

RENOVATION '74: *THE OLD SUITS THE NEW*

Decisions to "modernize" should be weighed carefully against diminishing character touches

by DOUGLAS LUTZ

Many regulars at Licking Springs Trout and GC in Newark, Ohio, carry an extra stick in their bags. A fishing pole, to be exact. The fly rod has been standard equipment at Licking Springs for many years.

A bubbling stream, presently stocked with smallmouth and rock bass meanders through this semi-private, 6,290-yard, par-72 layout, adding a particularly unique feature to an off-beat golf course.

Jan Michalek, a fish expert, was imported from Europe in 1961 to renovate and maintain the trout stream and fish hatchery. Michalek traces his expertise with raising fresh water fish back to 1324 when the forebears of both his parents performed the same function for Prague royalty in his native country, Czechoslovakia.

In addition to providing fishing pleasures for the membership, Licking Springs permits the public to try its hand along the stream with small floating lures and salmon egg bait any day of the year—at a fee, naturally. An-

glers are charged \$2 a day and \$.12 an inch for any fish they catch.

Not many courses can boast of their own trout streams or their own resident fish expert. There are, however, unique and antique features at many courses that should be, and frequently are, highlighted.

Serious consideration should be given by course owners and operators before the zeal for "modernization" eliminates touches of the past and before expedient decisions in the interest of faster play remove qualities unique to a particular layout.

Nostalgia, much in evidence these days in fashions, films and literature, may be found in various forms at many golf courses. Retaining nostalgic touches can add character to a course. Additionally, emphasizing unique features enhances the general look and feeling, frequently adding to the pleasures of a round. That ice-cold drink from an old-fashioned hand pump at a course wise enough to retain one will be remembered by golfers long after

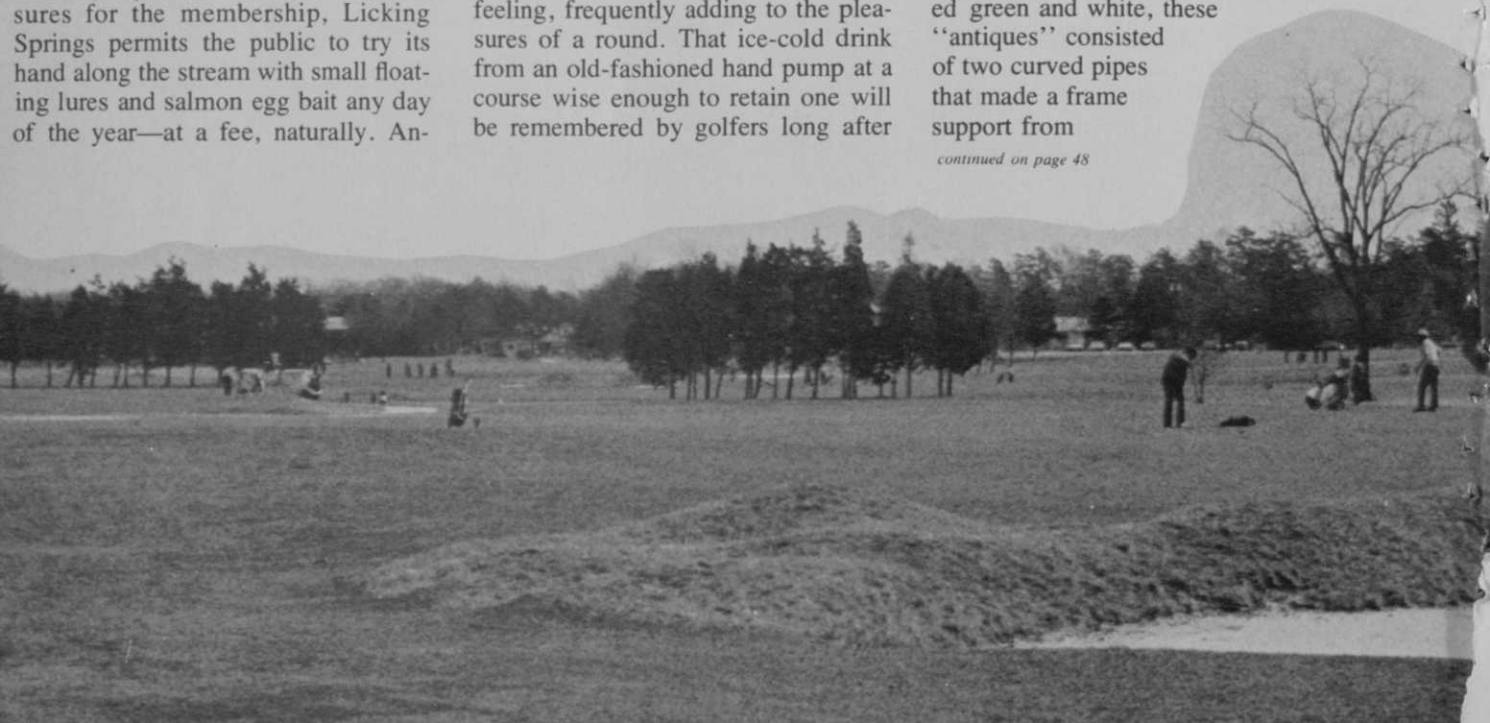
some of their bad shots are forgotten.

