

Blog 121 ~ Pine Brae Country Club

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

It is interesting to see how a parcel of land can be used in various ways over time. Pine Brae Farm is a good example of varied use. Before it became a club, the property had been a privately owned farm for many years. Next, a realtor/entrepreneur bought the farm to make it a country club. Then it became a swim club, and ultimately the land was returned to open space.



Long before it was a farm or recreation club, the Pine Brae property was part of the Van Horne Patent granted to the Van Horne family in the 1700s. The Van Hornes sold off large parcels of land to the earliest farmers in the Blawenburg/Skillman area. John, Frederick, and Michael Blaw's residences near Great Road and Bedens Brook Road were also from the Van Horne Patent.

Pine Brae fronted on Route 518 (also known at the time as Blawenburg-Rocky Hill Road and Georgetown Franklin Turnpike), just east of Duryee's Washington Well Farm. The name, Pine Brae, came from the topography of the land that had a slight hill, or brae. There must have been some pine trees on the property to influence its name.

While little is known about Pine Brae's origin, it was not an average farm. The original farmhouse still exists and looks more elegant than the typical farmhouse of the 1800s. It has Georgian-style architecture with several

fireplaces. Similarly, the seven barns and other outbuildings were well-crafted, featuring large barns (40 by 100 feet) of brick construction and twin brick silos. None of the farm buildings exists today.

From Farm to Country Club

Mr. and Mrs. Park Mullinnix were the last owners of the farm before the country club was developed. Foreshadowing the future of the property, the owners used one of their barns for entertainment, hosting community events. In September 1955, the Community League of Montgomery Township held its annual barn dance at the Pine Brae Farm.

Montgomery Township was a farming community in the late 1950s when Mario Lombardo, a realtor from Trenton, bought the property. He divided the property, separating the farmhouse from the other farm buildings. It was his intention to create a recreation and entertainment club in the country. He sold the farmhouse to David Demme for \$28,000.

Lombardo had many ideas about how the club members could enjoy the farm atmosphere. He initially purchased 38 acres where he used a barn as a clubhouse. He built a 40 by 100 foot swimming pool with a large diving area, four all-weather tennis courts, and areas for many activities such as archery and badminton. There was also a horse barn, bridle trails, a pond (which still exists) for fishing and winter ice-skating, and more. In his ads, Lombardo billed the club as a place “to reap the harvest of fruitful, leisure time spent in the pursuit of healthy recreation through every season of the year.”

He kept the farm name, Pine Brae, and called his property a country club. We generally associate the name “country club” with golf courses; however, there was no golf course. It truly was a club in the country. At its inception in 1960, Montgomery Township was still mostly rural. Pine Brae was advertised as “38 acres of unspoiled terrain...” Several years later, Lombardo purchased 50 more acres in hopes of future expansion.

Lombardo leased the property to the Pine Brae Club Board for 10 years with an option to buy it after that. He also sought financial aid from backers.

Family entertainment was a big feature of the club. Every year it held a horse show featuring dressage, competition in the open, and stadium jumping. To entice people to join the club, they invited TV cowgirl celebrity

Sally Star to entertain the families. A barn was refurbished to become a banquet hall, and group dinners were held there. The local Republican Club and fire company were among its patrons. They had an elegant French restaurant called the Lafayette Room and a wild-west themed restaurant called the Conestoga Room.

The club was not without controversy. The leaders of the project to build it were not from Montgomery Township, hailing from nearby communities such as Princeton Junction and Trenton. It was planned to be a destination rather than a local club. The maximum membership was set at 250 families. It also limited its club and pool memberships to whites-only. This was a source of contention with some members and ultimately led to some of them leaving the club.

To join the club, prospective members would pay \$475 the first year with an annual fee of \$325 thereafter. In today's dollars, according to a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, the initial fee would be \$5200 and the annual family membership fee would be \$3,662.

PINE BRAE WILL OPEN

Country Club Reveals Plans.

Pine Brae Country Club, which revealed earlier this spring its plans to establish a club in a group of brick farm buildings on Rocky Hill Road, Blawenburg, has announced that the club will open on July 4.

First year plans include the construction of a swimming pool, children's wading pool, four all-weather tennis courts, an archery range, stable facilities and bridle paths, a badminton court, picnic area, children's play areas, men's and women's locker rooms and snack bar.

