

## **“Recollections” by Robert C. Alexander (1912-1988)**

### **Our History**

The William J. Moore Tennis Center is located on Washington Street in Cape May, New Jersey, amid the surroundings of a fine old estate with its large shade trees, hedges, lawn and garden once owned by Dr. Emlen Physick.

The location was selected from several places under consideration in the autumn of 1961 by Mr. Thomas W. Harris, Jr., who thought there was a need for a tennis center in the seashore resort.

In December of that year, nearly one and three quarter acres of ground in the estate were given to the City of Cape May by Mr. & Mrs. Thomas W. Harris, Jr., Dr. & Mrs. Sidney Newcomer and Mr. Robert C. Alexander, with the stipulation that the land must be used for tennis and related activities.

In 1962, in the middle of April, construction of tennis courts and renovation of buildings at the center were begun under Mr. Harris's supervision. The work was financed entirely by private contributions. In May, the Cape May Tennis Club was organized and incorporated for the purpose of leasing, operating and maintaining the city-owned center as public tennis courts. A twenty-year lease was obtained from the city by the Club.

The court next to Washington Street, the first one to be completed, was ready for play by the second week of June 1962.

In the summer of 1962, the new tennis center consisted of five tennis courts built of local clay; the frame “Pro-Shop” moved from the old courts on Lafayette Street; a one-story frame tool house which was converted into a shower and lavatory facility; a small two-story red-brick building erected in 1895, said to have been the gardener's potting house, remodeled for a clubhouse; and a driveway and parking area.

An unusual feature at the center was the arrangement of four of the tennis courts in pairs. Each pair was surrounded by tall, private hedges in what had once been a part of the garden of the estate. The hedges provided protection from the wind and glare of the seashore, and the courts in pairs limited the number of players walking behind and across the courts or retrieving errant tennis balls.

Mr. William J. Moore, known as “William” by his many tennis friends, was put in charge of building the courts. He had been a tennis pro and manager of the clay courts at the Cape May Golf Club on Lafayette Street for nearly half a century. After that golf club failed, he had leased and operated the courts there himself on a year to year basis. This summer, 1962, William was in the “Pro-Shop” at the new tennis center having been hired as pro and manager. He was assisted by his son “Ossie”, who replaced him as pro and manager when he retired at 94 years of age in 1966.

Activities at the center during the first summer included a party for William on Saturday, August 4, in celebration of his 90th birthday, which also marked the "official opening" of the tennis courts; interclub tennis matches with a team from Moorestown, N.J.; a boys' and girls' tournament; and men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles tournaments.

Officers of the club were Mr. Robert C. Alexander, president; Mr. John Myers, vice-president; Mrs. John E. Davison, secretary; and Mr. Paul Vanneman, treasurer. Mr. & Mrs. Thomas W. Harris, Jr. were elected honorary life members.

In 1963, another pair of courts was built and ready for play by the summer; and an adjoining parcel of ground consisting of about one and one half acres was given to the City of Cape May for the tennis center by Mr. Alexander.

Mr. William J. Moore's contribution to education and tennis were well-known. His "Teaching Tennis to Beginners" was published in 1960 with a second printing in 1979. In 1957 and again in 1972, The United States Lawn Tennis Association recognized William's many contributions to the game of tennis by issuing letters of appreciation and congratulations. In 1968, at the 8th Annual Philadelphia International Indoor Open Tennis Championships, the Middle States Lawn Tennis Association presented William an inscribed silver plate for his "loyal and meritorious service to tennis."

On Saturday, August 5, 1972, William was honored in celebration of his 100th birthday anniversary at the Annual Luncheon held on the lawn by having the center dedicated as the William J. Moore Tennis Center. It was a poignant occasion.

Three days earlier, William had fallen while hitting a tennis ball on the first court and had broken his hip. There was deep concern for him and a question as to whether or not he would be able to attend the dedication. At the last moment, an ambulance transporting him from Burdette Tomlin Memorial Hospital in Cape May Court House on a hospital bed arrived at the Center. His sister, and all nine of his living children were there; the Mayor of the City of Cape May was there; and countless tennis players and friends were there. A bronze plaque on the red brick clubhouse marks the dedication. William died the following year.

In 1979, the Cape May Tennis Club received a new lease from the City of Cape May. Retroactive to 1978, it was for a term of fourteen years with an automatic option for an additional ten years. In 1982, the "Pro Shop" was enlarged.

In 1982-1983, a chain link fence was erected enclosing all of the courts, except numbers 2 and 3 where the original wooden posts and wire fence were left as a reminder of the earlier days.

"Ossie," who had been guest of honor at a "Surprise Reception" sponsored by the club in 1981 at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Clarence

Farmer in West Cape May "for 45 years of continued service" to tennis, died on February 27, 1983.

On July 4th, 1983, at Independence Day ceremonies, the new William J. Moore Tennis Center flag, designed by then-president Mr. John Bodnar and donated by Mr. George Lee, was dedicated in memory of Ossie.

On August 6th, 1983 at the Annual Luncheon, a bronze plaque on the red brick clubhouse was dedicated in the memory of Mr. Thomas W. Harris, Jr., who died November 27, 1982.

In 1983, the City of Cape May provided ground for additional tennis courts at the center.

In 1985, four quick-drying Har-Tru courts were built replacing clay courts number 6, 7, 8, and 9. This improvement was made possible through the generosity of thirty-five lifetime contract holders each of whom paid \$1000 for the privilege of playing tennis here. A memorial in the amount of \$2000 was given by friends of Mr. Mort Zirin, a tennis player, for annual playing contracts for two deserving Cape May youngsters to be selected each year by the Board of Directors of the Club.

Ms. Amaleta Moore, William's daughter, and Mr. Alexander were elected honorary members of the Board of Directors.

The Cape May Tennis Club is a non-profit corporation. All officers, directors, chairpersons, members of the committees serve without pay. Those on staff are paid.

Through the years, there have been many tournaments, many social events, and many happy times. We congratulate all those who have helped make these public tennis courts a success. The William J. Moore Tennis Center is a pleasant and friendly place to enjoy tennis.

The purplish-pink trumpet shaped flowers that grow near court 2 every summer are Magic Lilies (*Lycoris Squamigera*), perennial plants of the *Amaryllis* family. They have grown there, in front of the former potting house of the Dr. Emlyn Physick Estate since the estate was built.