



Historically Speaking

*With Eastchester Historian
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A brief history of golf in Eastchester: 1913-1931



Nowhere in the entire Town of Eastchester was golf played a century ago. The sport of golf had only recently arrived in the United States. Arguably the oldest and definitely the most influential golf club in America was St. Andrew's, established in nearby Hastings in 1888.

In 1898, a group of 18 golfers from Mount Vernon played on a nine-hole course on an estate in Eastchester where the present day section of Bronxville Manor rests. But in 1904, the golfers moved back to Mount Vernon and

called their new club Siwanoy. In 1913, the Siwanoy Golf Club began looking for land on which to build an 18-hole course. They bought the land given to Davie Williams at the end of the American Revolution, one of the captors of Major John Andre, co-conspirator with Benedict Arnold. And thus, a golden era of golf began in the Town of Eastchester.

Three years later, the first PGA championship was played in 1916. Rodman Wanamaker, the second son of Philadelphia department store founder John Wanamaker, donated the

\$2,500 prize money as well as the Wanamaker trophy, which has been awarded to the winner ever since.

Since 1916, the PGA Championship has evolved into one of the world's premier sporting events. Each summer, one of the nation's most outstanding golf facilities hosts golf's best professionals, as they compete for the Wanamaker Trophy. Siwanoy Country Club was only the first of four 18-hole golf courses to be built from the farms and woods of old Eastchester.

The same year that the first PGA was played at Siwanoy, the Oak Ridge Golf Club began construction of another full 18-hole golf course at the intersection of White Plains and Mill Road (today, the Huntley and Hickory Hill sections of the town). The property had formerly been the 112-acre Kasenetz dairy farm, and was located to the rear of the New Rochelle water works.

When this public course opened, it was easily accessible from every point in lower Westchester, with the Tuckahoe-New Rochelle and the Mount Vernon-White Plains trolley lines passing the property. A good size lake was used for skating purposes. A \$150,000 clubhouse was built with four large bowling alleys, a ballroom, dining room that sat 150, sleeping apartments with connecting baths, and a capacious locker room. In 1957 this clubhouse became Town Hall for Eastchester.

In 1922, Leewood Golf Course was chartered. Among its founders was D.W. Griffith, the great filmmaker whose studio was located in Mamaroneck. Late in his life, Babe Ruth was a member. Legend has it that a tunnel under the rail way was built to facilitate the Babe's trip to Yankee Stadium. The tunnel existed in old maps dating back to 1906. Babe was well known in town, but he never had a

tunnel built for him.

The last full 18-hole golf course to be built in the Town of Eastchester was the Lakeview Country Club (today Lake Isle). A nine-hole course existed in Mount Vernon and in 1918 became known as the Mount Vernon Country Club. In 1925, the Mount Vernon Country Club bought the northern section of the Iselin Estate off White Plains Road. The name of the club changed to the Vernon Hill Country Club, and in 1979 the Town of Eastchester acquired the club and named it Lake Isle.

By the end of the Roaring 20s, golf had become Eastchester's sport. Nan O'Reilly, golf editor of the *New York Evening Journal*, dubbed Eastchester "The Cradle of American Golf." The publication of the Eastchester Historical Society, *Story of a Town: 1664-1964*, explains why the years 1925 through 1931 were golden ones for Eastchester golf:

"In 1925 Willie Mac Farlane, Scottish-born professional at Oakridge, sent the town into wild jubilation when he tied the incomparable Bobby Jones in the US Open and then beat Jones in a playoff. A year later, in 1926, Jesse Sweetser of Bronxville and Siwanoy traveled to Scotland and returned with the British Amateur Championship. In 1928 Johnny Farrell, an Eastchester boy, won the U.S. Open title in another playoff with Bobby Jones. And in 1931 Tom Creavy, a local boy just a few years out of high school won the PGA championship when he beat Dennis Shute in the finals."

Within a six-year span, four major golf championships were won by four men who resided in the Town of Eastchester.

This is the eighth article in a series on the sporting legacy of the Town of Eastchester. "Historically Speaking" runs biweekly.