

Remembering the Raleigh Firemen's Club

About This Document

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Introduction

Did you know that members of the Raleigh Fire Department once had a clubhouse near Falls Lake? The property was located on Bayleaf Church Road and was owned by the Raleigh Firemen's Club Inc., a non-profit organization that spanned some fifty years. Here's that story.

The club began as discussions among department members in 1967. They wanted to develop a facility outside of the fire stations that could be used both professionally and socially, and to develop and cultivate a greater spirit of companionship among firefighters. Discussions were held on how to develop long-range plans.

After consulting a lawyer, the group organized as a non-profit organization called the Raleigh Firemen's Club. They were incorporated on February 2, 1968. The charter members were John Hester, Augustus Woodlief, Ned Perry, Lealon Frazier, Ellis Beasley, Lewis Bartholomew, Ollie Blake, Jim Ellis, and Reggie Poole, and all of whom served as the original Board of Directors.

The first officers were John A. Hester as President, Augustus R. Woodlief as Vice-President, Ned K. Perry as Secretary, Lealon T. Frazier as Treasurer, and Ellis H. Beasley as Sergeant at Arms.

In February, notices were posted at each fire station, inviting all fire department members to join. The membership fee was \$25, and

¹ Source: <https://raleighfiremuseum.org/2024/06/20/raleigh-firemens-club>

annual dues would be \$26. The first meeting for club members was held on March 4 and 5 at Fire Station 1. By August of that year, 119 of the department's 180 firefighters joined.

Land Purchased

In September 1968, the club purchased 11.74 acres of land on then-named Six Forks Road, about eight miles north of Fire Station 9. It was near the site of the proposed Falls Lake reservoir. Rejected sites included a 59-acre tract some 7 or 8 miles out Poole Road, and an 80-acre tract southeast of Knightdale.

The Six Forks Road site was purchased for \$15,000 from sisters Oza Lyon and Sallie G. Lyon. The club secured a ten-year loan for the remaining balance. The initial monthly payment was \$166.54, and the first payment was due on or before October 1, 1968.[1]

Members began clearing the land—including the approved expenditure of \$50.00 to purchase goats for clearing undergrowth—and later constructed picnic tables and a large wooden shelter. They also erected a sign at the site, noting the “Future home of the Raleigh Firemen’s Club.”

They also started raising money for a planned clubhouse building. One of the first fundraisers sold 15-foot rope ladders for \$10.00 each. Made by the “Blind Clinic,” they were designed to fit on a windowsill for emergency home fire escapes.

[1] In a letter to City Manager W. H. Carper on September 23, 1968, to inform him about the new club and its purpose, President John Hester noted that they had made a \$3,000 down payment on their property, and secured a \$15,000 loan on the remaining balance. The county register of deeds, however, recorded a \$15,000 sale price, not \$18,000.

Building a Clubhouse

By the early 1970s, the Army Corp of Engineers was identifying land for the proposed Falls Lake reservoir. In 1972, the Army identified 3.63 acres of the club's 11.74 acres of property for the project.[2]

In 1975, the land was sold, and the money was added to funds already raised for the clubhouse.[3] By that time, a large area of the club's property had been cleared. A well had been dug and a parking area had been created. A site for the clubhouse had also been selected.

The \$40,000 building was completed in early 1979. The one-story, 2,700 square-foot building had a large fellowship hall with a brick fireplace, two large bathrooms, a kitchen, and an office/storage area.

The names of members who helped finish the building were etched in the clubhouse sidewalk and were still visible decades later: Hubert Altman, Wilbur Beasley, Wade Boyette, Ronald Bunch, Lewis Choplin, Dudley Gill, John Hester, Harold Jones, Ben Johnson, Charles Kelley, C. A. Lloyd, C. T. May, Ronald Ricks, Bill Sykes, and Drewey Williams.

[2] In September 1974, the club received an realtor's appraisal of \$7,500 as the value of their 10.74 acres.

[3] By January 1972, the club had raised \$5,000 for the clubhouse. That spring they hired a fundraising company to sell tickets to a Grand Ole Opry Show at Dorton Arena in Raleigh.

Over the Decades

Later addressed 12601 Bayleaf Church Road, the clubhouse served a variety of functions over the decades, including holiday and Superbowl parties for firefighters and private functions for club members[4]. The building was also rented to individuals outside the fire department.

