in the evening. The Club was considered home away from home by members and employees. Generations have been raised at the Club and membership often continues with their children. The Club house started in the Moss House that was on the property when the land was bought. When the house burnt down, the Carriage House was used as the club house until 1949 when a concrete block club house was built. Due to modernization, it became necessary to build a new,

modern club house which was accomplished in 1984 modeled after Turtle Point club house in Decatur. The owners have upgraded the facilities since taking on the country club and improved the golf course.

The African-American community has supported the Club from the beginning by long employment including Caddies to Club Manager to employing the Club for events. Napoleon Woods, who did shoe shines and locker room coverage, was given an immense farewell party for his retirement. Walter's Cheeseburger is still on the menu and considered the best in Huntsville. The personnel still have a big smile when they talk about petite Pinkie High approaching the Club to have her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday event there. It was quite the celebration party to remember. A&M University recently held their golf tournament at Huntsville Country Club.

The employees as well as the members look on the Club as a family unit and are very supportive of each other. Members and employees have been known to form a confederacy during those rare moments when there was disagreement with the board's action against an employee. Amiability is the norm at the Club providing a very low turnover in employment, some employees working as long as 50 years at the Country Club.

The population of Huntsville grew very slowly until people came to the city to build and work at the Redstone Arsenal constructed to support World War II. From 1940s, growth exploded four times the amount

and the city has continued to keep up rapid growth. The Huntsville Country Club survived the great depression, wars, growth and changes in the



***Mary Kay meeting in  
Ladies Card Room***

city of Huntsville while continuing to thrive. During its last bankruptcy in 2013, it was taken over by six investors who became its new owners: Dave Tolliver, Bill Stender, Mike and Patsy Ryan, Benny Nelson, Rod Roberts, and Beth Boyer.

They are working to be good neighbors to Huntsville by opening the doors to all of Huntsville. The golf course continues to be only for members of Huntsville Country Club while the Club is open to provide a place for meetings and celebrations.

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### **References:**

Vines, William E., *Huntsville Country Club Celebrating 75 years*, © 2000

### **Interviews:**

Beth Boyer – co-owner

Michelle Kloske – Event Coordinator and Membership Director

Julia Wilson Conway – retired, Director of catering and events for 26 years

Tina King Walker – Bartender for 20 years

Jackie Noblitt – member, pro shop manger

Rhett Woody – 2<sup>nd</sup> generation member

Cedric Reeves – Lifeguard for three summers