

HISTORY OF THE CLUB

A. The Early Years (before 1963)

The story of how we have come to celebrate our 75th anniversary actually begins 100 years ago. LeRoy Goff writes in his memoir “Dee Dee Boy,” as a West Chop boy in 1911, he explored through the woods behind West Chop. One day he came across a footpath leading deep into the woods, and when the path stopped, there was a great open space covered with water. Suspecting it was a fresh water pond, he and his boyhood friends tasted it, and yes, it was fresh! Eventually they saw a man with a wagon full of small stones from the beach, and he told them the name for the pond was Mink Meadows. No one of any authority or with surety can say where the name emanated, but one story is that when the wind blew the grasses in the meadows in different directions, it reminded one of a mink’s fur.

Demonstrates His Faith In Martha's Vineyard

June 1 ————— 1928

The report that a golf course was being laid out on the West Chop property of Robert L. Bigelow has been confirmed by Mr. Bigelow, who spent a few days at his summer residence last week. Nine holes are to be laid out at first and if the project receives the necessary support, nine more will be laid out with a possibility of thirty-six holes sometime in the future.

The course will not be in shape for use this year, due to the lengthy process of properly preparing the ground. While the trees have been cut down and all stumps removed, the ground has been leveled and sowed to rye, this must be mowed and sowed and plowed once more this year before grass will thrive and thicken in the soil.

In speaking of this really formidable task which he has undertaken, Mr. Bigelow made it plain that he is planning for the future and the not-so-distant future either.

“Martha's Vineyard is destined to become the greatest summer resort on the New England coast,” he said. “The development of the airplane will make the island as near New York in the near future as the fifteen and twenty miles towns are now made by the auto.

“But provision for playing golf is only one of the many things that could be done here,” he went on, “just a small part of the general idea of development. I feel that the game is an appeal to all classes of people who are fond of outdoor recreation, it care should be taken by all people who are interested in island development that it is done along lines that make for permanence.

“The floating population, whatever they may be, can never be desirable visitors to the island and their coming should be discouraged. But we could all bend our efforts toward attracting people to the island who will establish permanent summer homes.”

Robert L. Bigelow, former president of the Eastern Exchange Bank in New York City, was a sportsman who loved hunting and fishing, and because of his love for the outdoors and for the Vineyard, had acquired Up-Island and Down-Island beach and pond property. Mr. Bigelow bought the property known as Mink Meadows before 1928, and commenced to cut down many trees to make fire lanes, which would impede the spread of a large conflagration. These fire lanes began to look like fairways to Mr. Bigelow.

Bigelow had been bitten by the “golf bug” and in a “fit of recklessness”, he hired golf architects, Wayne E. Stiles and John Van Kleek, and they laid out 27 holes. Embryonic fairways spread far and wide, and a large part of the last 106 acres, which is now Tashmoo Woods, took the brunt of the attack. But economic conditions changed. The depression was extremely difficult, even for a man of means like Mr. Bigelow. The plans reverted to the original fire lanes, and even finishing those was a big job in itself, because getting grass to grow on sand takes knowledge, patience, money, and time.

“After several years and after grass grew, the curious and interested began to make trips to the site, and soon people started to hack or shoot a few shots on the sly. Mr. Bigelow fed the grass with water from his own well and irrigation system, and fertilized well until it was ready. There was one operation which caused a delay to the official opening; there were a goodly number of stones which had not

been removed. This was remedied by a depression ‘army’ who were willing to remove said stones for the large sum of a penny apiece” (Dee Dee Boy).

Because the trustees at West Chop did not want the public to start going through the built up part of West Chop, and Mr. Bigelow’s activities were attracting attention, they proposed he buy a one hundred foot right of way from the back wooded part of West Chop which is now Golf Club Road.

Robert P. Bigelow, the originator’s son, recalls that when his father acquired the land, he put it in his wife’s name for tax purposes. The general supervisor was Hollis Smith, who had worked with Mr. Bigelow for years, and accounting was handled by Frank Alter, his secretary, who also had been in his employ for decades.



Robert L. Bigelow

ISLAND LINKS ARE THRIVING UNDER EXPERT

Turf Scientist Smith Is
Tenderly Tending Grass
At Mink Meadows

Special to Standard-Times

VINEYARD HAVEN, Aug. 13—

So you think you're having troubles, getting your little 2-by-6 front lawn to grow! So the Summer heat scorches your precious grasspatch to cinders!

Listen to the worries of Hollis A. Smith of this town.

Mr. Smith is a golf course turf expert—and if anybody knows about grass, it's he.

What! No Signs!

