

Pine Acres History

(For timeline overview see page 8)

As we reflect back over the years, many people have asked for the story of Pine Acres. So we begin a brief history lesson on the last 40 years. Sources for the history include the Lee Peiffers, the Year books, bulletins and carillons from 1958 – 1998 and the Endowment Board minutes.

In 1958, the Senior Married Couples Class was looking for a sizeable property for use by all church organizations for purposes of recreation, Christian Education, scouts and retreats. It was during hunting season that a piece of property was stumbled upon by Claude Erby in South Lebanon Township. The property was investigated and found to be the estate of Alice Westenberger. So 20 acres of woodland was purchased for the large sum of \$6,400.00. The property finally became an official purchase in January of 1959. The property was deeded to the church, but was the responsibility of the Senior Married Couples Class. Now that the property was purchased, they couldn't keep calling it "the property", so a naming contest was held to name the property. On March 21st, the majority number of votes agreed the name should be called Pine Acres. This name was submitted by Mrs. Richard Becker.

There was much work to be done. The Class just purchased 20 acres of woodland with a summer house and garage on the land. But there were trees everywhere as a woodland would be. So many Saturdays in March, April and May of 1959 were spent clearing out dead wood, providing a parking area and the basic necessities of water and toilet facilities. However, the building of a block structure for the toilet facilities was not completed during 1959. Then came the day of dedication. May 17th, 1959 at a 4:00 service, the property of Pine Acres was dedicated before more than 450 members of the congregation.

During 1959, work continued in the grading of the original lane (which is no longer in use), two parking areas, a ballfield, and toilet facilities. 1959 was also the first year that Day camp was opened. The first camp had 75 youngsters with a theme of "Adventures and Discoveries in God's World". I found it interesting that day camp was run by all women with the assistance of Rev. Althouse.

As we began the 60's, it was noted that development slowed due to lack of funds. It was also noted that progress slowed due to the large number of men having problems getting poison ivy. In late 1960, the money was gathered to begin the process of building a concrete pad for a pavilion. It was during 1961 that the Young Married Couples Class provided the funds to drill a well have a pump installed for water. Finally, we have water at Pine Acres.

In 1962, we received word that Penn Dot was going to install a new highway and wanted to purchase some of our land to make that happen. Finally in July 1963, after many meetings with Pa Dot, the lawyers and members of the Senior Married Couples Class, 2.6 acres of land were purchased by the state at a cost of \$1,948. The new highway, or state route 322, required us to move our entrance from the original location to where it is today.

While the legality of the highway was being pursued, day camp continued as well. In addition, the mortgage was burned, the kitchen (the block structure addition to the house) and fireplace were built in the house. During 1964, the activities picked up at Pine Acres as a youth retreat was held for the first time as was a Sunday School picnic. Throughout the summer, the Boy Scout troop of the church worked to build permanent shelters for camping, hence the A-frame was created. While the Scouts were building shelters for camping, the Senior Marrieds were building the pavilion and the Young Marrieds were working on the house floor.

On September 16th, 1967 the first Women's Retreat was held. During the 1967 – 1971 years, there isn't much published about the activities at Pine Acres. Beginning in 1972, discussions began to turn Pine Acres responsibility back to the church and take it away from the Senior Marrieds. At that point, the vote was in favor of keeping Pine Acres in the hands of the Senior Marrieds. Again, we go for a small period of time of no mention. In 1974, a new roof was put on the garage and porch. Again, there is a lapse in time and finally in October 1978, an official letter is drafted to the Consistory to have the Delegation of Authority for Pine Acres turned back over to the church. With the inactivity at Pine Acres and the soaring costs, the Koinonia Class (formerly the Senior Married Couples Class) felt they no longer could maintain the property as it needed to be maintained. January 11, 1979, Consistory voted to officially revoke the property of Pine Acres from the Koinonia Class back to the church of St. Mark's.

So the beginnings of what is now known as the Pine Acres committee. The bylaws were reviewed and changes made. The first set of quilt beds were made in addition to the house floor being repaired for the second time.

