

Fore! The tradition of golf in Chelmsford

If you are one of those who find pleasure and relaxation in following a small white ball as it makes its way down the fairway (with an occasional side trip into the tall grass, the sand trap, or a small pond), you are a devotee of an ancient sport.

Golf originated over 500 years ago in Scotland but it wasn't until the early 1890's that it migrated to this country — and to Chelmsford. The first golfers were Scottish shepherds. They played it by hitting a leather ball, stuffed with feathers, with the sticks they carried to herd sheep.

So many people played the game in Scotland that it was stopped by the government, who wanted them to practice shooting their bows and arrows instead of playing golf. With the bow and arrow they could defend their country; golf clubs were not considered to be effective military weapons. But by 1600 the kings were playing it.

Where does Chelmsford fit into the picture? Our town was one of the early ones to have a golf club with its private course. By 1900 (and possibly a year or two earlier), the Hornbeam Hill Golf Club, named for the hornbeam trees that were found in the area, had an active membership.

The course was located on land that later became Hornbeam Hill Road, just off the upper end of Dalton Road. This writer has not uncovered any photos or detailed descriptions of the greens and fairways but it is reasonable to assume that they were more nearly akin to the Scottish sheep pastures than the immaculately manicured links we have today.

Among the club's officers elected on May 24, 1900 was the secretary-treasurer, Rev.

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



Wilson Waters. Dr. Waters is better remembered as the rector of All Saints Episcopal Church and author of the "History of Chelmsford" than for his golfing prowess. According to the newspaper report of that meeting, "The membership of the club includes many of the active young people of the village and the game has become quite popular in this vicinity."

Tournament play began right away. On Independence Day, 1901, the tournament opened at 9 a.m. with a stroke competition for the young ladies of the club. The young men had a team match in the afternoon, which attracted a large gallery of spectators. As an added attraction, fireworks were set off on the links that evening.

The club's activities were not limited solely to "putting the pill" but also included other social events. The news media reported that the Hornbeam Hill Golf Club sponsored a hurdy-gurdy dancing party at the town hall the evening of September 6, 1900.

Chelmsford got its second golf course a quarter of a century later. It was on Memorial Day in 1926 that the grand opening of the Elmhurst Public Golf Course took place. These links were located on Boston Road

with the clubhouse on the knoll behind the present number 235.

According to the newspaper announcement of May 30, 1926, green fees were \$1.00 for gentlemen and 75 cents for ladies. Prices were higher on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays when everyone was charged \$2.00. The course was operated by Clifford Harvey, uncle of Claude A. Harvey and Muriel Whealen.

The Elmhurst Golf Club closed a few years later when the clubhouse burned.

Chelmsford's newest golf course is the Apple Country Club at 66 Park Road in South Chelmsford. This course came into being in the spring of 1964 on land that had been part of the Park farm. It was built by Archie Jordan, former cemetery superintendent, and was known as the Chelmsford Country Club. Under new ownership, the name was changed to Apple.

As far as is known to the present writer, these were our only full-sized golf courses. However, we were not immune to the miniature golf craze. Two of these amusements opened on the same street the same evening. Sinai Simard built his in the apple orchard beside his home at 71 North Rd. and, just across Dalton Road, Fred Russell had a competing "course" beside the Syndicate house. Showing no partiality, the selectmen accepted invitations to play the opening round at each installation.

More recently, there has been a miniature golf course on Middlesex Street in North Chelmsford. And that's the way it was.

George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.