

The Case for Foxburg's Old Course

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The Foxburg Country Club, in western Pennsylvania, believes that it is the oldest permanent club and possesses the oldest permanent golf course in the United States. The claim is set forth in the notarized affidavits of five distinguished elder residents of three little neighboring communities, each of about 1,000 persons or fewer. If their memories are accurate, and in some cases they are linked to corollary events which can be confirmed, the first five holes were laid out and the club was organized some time during 1887 and the same land has been used by the same club for golf continuously to this day.

The St. Andrew's Golf Club, which has been at Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y., since 1897, holds documentary evidence that its first course was laid out and its club organized in Yonkers, N. Y., in 1888, one year later than Foxburg claims. It has been generally believed to be the oldest permanent golf club in the United States, although other courses are acknowledged to be older.

Foxburg is near the confluence of the Allegheny and the Clarion Rivers, about 60 miles north of Pittsburgh in the foothills of western Pennsylvania. The course lies beside the Petersburg Road (State Highway 338), which runs between Foxburg and St. Petersburg, and its fairways roll across the hills above the Allegheny and provide picturesque glimpses of the river valley. It has the simple dignity which grows out of its own modesty.

The course and club came into existence through a chain of events similar to those which led to the founding of St. Andrew's in Yonkers, except that the late Joseph Mickle Fox fulfilled for Foxburg the roles which both Robert Lockhart and John Reid played for St. Andrew's.

Fox was born in Philadelphia on February 4, 1853, developed as a cricket player at Haverford College, where he

was graduated in 1873, and continued to enjoy the game at the Merion Cricket Club. After his graduation and admission to the bar, however, he made his summer home in Foxburg in order to manage family properties in western Pennsylvania, where his great grandfather, Samuel Mickle Fox, had accumulated 118,000 acres at the time of his passing in 1808, and he retained the residence until his death in 1918. The house is still standing and maintained by caretakers of the Fox estate. When Merion assembled a cricket team to compete in a series of amateur matches in Ireland, Scotland and England in 1884, Fox was among those selected. The team sailed in May, the matches were played through June and July and the players returned to Philadelphia that autumn.

Introduction at St. Andrew's

These facts are matters of documentary record in histories and clippings held by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and are relevant because they confirm the recollections of Foxburg elders that Fox had been introduced to golf and acquired his first left-handed clubs and gutty balls while abroad with the cricket team in 1884. The introduction is said to have taken place at St. Andrews, Scotland, and the team did in fact play at Edinburgh on June 7 and 8.

Unfortunately, there are no first-hand documentary records concerning either the first rounds of golf in Foxburg or the subsequent organization of the Foxburg Golf Club, as there are in the case of the American St. Andrew's. However, Foxburg residents who were associated with the early play have contributed confirmatory segments of the story. These basic recollections were notarized from 1947 through 1950.

According to these recollections, Fox laid out a short course on the grounds surrounding his home, known as the Man-

sion, in 1885. Subsequently, he sent to Scotland for more clubs and balls for his friends. In addition, he offered the present site to make the game available to the community, participated in the organization of the Foxburg Golf Club and became its first president in 1887. The precise dates on which the course was laid out and the club organized cannot now be recalled.

For purposes of comparison, Robert Lockhart visited Scotland in 1887 and brought back to Yonkers the clubs and balls which enabled John Reid and John B. Upham to play their original exhibition in the pasture across from Reid's home on Lake Avenue on a date which



Harry R. Harvey

Lester Studio

participants later recalled to have been Washington's birthday, February 22, 1888. The group also recollected that it had laid out its first course on North Broadway in April, 1888, after the great blizzard of March, and organized the St. Andrew's Golf Club and elected John Reid the first president during a dinner at his home on November 14, 1888, a date which was recorded in the minutes which have been carefully preserved by the St. Andrew's club. While Foxburg retained its original site through the years, St. Andrew's moved three times, to the Apple Orchard in 1892, to Grey Oaks in 1894 and finally to its present location in 1897.

The key witness for Foxburg is Harry R. Harvey, who with his late brother Frank stimulated the founding and progress of the club from its inception. He is now 85 and stated in a deposition notarized on September 10, 1947:

"That he was present at the organization of the Foxburg Country Club, Foxburg, Clarion County, Pennsylvania, in the year 1887 and at the organization meeting he was elected secretary and treasurer of the Foxburg Country Club and served in these offices continuously until the year 1941, a period of 54 years; that in the year 1884 the late Joseph M. Fox, Esquire, was a member of the American cricket team which went to England to play the English cricketers and while there was introduced to the game of golf; that in the year 1885 the said Joseph M. Fox built a short golf course on the Mansion grounds near Foxburg; that in the year 1887 the said Joseph M. Fox offered the present site of the Foxburg Country Club links, rent free, and that golf has been played continuously on said links (enlarged from time to time) until the present time; that five holes were in play in the year 1887 and in the year 1888 the course was enlarged to nine holes."