Uses ranged from wedding receptions to biannual clothing sales by Junior Women's League.

By the nineties, interest and participation in the club and the clubhouse had greatly diminished among Raleigh Fire Department members.[5] The club's board, however, continued operating the building.

In August 2001, the News and Observer published a profile of the club. The president was Bill Dillard, who had been serving for the last two years. The club membership consisted of less than ten people. The board had two members, including Dillard.

By that time, clubhouse rental tenants included the New Jerusalem Church of Franklinton, which used the space for worship service after their parish was destroyed in a fire in 1998.

[4] Club members were allowed free use of the facility twice a year for events such as family reunions and birthday parties.

[5] In 2001, club president Bill Dillard remembered that the last fire department-related party was around 1986 and drew less than ten people.

Water Rights and a New Well

In 2003, a new well was dug at the clubhouse. The quality of the original well water had deteriorated in recent years. Heater Utilities had approached the club, with an offer to purchase water rights and install a new well. The club was paid \$45,000 and granted free water for life. Clean, fresh water to the clubhouse was restored. The company also built an access road to reach the pump house and granted permission to the club use. The path provided new access to a fishing cove on Falls Lake. Club members could anchor a boat in the cove and walk to the clubhouse.

That year, Ronny Mizell was club president and board members during that period included Jay Faison, Dennis Gaither, Al Hogan, Ronnie Ricks, Rusty Styons, Greg Wall, and Randall Wright. Annual membership to the club was \$25.00, or a free with a day's work at the clubhouse. In August 2003, the club held a pig picking and all fire department members were invited.

New Directions, New Members

In 2008, Michelle Munisteri was club president and board members included Larry Stanford, Greg Wall, Jay Faison, and Al Hogan. That year, they started a new initiative to enroll as many fire department members as possible.

The club collected \$25 in first-year dues from around 250 members, which provided much-needed revenue to fund improvements to the clubhouse. The dues collection process was discontinued after a couple years, however. Firefighters who had paid dues were considered club members for life. They could also use the clubhouse for free, though a refundable deposit was required.

In 2008, interior cosmetic renovations were made to the property. It was painted and new appliances and lighting were added. New ceiling tiles were installed, new cabinets were installed in the kitchen and bathroom, and a new water heater was installed. Also, a storage building was added behind the clubhouse, erected by Greg Wall and Lonnie Glover. That year, two Christmas parties were held for all three shifts of firefighters.

After the deaths of firefighters Herman Jones and George Crocker in 2008, the club also created a hardship fund for fire department members in the memory of Jones and Crocker. The purpose of the fund was to help firefighters who had experienced a significant loss in their family. It paid for such expenses as groceries, medical bills, and excess funeral costs. The fund was operational for about three years, until the club stopped collecting dues and their funding stream ran out.

In 2009, Dacote Whitaker and Mike Kemmeries created a web site for the club. Also that year, on the one-year anniversary of death of George Crocker, the club held a memorial motorcycle rally on June 23, 2009. Over 100 bikers rode from the clubhouse to the cemetery in Pine Level, where a graveside service was held.

The Final Decades

Participation in the club again waned into the mid-2010s. By 2017, the club's board numbered just four people: Stephen Holleman (President), Larry Stanford (Treasurer), Ronny Mizell, and Al Hogan. The club organization had minimal participation from firefighters, and clubhouse was used only sparingly. That year, they made the decision to sell the property and the first inquiries were made with commercial real estate brokers.

In 2018, the club's board met with board members of the Raleigh Fire Museum. Together, they formed a new non-profit organization named Raleigh Firefighter's Hall and Museum. The purpose of the new organization was to receive and govern the funds of the club property sale.

In 2021, the club property was sold, and the Raleigh Firemen's Club received \$533,000. After the sale, the club made a one-time donation of \$25,000 to the Wake County Firefighters Burned Children's Fund, in honor of all those Raleigh Fire Department members who had worked and served to build the club.

In 2022, the club donated the remaining money to the Raleigh Firefighter's Hall and Museum. The club's board voted to dissolve the Raleigh Firemen's Club corporation. In 2023, the Raleigh Firefighter's Hall and Museum corporation was renamed the Raleigh Firefighter's Hall.