Pennbrook CC, a commercial course in Basking Ridge, N.J., features just such a link with the past. Where three tees and three greens converge, an old hand pump has served up crystal clear well water for more than 35 years. A chipped enamel cup, traditional around any old hand pump, rests on a post within easy reach.

Pennbrook is geographically unique, too. Four of its holes range the side slope of one of Watchung Mountain's ridges. The rest are flat fairways spread like giant green fingers into the thick forests and watery acreage of New Jersey's Great Swamp, a wildlife preserve.

The management at this venerable layout reluctantly bowed to progress recently when they eliminated their old-fashioned ball washers. Gaily painted green and white, these "antiques" consisted of two curved pipes that made a frame support from

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Roger Beadle (right), SCS district conservationist, checks out fishing at Orleans CC. NBC reporter Jim Collos (below) drinks while Tony Boschetti, CBS production coordinator, works Saddle River's old water pump.



Old Orchard's island green (above) at end of long par four seventh hole. Traps, formed by scooping and piling (left), were left in natural state at Lakewood CC. Ancient hillocks in background add still more character.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DOUGLAS LUTZ



Fairway traps remain today to add distinction along edge of flat fairway at Lakewood in New Jersey's pine belt.

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which were suspended a bucket of sand and a bucket of water. A strip of carpet was also attached to each frame. It was for rubbing the ball clean! The unusual ball washers gave Pennbrook an amusing touch of character right out of the late twenties that can never be recaptured.

An addition to the original barn clubhouse during an expansion program retained the flavor of the old building, which has perched proudly on top of Pennbrook's Watchung ridge for many years. Bright barn red and trimmed in white, this handsome structure backs the home hole's small, contoured, well-trapped green in beautiful style. Pennbrook's touches of the past add greatly to the enjoyment of a round at this excellent mid-Jersey layout.

Not every course can have water as famed as Merion's Baffling Brook in Ardmore, Penn. This partly hidden stream, which bisects the 378-yard 11th hole and forms a Y in front of and alongside the green, has proven disastrous for many of the game's greatest. Sarazen triple bogeyed here in the 1934 U.S. Open. Young Mason Rudolph (16) added eight extra strokes to his 1950 U.S. Open score by taking a 12! Many lesser known courses have used water to provide their golfers with unique challenges.

Green Knoll, Somerset County's exceptional public course near Somerville, N.J., maintains a classic water hole among 10 that are affected by water in varying degrees. Peters Brook, flowing through a trough lined with thick rough, angles across the eighth fairway four times during its wandering. Purposely left in its natural state, the brook is a real character builder. No compromise has been made to faster play. As a result, Green Knoll retains a look of distinction seldom evident at revamped public layouts.

Bridging fairways over waterways may speed up play, but it can destroy course character, too. Streams and brooks left to follow their own paths through the course terrain add natural hazards no architect can duplicate. Lakes and ponds have been artificially created

when the need for a water supply was genuine, and they frequently have become unique features. The best of these, however, seldom replaces the attractiveness of already existing water.

Islands, set in natural lakes, are always a pleasurable sight at any course. If they are the target at the end of a hole, even more so. There is no more enjoyable shot in golf than lofting a wedge to a patch of green surrounded by water.

At Old Orchard CC in Eatontown, N.J., the 483-yard seventh has just such a finish. What makes this hole more unique than most is the canal feeding into the lake. Flowing between planked bulkheads dating back to 1930, it crosses fairways, causing havoc with badly-placed shots.

Another excellent island green contributing character to a course is Ascarate Park's 16th in El Paso. Here the island also provides a tee position for the 17th hole at this layout etched into sandy flats bordering the Rio Grande in Texas' westernmost tip.

Old Orchard and Ascarate, two totally different kinds of courses, provide unique touches to a round of golf because of their island water hazards.

