

One Year's Fast Work Builds New Club

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On the outskirts of Pittsburgh, near the pit mouths of some great bituminous mines, a 9-hole course has done service for the golf-minded of that community.

The 90 acres used for this purpose straddled 2 incorporated townships, Castle Shannon and Mt. Lebanon, the course taking its name from the former, although the major portion of the land used for the course was in the township of Mt. Lebanon.

For over 40 years the property has been leased from a family of original settlers, and rumor has it that Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh's best known financier, and former secretary of the treasury, was one of the founders.

During that period Pittsburgh has grown, aided by the automobile and the arteries created thereby. One of these was the twin vehicular tunnels bored through a mountain that barred access to the south and west of the city. With the completion of this improvement and the gradual lengthening of the avenues leading from the tunnel exit, the district to the west and south grew by leaps and bounds.

Castle Shannon and Mt. Lebanon were in the paths leading to the open spaces and the sunshine that had been hidden by the hills surrounding Pittsburgh.

The former was the mining community, whereas Mt. Lebanon grew to one of the fine residential spots, where acre estates and homes of better than the average were built.

In the course of this building, the site occupied by the 9-hole Castle Shannon club became surrounded, and with the end of the war and a further demand for homes for GI and private citizen alike, covetous eyes were leveled at the property. The heirs, who had been immune to the pleas of the club membership to sell the property to them, sold to a local real estate development company, who soon issued orders to vacate so that building could commence.

Surveys were made and it looked as if the membership would be without a course on which to play for the years 1945 and 1946, but material to construct dwellings and build streets and install sewers, was not available and year-to-year and month-

to-month leases were given, permitting play until the end of last season.

Knowing that sooner or later the property would be used for construction purposes, a committee was delegated to look over available property in the vicinity with a view to purchasing same and establishing a new course, a modern course, an 18-hole course.

For weeks this committee roamed the hills, and to know Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, one realizes that hills aplenty were encountered. Over a radius of 30 miles they trekked, and in most cases soon discarded the sites as possibilities due to the hills and valleys encountered.

Locate Abandoned Farm

At the end of their journeys, apparently, they came upon an abandoned farm some 10 miles from the center of Mt. Lebanon, 190 acres of land overgrown with woodland, a former apple orchard and the usual stubble found in the neglected rural districts.

However, the rolling contour of the acreage, seen from a distant hill, made them realize that here was a possibility worth investigating. Their far-seeing eyes visualized just what might be accomplished if this property were available for the purpose they had in mind. Keeping their quest a secret and away from the real estate operators, they found that the property, like the Castle Shannon property we were being forced to vacate, was also an estate and that heirs would have to be consulted before a deal could be made.

Several meetings were had with the various heirs, and a tentative deal was arranged, based on conditions due to one of the heirs being a minor, and also due to certain mining and mineral rights that are usually retained by the original owners.

Having made this much progress the committee reported back to the Castle Shannon club, and suggested that rather than make a direct change-over from one club to the other, that a new corporation be formed, thus giving all members of the former club the privilege of joining the new club or withdrawing and receiving their pro-rata share of the proceeds of the liquidation, this being one of the clubs that

had money in the bank and other assets worthy of division.

This move having been made, a further meeting of those interested created an organizing committee, with power to form a corporation, take out a charter in the name of the Mt. Lebanon Golf Club, and arrange finances to proceed with the purchase and development of the property.

The committee was formed and the club was fortunate to have a variety of counsel in creating the project, their being engineers, lawyers, realtors, insurance men and publicists in the group, and each did his part in the most efficient manner.

With this array of talent, all substantial citizens of Mt. Lebanon, it was much easier to persuade a local bank to advance initial capital, in order that the property could be secured and construction started as soon as possible.

One of the first objects encountered was membership, it being decided to limit the list to 300 senior members, with the usual junior and ladies' memberships available.

With slightly over 30 members enrolled, it was decided that immediate steps should be taken to purchase the land, proceed with construction and campaign extensively for a quick closing of the membership rolls.

Preliminary engineering on the site brought out the fact that with the first layout shown there would not be over a 4 per cent grade on any up fairway. This was doubted by many, so with instruments this detail was proven to be true. Later, in rearranging the layout it was necessary to make one or two hops over small ravines, but with the aid of a small bridge between two fairways the necessity of making a severe climb was eliminated, and the 4 per cent grade was again established.

