

# Minikahda Celebrates 100 Years As a Golf Course—July 15, 1999

By JACK KOLB  
MGCSA Life Member

A short preamble appeared in "The 25th Anniversary Book" (1924) celebrating the 25th year of The Minikahda Club's existence. It read as follows: "Twenty five years ago the gregarious instincts of society was beginning to express itself in the Country Club. Minikahda came into existence to embody that spirit. It was a pioneer. It was a luxury. It was ahead of the times. At its birth, golf was new in this country and a golfer was a novelty, frequently he was an object of ridicule and derision — but all this has changed."

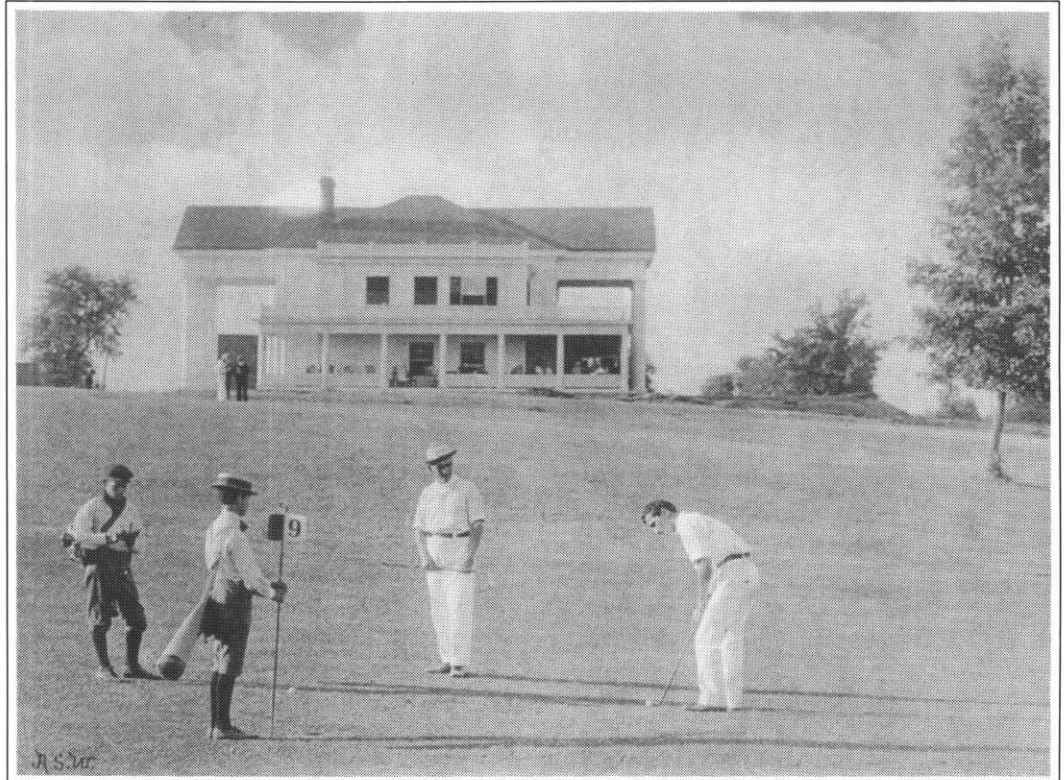
As we know today, golf clubs are essential to our organization (MGCSA), vocation and welfare. Golf is virtually a necessity and golfers are looked upon as our clients.

In the fall of 1898 three young couples with bicycles pushed their vehicles up a very steep slope on the west side of Lake Calhoun looking for a secluded spot for a picnic. The most recognizable name of one of the sextet was Clive T. Jaffray. Mr. Jaffray had been exposed to golf in 1895 and was ever on the alert in the Minneapolis area for a site which would be suitable for a local course. The beauty of the site so impressed the six young people that they set about at once to form a club for social and golfing functions.

Within 60 days of that picnic the first Board of Governors met on November 11, 1898. By April 1899 a full complement of members was secured plus a waiting list of 50. By midsummer, the clubhouse and a nine-hole golf course were built. **On July 15, the first ball was driven off number one tee by club president "Judge M.B. Koon."**

The new club was given the name Minikahda which means (in Sioux Indian language) "by the side of the water."

No access road existed originally and transportation to



*Early morning golf, summer of 1900. North face of Minikahda clubhouse.*

Minikahda in the years 1900 to 1906 was by boat from the foot of Lake Street to a boat house on the west shore of Lake Calhoun at the bottom of an 80-foot bluff below the clubhouse. Roads began to develop by 1906 and a horse shuttle replaced the boat until the year 1916 when a motor bus replaced the horse.

