

HISTORY OF THE BRAINTREE MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE

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INTRODUCTION

What today is the Town of Braintree's 18-hole golf course started as a privately owned 9-hole course in 1932. In the mid -1950's the owner wanted to sell the property. Some golf course members organized but could not come up with enough financing to buy the course. There were also offers from home developers. Fortunately, several prominent Braintree residents proposed the course be purchased by the town. A vote to do so passed overwhelmingly at the April, 1955 Town Meeting. In 1967 the town decided to expand the course to 18 holes. Construction was complete in time for the 1971 season. This brief history of the Braintree Municipal Golf Course provides important information about who influenced the development of the course we know today. They include the family that owned the land, the family that constructed the course, the golf course architects, and the key residents that have helped make the course one of the town's recreational jewels.

THE HOLLINGSWORTH FARM

The Braintree Golf Course was built on land originally owned by the Hollingsworth family. The family had owned and operated paper mills along the Neponset River since

before the American Revolution. The family purchased the former Revere Copper Works on the Monatiquot River in Braintree. In 1843 a new type of paper was invented at that location. It was made from discarded maritime rope and was called “Manilla” paper. A few years later the Hollingsworth Company developed machines to use the Manilla paper in making bags. Business was quite profitable for the Hollingsworth Company which expanded and eventually merged with the Scott Paper Company in 1954. The Hollingsworth family built a home on Washington Street in South Braintree near Jefferson Street. They called it Mill Brook. Across the street from the home the family owned a nearly 300 acres farm that bordered on the Cochato and Monatiquot rivers. The farm remained with the Hollingsworth heirs until the 1920’s.

THE ORIGINAL GOLF COURSE

In 1930 Archie C Burnett purchased the Hollingsworth farm for approximately \$30,000 with the intent to build a golf course. In a 1931 presentation to town officials, he proposed to “start on a modest scale of a nine-hole course and a small, attractive club house”. There were 140 to 150 acres available “in the event it might be deemed advisable to expand to 18 holes”. The preliminary plans showed “a nice balance of holes of the elbow and straightaway character, with a total playing distance of 3320 yards”. It was noted that the course is “only a few minutes from the South Braintree railway station, the course would serve both the golfing and social needs of the residents of Braintree, Quincy, Weymouth, Randolph and Holbrook”. The proposed name of the club was the “Monatiquot Golf

and Country Club”.

The original course was designed by Wayne Stiles who was a well-known golf course architect of the 1920's and 30's. Stiles was born in Boston in 1884 and was trained as a landscape architect. By the time he was in his twenties, he was among the best amateur golfers in Massachusetts. In 1915 he started his own firm, and later partnered with John Van Kleeck of New York. In the early 1920's the firm designs at Marlboro and Marshfield Country Clubs received positive reviews. By the mid-1920's the firm of Stiles and Van Kleeck were competing on par with another local architect, Donald Ross. During the rest of the decade Stiles and Van Kleeck's reputation increased. They expanded from a New England base to become a national firm with significant work in Florida. The firm designed 150 golf courses with about one-half still in operation.

In 1931 the firm designed the Braintree course which opened in 1932. Total cost was approximately \$45,000. The course included six par 4 holes, two par 3 holes and one par 5 hole. The course was located between Jefferson Street and the Monatiquot and Cochato Rivers. From the club house the first four holes ran southerly along Jefferson Street. Holes number 5 and 6 came back northerly to the clubhouse. Hole number 7 started near the club house and went easterly along Jefferson Street to a green over the Monatiquot River. Number 8 was a short par 3 that ran westerly, and number 9 was a par 4 that ran along the river back to the clubhouse. Several of the original holes are still in use today. Present day holes number 1, 9, and 18 have changed little since the 1930's.

Portions of present day holes number 2, 3, and 8 have had more extensive modifications.

PURCHASE BY THE TOWN

By the 1950's the widowed Grace Burnett, the daughter-in-law of Archie C Burnett, owned the golf course and planned to sell it. A group of golfers attempted to organize in order to purchase the course but they could not raise the necessary funds. An eager group of residential home developers were also interested. Fortunately, several prominent Braintree residents proposed that the course be purchased by the Town of Braintree. Led by Archie T Morrison, a Town Meeting Committee was formed to study the feasibility of town ownership and operation. The committee reported to Town Meeting that a sale price of \$75,000 had been agreed on. An additional \$15,000 would be needed for the first year of operation. A strong argument was made that the property would help maintain open space, would reduce residential development, help with flood mitigation, and allow future commercial development. The April 1955 Town Meeting overwhelmingly voted in favor of the acquisition. The course was placed under jurisdiction of the Board of Parks and Playgrounds Commissioners with Charles Abell as its first Superintendent.

