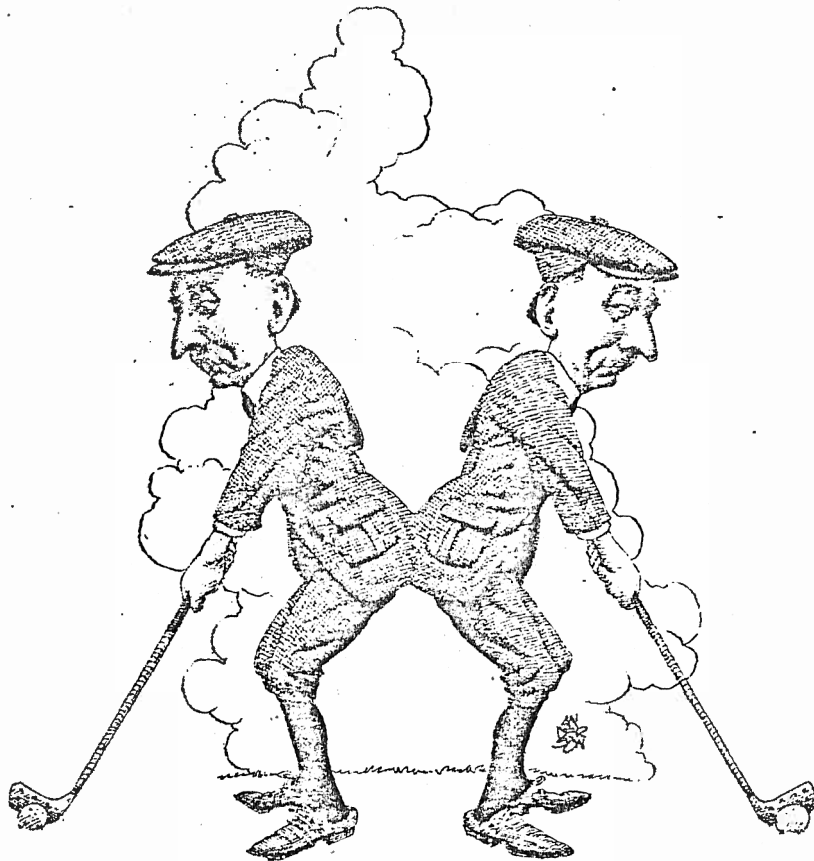


SCHROON LAKE

GOLF COURSE



A HISTORY... 1917-

June 1984
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INTRODUCTION

I little realized what I was letting myself in for when I volunteered to write a history of the Schroon Lake Golf Course. That was almost two years ago, and I am sure that another year or two will pass before I am finished and the history is published. In the meantime, for those interested, I have listed in this progress report some of the events that are a part of that history.

I have a background that is connected rather intimately with this particular piece of real estate. My boyhood home was on Hoffman Road; and before I was big enough to carry a golf bag, I shagged balls for lessons. As I walked by the course every day on my way to school, the green grass, the close cropped fairways and the greens became a sight I would never tire of. I was probably seven years old when, coming home from school one day, I stopped to talk with John Daigneau (originally spelled Daigneaualt). John was the first manager. He gave golf lessons and could be considered the first professional. John was at the first tee where he registered guests in a small ledger he carried in his pocket. There was no clubhouse and there were no facilities, only a cedar post planted in the ground with short limbs left on to hold your suitcoat and hat while you played. Many men played wearing their silk shirts and ties. Very few women played.

Beginning with 1923, and continuing to 1940, I was to spend most of my summers in some capacity or other, at this golf course. One year as a greenskeeper, when I was 16 years old, I mowed all of the rough with a scythe. Many memories come back. Some of them will contribute to this history; others are best laid to rest.

I am indebted to many people who gave of their time in answering my questions. I especially thank Paul Stapley for his research for me.

Crandall Library of Glens Falls and Richards Library of Warrensburg have provided most important material.

