

Westchester Hills Golf Club

INCORPORATED

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EDITOR'S NOTE

No attempt has been made heretofore to secure and place in concrete form data relative to the early history and development of our club. That the path was not altogether an easy one, that hard work and conscientious effort was put forth by the founders, that our growth has been substantial and sure; is shown by the facts herein presented.

No record of this kind could be complete without an article from the individual who conceived and who did so much to make our club possible. Mr. Robert E. Farley's letter on our early history is very interesting, valuable and appreciated.

(Signed) WALTER Z. SHAFER, Secretary.

A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

New York City, December 20, 1921.

MR. WALTER Z. SHAFER, *Secretary,*
Westchester Hills Golf Club.

My dear Mr. Shafer:

I am very glad to comply with your request for an article as to the early history of the country club.

I began the development of Gedney Farm and the construction of the Gedney Farm Hotel in January, 1913. I soon became convinced that the one feature still required to round out the community was a good golf club. I felt that such a club would not only be a great asset for Gedney Farm, but would meet a general demand that would constantly increase. I looked with longing eyes towards the old Safford estate of about 74 acres on Ridgeway, which I felt was remarkably well adapted to a golf course on account, especially, of its rolling contour, its freedom from woods, rocks and other difficulties in construction, its attractive lake, constituting an excellent water hazard, and its wonderful views. The old Safford residence also, although then in wretched condition, seemed well adapted, with extensive alterations, for a club house. I also owned, personally, the so-called Purdy farm of about 35 acres adjoining, with its frontage on North Street, the combined holdings affording us an opportunity to secure enough land for a full eighteen hole course. We acquired the Safford property at \$2,000 an acre and my own property at \$1,000 an acre, and as soon as weather conditions permitted in the spring of 1913 we began work on the course. I was very fortunate at that time in being able to get the services of Peter Oark, who had been the professional for some years at the Century Club, and I wish to take this opportunity of paying a tribute to Peter. There are unquestionably better golf players than Peter, but no man, I think, is better fitted for the work on which he then engaged. He took entire charge of the construction of the golf course, and it was laid out by him with such little help as I was able to give, al-

though we also called upon Donald Ross for some expert advice.

The work progressed rapidly during the summer of 1913, and in the fall when the first nine holes were practically complete and the club house was almost ready for occupancy, I invited a few friends and associates to join with me in the organization of the Gedney Farm Country Club. Our first and organizing meeting was held at the Gedney Farm Hotel, and we organized with a board of directors consisting of the following:

Robert E. Farley	L. Ward Prince
Kenneth M. Murchison	Charles H. Burr
Howard Willets	C. Halsey Mitchell
George G. Allen	Thomas E. Conklin
George C. Luebbers	Frederick S. Jackson
Dr. D. Austin Sniffen	

The officers elected were as follows:

Robert E. Farley	President
Thomas E. Conklin	Vice-President
Charles H. Burr	Secretary
C. Halsey Mitchell	Treasurer

The newly organized club then took over a lease of the entire property from the Gedney Farm Co., and I wish to say that the Gedney Farm Co. did best to make this lease a very fair and liberal one to the new club, with only some reasonable safeguard to protect the company's interests. There has been from time to time, I believe, criticism towards the Gedney Farm Co. on the part of members. This, I am quite sure, however, is based upon an entire misconception and misunderstanding of the facts, and in view of the fact that I no longer have any interest whatsoever in the Gedney Farm Co., I may be permitted to say that the club in my opinion is very deeply indebted to the Gedney Farm Co., for the way this company handled this matter from the beginning of the transaction, and the club, I feel, should be very grateful to it. Every dollar required in the purchase of the property, in the construction of the course, in the altering and im-

proving of the club house and the furnishing and equipping thereof, and in the maintaining and improving of the course for a considerable time was supplied by the Gedney Farm Co., and the whole golf club proposition was turned over to the club as a complete and finished proposition. The company further, in its lease did not provide for any stipulated or stated sum as rental, and the only amount that the club was definitely required to pay was the sum of \$750 a year towards the amount expended by the company for furniture and the insurance premiums. The club was to take over the maintenance of the property after November 1, 1913, and then if, at the close of a fiscal year after the payment of all of its expenses for the maintenance of the course, clubhouse, etc., and the stipulated payment as to furniture and the payment of insurance premiums, there was any surplus, this was to be applied towards the payment of the taxes on the property, and then still, if there was any surplus, the club was to apply the same as and for rental, with the express stipulation, however, that the Gedney Farm Co. should not receive more than 3 per cent upon the actual cost of the property to it, and the Gedney Farm Co. reserved the right to nominate a majority of the board only until such 3 per cent on the actual cost was paid. The reason for this stipulation as to the control of the board, of course, should be obvious. It was necessary that the Gedney Farm Co. should have some control over the policies and management of the club until it should receive at least some very small return on its investment. Some members have chafed at times because the Gedney Farm Co. seemed to get some advantage out of the country club, but anyone with knowledge of the facts I think will agree that the Gedney Farm Co. paid in a very large way for any advantage that it ever received.