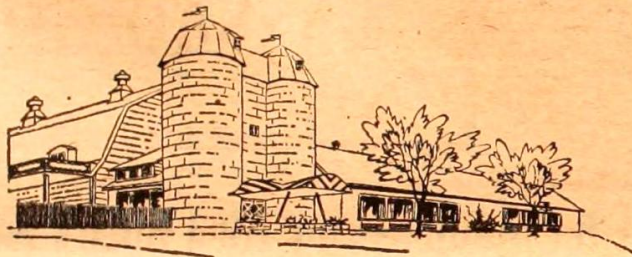
A pond at the rear of the property will be stocked with fish. Future plans call for a formal dining-room, cocktail lounge, game room and club room. The pond will be used for ice-skating in the winter.

Further information may be obtained from Paul O'Brien, 6 Canoe Brook Drive, Princeton Junction.

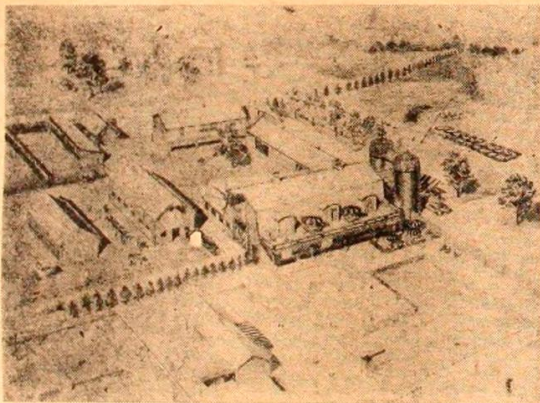
Town Topics, May 22, 1960

Pine Brae CLUB Blawenburg, New Jersey

limited membership
to year-round family
recreation in a lovely
country-side
atmosphere



Ready For Your Enjoyment This Year



Swimming Pool (Large 40' x 100' with 35' x 40' Diving "L"), Children's Wading Pool, 4 Tennis Courts (all weather), Children's Play Area, Stable and Bridle Paths, Picnic Area, Archery Range, Badminton Court, Ice Skating Ponds, Snack Bar, Fishing Pond, Men's and Women's Lockers, Health Club.

Additional Facilities to be Added Soon

Game Room (Ping Pong, Shuffleboard, Games, etc.), Club Room for meetings, bridge parties, etc.; Kitchen and Dining Facilities.

Considered for the Future

Squash Courts, Indoor Ice Rink, Golf Course, Cocktail Lounge, Formal Dining Room and Paddle Tennis Courts.

PINE BRAE CLUB . . . Located on Route 518 (Blawenburg-Rocky Hill Rd.) Just off Route 206, 10 minutes from downtown Princeton . . . the charm of existing authentic brick farm buildings, rich with sturdy character, combined with modern renovations and the installation of functional club facilities to produce a shaded, country-side atmosphere conducive to relaxation.

This summer, in addition to all the club facilities, 38 acres of unspoiled, rolling terrain will welcome you . . . later an additional 50 acres will be made available for your enjoyment.

Limited to a selected membership of 250 families, Pine Brae Club will maintain its air of country freshness to insure friendly, tranquil surroundings. Applicants for membership must be approved by Pine Brae Club's Membership Committee.

Explore now, the rewards of your membership in the Pine Brae Club and reap the harvest of fruitful, leisure time spent in the pursuit of healthy, recreation throughout every season of the year.

All this at a nominal monthly cost. For further details and illustrated brochure call or write . . .

PINE BRAE CLUB

c/o Mario J. Lombardo
1931 Brunswick Pike
Trenton 8, N. J.
EXport 6-7692

c/o Paul O'Brien
6 Canoe Brook Drive
Princeton Junction, N. J.
SWinburne 9-0427



An ad from the Town Topics to entice people to join the club.

New Year's Day Fire Strikes the Pine Brae Horse Barn

In the afternoon of January 1, 1968, all local fire departments were called to Pine Brae Country Club where its horse barn caught on fire. Despite their best efforts, the building was a total loss. The good news is that the horse barn was not used during the winter months.



IT WAS A REAL BARN-BURNER: Fire of undetermined origin Monday afternoon destroyed the barn on property of the Pine Brae Country Club on the Rocky Hill-Blwensburg Road. L. N. Lewis, just completing his term as chief of the Rocky Hill Fire Department, waded into the small pond to see what could be done to pump water from it. Fire companies from Montgomery Township and Hopewell also came to the scene, but barn was levelled. Horses used for riding at other times in the year were stabled elsewhere for the winter. (Marie Bellis Photo)

Lenape Swim Club

In 1976, the Pine Brae Club was in financial trouble, so the Board dissolved the club to avoid debts owed by Mario Lombardo. Apparently, some members wanted to rename the club and continue operation as a swim club. In 1977, a group of former members, not realizing the club's incorporation had ended, voted to amend the incorporation to change the name of the club to Sourland Swim Club. After further discussion, they

agreed to the name, Lenape Swim Club. They did not use a lawyer to do this and soon learned that the club had dissolved and another Lenape Swim Club had incorporated with that name in 1956. They registered the club in New Jersey with the name Sourland-Lenape Swim Club for tax purposes, but used the name Lenape Swim as the operational name.

