

The History Of Mendakota CC

By JACK KOLB

Back before there was a bridge over the Mississippi (Mendota Bridge) a ferry would take soldiers, horses, travelers and goods from one shore to the other. Fort Snelling was the main land owner and controlled vast areas of property. The area controlled by the Fort was known as the Fort Snelling Reservation. In Minneapolis, it included all the land east of the Fort to near the lakes of Calhoun and Harriet. The boundary to the north was near Lake Street. The area south of the river is more difficult to determine but it included all of Mendota and a great portion of Mendota Heights. Around the year 1853 the government began to sell parcels of the land to individuals.

Catholic Bishop Loras, in company with Father Ravoux, were cruising the area to determine a location for the historic St. Peters Church of Mendota. They were also interested in securing land for future use such as Resurrection Cemetery and a 160 acre parcel for the building of a Catholic Industrial School, the purpose of which was to extend to destitute, wayward or incorrigible children the protection of a home and education instructions in the arts and trades. The idea of the school was abandoned after the acquisition of 452 acres of land in St. Paul which today has become the St. Thomas University complex.

With the purchase of the property now known as St. Thomas University, the land in Mendota Heights was sold. Mr. Frederick Franzmeier purchased the property, and upon the marriage of his daughter, Laura Franzmeier, to a Mr. Louis Fischer in 1918, deeded the property to the newly-married couple.

Louis Fischer had some sort of insight on business. He built a 54' x 60' barn the quality of which was far and above any barn in the area. For those



BEHIND THE TENTH TEE AT RIVERVIEW COUNTRY CLUB we can see that the newest cars in the lot were 1937's. The farthest car on the left is a 1936 Terraplane. Riverview Country Club later changed its name to Mendakota Country Club.

of you who understand Gambrel Roofed barns, the area above the animal or basement portion is huge. Louis Fischer built his barn with hardwood tongue and groove flooring on the surface of what normally is the "Hay-Mow." He had already planned something other than farming and that was to have large "Barn-Dances." The Fischers did a lot of farm-type entertaining that was in the form of large Sunday dinners, the menu consisting of chicken with mashed potatoes, gravy and a lot of company!

From 1918 to 1925 Louis and Laura Fischer farmed their acreage. They kept cows, chickens and tilled the soil. They embarked on their marital life as farmers. In an interview (1948) with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Louis is quoted as follows: "I'll never forget the day, it was April 10, 1926, Herman Giersh, a former German soldier and my brother, Rudolph invited

me to play golf. I was doubtful but went over to Herman's place out of curiosity."

Giersh was working at Somerset Country Club and had a couple of old clubs and some balls he had found. He also had arranged two holes using empty tomato cans for cups.

"We played there for a few hours, then I told the boys to come over to my place as I had more room in my pasture," said Louis. So that afternoon the trio went to the Louis Fischer farm and in the cow pasture they laid out five holes, again using empty tin cans for cups.

A few Sundays later when the Fischers had considerable company they all went out and played. The guests, nine in number, were so enthused that they decided to organize as a club and dues were assessed at 50 cents each. They cleaned up the pasture a little and

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built sand greens. The Fischer cows were allowed in the pasture only on weekdays and were removed promptly at 4:00 p.m. Cows kept the grass down and added some unmentionable hazards. This was in the year of 1926. By the end of the year they had nine holes, and on a beautiful Sunday in August had 100 players at 25¢ each.

Successively, in 1927 and 1928, the course was enlarged to meet the ever increasing demands of golfers. By 1929 it was expanded to 18 holes and a total of 15,000 players had paid fees.

Eighteen grass greens were constructed in 1933 allowing the course to be awarded the 1934 State Publiclix Championship. Not many public courses had grass greens at this time.

Somewhere along the way the course was named Riverview Country

Club, a name that stuck until 1942 when the name was changed to Twin City Country Club.

In the meantime a clubhouse was needed. Louis Fischer by this time had sold all the animals and was deodorizing the barn to make way for use as a clubhouse. Louis remodeled the barn which became a rather attractive, three-story facility which served as living quarters, locker rooms, showers, dining room, snack bar and all the amenities found at a modern club. In 1933 the conversion of all greens to bent grass, along with an irrigation system, was completed. In 1935 a 20' x 50' addition was added to the south side of the (barn) Clubhouse.

During the late 1930s Northern States Power decided to run an electrical transmission line through the

property. Little is known about the litigation that ensued but one of the public relations gestures of NSP was to furnish all the technical knowledge of nightlighting and consultation on employment of night golf. A small 30 acre, 9-hole iron course (yardage ranged from 55 to 185 yards) with driving range, was built under lights. Twenty acres were used for the course and ten for the driving range. But as the war clouds of WWII became ominous, play diminished and the project was abandoned as part of the war effort.

In 1956 the club the Fischers had named Twin City Country Club was sold to a corporation made up of members of the club. In 1957 they (the membership corporation) changed the name to Mendakota Country Club as it remains today.

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