The club in its early years received considerable patronage from the guests of the Gedney Farm Hotel. This was not free at times from objectionable features, but at the same time the fees received from guests constituted a very vital and important factor in the life of the club in its early stages. The guest charges, chiefly from the hotel, in fact, enabled the club to maintain itself for some years. During the first year of the club's existence, one-fifth of its total revenue came from this source; in the second year about one-third of its total revenue, and in the third year about \$7,000 of the club's total revenue of \$18,400.00 came from guest tickets. Then again in the fourth year \$7,187 of the total revenue of \$22,803 came from the guest charges.

The club house and the first nine holes were formally opened on Election Day of 1913. The Gedney Farm Hotel loaned to us its orchestra, and we had an exhibition match by Jack Dowling and Alex Smith, and the club then really started its existence as an important factor in the golfing world.

Five more holes were completed and opened on September 5, 1914, and the remaining four holes were finished and opened in July, 1915, and our tennis courts were constructed in the spring of 1914.

In the beginning it was our plan to have the dining

service handled by Mr. Sherrard, manager of the Gedney Farm Hotel, but Mr. Sherrard found that he could not handle this efficiently and we therefore engaged as our first steward, Mr. Louis Furstenwerth, who had been for several years steward of the Scarsdale Golf Club.

As to membership, the club has the unique distinction of never having made any real, broad campaign for members, and from the very beginning all applications for membership were very carefully scrutinized and considered, and a consistent effort was made to admit to membership only people who would be desirable and creditable members for the club, and this policy, I believe, has always been strictly adhered to to the very great advantage of the club.

The first annual meeting was held on November 18, 1914 and at that time we had 117 members in all classes. We had also a surplus of \$1,190, but nothing whatsoever had been paid at that time to the Gedney Farm Co. on account of the club's obligations to it, and we had to do what many clubs are required to do in the beginning of their existence; that is, to borrow money from the bank to carry us through the winter. At the end of the second year our total membership had increased to 187 and we had a surplus of \$786, with still nothing paid to the Gedney Farm Co. At the end of the third year our membership had increased to 226 and we had a surplus for the year of \$5,065.81. At the end of the fourth year our membership had increased to 274, and we had a surplus for the year of \$4,394, but I believe that even at that time very little, if anything had been paid to the Gedney Farm Co., and the company besides its initial investment had, therefore, been taking care of the taxes, insurance premiums, etc., from its own funds. After the fourth year there was, in spite of the unfavorable business conditions, a steady and rapid increase in the membership of the club, and the club continually gained strength financially and in every other way. The golf course was steadily improved and soon was generally conceded to be one of the best in the metropolitan district.

I continued as president of the club until August 20, 1919, when I resigned and was succeeded by Mr. Thomas E. Conklin, who had been vice-president for several years. Although I have had no official connection with the club since August 20, 1919, my interest in it has always been very deep and very keen, and always will be, and it is a great source of personal satisfaction to me that the club is now in such a sound and fine position from every standpoint. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate every member of the club upon the favorable purchase of the property from the Gedney Farm Co., and to ask the members to give to the new board of governors their loyal and whole-hearted support and cooperation.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT E. FARLEY.

--W.H.G.C.--

The "Certificates" will be sent out in the near future by the Treasurer.

OUR ORIGINAL LAYOUT

By PETER CLARK

In March, 1913, I laid out our eighteen hole course and started actual building work on April 1st for the first nine holes. These holes were ready for play in October of 1913 and were the same layout as our present first nine.

When first opened these holes were in fairly good shape considering the short time the seed had been planted. Number six was built through swamp and woods and was by far the most costly hole on the course. These nine holes were carefully handled and their condition improved steadily, because the play was not heavy and the fairways had a good chance to mature. Election Day of 1913, I well remember as being the "Big Day" of the first season, and it seemed we were headed for success.