On January 7, 1986, a new Board of Trustees were able to incorporate under the name they had been using. The Lenape Swim Club was operated as a cooperative. The only thing remaining of Pine Brae Club was the swimming pool and some deteriorating buildings.

In 2000, Montgomery Township acquired the 125-acre property, which included the Pine Brae Club and other acreage. They leased the swimming pool and restroom/locker room to the Lenape Swim Club so they could continue operation. In 2014, the swim club closed, and by 2018, the township demolished the pool and remaining buildings at Pine Brae.

A rectangular advertisement for the Lenape Swim Club. The background is white with a green border featuring a pattern of water lilies. The text is centered and includes the club's name, location, services offered, membership types, website, phone number, and a tagline.

Lenape Swim Club
Located off Rt. 518 in Skillman

Swim Lessons, Swim Team and much more!

The logo consists of a stylized red 'L' shape with a series of horizontal arrows pointing left, stacked vertically to the left of the 'L'. Below the logo, the word 'LENAPE' is written in a red, blocky, sans-serif font.

LENAPE

**Family, Couple, Single, Senior
and Swim Team Only Memberships**

Check out our website today:
www.LenapeSwimClub.com

(609) 924-6404

A Hidden Gem in the Heart of Montgomery

From Swim Club to Open Space

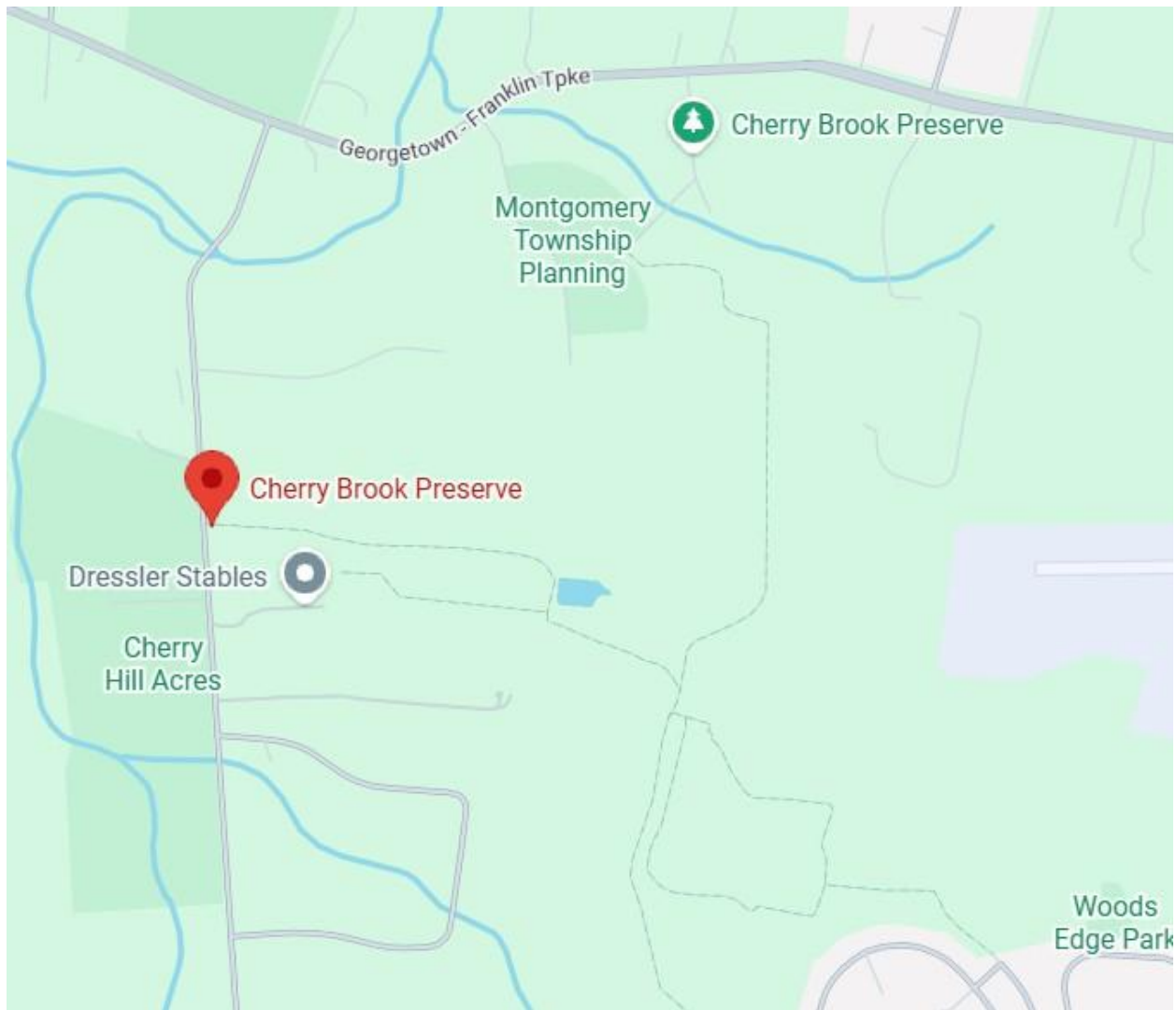


This is what the Pine Brae Country Club looks like today.

Montgomery Friends of Open Space (MFOS), a volunteer organization in Montgomery Township, has worked with the township for over 40 years to preserve land as open space. Over 8,000 acres have been preserved so far.

The MFOS realized that there was much more undeveloped land to preserve south, east, and west of the Pine Brae Club. While held by several owners, the total was over 400 acres. They also realized that it could easily become a large development.

Beginning in 1998, Montgomery Township, in concert with the Friends of Open Space and with grants from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection and Green Acres, purchased undeveloped land in what would become the Cherry Brook Preserve.



Cherry Brook Preserve is bounded by Georgetown Franklin Turnpike (Route 518) on the north, Cherry Hill Road on the west, the airport on the east, and close to Cherry Valley Road on the south. It has access points off Route 518 at Pine Brae Court, Cherry Hill Road near the Dressler Stables, and two entrances off Cherry Valley Road at Birchwood Drive and Linwood Drive.

