



Golf in the Holy Land

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

For most of us, mention of the Holy Land brings images of that land situated at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Christians think of Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Emmaus; Nazareth, Cana and many other sites. Jews, of course, think of modern-day Israel, Safed, Beersheba and many of the same places sacred to Christians. Nary a day passes, it seems, but we hear news from that religious and troubled part of the world.

Few think of Wisconsin when they hear of the Holy Land. But we do have a pretty part of our state that has, indeed, been a holy land

since it was settled by German Catholics in the 1840s. They came from the Rhineland region of Germany and brought with them their strong religious faith and built beautiful Catholic churches from stone and brick.

Israel and the area comprising the Holy Land covers a small area. So does Wisconsin's Holy Land. It is roughly bounded by Highway 23 on the south and the beautiful Sheboygan marsh on the east. The northern edge goes as far north as New Holstein, and Highway 151 forms the western boundary. Actually, the western edge is within sight of Lake Winnebago, only

all you see is the "Ledge." The "Ledge" is initially visible from about as far south as Oakfield and is the Niagra Escarpment of limestone that runs along the eastern shore of Winnebago and then up into and through Door County. As you drive up and over the "Ledge", the landscape is dotted with farms and barns and herds of Holsteins. My guess is that the Holy Land covers only about a hundred square miles.

This part of Wisconsin was smoothed out by the glaciers and made good farm land for the German immigrants. The upland medium-to-fine textured soils pro-

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St. Peter Church, in the village of the same name on the "ledge" on the west side of the Holy Land.

School, rectory and church in St. Anna, Wisconsin, on the eastern edge of the Holy Land.



duce good crops of corn and forages. It is far better than the driftless area in southwest Wisconsin where our home farm was. Despite the glaciers and the resulting land that is gently rolling, there are high places in the Holy Land, offering breathtaking vistas to residents and visitors.

Many of the high places were selected, appropriately, by the early immigrants as sites for their churches and schools and cemeteries. And every few miles, there is a church. Usually it is in a small

village, ranging in size from only a few houses to a few hundred residents. The village name most often comes from the name of the church. Witness: St. Peter in St. Peter, St. Cloud in St. Cloud and St. Mary in Marytown. There is the St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary, the St. Felix Friary in Calvary and St. Anna's Church in St. Anna. St. Joseph's Church is next to and across from two dairy farms, insuring that familiar and comfortable fresh country air will always fill the sanctuary! Smooth, well maintained roads can take you to Johnsbury, Charlesburg and Jericho. From street names throughout the Holy Land - St. Anthony, St. Andrew, Notre Dame and Holy Cross - to the Villa Loretto nursing home, the importance of religion to the early inhabitants and the current day citizens is very evident.

The German influence is equally

obvious - from names on headstones in the Holy Land cemeteries to the names on the mail boxes. Many who are born in the Holy Land never leave. They attend religious grade schools and high schools and even college at Marian and St. Lawrence; their feelings for their "homeland" is strong.

But as with other parts of Wisconsin, the strength of dairying has weakened. Milk prices are under \$10 per hundredweight and ever-rising expenses have strained the farm economy of the Holy Land. Some young people are taking jobs in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan. Others have been forced to move out completely. With that background and that reality, a group of farmers got together and decided to build a small, nine-hole golf course.

Their thinking was they had limited options to keep people in the Holy Land. What they had was land



St. Joseph Church...



and school, located in the heart of the Holy Land.



The steeple on the Catholic church in St. Cloud reaches toward heaven.



St. Mary Church in Marytown, Wisconsin.

that was certainly suitable for a golf course. They had equipment and knew how to operate it. A few even enjoyed the game. And they thought a small facility would not bring in so many outsiders that roads would suffer or that the character of the area would change. And in a modest way, the course could help the local economy.

They envisioned a golf facility for golf only. The clubhouse would be small with only a short order grill and a beer bar. The locker-room was going to be big enough to

allow for changing clothes, but that was all. They hired a landscape architecture student to give them a routing plan he thought made the best use of their land.

The land was made up from small parcels from four farms. The group of investors pooled land and money by a formula that assured fairness. The final piece of property they put together had a promontory, a few wooded patches and some fence lines defined by stones picked from fields for generations.