Meredith Eggesfield and Joan Mousaw, descendents of John Daigneau and William Cross, a cousin, have been most helpful.

I enjoyed the stories of three Old Timers of Elizabethtown: William Denton, Mel Longware and Alice Dugan.

Charles Brickwedel, of Schroon Lake, and Florence Cunningham, of Glens Falls, remembered many historical dates.

Vivian Murdock, of South Schroon, helped me in gathering information.

My lifelong friends, Nye and Addie Wells, must be remembered, and I will dedicate this effort in their memory.

I need pictures of the old golf course and any of the people who worked or played there.

The two golfers on the cover are from Golf Magazine.

Robert G. Swan

WHY A GOLF COURSE AT SCHROON LAKE

Schroon Lake experienced the usual history of settlement in the Adirondack Wilderness; pioneers, hunters and trappers, loggers and just people. It was a refuge for those who wanted relief from something and a challenge for those who were restless and adventuresome. Schroon Lake was a booming summer resort long before Lake George opened its gates to the tourists. The time came when people of means became interested in spending a part of their lives in the beautiful northwoods. They bought property on the lakes, built expansive summer homes, formed clubs and supported a new economy for the northland people. A small golf course was built on the east side of Schroon Lake at the narrows. It was a private club and supported by the members who were Gentile. The members owned property on the lake and their families spent the summer there. Some never went back to the city to live. It was a time of lawn parties, regattas, lawn tennis, picnics, swimming, sailing and golf. A good life.

This stage in the history of Schroon Lake was followed by the tourist era. People came there to spend a few days or a few weeks in rented facilities. They were business executives, politicians, government employees, clerks, secretaries and a multitude of people who now found time and the money needed to take a vacation. They came in droves.

Accommodations were needed for these people and smart businessmen supplied them. Two of these businessmen were James Emerson and Phillip Rice of Warrensburg, N.Y., forty miles to the south.

James Emerson became interested in Schroon Lake through his friendship

with the Leland family. Phillip Rice became interested in Schroon Lake because of his friendship with the Emersons and his desire to take part in the business opportunities he could see there. He was the proprietor of a guest house at Warrensburg.

Emerson had bought the Leland House situated on the lakeshore near the center of town. Rice bought lakeside property on the other side of town and built the Brown Swan Club. It opened for the season in 1916.

Golf was becoming popular and the two resort proprietors knew what to do - they built a golf course. Today, 1984, one of the attractions at Schroon Lake necessarily has to be this golf course. The Schroon Lake Club at the Narrows has long since disappeared, and so has the small course that served Scaroon Manor.

Neither Senator Jim Emerson or Phil Rice were golfers although Mr. Rice would occasionally play 9 holes.

THE FOUNDERS

James Alfred Emerson, 1863 - 1922, made his home in Warrensburg, N.Y. where he engaged in various successful business activities that had been established by his father. His partner in business was his brother, Louis W., who served as a United States Congressman and was also prominent in area business. James is of most concern to us because he supervised the Schroon Lake operations. He was president of the Schroon Lake Steamboat Company and operated stage coaches that transported guests from the railroad station at Riverside to the foot of the lake; they finished the trip to the Leland House on his steamboat line.

He served as a State Senator from 1907 to 1918. During that time he obtained many state highway improvements and was largely responsible for the start of the New York - Montreal highway. He was one of the first to propose a Buck Law in the State Legislature and tried to establish a state game farm at Schroon Lake. He married in 1900 and had one son, Albert Louis Emerson, who became an enthusiastic golfer. Senator Emerson was well-liked and highly respected. He died January 31, 1922 and his son, Albert, inherited the senator's interests at Schroon Lake. This included the Emerson share of the golf course.

Phillip E. Rice was born in the year 1878 and spent the early years of his life at Corinth, N.Y. He moved to Warrensburg, N.Y. in 1907 and entered the lumber and wood business. He established Ye Guest House on Main Street. His funeral services were held in this mansion in May, 1948. His wife, Pearl Thomson Rice, survived him and lived to be 98.