Eventually roads began to threaten the new golf course. Total acreage for an 18-hole course had not been purchased when Excelsior Road (Boulevard) was constructed connecting with Lake Street. Calhoun Avenue was constructed approaching the clubhouse area from the south, went up to the high plateau area on which the clubhouse was constructed, passed to the north side of the clubhouse and thence down to connect with Excelsior Road (Blvd.) Thus a highway ran through the front yard of the clubhouse and left golfers driving across Calhoun Road from number one tee to reach number one green.

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# Minikahda—

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Although Minikahda began as a nine-hole course there was at least one hole built entirely on land the club itself did not own. In 1906 a committee was formed to lay plans for an 18-hole course. Member-individuals purchased land parcels for anticipated course expansion, held on to them for several years without charge and then sold them to the Club without profit. Thus the second nine was built on property not yet owned by the Club.

It is interesting also that as the course was torn up and rearranged for an 18-hole layout, members were allowed to play at Minneapolis Golf Club which later changed its name to Bryn Mawr and went out of existence in 1911. The Minikahda 18-hole course was formally opened on July 4, 1907. After some tournaments and golfing professionals had played a number of rounds, recommendations for improvements were made. The golf architect, Donald Ross, made a study of the suggestions and redesigning began in 1916. World War I interrupted progress so that the Donald Ross changes were not completed until the fall of 1920.



Henry Mackall, long-term Green Committee Chairman (21 years) and befriender of Minikahda maintenance personnel.

The Minikahda Club has had a plethora of recognizable and celebrity names in its membership. One individual however, made decisions that would preserve the golf course and grounds as they are today. His name is Henry Mackall. Henry Mackall joined the club in 1911 and by 1913 began to serve the club in many illustrious ways. He served as secretary, president and for 21 years as green chairman. He lovingly preserved journals, notes, memorabilia and could give you the history of every bit of construction that had been done on the course as well as the litigation that went to preserve it. He was available to any employee who had to make hard decisions. He helped this writer in situations involving the widening of Excelsior Boulevard in 1964, and the litigation regarding removing the irrigation line from Lake Calhoun. We often sought his wisdom, which was resented by the duly elected green committee, making this writer unpopular with his immediate super-

visors. He was the only honorary member of the Board of Governors which the Club ever had.

As mentioned earlier, Calhoun Avenue ran through the golf course. It was Henry Mackall who engineered the vacating of Calhoun Avenue which ran through the club. And in exchange deeded land along the west shore of Lake Calhoun on which West Calhoun Boulevard now exists.

In 1959 there were many rumblings of disaster to the inner city country club: (A) Real Estate taxes were being computed on a value that open land best could be used. (B) A freeway running diagonally from Edina to downtown Minneapolis (through Minikahda) was on the drawing board. (C) Widening of Excelsior Boulevard which runs through the course. (D) Termination of drawing water from Lake Calhoun.

Many thought the Club could not survive all these threats. Options on land in the western suburbs was quickly secured with the idea that the club would relocate. One of these was a 725-acre piece of farmland surrounding a small body of water called Hazeltine Lake. This writer was privileged to view the site along with golf architect Robert Bruce Harris and a group of Minikahda members headed by Totten Heffelfinger. Great enthusiasm was expressed about the Hazeltine property, but upon being put to a membership vote in November of 1957 the proposal was rejected. Minikahda was not going to flee to the suburbs.

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Henry Mackall again was very active in promoting the "Green Acre" law which protected open areas from undue tax oppression. To satisfy the environmental critics who objected to pumping water from Lake Calhoun, Minikahda drilled a well and drew water from an aquifer under the lake. It had been proven that the irrigation water drawn from the lake was slightly more than one inch per year, a hot-dry windy day would remove more than that in an 18-hour period. With regard to freeways running through Minikahda, the proposed freeways were located elsewhere and Minikahda continues to enjoy its near downtown location.

In 100 years of operation the following men have worked the hallowed grounds of Minikahda as its Course Superintendent: Charles Erickson, Gordon Brinkworth, Ludwig Nelson, Idon Haugen, Jack Kolb, Larry Vetter, Dan Hanson and at the present time Doug Mahal.



From 1900 to 1906, Minikahda members traveled by boat from the foot of Lake Street to this boathouse on the west shore of Lake Calhoun. From this point they had a long, steep climb to the clubhouse.

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