

# History of the Cavalier Golf & Yacht Club

The land which the Club, Course and surrounding Neighborhood are situated was once rich and fertile farmland belonging to several families – all who also had the good fortune of holding spectacular views of the Linkhorn Bay providing, in the day an abundance of fish and shellfish indigenous to those waters.

By the early 1900's Birdneck was divided into five areas – land to the west of Cardinal Road belonged to the Miner family, to the east was held by Mr. Hurdle and beyond that was a forty-acre tract extending northward across the point owned by the Stormont family. The balance of the land was held by the descendants of John Ackiss, High Sheriff in 1769 whose property, some thirty acres from the end of Bobolink south to the inlet and north to where the Clubhouse now sits. The remainder of the Point belonged to the Miller family.

During the real estate boom of the early twenties parcels of land were being promoted for residential sale however it was deemed to be too far from the city of Norfolk. In 1925 Richard Crane, the son of a California plumbing manufacturer examined the land and decided to fund a ten to twelve year development program to bring about what is to this day know as Birdneck Point. Swamps were dredged to create attractive waterways, lights and plantings were put in to attract affluent buyers and he envisioned a Bermudian theme of architecture in the homes that were planned (many of which still stand today). In fact the original Clubhouse, consisting of a lounge, bar and dining room known as the Linkhorn Room was also architecture reminiscent of that found in Bermuda.

With adequate funding and a successful development underway Crane commissioned a golf course to be designed in 1926 selecting Charles Banks to carve a golf course through the residential neighborhood. The course was to feature holes that reflected the most famous holes from courses around the world, such as Redan, the Road Hole at St. Andrews, and Biarritz. The course was originally laid out with hole 1 starting where hole 10 is and the Clubhouse situated near where the Davlin residence stands today. It was deemed that the land there was not sufficient in acreage to fulfill the other recreational needs of the Clubhouse such as trapshooting and horseback riding (stables and track).

An arrangement was secured with the owners of the Cavalier Hotel (built in 1927) to facilitate the recreational needs of hotel guests. Upon Mr. Crane's untimely and tragic death in 1938 while duck hunting on the James River the golf course was purchased from his estate by the Cavalier Hotel and was thereafter know as Cavalier Country Club. The owner of the hotel, Mr. Sidney Banks (not related to the course architect) was a very positive force in the growth and improvements to the Club, its amenities and towards the neighborhood in general.



On March 22, 1947 the Club's manager announced that the facilities at Birdneck Point would now be known as the Cavalier Yacht and Country Club, a private, non-profit club for the exclusive use of the Members and their guests and would be directed by officers and a board of directors. A full membership which included green fees was \$75 annually, social memberships were available for \$25 – extensive improvements continued to be made to the property and Mr. Banks continued to oversee the operation of the Club. Later that same year an extension was planned to the 55 foot pier in anticipation of extensive dredging of the Lynnhaven Inlet which would open up Broad and Linkhorn Bays to larger boats. Other improvements were announced including a 200 seat dining room (although not completed until 1959), shuffleboard and paddle tennis courts and anchorage for seaplanes for guests arriving by air. By the summer of 1952 the Club was considered to be one of the mid-South's major Yacht Clubs, its marina accommodating some 75 yachts and cruisers on their dual 200 foot-long piers.

During the mid to latter 50s the Club continued to prosper and improve, adding overnight rooms and a pool, the stables were torn down and two tennis courts added in their place and construction to the dining room completed. To facilitate these improvements it was deemed that the Club must maintain a minimum of 60 Members but that a maximum of 100 would be set so as to keep the golf course from becoming overcrowded (as it was still being used by Hotel guests.) On April 19, 1959 the new dining room was dedicated with a formal dinner honoring eleven past Presidents of the Cavalier Yacht and Country Club. Ten of the men and the widow of the eleventh were invited to attend: H J Murray (1948 and 1951), the widow of Ezra T Summers (1949), C Fred Cook (1950), Charles S Crocker (1952), J T Timmons (1953), William H Terry (1954), Robert S Wahab (1955), William A Robertson (1956), Robert M Lambe (1957) and E Ashley Haycox (1958).

In 1959 the Club and its properties were purchased by the Southwestern Development Company which allowed Banks to continue to run the Club under a lease agreement that would cease at the end of 1960. It was conditioned that the golf course could not be sold for ten years and would still be available to hotel guests at the prevailing green fees. Southwestern's desire was to establish the Club as a true private club, operated and controlled by the membership and therefore leased it to the members for \$48,000 per year. The following year Southwestern sold the property to the Birdneck Cavalier Land Corporation for approximately \$600,000 and was funded - half by stock certificates and half by bank loans, in return a new lease was negotiated with the members of the renamed Cavalier Golf & Yacht Club. Also included in the lease was the provision that the golf course could not be sold for ten years.

