



The Ideal Country Club

By Monroe S. Miller

It was a lot of years ago—I don't recall just when—that I read stories Zona Gale wrote about a fictitious, quaint small town called Friendship Village. She was a Portage, Wisconsin writer in the years around the turn of the century, well known in her time. She spent nearly all of her life in Portage, so I just knew that Friendship was somewhere in our state.

Generally speaking, her stories depicted a pleasant, safe, warm and happy life of her many characters. Her words often made me think of the scenes in many of the Currier and Ives paintings I had seen.

And for years in more recent times I have spent the two hours around supertime on Saturday night listening to Garrison Keillor. I disagree with his politics—his recent foolish defense of Bill Clinton, for example—but his tales of Lake Wobegon, an imaginary town in Minnesota, are fun and humorous. They tempt folks like me to create an image of main street, Bunson Motors, the Chatterbox Cafe, the L.W. Lutheran Church and all else he talks about in that little village. Lake Wobegon is where “the women are strong, the men good looking and all the children are above average.”

I want to go there! And to Friendship Village as well.

The intrigue of these special places has more than a few times inspired me to think about the perfect golf course. Where would it be? What would it look like? How's the weather there? What's its name? Who designed it?

Nowhere have I been able to find out about such a golf course. The only way to satisfy my curiosity is to let my imagination create it.

So here it is. I have named it after the one-room rural Wisconsin school I attended—The Ideal School, the road past our farm—Ideal Road, and our 4-H Club—The Ideal Hilltoppers.

Come visit with me the Ideal Country Club.

Ideal Country Club is located in the driftless area of western Wisconsin.

The terrain is rolling—not severe, by any means—but with just a hint in a place or two of the prairie grasslands on west of it. It is an interesting and beautiful piece of ground.

The Club owns 320 acres although the course occupies far less. This many acres allows for natural perimeter areas and lots of privacy.

There is a modestly-sized natural lake, and as with the stream running through the course, it is spring fed. Because of the way the stream evolved geologically, it never floods and stream bank erosion is never a problem. The lake is weed-free and a deep blue-green in color. Nearly all the golf holes involve either the lake or the stream at some place.

There are many quiet, out-of-the-way places on the golf course. Players always have a sense of solitude and seldom encounter or even see others playing at the same time.

God was kind when he created this piece of property—it is a golf course superintendent's dream come true. The soils are either sandy loam or loam and extremely well drained. There are no rocks within three feet of the surface.

During the course construction practically no soil was disturbed. The result is a complete absence of problem areas due to compaction, profile disruption or destruction of natural drainage.

Since it is an upland site, the landscape is home to climax vegetation typical of that part of the Badger State. Mature oak (many species), hickory, sugar maple, locust and ash are especially impressive. Here and there are groups of evergreens—white pine, cedar and spruce—which are valuable accents to the course and its surroundings.

The Club has defined golf holes only with plants that were moved from elsewhere on the property. Every woody plant had its start in life on these grounds. Wildflowers abound and in the springtime members com-

pete to see who finds the first Lady Slipper, the first bloodroot, the first Jack-in-the-Pulpit and the first bluebell. There are areas along the meandering stream that seem blanketed in blue when the bluebells reach their peak bloom.

At Ideal C.C. the weather is great. Its peculiar microclimate is best described as “moderate”. All four seasons are distinct. Summers are pleasant and mostly cool—“ideal” the players say—although it might reach 90 degrees F. once or twice a year.

Wisconsin superintendents would love the winters at I.C.C. Always, there is lots of snow on the course. It seldom gets above 32°F. in the winter months, but rarely drops below 0 degrees. There has never (NEVER!) been any winterkill on the golf course at I.C.C. Members enjoy ice skating on the pond for at least three months and cross country ski on the perimeter. Staff are given those same opportunities.

Spring is something else; it seemingly lasts forever. The blossoms on the plum, apple, wild cherry, haws and dogwood are colorful and enduring, especially since the winds are light. The average daily temperatures rise slowly with each passing day, bringing the course out of dormancy with ease.

Autumn at Ideal is the best of the four seasons. It is everybody's favorite as it builds from cooler evenings in late August to brilliant color around Columbus Day in early October. It is rather interesting that at the Ideal Club the sugar and red maples have color at least equal to the best New England has to offer. It must be the unique combination of soil and climate at I.C.C. Those brilliant colors are superbly complemented by the subdued visual feast of the many oaks—burr, white, pin, red, chestnut and black. Players say golf is great all days, but the ultimate times are in the fall.

