



## Seminole Pow Wow Newsletter

[www.meetup.com/flsckc-com](http://www.meetup.com/flsckc-com)

### 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Fall Festival, Sat. Oct. 2, 9:00 am

Our 100th Anniversary Celebration is coming up soon! It will be held in conjunction with our annual Fall Festival on Saturday, October 2nd, starting at 9:00 am with a “poker paddle”, continuing with friendly fellowship, and concluding with an outdoor picnic at the clubhouse (address 4619 Ortega Farms Cir, Jacksonville, FL). Friends of members are welcome also. Please RSVP on our Meetup site or email/call me so we can plan accordingly.

Remember to keep track of your miles for the 100-mile challenge and how many bags of trash that you pick up. We challenge members to each paddle 100 or more miles this year and those who meet the paddle challenge will receive a small memento! Use the form at the end of newsletter to log your miles and bring it to the party. Look for more information on [www.Meetup.com/flsckc-com](http://www.Meetup.com/flsckc-com).

We also challenged ourselves to collectively pick up 100 bags of trash this year. So far members have reported 56 bags of trash, most recently 17 bags from Fishing Creek. Keep up the good work!

This issue of the Pow Wow is dedicated to the history of the club from 1921 to 2021. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or one of the other Board Members listed at the end of the newsletter.

**Susan Poole,  
Commodore**



1921 — 2021

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#### Special points of interest

- 100th Anniversary Celebration and Fall Festival Sat. Oct. 2, 2021
- View up-to-date schedule and RSVP for paddle trips on the website [www.meetup.com/flsckc-com](http://www.meetup.com/flsckc-com)

## The History of our Club 1921—2021

### 1921 - 1971 First 50 years

When the Seminole Canoe & Yacht Club was organized in 1921, Jacksonville had one-tenth the population it has today, Roosevelt Boulevard was a dirt road and the St. John's River Bridge had just opened for traffic on the site of what is now the Acosta Bridge. But, with the Great War ended and soldiers returning, the 1920s ushered in a boom time both in Jacksonville and nationwide. Economic prosperity meant families could afford their first cars, radios, phones and even recreational watercraft. Despite Prohibition, these people were ready to party.

So began the group we know today as the Seminole Canoe and Kayak Club, initially at a rented site on the south end of the old Ortega Bridge. The club reportedly had a championship basketball team and strong debating team, as well as good racing paddlers. Marathons were held on courses in the St. Johns River from Jacksonville to Mayport, where boats had to watch not only for the tides, but for passing freighters and passenger steamships as well.

In 1928, the club moved to its present location, buying acreage on what was then known as McGirts Creek from Mr. Bolles, the owner and operator of Bolles School in San Jose. The property included two wooden boathouses, a wooden bulkhead, a short dock and a house, which was used for what a club history called "stag parties." (Though women had been granted the right to vote in the U.S. in 1920, the club's membership was exclusively male until 1971.)



View of Ortega River (formerly McGirts Creek) at sunrise from club's property, purchased in 1928.

One member, Bronson Lamb, an executive with Gulf Oil Co., had a fleet of state-of-the-art outboard racing boats which regularly raced on a course opposite the club. A miniature golf course was also built on the grounds for members' entertainment. With the depression, the club became a poor man's yacht club, with dances, dinners, theater parties and other social events. There was keen competition in paddling marathons, cruising, sailing and moonlight canoe tows behind one member's powerboat. First person to arrive got the favored position at the end of the tow line, away from the powerboat's exhaust.

Paddling races were held on 500 meter and 1000 meter courses off the far side of the Ortega River from the south to a finish at the club's bulkhead, with canoers navigating around solid masses of water hyacinths growing and floating in the river. (The course markers were knocked down by dredges and draglines during the building of the island opposite the club in the 1960's.)

Members regularly won national cruising titles and canoe sailing races. The club helped form a Southern Division of the American Canoe Association, known as the Dixie Division. And one member, Mally Mallison, was named assistant manager of the 1936 Olympic Paddling Team, accompanying the team to Berlin that summer.

But all this partying had a price. In 1937, the club was forced to sell a large part of its property, 2.6 acres, to its neighbors, the Manns, in order to keep from losing everything to the mortgage holder. The mortgage on the remaining property was paid off in 1952 and since then the club has been free from liens.

*Contributors to the 100 year History: John Blois, Kris Hundley, Ron Moredock, Susan Poole, Pam Rillstone, Paul Staley, Cynthia Seagraves, Kerri Wick, and names unknown who compiled the first 50 years' history.*

The History of our club 1921—2021 (cont.)