In 1969 the lease was renegotiated and construction begun on the new clubhouse. The motel units and pool were razed and a new pool and tennis courts were built in their current location – the total cost of the project was projected at \$500,000. A three phase, ten year project was adopted and work commenced. By the end of 1980 with all work completed the Club purchased the property from the Land Corporation for 1.2 million dollars and the latter was liquidated. In 1981 the long promised Golf Shop was added with cart storage below and a centralized irrigation system was added to the golf course fed by new wells replenishing the water to the lake on number 7.

The Cavalier has been host to many famous golfers – Mickey Wright, Betsy Rawls, Louise Suggs, Patty Berg, Kathy Whitworth, Beverly Hanson and Marilyn Smith have joined an illustrious group of men such as Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead, Marty and Ed Furgol, Julius Boros, Tommy Bolt and Jack Nicklaus as the Cavalier has been the site of a number of LPGA, PGA, USGA and Mid-Atlantic tournaments through the years including the Virginia Beach Open played here during the 1950s. The infamous Walter Hagen was actually the Club's honorary Chairman and touring Pro in those years. Another chapter of interest came during the Second World War when an anti-aircraft battery was set up near the 15<sup>th</sup> fairway and the Clubhouse opened up for the recreation of officers stationed in the area.

The Club has a proud and storied past as one of the premier Yacht Clubs on the East Coast and dates back to its formation in 1947 when Sidney Banks invited P J Murray and W H Terry to organize the new activity thus instigating the change of the Club's name to Cavalier Yacht and Country Club with activities beginning in the summer of 1948 when the Club sponsored sailing races and held its first cruise to Urbanna in which seven boats participated. The Club has grown its docks and capacity over the years starting with a ten by forty foot float, followed by a pier with ten slips constructed of untreated hard woods taken from the property – which in turn was replaced a few years later when the Beach Canal was opened and interest had soared. A second dock of 180 feet was constructed in 1951 with a pier at the end...and by 1997 the Club offered 85 slips on three piers but continued to maintain a wait list and in the summer of 2004 installed two sets of floating docks at the end of the North and East Piers taking the capacity to 100 slips.

With the growth of the Marina so grew the membership and in response to what had become and inadequate and dated Clubhouse a complete renovation and expansion of the existing facility was undertaken in 1996, as well as work to the seawall, fueling system and later the addition of two tennis courts bringing the total to six. The entire Clubhouse reopened to its Members on May 31, 1997. Maintaining a well appointed, modern and first class facility had always been the Club's hallmark dating back to Sidney Banks' commitment, philosophy and love of the Club. Many of the active golfing Members knew that the Golf Course had been overdue for an extensive renovation and modernization...

A concept plan was designed by Lester George of Richmond and in 1999 the Board of Directors adopted the design, however due to the significant scope of the project and the funding necessary to complete such an undertaking work did not commence until the summer of 2002. Further research was performed by Mr. George with great care given to not only a renovation but the importance of the historic significance of restoring a Charles Banks Golf Course. Charles Banks had created a number of unique courses in the 20's and had worked for and been influenced by the works of Seth Raynor as well as studied the great course of the day designed by C.B. MacDonald and A.W. Tillingast of the same era. It was Mr. George's quest to deliver to the Members of Cavalier the "Best of Both Centuries" with a precise and historic restoration yet enhanced by subtle modern design techniques and capabilities – the result? Perfection...today the course still plays to its par 69 from the tips a mere 6175 yards...however adding to its slope of 130 is the unique mind-games placement of its bunkers and hazards, elevated greens and tight fairways, this classic course, a shot-makers dream holds the truest of tests for the best of golfers, while still delighting golfers of all skill levels. The course reopened to its Members on May 21, 2003 with some of the Club's most tenured Members first on the tee; Bob & Augusta Goodman and Edgar & Kathryn Cayce...they had witnessed much of the history documented above first hand.

The dedication and legate nature of the Members of the Club coupled with there commitment to maintaining its heritage will keep the Cavalier Golf & Yacht Club improving and reinventing itself towards better serving its membership for years and years to come.

To be continued...

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A special note of thanks goes out to Barbara Fleming (Member since 1968) who has compiled the complete document in which the above journal was taken, The History of Cavalier Golf & Yacht Club. She continues to preserve the unique heritage of the Club to this day.