From the high point, three church steeples were visible and led to their decision to call their golf facility *The Golf Club at Temple Hill*.

When I visited the course for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised. They made good use of the land and its features, laying holes across the hills and around the woods. The round stones harvested over the past 150 years, which had been ground smooth and round by glacial movement, were dumped strategically as unusual hazards. A pretty decent machine shed had been rehabbed for a shop. Fescue fairways and colonial bentgrass greens and tees made the course unique.

At the first tee was a fairly large yet simple sign in white with black lettering. It said, *The Ten Commandments of Golf at*

Temple Hill. The commandments were listed as follows:

1. Thou shall give God thanks for the beauty of this golf course.
2. Thou shall enjoy your game of golf at Temple Hill.
3. Thou shall not swear.
4. Thou shall not criticize the golf course superintendent.
5. Thou shall replace all divots.
6. Thou shall repair all ball marks.
7. Thou shall take no mulligans.
8. Thou shall take no gimmes.
9. Thou shall not cheat; golf is close to a holy game.
10. Thou shall say a little prayer of thanks to God at the end of the round for this peaceful place and your pleasant experience.

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The other idea they came up with for their golf course was naming the holes. Giving each golf hole a name isn't new, but the names they chose were interesting, at first blush anyway. On second thought, they were pretty obvious.

The first hole was call "Faith." It was a fairly easy four par with a big green and no bunkers. It was the chance to establish faith in your game as you headed to the second hole. There is nothing like getting off to a good start.

Different deal on the second. Given the name "Hope", that is what

you needed as you drove this long par five with the OB all along the right side.

The third hole was the chance to recover, a nice and short par three called "Charity."

Players teeing the ball up on the fourth hole faced a strongly uphill golf hole with a couple of the piles of stone that had been cleared from the fields on either side of the fairway. A mis-hit ball could well careen from the stones in wild and unpredictable ways. The hill and the stones inspired the name "Jacob's Ladder."

Players were now on a hole - the fifth - that bordered on a farm field, one that fell away and was sloped severely enough that it was always cropped with a forage - alfalfa, clover or a combination. The hole was named "Milk and Honey" for the feed value to the dairy herd the adjacent field provided and for the nectar given by the blossoms.

Players liked the sixth hole because it was an open hole with a broad, flat fairway. Its strength was length, ergo the name "The Crusade."

The seventh was a chance to get a stroke back, if needed (when isn't it?). It was a short par four with the green cut into the hillside. It was a pretty spot with a nice view of the surrounding countryside. It was named "The Choir Loft."

The toughest hole was named, appropriately, "Apocalypse."

Dangerous, well bunkered and lined with a creek along almost the full length of the right side, the hole challenged the best players at Temple Hill.

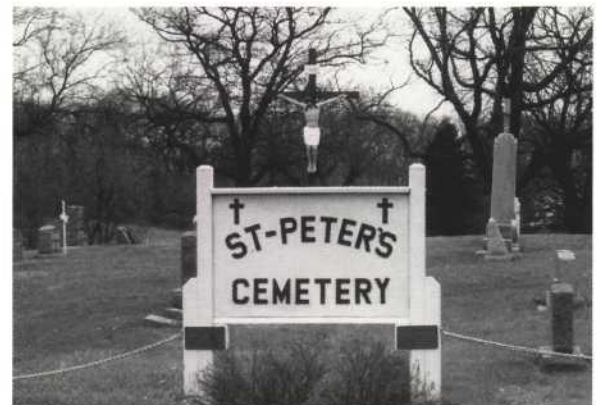
And the course ended with the ninth, given the name "Exodus." It was a great finishing hole but it brought players back to the little clubhouse on the hill. Most often they were refreshed as they soaked in the view of the Holy Land, Wisconsin's Holy Land. Most returned often to this little course that the farmer owners said was designed by God.

And, as you think about it, He has a hand in all of our courses and in all of our lives. ✨



Final resting place for sisters of the Church, in Mt. Calvary.

A view of Wisconsin's Holy Land from cemetery at St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary



Cemetery in village of St. Peter.