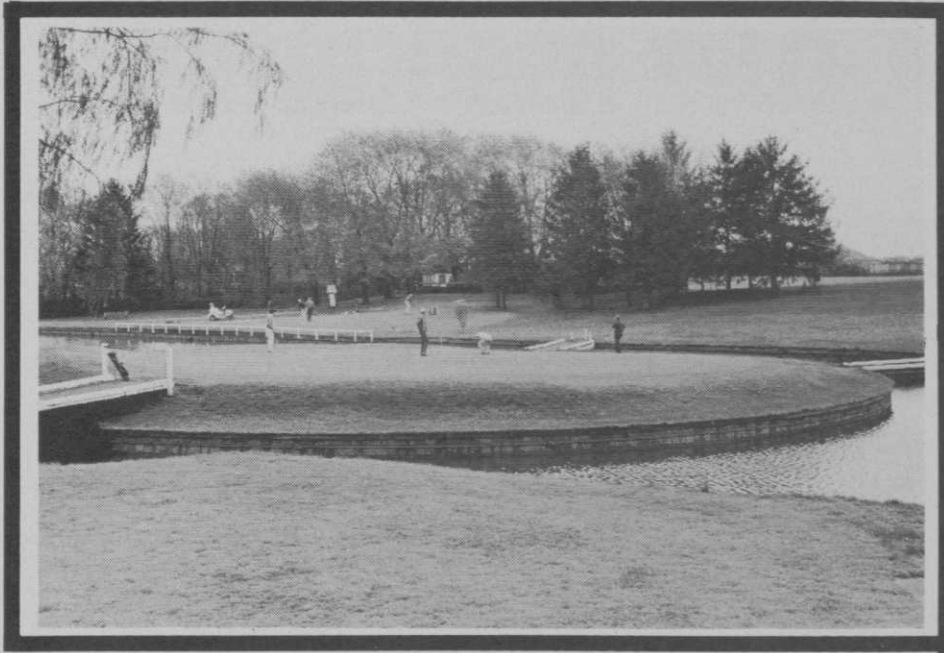
There are, of course, many layouts not fortunate enough to have water hazards, especially those on flat, former farmlands. Unique features in other forms frequently add a serious challenge while adding character touches at these "farm" courses. Commack Hills, set in the broad plain of mid Long Island, out beyond the Dix and Half Hollow Hills, has several unique features worth retaining. The course is dotted with over 200 pine trees less than three feet tall. Wide open spaces are formed into fairways wherever these evergreens are clustered into bordering hazards. A huge tree, almost dead center in the 375-yard seventh fairway, is in the landing area for most tee shots. Although it is true this tree might be considered in the way by many players and speedier play might result if it were removed, no such expedient action has ever been contemplated. Thus, an unusual challenge from the tee also adds a touch of character. Additionally, Commack retains reminders of its past in the animals frequently found

grazing near the 13th green and 14th tee. It's not unusual to see a goat and several ponies nibbling the excellent turf, because the old Carl Homestead farmhouse and barns are still standing and bordered by the course grounds on three sides. Commack's trees and animals contribute character of a most unusual nature, thereby helping overcome the natural monotony of most farm courses.

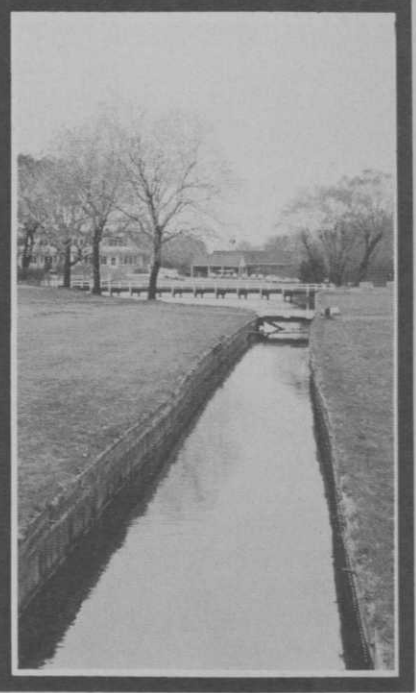
Another exceptional public course with a natural hazard in the middle of a fairway is Sheridan Park Municipal in Tonawanda, N.Y. Its toughest hole, the par-four, 458-yard seventh is bisected by a stream that affects no less than 10 other holes, including the 10th and 17th twice each. Angling across number seven at 45 degrees, the stream must be carried by the second shot. However, just beyond the stream, at the height of a well-placed three wood shot, a tall, bare-trunked tree blocks the way to the green. Looking like a giant slingshot topped with leaves, the upper part of its trunk forms a perfect Y and the temptation to put the shot through it is hard to resist. No doubt this monstrous tree has deflected many a good shot. Cutting it down would speed up play, but Sheridan Park, host of the 1961 Publix and already a distinctive course, has wisely made no move to eliminate one of its unique features.