Mr. Rice was graduated from Cornell University where he was president of his class and a member of the Delta Chi Fraternity. He became a popular figure in the resort industry. He served 12 years as president of the Adirondack Resort Association and was president of the New York State Hotel Association from 1929 to 1935. He served on the Advisory Committee for the New York World's Fair of 1939. Mr. Rice was a 32 Degree Mason and a member of Glens Falls Elks Lodge 81.

Mr. Rice was host to Oscar Seagle when the Brown Swan Club opened in Schroon Lake in 1916 and provided studio facilities for Mr. Seagle until he purchased property and established the Seagle Colony. This establishment is still operated by his son, John Seagle.

**THE BEGINNING
1917-1918**

James and Louis Emerson and Phillip Rice purchased 100 acres on the outskirts of Schroon Lake, bordering the Hoffman Road, from Clara A. Leland. This was to be the site of the Schroon Lake Golf Course. The deed was recorded in Elizabethtown, N.Y., September 25, 1917.

The **Warrensburg News** on September 20, 1917 carried the following article, "New Schroon Lake attraction - golf course to be built for next season by Emerson and Rice." The links were to be laid out by Donald Ross and to be ready to open in 1918.

Believe it or not, the course was constructed in the fall of 1917 and the spring of 1918. It was opened for play on Memorial Day 1918. John Daigneau supervised and the work was done by a local contractor, assisted by Emerson Farm personnel. John was a resident of Elizabethtown, New York, and had been the head greenskeeper at the Cobble Hill Golf Course for many years. He was employed by Emerson and Rice to supervise the construction of the course at Schroon Lake. It may have been originally designed by Donald Ross, but John used what was there and the time he had and built a golf course. He continued as the manager for three or four years, spending the summers at the Leland House and returning to Elizabethtown in the winter. His wife, Elsie, accompanied him for two summers and worked at the hotel. They had three sons: Fred, John Junior, and Richard. The course consisted of seven holes and had two fairways crossing. The land had been used as farm and pasture land. The fairways and greens were prepared with farm machinery and hand labor. The greens were small. Sand traps were shallow and flat. Water was still in the future.

Golf tees were constructed by filling a box, about 8 feet by 8 feet, with clay. It was like concrete when dry and slippery as hell when wet. How did you tee up your ball? A wooden box, on legs, was situated next to the tee. It had two compartments. One contained sand and the other contained a pail of water; you wet some sand and formed a small mound upon which you placed the ball. Water was brought from the nearest spring or swamp.

1919-1920

During this period the course was enlarged to nine holes and a clubhouse was built. Fairways for a second and third hole were carved out of the woods to the west. The first and fourth holes were lengthened. Work was done by a local contractor with assistance from Emerson Farm personnel. The rough on these new holes was really rough. It was mostly woods, stones and brush. It might appear that these nine holes were in the original plan drawn by Donald Ross. The element of time had permitted only seven holes for the first construction.

The club house contained two rooms and a small club repair shop. It had no running water or toilet facilities. Wooden lockers were provided for club storage.

1921-1923

John Daigneau returned to Elizabethtown and was replaced by his two sons, John Jr. and Richard. John Sr. died at Raybrook Sanitarium, June 6, 1926. Elsie's death preceded his by about four years. John Jr. became the pro and

Richard the assistant. The sons stayed in Schroon Lake for three summers. They wintered in Elizabethtown. Both are now dead. John was a slam-bang golfer, using a baseball grip. Richard was a six foot plus athlete and a superb golf hustler. He spent some time as a patient at a sanitarium in Saranac Lake and died in California in 1982.

During John, Jr's. tenure, water had been piped to the course and toilet facilities added to the club house. A ladies' room with lockers was added. Clay tees had been replaced with grass and rubber, and wood tees were replacing the sand.