After a lull in activity during World War II, things ramped up again in the late 1940s and 50s. In 1949, members built a new concrete bulkhead. In 1954 and 1955, members also funded and built the current concrete block boathouse in place of the one remaining wooden boathouse. Original plans called for a concrete block clubhouse to be built over the entire new boathouse. However, with members providing both the work and the materials, the plans were adapted to the present wooden clubroom over the south section only. Begun in 1968, it was completed in 1971, in time for the club's Golden Anniversary.

A driving force in the club for many years was Noble Engle Jr., after whom the clubhouse is named. A civil engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Engle was a Jacksonville native whose uncle, Joseph Engle, helped found the club in the 1920s. Despite being crippled by polio at age 3, Engle became an award-winning gymnast, canoeist, kayaker and windmill class sailor. In 1951, he and a friend completed a 500-mile, 15-day journey starting at White Springs, following the Suwannee River to the Gulf to

Cedar Springs. They went on to the Withlacoochee River, then crossed land to the Ocklawaha River and to Silver Springs. They spent three days on the St. Johns to return to Jacksonville, which Engle reported as the most difficult part of the trip.

In 2013, three years after Engle's death, his sisters deeded land the family had begun acquiring in the 1940s to North Florida Land Trust in his name, to ensure its permanent protection and preservation. The Noble Engle Trust encompasses 500 acres, much of it classic salt marsh habitat near and adjacent to the Nassau River on North Main Street in Jacksonville, Fla. within the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve.



Mally Mallison (left) presenting Hardy Nurmsen (standing on sailing canoe) with a Seminole Canoe Club Paddle, 1936



Noble Engle and his sailing canoe.



Noble Engle Land Trust

The History of our club 1921—2021 (cont.)

1970 - 1980

During its second 50 years, the club opened up its membership to women. In a February 1971 newsletter, Commodore Patrick Pattillo urged members to vote for the change, noting that “This amendment has always been blocked in the past by the necessity of a 2/3 majority vote...but we hope that interest will be sufficient to make it possible at this time.”

Sailing remained a popular activity with club members, with both prams and sailing canoes participating. Trophies included the “Didapper” award for getting dunked the most in sailing events at the club.

Current member Kerry Wick remembers her parents, Tom and Barbara Fitzpatrick, joining the club in 1972, soon after her father surprised her mom with a canoe for Christmas. Then a young teen, Wick said she and her younger sister didn’t meet a lot of people their age in the club. “It was just old folks, just like today,” she said. One of her fondest memories, other than winning the seven mile Citrus County Canoe Race, was the annual Green Corn Festival. “Being from a ‘Kool-Aid’ family that didn’t typically stock soft

drinks, it was exciting to be able to reach into a washtub full of ice and choose a Yoo-hoo soda in a glass bottle.”

Paul and Elizabeth Staley, who joined the club in 1970, loved paddling the Santa Fe River but it was a ranger-led, night paddle on the Ichetucknee that remained in his memory decades later. Coming around a bend, he said they could hear beavers’ tails slapping. John Blois, who joined the club with his wife Eve in the early 1970s, also remembers the Ichetucknee as his favorite destination.

When he first joined, however, Blois said the club was barely active, with only four or five people participating in trips. The clubhouse had also become a repository for members’ cast-off furniture, so Blois said his wife Eve took on the task of updating it and making it more presentable to prospective members. One item that had to go: an old cot that was rumored to be used by a certain member when he’d bring his dates by the clubhouse. Blois said one day the cot disappeared and a \$10 donation was deposited in the club’s account.



Barbara Fitzpatrick canoeing.



The green corn festival is traditionally a sacred Native American celebration, giving thanks for rain, sun, corn, and a good harvest.



Top row Unknown, Diane Aiken (blue visor), Tom Fitzpatrick, John and Eva Blois, Unknown. Bottom row Unknown, Barbara Fitzpatrick. If anyone can identify the other three members, please email or call a Board Member.

## The History of our club 1921—2021 (cont.)

### 1980 to 1999

Cruising destinations were many of the same we enjoy today: the Suwannee, Santa Fe and Silver rivers, as well as an annual Labor Day campout at Fore Lake in the Ocala National Forest, which attracted 50 to 60 members in 1987. There was also an annual “Wild Hog Canoe Race” down the Waccasassa River in Levy County. According to one winner’s breathless review, the race entailed climbing over logs, dodging jagged limestone outcroppings and generally getting both yourself and your boat battered and bruised.

Sometime in the 1980s, about 10 members went on a 10-day trip to the Allagash Waterway in Maine led by John Blois. Cynthia Seagraves remembers it being the first time she had paddled a canoe with her friend Louise. After two contentious days on the water and a disagreement on whether or not to proceed through the rapids up ahead, John stepped in as mediator and they came to an agreement on how to work together better. However, their canoe got stuck on a rock in the whitewater and somehow they managed going downstream backwards for the remainder of the rapids. After that, she said the two of them managed to get along well for the rest of the trip.