At about the same time the Walworth Manufacturing Company was seeking land for a new \$5 million dollar manufacturing facility. Town Meeting subsequently authorized the sale of approximately 36 acres of the golf course property to the company. This required the

rerouting and rebuilding of three of the nine holes. Original hole number 3 was a par 4 dogleg left. It was changed to a par 3. Hole number 4 was a par 3 which was changed to a par 4. The par 5 hole number 5 also required that its tee box be moved. The alignment changed the hole from a dogleg right to a dogleg left. Cost of the modifications was approximately \$20,000. The town retained golf course architect Geoffrey Cornish to complete the work.

Interestingly, as a part of the Walworth project the company purchased another ninety acres near the golf course. Located on the land was the General Sylvanus Thayer birthplace which was built in 1722. The company assisted the Braintree Historical Society and the town in relocating the house to its present location on Washington Street across from Town Hall.

EXPANSION TO EIGHTEEN HOLES

During the late 1950's and early 1960's Americans had more free time and there was a golf boom. Charles Abell reported to the Park and Playground Commission that golf revenues at Braintree had suffered because several new 18 hole courses had opened nearby. He urged immediate expansion to 18 holes. In 1967 Town Meeting voted an appropriation to make surveys, retain an architect, and prepare designs for expansion. A year later Town Meeting unanimously approved course expansion. The expanded course opened in the spring of 1971. Within a few years new environmental regulations were passed that might have prohibited the expansion. Cost of the work was approximately \$400,000.

The town retained the firm of Samuel Mitchell to

design the expansion. Mitchell grew up in a golf family. His father was the head greenskeeper at Kernwood CC in Salem. Samuel graduated from the prestigious Stockton School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For his Braintree design, Mitchell decided to use only seven of the nine holes being played. He abandoned hole number 7 which was needed for expanded parking and also hole number 8. Both those holes were immediately adjacent to the Monatiquot River and subject to periodic flooding. On the front nine the first four holes were maintained. Mitchell then built three new holes: a par 3, a par 5, and a dogleg left par 4. To complete the front nine original holes number 8 and 9 were used. On the back nine eight new holes were required. Holes number 10, a par 5, and number 11, a par 4, ran southerly along the Cochato River. Hole number 12 was a par 3 requiring an approach shot over the river to a green built directly adjacent to a large pond. Hole number 13 was a par 5. Hole number 14 was a dogleg right par 4. Hole number 15 was a par 4. Hole number 16 was a par 3 that required an approach shot over the Farm River. The Farm River at that point connects with the Cochato River forming the Monatiquot River. The Monatiquot River then flows for about five miles through Braintree to the Fore River at Weymouth Landing. Hole number 17 was a par 4 that ran along the Monatiquot River. The hole also required an approach over a brook that drains Sunset Lake. Mitchell used the original ninth hole for hole number 18 on the expanded course.

To allow multiple pin positions Mitchell's design featured large greens by comparison to the original

course. For example, greens remaining from the original Stiles course such as present day numbers 8,9, and 18 range from only 3,000 to 4,000 square feet, whereas, Mitchell's greens range from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet. Mitchell also made approach shots difficult by protecting greens with large bunkers. Many pin placements require shots over those bunkers. Most of Mitchell's greens also sloped from back to front making for difficult rear green pin placements. The new eleven holes were constructed in marshy areas along the rivers. Mitchell built four large ponds, one with a depth of about 25 feet. The excavated soil was used to build up the elevation of the new holes.

MORE RECENT MODIFICATIONS

In the 1980's and 1990's the town replaced the original clubhouse and constructed new cart storage and course maintenance facilities. In the early 2000's holes number 2 and 4 were remodeled. New forward tees were constructed on most holes which substantially reduced forward tee distance. In the 1980's the forward tees measured approximately 6100 yards with par of 74. After the modifications the forward tees measured approximately 5100 yards with a par of 72. Other improvements have included rerouting golf cart roadways away from greens and tees, and modifications of the irrigation system. New piping and sprinkler heads have been added to increase the coverage of irrigation in rough areas. There has also been a significant increase in the sophistication of mowing equipment during the last 20 years.

CONCLUSION

The Braintree Municipal Golf Course is only possible because the Hollingsworth family decided to acquire a large farm in South Braintree. In the early 1930's the Burnett family was instrumental in financing the original course and hiring a well-respected architect. The Town of Braintree was fortunate to have respected leaders at a critical time in the mid-1950's that understood the benefits of town ownership. By the late 1960's the town realized the importance of expanding to an 18 hole golf course. The Braintree Municipal Golf Course is widely recognized as one of the best on the South Shore. It is an affordable, walkable, well-maintained golf course. Its popularity is confirmed by the over 40,000 rounds of golf played each year—one of the highest in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.