Necessity for change in the face of financial pressure is frequently coupled to an examination of the number of rounds played. This has led to decisions that hopefully might result in speedier play. On many occasions that decision has ultimately destroyed irreplaceable elements in some locations. Speeding up play by eliminating or modifying sand hazards is the common adjustment, but not necessarily the wisest.

Consideration should be given to the self-sustaining aspects of an excellent bunker prior to filling it in, letting it grow over or reducing its size. Generally, drainage is no problem in a well-constructed old bunker. Raking and the removal of loose impediments need not be a daily chore. Autumn leaves are probably the biggest clean up job the maintenance crew must face. Mowing around a bunker can be a costly process, because in most instances it must be done by hand. Modifi-



Old Orchard's "canal" running through planked bulkheads crosses eight fairways before forming a lake around the 7th green at the tough New Jersey course.



cations in bunker shapes have frequently been motivated by grass cutting problems in addition to the rationalization of speeding things up.

At most municipal and public courses the brand of golf ranges from beginner to expert. Hackers are balanced by low handicappers. The broad middle segment of golfers generally represents the bogey and over shooters. Scores run from the upper 80s to just over 100. In this large group one finds few expert trap shot players. A key shot in the game is seldom, if ever, practiced by this group and is a nightmare when faced. The result is a lot of flying sand and a lot of time wasted in the bunkers. And yet, sand shots are an integral part of any decent round. Bunkers certainly contribute to the beauty of a layout while adding the degree of difficulty envisioned by the designer when he laid out the hole.

The dilemma for management is easily understood. Lose revenue because of slow play or speed up play and lose character. Unfortunately, most revisions have been motivated solely by the financial consideration.

A simpler and far less costly approach to overcoming the problem of slow sand play is to move the tee markers as far back as possible. Placing them forward, which seems to go hand in hand with an attempt to speed things up, is a delusion. Tee shots by most average golfers on a par four, for instance, are not long enough to permit the following

fairway shot to reach the green in regulation figures. Still, the average player will wait until the foursome ahead putts out even though he hasn't a chance of reaching the green in two. Etiquette dictate he must wait. When he does shoot he may not be on line, and the groans can be heard all over the course attesting to his having found the bunker. The cycle begins again. By starting him off with the longer distance, his second shot, in many instances, could be taken without waiting in the middle of the fairway.

Each hole, particularly the par fours, should be carefully analyzed as to driving length and degree of difficulty facing the average player. Analysis might reveal that the delay on a given hole is really in mid fairway and not necessarily in and around the bunkers. The finest elements that truly add character to a course may, in fact, not be the cause of slow play. At least not to the extent that has caused the wholesale revamping and elimination of so many bunkers.

Compromise after careful analysis can result in retaining course character, especially when dealing with the elusive problem of time spent in bunkers by the average golfer.

At the Lakewood CC in New Jersey, which is a very popular semi-private layout, the problem was solved through compromise. As an example, huge shallow bunkers fronting the left approach at the par-five, 537-

yard 11th hole were cut down in size to ensure against too many trapped shots. When forward tee positions were used, two good back-to-back woods frequently found the leading edge of the old bunker, particularly when the fairways were a little dry and there was some roll on the level terrain. The shot remaining to reach the green in three was a long sand shot needing an expert's touch. The finesse required was simply not in the average golfer's stock of shots. By tightening up the bunker at the front edge, fewer second shots rolled into the bunkers, resulting in faster play. This same technique was employed at several holes thus eliminating some beautiful bunkers that had withstood the test of time. Lakewood dates back to the early twenties. Speedier play resulted, but character diminished.

Lakewood was fortunate. With so many character elements it could afford to sacrifice a few. Unique bunker work was retained along

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fairway edges. Hand manicured mounds on the green side of these old-fashioned traps attest to a method of construction seldom evident today. Scooping and piling, although a relatively simple procedure, was done by hand or by horsepower using a chain rigged pan scoop if the bunker had any depth or large proportions. Lakewood proudly exemplifies the expert handwork of the artisans of course construction in the twenties.

The economic feasibility of putting a man to work building such a bunker in today's labor market automatically eliminates any further consideration of this type installation for the courses now being built. All the more reason for courses with such nostalgic elements to retain them. They become historic finally and may serve as models of what a good fairway bunker should be: natural in shape and size with just the right amount of difficulty built in.