Upon Harvey's resignation as secretary and treasurer in August, 1941, the club arranged a testimonial dinner and the program carried the following notation: "Given in honor of H. R. Harvey, who has been secretary of the Foxburg Country Club, Foxburg, Pennsylvania, (the oldest golf club in continuous existence in the United States) from the time of its organization in the year 1887 to the time of his retirement this year, completing a term of fifty-four years' service. We believe Mr. Harvey to be the earliest living golfer in the United States."

Harvey was still playing the Foxburg course last summer, 84 years after his birth and 64 years after the present course is said to have been laid out and the club organized. Harvey's recollection of the year in which the community course was laid out and the club founded is supported by other elder residents.

H. J. Crawford of Emlenton, Pa., a

Linking the Past and the Present at Foxburg



An early four-ball at Foxburg. From the left, the players are Harry R. Harvey, D. C. Hart, Charles Hart and H. H. Porterfield. The date is not known.



More recently on the same course. The players are Harry R. Harvey, Gilbert Chipley, Marcellin C. Adams and Charles Adams.

banker who is more than 80, deposed on September 9, 1947, "that for a period I was a member of the Foxburg Country Club and to my personal knowledge know the said club was organized and began doing business in the year 1887, that the said club has been in continuous existence and operating without interruption since that date."

C. H. Adams of Parker's Landing, Pa., 86, deposed on October 30, 1950, "that in my younger days I was a commercial traveler. In 1888 I made the territory adjacent to Foxburg, Pennsylvania, every thirty days. One of the places covered regularly was St. Petersburg, a distance of three miles beyond Foxburg. Returning by livery team on an early spring trip to St. Petersburg, I passed a field on which a game new to me was being played. This I found to be the game of golf, and on several occasions I stopped to watch the players. This field is still part of the Foxburg Country Club golf course. I fix the year from the fact that in 1888 I first began traveling in that section. Also it was the year of the great blizzard of March, 1888."

The late C. A. Miller of Foxburg deposed on September 29, 1951, "that he attended Clarion State Normal School during the years 1887 and 1888 and made frequent trips on the narrow gauge railroad which passed the golf grounds of the Foxburg Country Club in the Borough of Foxburg, Clarion County, Pennsylvania;

that he usually returned home from Clarion to Foxburg for week ends and says that during the spring vacation of 1888 he played golf on the Foxburg Country Club course with Mr. A. J. Dixon of Philadelphia, who he understands was one of the original members of the Foxburg Country Club; that he has been a citizen of the Borough of Foxburg, Clarion County, Pennsylvania, practically all his lifetime and that he believes the Foxburg Country Club has been in existence since sometime during the year 1887 continuously until this time." The opening of the Normal School in Clarion in 1887 and the existence of the railroad are confirmed facts.

Miller's brother, the late Hubert F. Miller, wrote in a letter dated June 16, 1949, "If you go back to 1887 . . . you will have to visualize a very crude golf course at Foxburg with only five playable holes for the first year or two, no regular income or clubhouse, no caretaker, a few 'natural' greens . . . verily, an abandoned cow pasture. Within the area and quite near by were several producing oil wells and several large oil storage tanks . . . The real founder of the club was Mr. Joseph Fox who gave us the free use of the cow pasture, reserving room for a small ball park also, without cost to anybody . . . He certainly showed his personal interest in golf and baseball and maintained a private course around the Mansion. That was a year or

two before the Foxburg Country Club began to function. I played there by invitation with several founder members of the Foxburg Country Club after 1887."

The late Mrs. Major R. Morgan of Foxburg, who was then 87, stated in 1948 that in the autumn of 1888 she had been married and moved to Foxburg, where her late husband had regularly played golf with Frank and Harry Harvey, Fox and visitors from Philadelphia. "The men all played on land belonging to the Fox estate. This is the same land on which the Foxburg Country Club still has its course," she wrote. "Several years after the men had organized their golf club, a ladies' golf club was formed of which I was the first president, and with the exception of two intervals I retained that office for thirty years. Although we used the same course, this was an entirely separate organization with its own rules," she added. "I do not remember a time when golf was not being played either on the course laid out by Mr. Fox around his residence or on the links adjoining the Petersburg Road on land Mr. Fox allowed the new club to use."