Senator Emerson died January 31, 1922. The death of Louis Emerson in 1924 left the Schroon Lake properties, including the golf course, in the hands of Albert L. Emerson, the son of James. Albert became an enthusiastic golfer. He was a left hander who later switched to right hand play. Albert joined the Glens Falls Country Club and was tutored by Ben Lord. He spent his summers at Schroon Lake and played the course many times. He had a putting green built at the Leland House where he usually spent his summers. He was always looking for a putting match in the evening. Albert rarely played just for fun. He could afford.

1924-1932

Due to Albert Emerson's influence, the new pro at Schroon Lake was a fair-haired young man from Glens Falls, N.Y. He had been a caddy, caddymaster, and one of Ben Lord's assistants at the Glens Falls Country Club. His name was William Cunningham, better known as "Boots." He probably weighed one thirty-five soaking wet. He hit a long ball which usually hooked; he had no problem,

when it didn't, getting on the sixth green in two.

During this period, further improvements were made. Holes eight and nine were lengthened. A new tee for seven was built. The fairways were top-dressed with four to six inches of top soil trucked from the flats on the Alder Meadow Road. Green fees were now one fifty daily and caddy fees were fifty cents, one bag for nine holes. Five employees handled the club house and players. Two or three were employed as greenskeepers.

This was a good time for Schroon Lake and the golf course. The Leland House, Brown Swan Club and other hotels and guest houses were running at capacity. Residents were renting their homes for the summer and living in makeshift quarters. The golf course needed a starter and patrolman. The town employed a policeman to direct traffic. There were many "Night Spots" in operation and regardless of the 18th amendment many places served alcoholic beverages - with caution. Main Street on Saturday night was a parade of the latest fashions and a display of jewelry. The popcorn machine in front of the theatre did a land office business. During one period there were two theatres running. Taxis made regular trips to New York City. Route 9 was busy. Yearly, Herman Robbins, owner of the AlBurNorm Hotel, brought bus loads of movie industry people from New York City to play at the course. Politicians and prominent people, friends of Emerson and Rice, were frequent guests at the course. Governor Al Smith played there when John Daigneau, Jr. was pro.

In May 1932 Emerson sold his two-thirds interest in the course to Phillip and Pearl Rice. This was the last summer for "Boots" Cunningham, and he left after Labor Day. Charles Brickwedel kept the course open for fall play. "Boots" was employed the next summer at the Warrensburg Golf Course owned by

Mark Cassidy. He spent the next nine summers there and worked at a Glens Falls A & P Store in the winters. He married Florence Beaudin in 1950. There were no children. He died in 1963, age 57.

1933-1941

Griffin O'Keefe was employed as the professional and served in that capacity through the summer of 1941. Griff had also worked under Ben Lord at the Glens Falls Country Club. He was married in 1936 to Mary Holloran of Glens Falls. They had two children, Linda and Denise. He was employed by the First National Bank of Glens Falls from 1941 until his death in 1961.

Schroon Lake was still busy, but the big crowds at the golf course were dwindling. The effects of the "Crash of Twenty-nine" were being felt. The Leland House burned in 1937 and was never rebuilt. More local people were taking up the game and caddying was not quite as profitable.

In January, 1935, one-half interest in the golf course was sold to Joseph Giannini, a Schroon Lake businessman. Joe later remarked that this was not one of his better investments.

1942

Carl Suhrland, a local boy, who had worked many summers at the course and was assistant to "Boots" Cunningham, was appointed pro. He served one year.

1943

Lee Vanderwalker, assisted by his son Richard, took over the management of the golf course. Lee was a resident who had worked as a greenskeeper and became interested in the game. He wasn't long but he was accurate. Richard became a good golfer.

1944

Bernard Bogle, a resident who had come up through the caddy route, took over the management for one year.

Not enough play and increased costs were a discouragement to both Rice and Giannini. It appeared that the links might again return to other uses. It was finally proposed that the Town buy the course and run it as a tourist attraction; the thought was that, in the future, it could be an asset. The Town assumed ownership on December 21, 1944.