Also in 2023, the firefighter's hall began investing the money from the club sale. They created an investment strategy that mirrored what the

Raleigh firefighter's pension fund has used for years to ensure a safe but steady return. The hall plans to donate each year's interest to the fire museum, to help with operational expenses.

The board members of the Raleigh Firefighter's Hall are Stephen Holleman, Larry Stanford, Ronny Mizell, Alan Walters, and Mike Legeros. To contact the organization, email Ronny Mizell at ronnymizell@gmail.com.

Past Presidents

This list is incomplete.

- John A. Hester (1968 to 1974+)
- C. T. May (1976, 1977) (and other years?)
- Danny Poole (late 1980s)
- Bill Dillard (1999? to 2001+)
- Ronny Mizell (200_ to 2004)
- Michelle Munisteri (2004 to 2017)
- Stephen Holleman (2017 to 2021)

Past Officers and Board Members

This list needs to be expanded.

- John A. Hester, President (1968 to 1974+)
- Augustus R. Woodlief, Vice-President (1968 to 19??)
- Ned K. Perry, Secretary (1968 to 1970 or later)
- Lealon T. Frazier, Treasurer (1968 to 19??)
- Ellis H. Beasley, Sergeant at Arms (1968 to 19??)

- C. T. May, President (1976, 1977) (and other years?)
- C. E. Kelly, Vice President (1976) (and other years?)
- Hubert Altman, Treasurer (1976, 1977) (and other years?)
- G. O. Tuttle, Secretary (1976) (and other years?)

- Charles Narron, Vice President (1977) (and other years?)
- James Atkinson, Secretary (1977) (and other years?)

- Danny Poole, President (late 1980s)
- Donnie Perry, Board Member (late 1980s) (also officer?)

- Bill Dillard, President (1999? to 2001+)
- Ronny Mizell, President (200_ to 2004), Board Member (2004 to 2021)
- Michelle Munisteri, President (2004 to 2017)
- Stephen Holleman, President (2017 to 2021)
- Larry Stanford, Treasurer (c2004 to 2021)

Snapshot

In January 2008, the officers and the board of the club consisted of:

- Al Hogan
- Donnie Carter
- Greg Wall
- Jay Faison
- Jim Barnes
- Larry Stanford, Treasurer
- Michelle Munisteri, President
- Randall Wright
- Ronnie Ricks, Vice President (may have changed to Sammy McIntyre)
- Ronny Mizell
- Rusty Styons
- Steve Bartholomew, Sergeant at Arms.

City Firemen Organize Club

The Raleigh Fireman's Club, Inc., composed of 110 of the city's 190 firemen, has been organized, and the group plans to build a clubhouse nine miles north Hills.

President John Hester said the club will provide a place for regular meetings and facilities for training firemen.

A donation of \$1,000 presented by Mr. Riegler, 200 Woodbury said the check was from fine young dedicated give so much for so little.

Officers, in addition to A. R. Wood, president; Ned secretary; L. T. treasurer, and Ellis sergeant-at-arms.



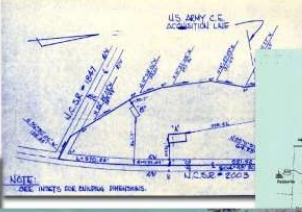
Firemen Sell Rope Ladders

Members of the Raleigh Fireman's Club are selling rope ladders to help fund for a club house.

Fireman's Club President John Hester said the ladders, available at all Raleigh Fire Stations and are \$10.00 each.

Made by the Blind Citizens' ladders fit on the window and use as an emergency exit in case of fire, Hester said. They can be stored in small areas until needed.

The club purchased 12 acres of land on Six Forks Road near Boone River several months ago and hopes to build there, Hester said.



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Raleigh, N. C.
FRI., MARCH 3, 8 P.M.
Stomps You Have Seen and Heard On
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- LESTER FLATT and The Nashville Grass
- LEON BOLLINGER
- LEONA WILLIAMS
- CLEM APPLECKOCKER

Admission: Children Under 15 "1"
Adults "2"

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North Raleigh News

Firemen's Club no longer burns bright

Building's time has passed, but there's no accord on what to do with it.



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