During the late 70's and early 1980, there is much discussion about fund raising. Whether it was a chicken barbeque or a chicken corn noodle soup or bake sale or a hoagie sale, the raising of funds was occurring. The problem was, the congregation wasn't using the facilities. The picnic was no longer being held at Pine Acres, day camping had stopped years back, Youth retreats were no more. With the additional funds, new picnic tables were made and work days had the property looking great. But for whom? The facility was being used many weekends, but by outside groups. The congregation wasn't showing up for work days nor was it using Pine Acres for activities.

In 1982, a new roof was put on the pavilion. In 1983, we had a forester come in and harvest 100 trees to help thin out the thick woodlands. By the mid 1980's there was a growing concern if Pine Acres really should continue to be owned by the congregation. Work was being done, but who in the congregation was appreciating it? There are numerous articles discussing the work being done and attempts to invite people to Pine Acres, but groups weren't biting. In 1986, a committee was appointed to evaluate the future of Pine Acres. Consistory continued to ponder what to do.

During 1986 and 1987 Senior Pastor reports, Pastor Shultz challenged the congregation and it's groups to increase the usage of Pine Acres. He went as far as calling it the "Sunday in the Park" for 1988 challenge. He challenged one group to plan an activity each for the months of May, June and July. If it occurred, it wasn't reported in any of my references for this history. However, the Pine Acres committee did pursue putting a new roof on the house in May. By July 1988, the Tabor Boy Scouts were looking for a camp and worked out an agreement with us to use Pine Acres as their camping facility.

During the August 10, 1989 Consistory meeting, there was serious discussion to sell Pine Acres. However, due to the low attendance at that meeting, the vote was deferred. This is the last time it is documented in Consistory minutes to sell Pine Acres.

In 1990, Pine Acres begins it's turnaround. The committee approaches the Endowment Board for the first of a number of needed repairs. It's documented in the Endowment Board minutes that they approved these monies because of the renewed interest in the property. Additionally, informal picnics were planned for the summer of 1990 to get people back to Pine Acres. Unfortunately, with the positive growth, there were some problems. In September 1990, we experienced a series of break ins with damage exceeding \$1,000.00. But that didn't slow us down going into 1991.

We began the year with more workdays then the facilities had seen in awhile. We also saved the Foodland stamps for material to make the curtains, etc in the bathrooms. With the addition of these curtains, the bathrooms were overhauled. Fresh coats of paint covered the dull look and the curtains started to make things look a little homey. The committee also got rid of the mowers that were continually breaking down and bought the first of the John Deere mowers. By the summer things were looking quite pleasing. The revitalization of the day camp program that had left us in the early 60's was back. Also, in August, we brought the all church picnic back to Pine Acres. What a day it was with 250+ plus back on the grounds.

Bringing back two long missed programs began the 1990's off with a bang. Previously, the work at Pine Acres ceased when the rental season was over, but in 1991, there was so much energy after the picnic, work days were held in the

fall for the first time in the documented history. 1992 saw the improvements continue. One major and nagging problem over the years was the moisture in the house basement. In 1992, the basement floor was concreted. With this improvement, the committee hoped the house floor could be saved from sagging. This change was watched with a hopeful eye.

During the summer of 1992, many things changed. First, the siding of the A-frame and smoke house was done. Also, the first Swing 'N Slide set was built. Finally, the kitchen was repainted. Also, a group of retired men began spending their Thursdays doing work at Pine Acres. Again, with all these positives and more activity, we continued to have problems with people trespassing and vandalism. Just in this year, there were at least 4 acts of vandalism or trespassing. Something had to be done, so we consulted the South Lebanon Twp Police for advice. They urged us to move our gate out to the road so that just one car could park. By doing this, they felt the State Police and they could patrol the facilities better than if the gate was in the lane. So, the gate was moved. You'd be surprised how many people now know us as the property with the yellow gate.