One of the most unique bunker features at this very old layout helps turn the par-three, 200-yard 15th

hole into the toughest test on the course. Between the small green and the Metedeconk River that flows across the fairway, the club's initials are etched into the lush turf in the form of a series of flat traps. Not only is this bunker arrangement unique to Lakewood, it is no doubt unique to the entire country. Incidentally, this hole is number one in the handicap ratings.

To overcome the dullness of flat fairways where Lakewood is wide open, huge mounds topped with trees separate them. Here again, Lakewood reaches into the past in retaining an element unlikely to be found at many courses and certainly not being built into today's layouts. When original construction was underway, rocks removed from burgeoning fairways were simply piled high and covered with earth. Looking like some ancient Indian burial mounds, these hillocks have grown thick with trees and brush through the years. In addition to evoking a nostalgic feeling, they provide a serious challenge requiring accuracy while helping delineate the fairways.

In many respects, playing a round at Lakewood is like stepping back in time. Retaining its antique and unique features doesn't seem to have seriously affected the club's income. In fact, it might be said that the feeling of nostalgia Lakewood transmits to modern golfers may well be one of the major reasons they keep coming back. Perhaps all the charms of yesteryear's golf have a subconscious appeal to today's golfers. This would appear to be true at the Lakewood CC.

Styles of architecture have changed through the years, of course, but the elements that enhanced golf courses in the genteel days of gutta percha and plus fours are still evident in many layouts.

Unique qualities built into old courses were frequently brought about through necessity rather than design. Design evolved as a result of construction methods and became standard practice in course installation. Magnificent old bunkers backed by huge terraced earthen works were simply created by scooping out the earth and piling it nearby. Thus expedient decisions resulted in a style of course design that has been held to be the model for more than 70 years.



A large tree in the center of the 7th fairway at Commack Hills, Long Island, presents a unique challenge.

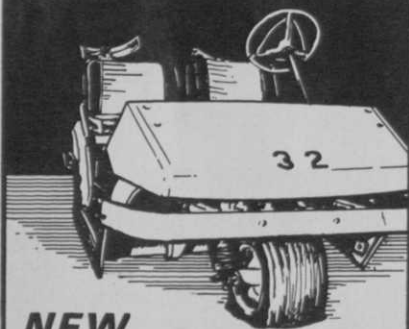
Without machinery of the size and strength we know today, removal of rocks in early construction was a horrendous problem. A ready solution was found whenever a hillside or slope was available. The rocks were levered into position and tumbled down the hill to find their own resting places in nearby woods or midway between fairways. Level courses were cleared by dragging the rocks on horse-drawn skids to a convenient out-of-the-way place as we have seen in the mounds at Lakewood.

Antique and unique features abound in the world of golf, some in single elements such as the old-fashioned trestle crossing a ravine at Richmond County on Staten Island, New York City's only remaining private club. Others in entire courses evoke a nostalgic feeling while providing visual delights and playing conditions of the past.

None is perhaps more unusual than the cemetery surrounded by the Passaic County GC in Preakness Valley Park, Totowa, N.J. Dating back to America's revolutionary beginnings, a small tree-sheltered hilltop was a family burial plot long before the game of golf came to our shores. Not very many courses can boast of a cemetery within their grounds. Certainly none with a tombstone dated 1774! That's 113 years before the Foxburg GC in Pennsylvania was organized as the first of its kind in this country.

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The elimination of antique or unique features to serve the need for faster play can prove disastrous to a course's character. Frequently, there is an alternative plan that may achieve the same result and still allow retention of past touches.

We all need to be reminded of where golf began and of the important steps that have been taken along the way to advance the game to its present state of excellence. Appreciation of the elements in terms of an over-all appearance go hand in hand with an appreciation of a well-played round.

The serious golfer is not merely interested in scoring. He likes to feel the presence of a course, to enjoy the beauty of a well-contoured green and the challenge of a well-constructed bunker.

There is no better assurance of continued success as a course operator than in maintaining character touches most layouts already possess.

There is no better way to ensure your golfers' total satisfaction with the game than in retaining and highlighting antique or unique features at your course.

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whole thing. That's one big package. If you're able to put it all together with the weather, you can come up with a finished product that you can really be proud of. It isn't the salary or anything like that that's kept me in the business; it's the challenge to do a good job."

The challenge to do a good job . . . it's not offered to every superintendent. And, to be sure, not every superintendent would accept the challenge even if it were there. But on a growing number of golf courses across the country, an awareness of the true value of the superintendent has come to both the superintendent and his management. And when that happens, when the superintendent is given total responsibility for the condition of the course and an adequate budget . . . and when he, in turn, applies his knowledge of grass, his skills as a manager of men and money, and his ability to communicate . . . then he earns the respect and appreciation of his management and the people who play his course.



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