



**Our
History**

Ballston Spa Country Club



In the Beginning

Plans for a golf club were initiated at a meeting of supporters of the sport held July 10, 1925 in the Utopian Rooms (editor's note: anyone know where this was?) A unanimous decision was made by those attending to purchase the 116 acres of the John Gilman farm, located one mile west of the Village of Ballston Spa.

The property contained a story and a half bungalow that had just been built on a knoll which had four rooms on each floor, barns and outbuildings. There were several springs, a well from which water was pumped into the house and the Gordon creek running through it which was to be used to water the greens.

The scenic Ballston Golf Course was sculpted from the natural beauty of the land on which grew birch and pine trees. The first nine holes were laid out by Jim Thompson, pro at the Mohawk Golf Club, Schenectady. He positioned the greens to take advantage of the creek for easy access to the water, to keep them in good condition. He was paid one \$50 share of stock for his services. Labor for construction was \$4 per day and \$8 for a team of horses per hour for use of a tractor (sic).

The rough work was done by John Noonan with horse drawn equipment. The large stones were removed with a stone boat.

Last month we mentioned the initial meeting to establish the Ballston Golf Course on July 10, 1925, was held in the Utopian Rooms. Further to my request for information on this location, John Coppola has forwarded an article on the Utopian Club, a Gentlemen's Club formed in 1885 in Ballston Spa and located, at the time of BSCC's genesis, in the building now known as the Arcade Building. The Utopian Club membership was limited to 50 individuals and neither gambling nor spirituous liquors were allowed. Fortunately, they opted not to continue these policies in the formation of the new Golf Club.

The Founder of the Ballston Golf Club was DeForest Weed (a name you have to love), who served as the first President. The Club was incorporated September 16, 1925, with stock being sold at \$50 a share. The first share was issued October 28, 1925, and signed by the President and by the Treasurer Jay Weed.

Two tennis courts were also built, which were popular, located to the right of the present entrance. The courts were abandoned after 1941.

The total cost of the property and its transformation to a golf course was estimated at \$12,000 - \$15,000, of which \$6,500 was to be paid for the land, while the equipment and work would come to \$5,000. The remainder was earmarked as a contingency fund for unexpected expenses.

Shares at \$50 each were to be issued and were expected to pay a dividend. Dues were \$25/year with the first dues payable by April 1, 1926. Play started in 1926 with six holes roughly finished. The final three holes were built the following year. There were 98 original Charter Members. The other first officers were James M. Beverly, Vice President; Charles H. Grose, Jr. (who remained an active Member for over 50 years), Secretary; and Robert L. Carter, treasurer. Grose resigned his position April 13, 1934 after serving as secretary for nine years.

The original twelve members of the Board of Directors were: DeForest Weed, Floyd Shutts, Charles Grose Jr., Irving Wiswall, David Furlong, John Payne, Lamont Stroud, Robert Carter, Charles Connely, James M. Beverly, P. Gillespie Dunn and Edward S. Coon.

The first incorporation meeting was held October 5, 1925 under the chairmanship of Irving Wiswall.

Harry Wilkins was hired at \$25 per week to work for the Club. He was given the use of the upstairs portion of the house rent free and was to serve lunches to Members and fix up the building in his spare time. Electric power was installed on May 11, 1926 at a cost of \$118. Green fees for the summer of 1926 were \$1/day, \$5 for a week and \$15 for a month. Only those living outside Saratoga County were eligible to play as green fee players. A total of \$198 was collected in green fees during the season.

In 1932 the green fees were upped to \$1.50 for a weekday and \$2.00 for Sundays, while 50 cents was charged for use of the tennis courts for residents outside of Saratoga County.

The first sign identifying the Club was erected June 4, 1928 and the piano and stool were purchases at a cost of \$50 on April 8, 1932.

In 1930, the Club gained 45 new Members, of which 16 were resident, 22 non-resident and three juniors, bringing the total golfing memberships to 156. Four new tennis Members were also accepted.