Pine Acres was put to bed for the winter of 1992-1993 as the snow fell and the ice came. With the ice came the greatest physical change that Pine Acres had seen in years. During the storm, 21 trees became victims of the Nor Easter and snapped onto buildings, shrubs, roofs, whatever it could find. We had trees uprooted with holes deep enough to lose a 5 year old. What a challenge ahead of us. The trucks, tractors and chain saws hit the woods for 2 solid Saturdays. This was 20+ people working 8 hour days just picking up and moving the wood to one central location. Then it was time to call in the fire department for one of those old fashioned bon fires. What a challenge it was and what a challenge we met and overcame.

Now it was time for the summer repairs. Of course, the retired men couldn't rest after the spring work was done. It was time to put siding on the house and shed as well as screen in the side porch. What a year 1993 was. Kid's Kamp and the All church picnic continued to grow right along with the changes.

By 1994, we saw the addition of hot water in the house for the first time since 1958. With the addition of the hot water, the kitchen area was renovated and new countertops built. Of course, the work couldn't stop in the kitchen. It was time to put siding on the house and pick the color sequoia for the contrasting shutters. Additionally, electric was run up to the Boy Scout area, so no more flashlights.

By 1995, the improvements just continued to grow. With Kid's Kamp exceeding 60 campers, the play area needed some more equipment. So on came the turbo slide and more swings. Now, the kids can climb the monkey bars while mom and dad sit on the family swing. While the play area was being built, work began on a

macadam walkway from the parking lot to the pavilion. No more tripping over tree roots. This makes unloading a lot easier for people.

Of course, these changes brought more people out and people wanted to stay overnight, so dusk to dawn lights were added. There is no longer a fear of not being able to see at night. As work continued in 1995, a galvanized aluminum roof was added to the A-frame. The storm damage of 1993 punctured a hole into the roof and the weight of snows caused us to reconsider shingling the roof. Now the snow slides right off.

With everything else having a fresh coat of paint or recently had vinyl siding added to it, the shed or garage area was beginning to look shabby. So in the fall of 1995, the men put siding on the shed as well as added a new garage door. No more having to swing open the garage doors. The work didn't stop with everything that was done so far. A dehumidifier was added in the basement to dry out the floor boards. The beams were beginning to rot causing the living room floor to sag. With the addition of the dehumidifier, the boards were dry for the first time in over two decades.

Finally, the trees around the house and pavilion were taken down. This change was made as the committee realized the need after Kid's Kamp. The Saturday prior to Kamp, a thunderstorm caused a portion of a tree to fall on the pavilion roof. In addition to that tree, other large branches and trees came down. Many hours were spent on Sunday cleaning up in preparation for Kamp, however, not everything could be done by the congregation. First thing Monday morning a tree company was out taking down the tree so Kamp could continue that week. The damage was just a little too close to being serious, so the decision was made to take down the large pine trees around the buildings to prevent further problems.

1996 challenged us in a number of ways. First, the Lebanon Valley saw more snow than they had in many years. The snow was over 3 feet deep. With that in mind, there wasn't much thought given to possible problems at Pine Acres until roof after roof in the city began to collapse under the pressure. So we waded through the hip deep snow to find a number of beams split and the roof was sagging. The snow was shoveled off the roof to take the immediate pressure off. When spring finally sprang, more support braces were built and the beams reinforced. Then, the water system gave out. It didn't exactly stop producing water, the water just wasn't clear water. So a new water system was installed.

Now, the men were able to begin their scheduled work. The living room floor was replaced. In addition, the floor was reinforced with more joists. Outside, the storms of 1996 finally put an end to the boxwood hedge around the flagpole. The hedges were pulled out and loads of topsoil brought in. The area was seeded with grass and a circle of flowering annuals and perennials were planted. Kid's

Kamp found the area so peaceful, in 1996 a cross was built for the chapel area. The area just couldn't look better.

With the storms of the last four years, people were beginning to wonder if the name Pine Acres really was correct anymore. Trees were being taken down or falling down faster than they had in years past. So, 150 new douglas fir and pine tree seedlings were planted.

Unfortunately, news comes in threes and by July we had figured out what our third thing was for the year. The refrigerators were giving out. We could only keep one cold anymore and Kamp was coming. So the Saturday before Kamp, a new refrigerator was delivered. This sounds like a lot of work, but the men weren't done yet. The picnic was getting too big and finding our own sound system was becoming a necessity. So by picnic time, we had outdoor speakers and a sound system. The neighbors can now join us for church service.