1945-1951

Leonard Pitkin was to serve for the next six years as professional. Lennie had also come up through the caddy route and was a good golfer. The journey back to good times on the golf course had begun.

CADDIES

Not many golf histories say much about caddies. The author thinks this is a mistake. The development of the game could never have taken place, as it did, without them. For the young boys, and some older ones, of Schroon Lake, it was a bonanza. During the late twenties and early thirties

an ambitious caddy could make enough to support a family or pay for college tuition, buy a car or even get married.

They came from New York City, Albany, and as far away as Rochester and Buffalo. Some spent the winters caddying in Florida and returned to Schroon Lake in the summer. Several places in town boarded caddies; Mrs. Smith Wilson was a surrogate mother to many.

"Boys will be boys," and no place was it more evident than at the caddy pad. If there was a shelter, they tore it down; if there was a fence, they sat or leaned on it until it collapsed. There was an area to play jackknives, shoot crap or whatever. Waiting for a customer was tiresome, and boys have to keep busy. Many a boy couldn't wait until he was big enough to caddy. Some would try even when the bag dragged on the ground. The order of being sent out was always a bone of contention. Everything was tried as caddymasters used their ingenuity. One time they drew numbers out of a hat. One time they signed up as they came to the course. This didn't last long because caddies insisted on signing up as early as 2:00 A.M. To complicate matters further, players would ask for certain caddies, no matter where they were on the list. Some caddies were innovative. A caddy from Warrensburg, who is now a successful lawyer, had cards printed to pass out to customers. He was nicknamed "Blabbo." His card read: "Ask for Blabbo, the caddy with the eagle eye." All in all, it was good business and the money flowed. Where else could a boy work and almost be his own boss. Two girls braved the ranks of the caddies in the early 1940's. They were Lucille Flanagan and Betty Lou Rosenberg. They branched out, calling themselves "The Caddyettes" and danced and sang at Clautices night spot.

GROUNDSKEEPERS AND MAINTENANCE

It would be impossible to remember all of the people who contributed to the groundskeeping at the early Schroon Lake Golf Course.

King, Venner, Wells, Goachie, Dickenson, Vanderwalker, and Bruce are names that come to mind. Among these, two men stand out as almost making a career as the keepers of the green and also as lovers of the game itself.

Nye Wells was greenskeeper at the Schroon Lake Golf Course for fourteen years, 1932-1946; his brother, Edward, worked with him. Previous to 1932, Nye spent seven years as greenskeeper at the country club on the east side of Schroon Lake. Nye was a native and spent his boyhood on Hoffman Road within sight of the future golf course. Nye, following in the footsteps of his father, was a hunter, trapper and handyman. He became an enthusiastic golfer. He could play the game.

Lee Vanderwalker lived next to the first hole, worked on the course, managed it for one year and also learned to love the game. He joined the club house staff in many an afterwork match. The favorite game was ten cents a hole with carry-overs. Not much like Albert Emerson's \$1500.00 match but just as much fun.

Early maintenance equipment consisted of one horse, one horsedrawn fairway mower, one wagon, two green mowers and several long cane poles. An assortment of shovels and rakes and wheelbarrows were also needed. Scythes were used to mow the rough by hand.

The horse was used chiefly to mow the fairways, drawing a four-foot wide mower. Deb King spent most of his time seated on this mower, and one wonders

what he thought of, hour after hour, as the horse, wearing leather boots, plodded around and around. No reins were needed. Eventually, the fairways were mowed with a Ford tractor and gang mowers. The wagon was replaced with a Ford truck. Greens were mowed with a hand mower trundled from green to green in a wheelbarrow.

The cane poles were used every morning to "whip" the greens and remove the heavy dew that usually followed the Adirondack cool nights.

1952-

The years that followed were to see, finally, the rebuilding of this Schroon Lake attraction. Harry Tucker, as manager, Bobby Bruce, as head greenskeeper, and John Kelly, Town Supervisor, were to combine efforts to accomplish this. The Town Board played its part, and a new club house was opened in 1982.