

Root Beer and Checker Club, a Brief History

Hal Redden, Prepared for Fair Haven , NJ Centennial

The Root Beer & Checker Club is a men's luncheon club which was started informally in 1945 at Hesse's Luncheonette & Ice Cream Parlor on Front Street, Red Bank , at the foot of Broad Street. Local business and professional men would gather to have lunch together and tell stories. Some of the early participants were Bill Sherwood, Ed Conover, Ray Taylor, Frank Pingatore, and Ed Macklin. Apparently, the luncheon meetings drew the attention of other locals, and when one asked "what's going on with these regular lunches", the answer by Ed Macklin was – "we're just drinking root beer and playing checkers" – of course a fabrication, but the name stuck. As word spread of the good fellowship others joined in, and by 1949 it was necessary to move the luncheons to the Olde Union House on Wharf Avenue. Ed Macklin served as the 1st president of this informal group. By 1956 there were about 100 members plus a waiting list, so it was decided to draw up a charter, formalize the name, and elect the first president, Ed Conway. Following that, in 1959, the Club moved again, this time to its own location at 5 Broad St above the Colonial Restaurant. A dumbwaiter lifted the lunches to the 2nd floor where Bertha served the food and George tended the bar. This was progress. In addition to meeting for lunch and then returning to work, there were some incidental club activities, such as reading magazines, playing gin, and bumper pool competition.

At the same time, a tradition was growing within the club, that of honoring certain members who had distinguished themselves for service to the community at large. In fact, one of the early honorees was William J. Brennan, a member of the

U.S. Supreme Court. The last few lines of the Eight Ball Poem indicate the high regard in which recipients are held:

"So if you would like an 8 – Ball
For your mantle or your den
Go out and earn the deep respect
Of all your fellow men."

In 1999 Red Restaurant needed the Club's second floor space in addition to its own on the first, so after 40 years on Broad Street, a move was made to Knights of Columbus building at 200 Fair Haven Rd. in Fair Haven. We became our own restaurant with a cook, bartender, waitress and lots of bills to pay. Happily, a move in 2009 to the present quarters in Nauvoo Grill at 121 Fair Haven Road made life a lot easier, and lunch is served Tuesdays and Fridays, throughout the year.

Over the years there have been some members who have felt that "fellow men" should have included "fellow women". As a club structured to represent business owners and professionals, networking opportunities that could have been extended to women were being withheld. Now, however, age seems to have taken over and "retired" pretty much describes the membership. Women still are not included, but they no longer seem to care!

Several social events are held annually – Fall and Christmas cocktail parties, St. Patrick's Day and Thanksgiving luncheons, as well as theater parties, local boat and Monmouth Park trips, football outings and the 8 Ball luncheons. Membership is open and anyone interested is invited to contact the Club through Nauvoo Grill.