By 1997, the kitchen was in for another overhauling. More space was needed during Kamp and the picnic. Another refrigerator was bought and the kitchen totally rewired. Housecleaning was done and the kitchen repainted. When everything was done, there was finally some work space to cut the watermelons. In addition, after 38 years of chasing the baseball into the poison, enough was enough. A backstop was installed for baseball. What a treat it has been to not have to chase those missed strikes into the poison.

Once again, the lawn mowers were drinking more oil than a mower should, so they were traded in for a new John Deere tractor. Finally, two mowers that could be trusted.

By June 1997, the committee was questioning it's mission statement. What was it that they really wanted Pine Acres used for. So the committee went back to it's origin in 1958 and remembered the statement from the Senior Married Couples class..."to provide church organizations a sizeable property for purposes of recreation, Christian Education, scouts and retreats". The original map was consulted to see what was missing. It finally dawned on them. What was missing was a cabin for overnight retreats. So in July 1997, work began for the largest task taken on by Pine Acres since the beginning. Drawings were prepared and permits gathered.

In February 1998, work began on the 20' x 56' cabin by clearing the area. A subcontractor was hired to do the footer and pour the concrete. After that, it was 27 persons from the congregation who framed the building, put the roof trusses in place, shingled the roof, did the electrical work and whatever else. The goal was to have the building dedicated by the picnic. Those that were at Kamp a month before were skeptical that it would happen, but the weekend following Kamp was the turning point to the project. By picnic day, the cabin was ready and ribbon cutting ceremonies held.

In 1999, hot water was added to the bathrooms and kitchen. Finally we could do dishes in hot water. By 2002, we were experiencing a problem with mosquitoes and everything that goes with not taking care of standing water. The pond was refurbished and we obtained our permit to own grass eating carp. Now the pond has become an educational area for many groups.

The most recent structure added to Pine Acres was the Pole Barn. Through the growth of having multiple riding mowers, a Kubota tractor for heavy moving and two golf carts to help get around the area quickly, the original garage was busting at it's seams. Now we have a place to keep all the vehicles under cover providing them longevity.

We end the history with our 50th anniversary celebrated August 23rd, 2009. The day was one to celebrate and one that we were blessed with absolutely beautiful weather. We also dedicated 32 dogwood trees planted in memory of family members to celebrate the occasion.

Pine Acres Time Line

- January 1959 - Property purchased.
- March 21, 1959 - Pine Acres named.
- May 17, 1959 - Pine Acres presented to St Mark's at a 4:00 p.m. Dedication.
- 1959 - First church camp held.
- 1961 - The current 322 built taking 2.6 acres leaving 17.4 acres for Pine Acres.
- 1964 - Kitchen, pavilion and bathroom built.
- 1978 - Senior Married Couples class revocation of Pine Acres to St Mark's.
- 1980 - New picnic tables built.
- 1983 - 100 trees harvested.
- 1986 - 1989 - Multiple vandalisms.
- 1987 - Pine Acres evaluation committee created.
- Sept 14, 1989 - Vote to sell Pine Acres didn't have enough yes votes, life for another year.
- July 1991 - Day Camp started again.
- July 1992 - After more vandalism, gate moved to current location.
- 1992 - First playground equipment built.
- 1993 - Significant storm damage fells 21 trees.
- 1994 - Siding put on house.
- 1995 - Macadam walkway installed.
- 1995 - Turbo slide playground equipment built.
- 1996 - Heavy snow hammers boxwood circle, 3 feet of snow shoveled off pavilion roof.
- 1999 - Overnight cabin built by 20+ members of the congregation.
- 1999 - Added hot water in bathrooms.
- 2002 - Pond refurbished as wildlife preserve.
- 2004 - New signs along the road made and installed.
- 2004 - Trees timbered in upper property.

- 2006 - Pole Barn built by Pine Acres crew.
- 2009 - Dogwood trees planted in memory of family members.
- 2009 - Pine Acre's celebrates 50th year anniversary.