The club’s annual Christmas party has been a popular tradition, with Paul and Elizabeth Staley often decorating the clubhouse. A newsletter in 1989 attempted to set the fol-



Christmas party 1988. Back row: Pam & Al Grant, left to right: First 4 unknown, Elizabeth and Paul Staley, Eva and John Blois, Unknown

Photos by  
John Blois  
hanging in  
clubhouse



lowing short-lived rules for the gift exchange: All gifts must come from garage sales or Goodwill and be wrapped in a paper bag. Winning categories included “ugliness,” total inappropriateness,” and “tackiness.” Cynthia Seagraves recalls helping to decorate the Christmas tree and that one of the most popular gifts was a handwoven straw hat that Noble Enge would make from palmetto leaves. Also extremely popular were nature photos taken by John Blois, who first picked up a camera as a young teen and whose photos have been published in several magazines.

In February 1989, the club’s property became tax-exempt and the well and pump house were added. Paul Staley, who will be 98 during the club’s 100th anniversary year, recalls that members went to the health department to show them where the new well would be drilled. They were quickly informed that wasn’t the way the city operated: City officials would determine where the well would go and then they’d inspect the work. To this day, Staley, a 50 year member of the club, maintains the pumphouse and well. And it’s passed every city inspection it’s ever had.

In 1991, the bulkhead washout area was repaired. A new floating dock was built in 1993. In the early 1990s, a new county property tax assessor was proposing a large tax increase on the club on the grounds that a “Yacht Club” in Ortega could not be a non-profit entity. After some negotiation, Paul Staley said he and others were able to convince city officials that we are a small club with no commercial interests. In 1993, to satisfy the city’s concerns, the club changed its by-laws and corporate charter, saying it would give to and work with charity organizations in order to remain exempt from property taxes. It also officially changed its name to Seminole Canoe and Kayak Club.

The History of our club 1921—2021 (cont.)

2000 - 2021

The club’s long history and success is due to the hard work and dedication of its many members over the years. For many years Helen (Lovell) Koenig dedicated her time and talents to decorating the interior of the clubhouse and landscaping the grounds. Framed photographs of birds taken by John Blois are hanging on the walls. The racing canoe which used to be hung inside the clubhouse was converted to a buffet table supported by cypress wood. Some of the flowering plants and trees Helen planted are still growing today.

Fritz Koenig redesigned the boat storage area with pulleys and winches around 2015, then built new doors for the boathouse using boards that washed up during Hurricane Irma in 2017. David and Susan Poole installed the new EZ kayak launch on the floating dock in 2019. Bulkhead improvements were done by a local dock builder in 2020, who inserted a fabric liner behind the concrete bulkhead to reduce erosion.

Numerous other club members assisted in the maintenance of the property (tree and debris removal, mowing, repairing the hillside leading down the dock, planting grass, sealing the dock and doors, repainting and repairing, hanging a swing, building picnic tables, etc ....). Others



SCKC Kayak launch and boathouse. Air conditioned meeting room is on second floor with refurbished canoe buffet table.



Christmas party in redesigned boat storage area.

helped out with Christmas and tree decorations. Without their cheerful and dependable service, the club would not be where it is today.

The club’s membership has remained fairly stable over the past few years, at about 85 families, including multi-generational families. Among them are Cynthia Shank, and Perke and Wilson Robinson, whose mother, Annie Robinson, was the club’s oldest member when she died at age 97 in 2008. Tom and Barbara Fitzpatrick were active in the club and served on the Board for many years and their children Kerry Wick and Kathleen Fitzgerald remain members in the club. Paul Staley is one of our lifetime members and his son-in-law Ron Moredock is busy leading paddles for the club.

The pandemic of 2020 forced the club to cancel social gatherings like the Christmas Party and Green Corn Festival and board meetings became virtual via Zoom, rather than in person at the clubhouse. But kayak outings continued uninterrupted, with strong participation from members who were tired of being quarantined and anxious to be out on the water. They relished the fact that protective masks and social distancing were irrelevant when you were paddling the river.

We are also thankful for the club members who volunteered to serve on the Board of Directors over the past 100 years. Due to their dedication, the club has remained active and solvent. We continue to paddle together, usually at least once a month, and haven’t lost a single person! We remain the “poor man’s yacht club,” and we are the richer for it.



**Seminole Canoe and Kayak Club  
Officers and Board of Directors 2021**

Office	Name	Email	Phone number
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Pow Wow Newsletter Editor	Susan Poole		

Board Meetings are held on the second Monday of most months, at 7:30 pm in the Clubhouse. Members and guests are welcome. At least 4 General Meetings are held during the year for all members. Board meetings may be cancelled on months when General Meetings are held. Let us know your suggestions on how we can serve you and the club better.



These are two of the pictures hanging on the wall in the clubhouse.



"The crazy canoeists!"