The first mention of a Pro was in October, 1932, when the name Dan DePalma was proposed, but it was not until November, 1933 that Tim O'Connell was hired at \$500 and golf shop concession. On May 4, 1934 Mr. O'Connell was given authority to operate the store and taproom with the Club to buy the license. He was directed to order score cards and draw up golfing rules June 1, 1934.

The Club applied for membership into the USGA and to the Women's Northeast Golf Association on June 1, 1934.

During the first season under Mr. O'Connell as Pro Superintendent, the condition of the greens and fairways improved, resulting in favorable comments and a large increase in green fees playing the course. Green fees totaled \$3,572 during the year and the Green Committee reported that Tom Cochran and Gene Sarazen, and other top State amateurs who played the course this year stated the course had the best greens and was in the best condition of any in the Capital District.



Pictured during a social time held at a Manchester VT club when they accompanied their husbands for a day of golf are old time members Mrs. Duane Fuller, second row right, and Mrs. Arthur Garbrecht, middle, top row.

The other ladies are the late Mrs. Larry Smith, first row right, her guest from NY City and another guest from Schenectady, whose names are not known.

Besides Mrs. Fuller, are: Mrs. John Mosher, now of Connecticut; Mrs. Thomas Morrissey of Greenwich and Mrs. Clarence Slade of Ballston Spa.

Next to Mrs. Garbrecht is Mrs. George Stack of Ballston Spa.

The men were invited to play a 36 hole tournament and the ladies would play 18 holes and go on a picnic to make a full day of it.

In 1935, minutes note it was the coldest April and May, the wettest July and driest August in the history of the Club. Despite these adverse conditions, the playing conditions remained fine. New bridges were built during the year and membership dues remained at \$25 a year and \$15 for women.

The Club was able to function during the war years when ten Members paid \$25 dues in advance for 4 years. The \$1,000 kept the Club going until 1945. Memberships were down to 20 and credit was denied by the bank because of a \$3,000 outstanding loan.

Paying the advance dues were DeForest Weed, Arthur Galbrecht, Duane Fuller James Beverly, Walter Mooney Sr., Frank Noonan, Emil Steiner, George Cunningham, Edward Smith and E.J. Shutts.

In 1942, all Members in good standing at the end of the 1941 season, who were called into the armed forces, were continued in membership without dues for the duration of World war II.

During this same time period in the 1940's, the exact date is not known, a humorous story is told about Art Garbrecht, winner of the Handicap Tourney. It seems that following the presentation of the coveted silver trophy cup by George Cunningham, one of the fans, a practical joker, borrowed the cup to look at it and deliberately left it out on the 8th fairway. Imagine Mr. Galbrecht's chagrin after returning to the clubhouse and being questioned as to its whereabouts. Someone conveniently spotted it shining on the far off fairway, making it necessary for the winner to make a quick trip to retrieve it.

Social members were first admitted during 1947 at \$20 per season.

Over the years, the Board was dissatisfied each year with basic things on the course, such as lack of proper equipment, power and course conditioning. In 1954 the sum of \$1,500 was earmarked for refurbishing the tee areas.

Dues, which were kept to a minimum, began to escalate with each successive year. In 1955 they were increased to \$60 for individuals, \$48 for women and \$84 for family. In 1956 to \$72 for men, \$60 for women, \$102 for family and \$30 for students. Another jump came in 1965 when the single membership was raised to \$100, family to \$130 student to \$40 and social to \$25.

NOTE: The rule to call balls out of bounds when in the wrong fairway was made June 2, 1941.

1952- A special meeting took place to discuss an addition to the Clubhouse for which an expenditure was approved of \$8,500 for the addition to the west side of the building.

The following year, Members loaned \$5,000 at 5% interest for 10 years and \$3,500 was borrowed from Mechanicville Bank to meet this expense.