In 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave the township a grant to plant 1,000 trees in an open field in the Preserve. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection deemed the land an “exceptional resource value” because it was a suitable habitat for reptiles and a stopover for migrating birds. With the grant, the township also created three ponds. The developers of the adjacent Yorkshire Woods and Woods Edge donated the land as open space.

The township and MFOS continued to expand the Cherry Brook Preserve. In 2017, they bought 36 acres from Thompson Land, and it recently bought 16 acres from the Jefferson property on the eastern side of the park.



An entrance to Cherry Brook Preserve near Pine Brae Court. These public lands are dedicated to recreation and enjoyment.

If you visited the north side of Cherry Brook Preserve today, there would be little that you could recognize. The farm that became Pine Brae Club and

Lenape Swim Club has returned to fields and woodlands, the way it was for many years. The clubs have had their time; their season is but a memory.

Also of Interest

1. Pine Brae Club used the location name of Blawenburg even though it was in Skillman. Perhaps Blawenburg was a better marketing draw! Lenape Swim Club used a Skillman address.
2. Cherry Brook Preserve is the township's largest park with over 400 acres. By comparison, Skillman Park is 247 acres. The Department of Corrections lands adjacent to Skillman Park on the eastern and western sides, which are being considered for purchase by the township, are just under 400 acres.
3. Cherry Brook Preserve has a maze of trails. Arm and Hammer provided a grant for trail signs, and Montgomery Township and the Montgomery Friends of Open Space installed them to make it easier to navigate the trail system.
4. While most of the land in Cherry Brook Preserve is dedicated open space, some acreage is leased to the neighboring Drake Farm.

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### **Sources**

#### **Information**

Thanks to Ken Chrusz for the information about the Pine Brae Club he provided from the Town Topics and Princeton Herald.

Thanks to Reed Chapman, a member of the Montgomery Friends of Open Space, for information about the Pine Brae Club and Cherry Brook Preserve.

Thanks to Eric Perkins, Esq. for information about the dissolution of the Pine Brae Club and the incorporation of the Lenape Swim Club.

Inflation calculator <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>

## **Pictures**

Logo Pine Brae Club logo—from club ad

News article—Town Topics, May 22, 1960

Pine Brae Club ad—Town Topics, May 5, 1960

Barn Fire—Town Topics, January 4, 1968

Lenape Swim Club sign—Town Topics, February 22, 2012

Club today—D. Cochran

Cherry Brook Preserve map—Google Maps

Cherry Brook Preserve welcome sign—D. Cochran

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