Mr. Smith, graduate of University of Maine and Harvard, where he acquired AB and Masters' degrees in Forestry, can look over greens and fairways he has created and see the fruition of three years of ~~scientific care and not a "keep off the grass" sign in sight!~~

Worst of the abuse a golf course takes is not constant passage of followers of the sport nor excavating onslaughts of their clubs, he will tell you. The grass on a course is abnormally short, less protected against the elements, requiring the most tender care if it is not to fade and die almost overnight.

Three years' efforts spells only the beginning of his troubles for a turf-care expert.

Just a Swamp Then

When Forester Smith took over Mink Meadows golf course at West Chop, it was still in its infancy, a broad swath just cleared through an oak forest.

To add to physical difficulties presented by grading, this particular area constituted a chemical problem—it was too much on the acid side.

"We found on sending soil samples to Massachusetts State College, that this stuff we were dealing with would not do for our purpose," he explained. "That meant using a heavy dose of dolomite mixture on our soil to bring it around toward the alkaline side."

Ah—Planting

Planting followed clearing. Successive sowing, growing, plowing under of seasonal rye, buckwheat, timothy and clover to alkalize the soil as a base for grass improved the seed bed.

Each multiple plowing and harrowing was accompanied by removal of stones and roots brought to the surface, until the area was well free of these materials. Into this soil went large quantities of the dolomite with its high magnesium content.

Foreign Stock Imported

Chosen for final surface grass were two varieties, neither native to the Vineyard, but the most suitable grasses were chosen by first planting sweepings from Vineyard barns, best of these being taken as index to what the soil would cherish most. The more aristocratic members of these families were then imported, one coming from seaside areas in Oregon where, in all the United States, it is known to flourish amid salt air.

To provide protection to the final sward in its infancy, red-top and a little English rye were planted, as "nurse crops," to shade the younger, slower-growing grasses.

Grass, At Last

Hardy adolescents at last, the two white hopes of the new fairway outgrew their nurses, crowded them out, and formed a tight-bound surface turf over which you can scuff without harming them.

Tees and greens, necessarily more carpet-like for those long putts, demand more specialized attention than fairways. When you reflect, Mr. Smith commented, that this grass is cut down to within three-eighths of an inch, it becomes apparent that more than ordinary care of its water supply is ahead for those who wish to keep it alive.

Rigorously reared, the green and tee grasses require a schedule of fertilizing and watering constantly adhered to. Mr. Smith went on, with a standard Weather Bureau rain gauge co-operating on the water end. If the gauge reveals a deficiency through lack of sufficient rainfall over a certain period, he explained, the water system of the course is used to make up the difference, a given amount of water having been determined as best for the greens.

"You see," Mr. Smith explained, "you are really hastening the growth of the grass, and then you cut it too short for a normal protection, thus requiring fertilizer and water schedules to approximate the normal, healthy condition."

Diseases, Too

But the turf expert doesn't find himself a shady spot in which to rest and watch his grass grow at this point. His job as nursemaid has just begun, for a never-ceasing battle begins with grass diseases too numerous to mention.

Most common is "brown patch," at mention of which the average lawn grower will gnash his teeth and spout vitriolic comment indicative of sad experience.

This villain in the bed of clover comes at night when sudden temperature changes have promoted its peculiar cobweb fungus, bringing about by morning innumerable spots of dead brown. Sprays or powders with mercury base are used to combat it, while long bamboo poles passed over greens surfaces at early dawn like a magician's wand may break the fungus webs and prevent spreading.

The next time you stand on a velvety green arranging your stance, reflect on the care and science behind that turf beneath your feet—but don't reflect too long; that testy foursome behind is yelling about going through again!

The flavor of the early years is nicely captured in the below commentary by George Santos, Sr. As he notes, George started as a caddy at Mink Meadows, later to become a longstanding member of the Club:

“It had to be about 1938. Someone had to carry those golf bags. There were six of us, standby caddies. We were there each day and were paid fifty cents each day whether we caddied or not. The players at that time were mostly the West Chop colony, the Greenoughs, the Gibsons, and others there for the summer season. My home was on Pine Street, directly behind the new Catholic Church. Early mornings, I would walk along Pine up toward Tony Silvia’s house and cut through the woods to the Herring Creek Road which passed just south of the 4th tee of Mink Meadows. (You can see it from the 4th tee). Cutting into the course, I would stop along the 1st hole at the pump house for the course and hang my homemade root beer bottle into the cold water to have it at lunch time. We would hang out behind the clubhouse and wait for players to arrive. (There weren’t many when the course first opened.) It was boring at times, but we played games to keep busy. We would build tree houses near a little creek that fed off a small pond nearby. I remember one day standing on a large rock at the edge of the water. Suddenly, the rock moved. I’d been standing on the back of a loggerhead turtle. You never knew what was around at the Mink.