The start of something big came about September 13, 1953, when an application for a summer liquor license was approved, covering the period from April 1 to October 20. This project was destined to fall through when it was learned that the kitchen had to be operated to obtain the license. An estimated \$800 was spent to buy the necessary equipment. Members came to the rescue and worked in the kitchen on weekends when this service seemed doomed due to lack of help.

1954: During this season, club handicaps were established for the first time with W.W. Sweeney named as chairman of the handicap committee.

Memberships were closed and a waiting list established. Starting time signups were discussed with Fran Cary, delegated to talk to Pro Jim Farina to set this up. A sign was to be erected on the first tee not to allow twosomes to play on Saturdays and Sundays until noon, a practice that still holds until today. (*Editor's note: it's since been changed to 11 AM*).

Even in those days, the subject of allowing women on the course before noon on Sundays was under discussion. The matter was finally resolved when it was rejected by Bailey Tiel in 1963. (*Editor's note: I'm not sure what this means*).

Over the years, much work was done on the grounds, an endless project.

The decision to remove the old porch and replace it with the patio came about this year.

The operation of the kitchen was a continual problem. It wasn't until 1958 that this problem was solved with the hiring of William Strianese to operate the bar and kitchen for \$3,000. He was given additional help if it was needed on Saturdays, Sundays. And holidays with the club paying for the salaries. He resigned in 1964 and was replaced by Leonard Bayes, who served until 1966 when Betty and Manny Rodriguez took over. They were replaced by Charles Richer in 1974.

A major problem developed in 1958 when the state decided to widen Route 67, meaning a property loss of three and a half acres, necessitating the altering of three holes. A committee composed of Ray Ashdown, Don Nichols and Gino Turchi was named to look after the club's interests in this matter with Ed Tracy to act as the legal advisor. Another committee, made up of Turchi, Jim Farina and Art Garbrecht, was appointed to oversee the course due to the proposed highway changes. After receipt of a survey map and planned changes, the committee decided two new sets of tees would be necessary since they were not sure how much land would have to be forfeited to the project. However, the state held up on plans, but the committee continued to prepare for changes to the east end of the course should they become ne

In 1959 the state notified the club of plans which resulted in only the 7th green having to be moved. After the state completed its project, the club brought legal action which resulted in the state paying the damage claim with \$14,000 in 1962 after urging by Ed Tracy that the club press for the settlement.

1959: The board tabled the request by Jim Farina to operate two electric carts because the bridges were too narrow to pass with safety. He was told a month later that the use of cars was inadvisable. Today (1975), the carts are prevalent, but it wasn't until 1963 that permission was granted to obtain them for course use.

The club standing was 232 playing members and 25 social which increased in 1960 to 251; 1961 to 269; 1963 to 300 and in 1964 there was a waiting list of 86 people.

A membership list was established in 1965 limiting the number to 300 and then increased in 1968 to 375, which still remains.

During this year, the lookout tower on the 4th hole (the present 10th) was removed because of its unstable condition. The new power line to the pump house was installed at a cost of \$1,200.

In 1954 an initiation fee for members was also discussed so that advance notice could be given to new prospects.

Other points of interest were that a juke box was installed at no cost to the club and a colored television in 1968. Ray Ashdown donated a truck which was to be repaired by the club and also gave a 275 gallon oil tank that was installed in the basement. Another donation came from Art Garbrecht of an oil burner. The hi-fi system was installed in 1956 for \$300 and the ladies room was remodeled at a cost of \$500. Inflation also upped the green fees to \$2 on weekdays and \$4 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

1956: (*editor's note: we seem to be skipping around here*). George McDonough and Ed Tracy were named to look into obtaining an option to acquire adjacent land for expansion.

The club was incorporated with the operation set up by Ed Tracy to expedite obtaining a liquor license which finally arrived May 23, 1956. Incorporation Officers were Ray Ashdown, President, George McDonough, Vice President, Harold Arff, Secretary-Treasurer; Frank Thomas and William Eldridge, directors.

