

Deer Creek Conservation Club History (Carroll County, Indiana)

About 37 years ago the first seed was sown that grew to be a big thing for many years. Several men in the Deer Creek Community wanted to gig, but could not do it legally except as a club or an organization.

In 1935 Arthur Cohee called some of the men together at the Charles McCain Filling Station on the McCain farm on Indiana 29, north of Deer Creek.

An organization meeting of the Deer Creek Conservation Club followed in the Deer Creek School Building. Cohee was elected president and Lionel Delaplane, secretary. Plans were made to do some gigging for carp and suckers. Oral Caldwell stored the gigging equipment at his home.

The club's first fish fry was held in 1937 at the Deer Creek Masonic Hall for the purpose of recruiting a membership and to raise funds. The price was only 25 cents per family; of course, each family took a covered dish and pie. To accommodate the increasing crowd, the annual fish fries were moved to the Deer Creek School Building until club grounds were purchased and a suitable building constructed.

The Conservation Club men were noted for their fish frying abilities. During the many years they were in business they went far and near with their own equipment to fry fish for as many as 22 organizations in a year. The most fish they fried for any one supper was 250 (?). They purchased a truck to convey their equipment.

The group purchased 12.7 acres of land along Deer Creek from Taylor and Lillie M. Fouts and received the deed August 17, 1940. The seven-tenths acre was purchased to gain an entrance over the hill to the area along the creek. The cost was \$600, according to the deed. Surveying was done by Arthur Ritchey. Asa Ryan of the Cass County Conservation Club was contacted for information in expanding the club.

To help pay for the land, \$20 life memberships were sold.

While clearing the brush on the land purchased, the men found a spring, and with 12-inch tile and a pitcher pump, they had their first well. The pond in the creek adjoining the grounds was an old stone quarry. About five springs from the hillside flow into the pond.

Charles McCain donated his old service station building for the first clubhouse. Harry Plank provided wheels for the building's ride. Taylor Knight, the club's third president, pulled it with his tractor to the club grounds.

About 1941 an old house on the Sally Stephen farm had to be razed to make way for a practice landing field for airmen at Bunker Hill Air Force Base. It was purchased for \$225, torn down and the lumber used to enlarge the clubhouse with a 20-foot shed built on the east. The floor was of sand and gravel.

Labor Day came to be the date for the annual membership fish fries. For several years the price was a dollar per family. Later the fee was increased to \$2.00. The day and night activities also included a ballgame and a trap shoot with about 7,000 rounds used. Orvie Harmon, secretary for several years, usually announced the ball games.

A softball league was organized in 1945 and electric lights and bleachers were added. Popcorn was sold at the games by the girls of the Luther League of Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church. As the club activities and community interest grew and the women wanted to be involved, the facilities became inadequate. In one evening \$1,700 was raised in donations and pledges toward another building.

In 1948 a new cement block two-story building was constructed with Ted Sidenbender as carpenter and Orville Hinkle, chairman of the club for some 20 years, as supervisor. Material was furnished by the club and labor was donated. The old building then was used by the caretakers, many who were single and lived in it.

The following year a large porch and spacious kitchen with built-in cabinets and dumb waiter for serving to the dining room were built onto the cement block structure. Soon the kitchen was well-equipped, mostly by donations. A well was drilled and water piped to the kitchen and rest rooms. A pretty walk was cleared around the pond and two or three wooden bridges across. Pine trees were planted in the front of the building.

Regular meeting of the club officers were on the first Tuesday night of each month. One of the stipulations made by the officers was that alcoholic beverages were not to be permitted on the grounds.

Trap shoots, dating back to 1949, were held on the second and fourth Friday nights of the month. The automatic trap was made by John Wilson and William Kuszmaul.

To raise funds, euchre parties were held on the first and third Monday nights of the month. The first was on January 10, 1949. Card tables were donated, but most of the 27 tables were made by Roy McKinney.

This same year a venison supper was served. An American flag donated was by Mrs. Alice Campbell and an oil heater purchased at Burlington for the upstairs room.

The holiday seasons were not complete without the family Christmas parties which featured entertainment, a decorated tree, and Santa.

Another annual event was the New Year's Day fox drive and trap shoot which attracted men from as far as Indianapolis, Monon, Kokomo, Peru, Rochester, and Fort Wayne. Roy Yeakley, the club's second president, engineered the cooking of six gallons of ham and beans (16 pounds of beans and a ham) for the noon meal which was accompanied by cornbread and pie and coffee. Mrs. Yeakley had a chili recipe which she gave to about six other ladies who also made chili to be served. When Orville Campbell tired of making coffee in a lard can, three coffeemakers were purchased.

The club sponsored a Boy Scout troop and Camporees were held at the site.

The playground equipment has always been popular with the children. When the slide became rusty, they used a roll of waxed paper to sit upon (or bread wrappers) until it became slick again.

Also a part of the busy schedule of the year-round Conservation Club calendar were family reunions, square dances, weddings, receptions, birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, and Home Demonstration, Farm Bureau, Scout, and 4-H meetings.

When it became difficult to secure officers for the Conservation Club, the general feeling was that the Deer Creek Community still needed the facility, no matter how difficult it was to secure help. The officers contacted the Carroll County Commissioners and proposed to turn it over to the Carroll County Park and Recreation Board. This was accomplished and the land deeded to the Park Board on February 10, 1967, and recorded May 11, 1967, when Jesse T. Kuszmaul was the club president and Leonard Chapman, secretary. Money in the club treasury was divided among the stock holders. Mr. Kuszmaul purchased the fish frying equipment and that year had 33 fries. He later sold it to the Tatmans at Logansport.

The name changed from Deer Creek Conservation Club to Deer Creek Park.

Under the new management, Dick Shedron represented the community on the Park Board until Dana Myer was appointed early in 1972.

The grounds are still available to the public as before. Camping, fishing, boating, reunions, picnics, and meetings are some of the present activities at the park. Fees are charged for camping and use of the building. Camping is \$1 for a night or \$5 for a week with a two-week limit. The building rents for \$10, or \$4 for the top floor and \$6 for the lower floor, which includes the kitchen and large dining area.

The building has served as a voting place for primary and general elections. With only one precinct in Washington Township now, all voting is done there.

Willie Segraves served as the first caretaker. Others were Hawley Baker, Lloyd (Friday) Mohr, Blane Tribbett, and Lewis Cates. Michael Maple, a Lewis Cass High School teacher, is the present caretaker and has served since 1966. He and his family live in their mobile home on the park grounds. Reservations may be made by calling him at (219) 859-2371 or by stopping at the park.

The park is conveniently located along Deer Creek and Indiana 218 which was built and the roadway changed before the grounds were purchased. Deer Creek Park provides an ideal and quiet location for a summer outing or winter fun to while the time away. Possibilities for future development are unlimited.

Written about 1972, author unknown