Another time (years later while playing golf), I was about to hit my drive on the 3rd tee. “You’d better wait a minute,” someone said. I looked out and standing about 200 yards ahead, a beautiful doe was looking at me. (I believe she was waiting to compliment me on my 375 yard drive.) It was not unusual to see deer around the course.

On rainy days we used to stay in the shed along the 1st hole where they stored the loam for the greens along with other greens keeping equipment. One day, Herbie Isaacs brought a snare drum. We started the Mink Meadows jazz band. One caddy rolled up a magazine and beat out a tune on the louver slats on the window. My “instrument” was a batch of galvanized water pipes which I banged on. (We never made the big time.) Along with Herbie Issacs, were Howard Andrews (“Bay Rum”...his father Billy Andrews was a barber across from the Capawock Theater), Tom Brennan, Milton Nichols, Tony Lima, and myself; we were the six standbys. As the course grew, there were numerous other caddies. Some were locals and some were seasonal.

It was a pleasure to grow up in this area. I was fortunate to end up with a piece of property at Lake Tashmoo. I spent a lot of my childhood at the Lake. It was fresh water ‘til the 44 hurricane, when they decided to open the narrow creek to the Vineyard Sound. Our Pine Street gang swam, fished, and ice skated at the Lake. To continue with the Mink, it would have been nice to see the back nine come into the picture. They did start to cut and trim for the additional holes, but along came World War II that fouled up a lot of people’s plans.

Mr. Bigelow, the owner of the club, was pretty regular with the caddies. After one good summer season, he invited the caddies (maybe a dozen then) to his West Chop home and gave us a turkey dinner and then monetary gifts. It was a nice event. He always picked me as his caddy. At one point, I thought he might fire me though. After a round, we were at the 9th in front of the clubhouse, and as I was about to put his putter into the bag, it hit him in his glass eye. Thank God, no damage. It was quite an experience at the Mink, good friends and fun times. Another experience I didn’t mention was going swimming in the Vineyard Sound at our lunch break. Yes, I will always remember the Mink.”

Mr. Bigelow’s son also remembers that the course was closed from 1942 to 1944 or ‘45, and during those summers, young Mr. Bigelow served as an assistant air raid warden. A Vineyard Gazette article from May of 1942, states: “The privileges of the Mink Meadows Golf Club course have been made available to the Twelfth Company State Guards of Vineyard Haven, who essayed field tactics for the first time on Sunday. Hitherto, the company has confined its activities to movements performed in the restricted areas of the school gym or grounds outside. At Mink Meadows, however, battle formations are possible, and these were attempted with proper reference to the placement of the various units”

Also, since the course was not in use, young Mr. Bigelow learned to drive a car on the fairway without endangering anyone or anything. Another memory of his: “My family also owned a camp on the west shore of Tisbury Great Pond.

My father asked the man who had rented it to come to lunch at our house in West Chop, and bring a friend who was visiting him. They came to our house in the summer of 1944, and after lunch the four of us walked around the course. My father and his tenant were slower than the guest and I, so we walked ahead of them. The guest told me about making one of the best movies of that time, and how he enjoyed being the star. His name was Jimmy Cagney.”

In December, 1945, the Gazette reported that “West Chop interests” are about to lease the Mink Meadows golf club and start immediately to put the course in shape for use. The terms of the lease place the operation and maintenance of the club in the hands of the lessees at the price of one dollar a year, and Richard D. Mansfield, has been engaged to put the course in order and to act as groundskeeper for the lessees.

When Mr. Bigelow died in 1952, his widow, Doris, and his son Robert, hired Mr. Mansfield, who was managing the Oak Bluffs Golf Club (name later changed to Island Country Club) to also manage Mink Meadows Golf Club, which he did through 1962.

MINK MEADOWS GOLF CLUB

Opening May 15, 1939

GREENS FEES

Daily Greens Fees.....	\$ 2.00
One Week Privilege.....	10.00
One Month Privilege.....	25.00
Summer Privilege.....	38.50

JUNIORS UNDER 18 NOT PERMITTED TO PLAY UNTIL AFTER 4:30 P.M.

RATES FOR JUNIORS ONLY

Daily Greens Fees.....	\$ 1.00
One Week Privilege.....	5.00
One Month Privilege.....	15.00
Summer Privilege.....	25.00

PROFESSIONAL

David Davidson of St. Andrews, Scotland

Lessons by Appointment.