The first annual meeting of the corporation took place September 19, 1958.

1957: The initiation fee was set at \$25 which went up to \$100 in 1963 and \$120 in 1964 and remains at \$150 today (1975)

Elizabeth Thielemann, affectionately known as "Little Thiel", was elected the first election inspector and still continues to serve in that capacity in 1975.



Fun Time 1955

Members are pictured having a good time during a costume tournament which was popular in 1955.

Clockwise from upper left: 1: Agnes Garbrecht, Ruth Morse, Helen Fitzgerald, Sue Finch. 2: Pete Wetsel, Duane Fuller, Art Garbrecht 3: Duane and Quil Fuller, Penny and Elizabeth Thielemann 4: Gino Turchi 5: Art Garbrecht and Muriel Decker

The consensus of the Board to acquire land for 9 more holes was made in 1960. It was projected that an additional 145 acres were needed to round out the 18 hole layout. The former project had been dropped because of lack of funds. Another committee, composed of Don Nichols, George McDonough, Paul Powers Gino Turchi and Jim Farina was appointed to inquire into the land acquisition possibilities. An all-out effort was made to build the second nine, but Nichols reported that the cost was too high for the 30 acres needed that was estimated by Jim Farina. (*editor's note: the 130 acres/45 acres discrepancy is not explained.*)

1960 - A windfall came in the form of an \$1,100 inheritance from Mrs. James Weed.

The first woman Board Member was Clair Walbridge.

The sum of \$1,000 was authorized to be spent on fairway and tee work.

\$7,000 was realized from green fees, keeping the dues from increasing.

1961 - The committee reported that the Melander property was offered to Ed Tracy as Club representative for \$12,500.

The Club did not buy the land because the family wanted to sell the entire plot. Edward Johnson was subsequently approached about 24 acres located to the rear of the course. Another property that came under discussion was the Madison land, on which a survey was done and the proposed additional 9 holes mapped out.

Finally, the 21.2 acres of the Burton Madison property was bought for \$2,541 and the 9 holes laid out by Gino Turchi and Farina, which were to be checked out by Jim Thompson and Armand Farina, who were course developers.

Contractor Archie Craig of Rochester was to look over the land and prepare an estimate of the cost of adding the 9 holes. He was hired in 1962 and estimated the cost at \$88,000 for the work. Work began in 1962 to remove the stumps and rough out the holes.

1962 Financing the project came in 1962 through the efforts of R. Bailey Tiel, assistant treasurer of the Schenectady

Finally, the reshuffled tees and greens incorporating the original 9 holes, in operation since 1926, over natural ponds, Gordon's Creek, with doglegs and hazards over the additional 69 acres, was opened in April 1965. This is the year that Jim Farina marked his 12th year as Pro at BSCC. The opening had been delayed because of the excessive drought during the Spring. The new layout was a par 72. (*editor's note: Does anyone know why it was a par 72? I know the first hole was originally a par 5, with the tee back by the practice range and the 15th was, at one time, a par 4, with the tee back by the 14th cart turnaround area, but I'm unsure of the timing of both.*)

Notes of interest for 1961 shows there were 120 Members and an assessment of \$50 for capital improvements was established. The Men's League switched to Tuesdays, where it still remains. Weekday green fees were increased to \$3.

In 1963 the Bucks & Does League was established and at the request of Betty and Manny Rodriguez, was scheduled for Fridays.

During the Winter of 1971-72, an addition was built on the Clubhouse to provide adequate facilities for the increasing membership. The inside of the Clubhouse was transformed into an inviting place to socialize in the winter of 1974-75.

During the year, leagues are featured, as well as individual and mixed tournaments. In addition to the Medbury Trophy for men (*editor's note: any connection to the Medbury Inn downtown?*) which is perpetuated by Alfred Simon, there are memorial tournaments, the Iver Lees for class A golfers, the Decker Memorial for class B and the Fred Donnetta for class C. There is also the Vivian Guy Member-Member tournament for the ladies.