The moderate and entirely pleasant environment at Ideal Country Club means very little disease pressure. The same is true with insect problems. There aren't even any mosquitoes. The weather and excellent soil conditions are so conducive to grass growth that weeds find it nearly impossible to get a start or toehold. They simply cannot compete.

Rain most often at Ideal C.C. comes at dusk and is over by dawn. It is weekly, gentle and seldom accom-

panied by lightning. The course gets something over 40 inches of precipitation each year

You would love the greens at Ideal. There is a gentle roll to each, but not so severe as to limit cupping areas. They are smooth, well drained (as all properly built USGA Green Section greens are), and appropriate for a course named Ideal. They present very few problems, only wonderful putting.

The entrance to the Club is understated and tasteful. You could easily drive right by it. But the winding lane to the clubhouse is flanked on either side by stately American elms, and the ride is like a trip through an archway of leaves. It is wonderful. Many wonder how Dutch elm disease missed these mature trees, but it did.

The clubhouse is a delight. Designed by Wisconsin's own Frank Lloyd Wright, it is built of wood and stone native to the property. It is a comfortable place for dining and relaxing. My favorite room is the library; it's a great place for reflection.

The clubhouse manager at I.C.C. is a congenial gentleman, very capable and bright. He handles his responsibilities with class and aplomb. He has a dining room that is known far and wide for fine food, and his social program is the envy of many. He never meddles in golf course affairs, recognizing he knows nothing about a golf course.

The golf professional at Ideal Country Club runs the best golf shop anywhere, offering goods and implements of highest quality at a fair price. He is a superb and patient teacher of the game, and he is especially good with junior players. Members are always anxious to play in a foursome

that includes the Club pro. He never meddles in golf course affairs, recognizing the he knows nothing about a golf course.

The board of governors is made up of the finest people you'd like to meet. Always there is a mix of professions and expertise. But they see their role as advisory, leaving the three managers—golf course, clubhouse and golf shop—to do the jobs they were hired to do. The board is generous with compensation—nary one of the Club employees ever has to ask for a pay raise. And they have many Club privileges extended to them. The governors are completely open, allowing managers to attend all board meetings. The chairman of the board happens to also be president of the state Audubon Society.

The players at Ideal Country Club don't like a lot of silly amenities on their golf course. Since it is a private course, they don't need a lot of signs telling them which hole they are playing or its yardage. They loathe any yardage markers, refuse to allow a half-way house and never ever want to see a beverage cart on the course. Most want little more than a flag, a stick and a set of tee blocks for each hole.

Members at I.C.C. certainly enjoy annual and perennial flowers around the clubhouse and its surrounds, but find them out of place on their golf course.

Really, the members are the greatest. During aerification, for example, they never complain. In fact, most thank the golf course superintendent for enduring the hassle and hard work for the betterment of the game at Ideal C.C. They are truly grateful.

Players at Ideal are walkers. There

are only five golf cars (all electric) and players are eligible to use one of them only if a doctor says it is necessary. They feel it is necessary to walk to truly enjoy the wonder and beauty and subtlety of the golf course.

It would be tempting to dream of the course that opens on July 4th and closes right after Labor Day. But the golf course and landscape of Ideal Country Club are so beautiful, so delicious, so wonderful that you want to give the players the longest season possible. As a compromise, only 50 rounds a day are allowed.

And none before 8:00 a.m. Also, no simultees are allowed. The course has only one outing a year—a fundraiser for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association and the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The shop at I.C.C. must have been designed in heaven. It is big yet cozy. Unlike most golf course shops, it isn't a metal building. Rather, traditional construction gives it the look of belonging to the wooded site it occupies. The superintendent's office is roomy, carpeted and equipped with the latest office equipment—fax, copier, computers and cellular phones.

Ideal Country Club has the latest in grass machinery. Each piece has a backup, just in case. And, of course, I.C.C. would only have Ford trucks and Ford tractors.

The Ideal Country Club is quite a place, an environment most golf course superintendents only dream about. As a matter of fact, oftentimes when you are visiting and touring or even playing at I.C.C. you have to pinch yourself to make sure you aren't dreaming.

It is that kind of place. 🌿

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