In the fall of 1913 we started construction work on five additional holes, working all winter and had them in shape ready for play in September, 1914. Our success seemed nearer. These five holes correspond to our present numbers 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18, and were you to play these 14 holes by our present numbers the rotation would be the first seven, then the 12th, 17th, 18th, 10th, 11th, 8th, 9th. To complete the full 18 we doubled on the first four holes.

These fourteen holes received continuous and careful attention and later on in 1914 we started work on the other four. Here was real difficulty, as we had quite a problem getting the fall for the drainage. The mound short of the green going to the present 13th hole was used as a dumping place for all the rakings and rocks from the swamp and other holes, and when finally covered with soil and grass it added greatly to the layout, and eventually made one of the best holes on the course. These four holes were finished and the full eighteen holes were opened for play in July, 1915. Our success had almost arrived.

Every year added improvements have been made, such as water pipes to all of the greens, putting in bunkers and sand pits, or altering old ones, additional drainage, etc., also larger tees on every hole. With the final changes as determined upon for 1922 I know we will have a very good course and our desired success will have actually arrived.

--W.H.O.C.--

Your Editor acknowledges with thanks the receipt of several letters stating approval of BULLETIN No. 1, also the verbal expression of several members to the same effect.

It is expressions of this kind that are going to enthuse each and every one who is actively working to make our club a real success, and cause them to keep on "doing."

--W.H.G.C.--

BULLETIN NO. 3

The next BULLETIN will be given over to the recent changes in our club Constitution and By-Laws, and will set forth in complete form the new Rules and Regulations of both the Green Committee and House Committee.

The different chairmen and members who are to serve for the coming year on the various committees will also be listed.

DO YOU KNOW?

Our Club was originally incorporated October 2nd, 1913, as the Gedney Farm Country Club, Inc., and changed in 1921 to the Westchester Hills Golf Club.

--W.H.G.C.--

Peter Clark is the only professional ever in service at our club. His engagement dates back to the spring of 1913. He came to us from another Westchester County course, the Century Golf Club. May you be with us, Peter, for a long time to come!

--W.H.G.C.--

Our first Golf Schedule was printed in 1916, necessarily a very simple affair of few pages and few contests. It did not compare very favorably at that time with schedules issued by other clubs. Today our Schedule Books are eagerly sought for and used by many clubs as aids in preparing their contests.

In fact, our Schedules are known to be the most complete in detail and contain more diversified events than that issued by any other club.

--W.H.G.C.--

The first Year Book was printed in 1918. We now issue one yearly. Each year it seems to become more complete and interesting. One of these days we will excel in this department also.

--W.H.O.C.--

The first Chairman of our Ground Committee was T. E. Conklin who served till 1919.

The first Chairman of the Tournament and Handicap Committee was Dr. D. A. Sniffen.

--W.H.G.C.--

The Qub's first golf contest was on Decoration Day, 1914. A medal play contest with handicap, and there were eight entries. Picture in your mind one of our entry sheets during the past season. If we didn't have fifty entries, the weather must have been quite bad.

The first match play competition started in July, 1915, and was won by J. R. Howard, Jr., and "Johnnie" won many thereafter.

The "September Cup" event of 1915 was the first match play contest where sufficient entries were made to allow for a full 16 to continue at match play.

--W.H.G.C.--

Mrs. J. R. Shoaff was the first Chairman of the Women's Golf Committee, serving in 1914.

--W.H.G.C.--

At a general meeting of the club, Hotel Commodore, February 19th, 1921, one hundred and fifty members subscribed to Certificates of Indebtedness, thereby assuring the success of the plan to purchase the club property. At this meeting it was also decided to change the club name. The new name to be chosen later.

The first payment to the Gedney Farm Company was made on February 23rd, 1921, at which time the formal contract was signed.

--W.H.G.C.--

Our membership has shown a steady and healthy growth since the beginning. The figures given are at the close of each fiscal year, November 1st.

1913-11	1916-226	1919-330
1914-117	1917-256	1920-365
1915-187	1918-274	•1921-360

•After purchase of property.

--W.H.G.C.--

MEMBERSHIP AS OF DECEMBER 1st

Sustaining, 255; non-sustaining, 3; associate, 68; Country Club, 17; family Country Club, 1; junior, 16. Total, 360.