Spring events for the congenial membership includes a Spring Dinner-Dance, 2-day Member/Guest, memn's and ladies' 1-day Member/Guest, the King & Queen Tourney, Burning Leaves, Women's Falling Leaves, Scotch Foursome and the Fall Dinner-Dance.

The Club boasts an active Junior Program, where youngsters learn the basic rudiments of golf and golf etiquette. Members' children between the ages of 7 and 16 are eligible. The Joe Hannah Tournament is played during the year and te winner becomes the Junior Club Champion.

Fuller Day - In August of 1969, the 8th hole was dedicated in honor of Duane and Quil (Ruth) Fuller of 19 Hyde Boulevard on their 40th anniversary as members of the Club. Both have been instrumental in helping to develop the course into its current beautiful condition. He was Club Champion in 1933, 35, 36 and 37 and shot his age at 74. He was Club president and Board member for many years.

Quil was Club Champion 6 times, winning it in 1941, 51, 53, 55, 57 and 66.

In 1961 **Gail Sykes**, dubbed "Little Miss Grand Slam" became a Member at 13 years of age. She became the USGA Girls Champion when she was 16 years old, was named Schenectady County Junior Golfer of the Year in 1963 and Woman Golfer of the Year by the Schenectady Gazette in 1964, 1965 and 1969.

She became Schenectady County Women's Amateur Champion in 1964, 68 and 69. She won the National Collegiate Women's Championship in 1968 and the Northeastern Women's Senior and State Junior Girls Championship in 1968. She was ranked 9th Women's Amateur in the country by Golf Digest in 1968, winning every junior event at the local level.

Mrs. Gail Sykes Clayton, who was 27 in 1975, won the Ohio Women's Amateur Golf Tournament that year, our 50th anniversary as a golf club.

William Gormley Jr., son of Dorothy and William Gormley, who is the assistant Pro in 1975, was honored in 1969 at a trophy dinner, when he became New York State Junior Champion. The same year, he was named Schenectady County Junior Golfer of the Year, won the Eastern NY Boys Championship at the Edison Club, The ENYGA at BSCC and the Eastern NY State Junior Championship at Nottingham Knoll in Syracuse.

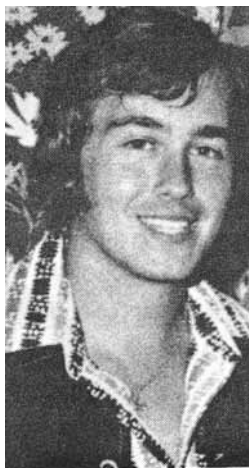
He won the Club Championship three times, 1970, 72 and 73. In 1975 he was the Teaching Pro at BSCC.

Lonnie Parks was Club Champion seven times, taking the honors in 1949, 50, 51, 52, 54, 57 and 59. He shared the course record with Jim Farina before Farina broke it in his seventh season at BSCC with a 63. (*Editor's note: This is news to me. Until I read this, I was under the impression that 64 was the record. Sorry, Todd.*) The record for an amateur is also 63, held by Howie Derrick.

A special meeting was held February 24th 1975, under the general chairmanship of Bailey Tiel, to plan for the Club's 50th anniversary, to be officially observed August 2nd. Many special events were held to commemorate the occasion. There was an 18 hole tournament for men and women, special entertainment and mementos, free refreshments, and free program of the Club History (*editor's note: from which most of this history has been gleaned.*) The celebration will conclude with a dinner- dance in the evening.



Gail Sykes Clayton is pictured with her mother and John Hathorn Jr., during a dinner at BSCC in her honor in 1965.



William Gormley Jr.



Dick Osborn, right, is shown with Bill Gormley Sr., left, Asst. Pro and his son Billy, who is the Teaching Pro in 1975. Osborn, of Elnora, was Pro for 9 years previous to this photo.