This feature has appealed to many of the older golfers of other clubs, where the hills were too much for their legs and hearts, and they have transferred their affiliations in order to lengthen their golfing days.

The next step was to get the best golf course architect and contractor available, and this work was turned over to James Gilmore Harrison, who for 15 years had been a right hand man of Donald Ross. Harrison had constructed several courses in the Pittsburgh district, and was well known for creative work in New Jersey and on Long Island.

Machinery Rushes Work

On May 4, 1946, Harrison moved in his machinery, consisting of several bulldozers, and a new tool used by power companies in making right-of-ways for power lines, called a tree-dozer. This machine, similar in construction to a bulldozer, has a heavy blade that travels about a foot un-

derground, and above same the plow effect tended to throw the trees to one side after the blade cut down the trees. The machine was capable of cutting down a 6-inch thick tree quickly.

In a matter of weeks the fairways, as laid out, were cleared of trees and brush, and it was found that the entire acreage was covered with a rich topsoil to the depth of one foot on an average. Only on one spot, where it was necessary to gouge into a hillside for a green did they encounter any rock, and it was a shale and easily handled.

So rapidly did the contractors work that the committee found themselves being hurried to keep up with the construction and provide all the facilities needed. The course was soon plowed, harrowed and raked, and water was the next objective, as we had been promised that seeding would commence in September.

Being out in the country, with no water mains available within 3 miles, although it had been promised by a nearby water company which had plans to lay mains to near the course, but which was stymied by state authorities due to changes in road construction, other plans had to be made and done so hurriedly. Tests of various wells and springs on the property soon proved that quantity would not be available.

Not to be outdone at this stage of construction, and learning that the water company had a lake, which was one of their sources of supply, within 2 miles of the course, invasion pipe was purchased from a Government agency, and with permission granted by adjoining landowners an overland pipeline was laid from the lake to the golf property line. A private pump house with pump and motor were installed at the lake, with watchmen available to turn on or off as needed. This assured the course of all the water needed, the line being a 6-inch pipe with no interference from other users. In addition the water was of the "live" variety, not having been treated with chemicals as are waters in company mains. The lake is stocked with bass.

Lines were laid on all fairways, with sprinkler outlets every 90 ft.

Seeding was started early in September, and shortly thereafter water was pumped into the lines, just in time to bring out the grass, and with a long and warm fall season, fairways and greens have come forward with great rapidity.

In the construction of the greens and traps Harrison brought out the latest in ideas for this work, building these parts of the course so that mowers can be used entirely and eliminating all handwork which is necessary where the embank-

ments and hillsides of the traps are too abrupt.

The local county agricultural agent, together with 2 professors from Pennsylvania State College, who conduct annual clinics for greenkeepers at the college, expressed the opinion that they have never previously seen a stand of grass to equal that which we had to show them.

The opening date for the course having been set for Memorial Day, May 30, 1947, these gentlemen said that without a doubt the turf at that time, provided we had a fairly even winter and spring, would permit of such an early play. Greens have been cut as many as 12 times, and fairways up to 8 times, which is most remarkable, considering that seeding was not started until September.

We were fortunate in getting an outstanding greenkeeper. Tom Snee, greenkeeper for 13 years at South Park, a public course operated by Allegheny county, and who helped to construct that course, took over with the completion of construction by Harrison, and is carrying on in such a

manner with his crew of 8 men that even the rough will be in good condition.

Due to building restrictions it is impossible to construct a clubhouse in keeping with the course at this time, so the 12-room farmhouse on the property is being renovated and a 40 by 60 addition is being added, the first floor to house the men's locker and shower rooms, whereas the second floor will be used as a dining and dance room. The other rooms in the building will be converted for women's quarters, card and lounge rooms, and office quarters.

Completion of this work will be accomplished in plenty of time for the opening, with lockers and furnishings needed being promised at an early date.

One of the communities younger pros has been signed; Russell "Nemo" Sherba.

The membership rolls have been completed.

Thus necessity has mothered a golf course, being born in May, 1946, and gaining its first birthday in May, 1947, with active play on the entire 18 holes and full club house facilities.

COOPER'S AT THIS COURSE

Harry Cooper who took this photo of his Oahu CC at Honolulu is doing everything but playing in a grass skirt to press-agent the charms Hawaii has for the tourist. This business of a pro acting as a tourist bureau drum-beater for his locality always is smart operating, and Harry's doing a masterly job at it.