Early Record-Keeping

The lack of documentation regarding these early dates is simply explained. Harvey relates that he took care of the simple details of running the club with the

sole assistance of a small notebook into which he entered the names of the members and the dates on which they paid their dues, originally one dollar a year. The dues eventually were used to pay one John Dunkle at the rate of \$15 a year to cut the fairways with a scythe. Collecting the dues and paying the "greenkeeper" were Harvey's only duties in the early years, and when all financial entries had been made, the records were considered complete for the year. Eventually the notebook disappeared, probably when Harvey changed his residence. There were no minutes and no newspapers were published at the time in Foxburg, so there was no medium for other records of club activities in the earliest years.

Although organized as the Foxburg Golf Club, the name was soon changed to the Clarion County Golf Club. When it became apparent that players were being drawn from the counties of Armstrong, Butler and Venango, it was decided that it would be more diplomatic to revert to the Foxburg name. Since then, it has been the Foxburg Country Club. The course, which had been enlarged from five to nine holes in 1888, later grew to 18 holes, but the newer nine subsequently were abandoned, leav-

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The Foxburg ladies formed their own club soon after men had established the course and club and always have played a prominent part in the activities there. Mrs. Adam Miller here is addressing her ball in an era when golfing costumes were somewhat more cumbersome than they are today.

"Golf House" Is for You

People drift into "Golf House", the new USGA headquarters in New York, on the average of three or more per day. Often men working nearby come in during their lunch hours. They have signed the guest book from 28 states and six foreign countries.

Our library is here for the use of golfers who would like to look up references or just sit down for a while and read. The other day J. F. Curtis, of Roslyn, brother of Margaret and Harriot, came in wanting to know when he played in a match against the Canadians. Mrs. Paul W. Adams, of Hartford, came to look up background for a Connecticut women's bulletin. A newspaper man from St. Louis wanted to write about "Golf House."

We have more than 750 books, not counting bound periodicals, dating from the earliest days of the game. We suggest that anyone desirous of contributing to this library write in advance, giving the name of the book and author, so that there will be no duplication.

James O. Burns, of Kenmore, N. Y., recently donated a ball which Johnny McDermott used in winning the Open Championship in 1912, to increase our collection of the memorabilia.

The USGA flag is now flying outside of "Golf House". It was donated by Isaac B. Grainger and the pole by James D. Standish, Jr.

A new idea for enrolling Founders of "Golf House" has come from Shepard Barnes, of Jersey City, N. J. He has made contributions in the name of his two young grandsons, Ross M. Barnes, Jr., of Detroit, and Charles W. Saacke, Jr., of Ruxton, Md. Mr. Barnes formerly was President of the Metropolitan Golf Association in New York and is a member of the USGA Handicap Committee.

Approximately \$20,000 is now needed to complete the purchase and renovation of "Golf House." Additional contributions to complete the fund are welcome, and any golfer, club, association or any-

one else interested in the game may become a Founder. Contributions should be addressed to:

USGA GOLF HOUSE FUND
40 EAST 38TH STREET
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

Following are Founders not previously recorded in the USGA JOURNAL:

Frank Campsall, Jr.
J. E. Cummings
John McKinley
Mrs. Warren R. Pollard
Dr. A. G. Sacco
Morgan J. Seaton
C. Ross Somerville
Mrs. Otto Wenzel
William F. Zongker
Club

Berkley Hills Golf Club, Pa.

FOXBURG'S OLD COURSE

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ing only the original nine. The club purchased the original land, which it had been leasing, in 1924 and has since acquired some additional land to accommodate changes in the course. The original sand greens are now grass.

There are, of course, earlier references to golf in the United States, but none reflect the permanence which attaches to Foxburg and St. Andrew's. Rivington's Royal Gazette of April 21, 1779, a New York publication, carried an advertisement for clubs and Caledonian balls addressed "To the Golf Players," indicating some acceptance of the game here at that time. The South Carolina and Georgia Almanac of 1793 carried under the general heading "Societies Established in Charleston" an item entitled "Golf Club Formed 1786" and listed the officers thereof, and there were subsequent references in southern publications through 1811 to the "South Carolina Golf Club" and the "Savannah Golf Club." Russell W. Montague and four friends organized a golf club in 1884 at his summer home at Oakhurst, only two miles from White Sulphur Springs, W. Va. None of these endured, however. The first permanent golf club in this hemisphere was the Royal Montreal Golf Club, formed in 1873.