

Golf for All of Us

by Bob Kanehl, with thanks for research to: Town Clerk, Joe Camposeo; Town Attorney Tim O’Neil; retired Town Director of Public Works, Jay Giles; and Town Historian Susan Barlow

Longtime town official Nate Agostinelli sat down with me the other day, recalling some of the most interesting stories of his life. One of these accomplishments was Manchester's purchase, in the 1950s of 1000 acres of land, including the location of the Manchester Country Club. Residents gained not only a golf course, but also Globe Hollow and Taylor Reservoirs, watershed in Glastonbury, and water-treatment facilities. This purchase, from the Cheney company, Nate feels was incredibly lucky for the town and its residents. “Many people today do not realize how much land is there and how wonderful it is that it has remained undeveloped.” Agostinelli noted that the land purchase was approved in a December 12, 1955 referendum, in light voting by Manchester residents. And to this day, we have a public and private course, with golf available to the public, and “not just a game for the rich.”

Golf has been a mania in Manchester for well over 100 years, starting long before the current facility opened on South Main Street in 1917.

South Manchester and the Cheney family had a long history of love for the game. They were involved with the creation of the Manchester Country Club, and also with the creation of a golf team which dominated the state championships in the early 1900s. It was an all-Cheney team, by the way. Operating out of the Orford Golf Club, this team produced some of the best golfers in the state. The Orford Club course was where the current high school sits. This course had nine holes and helped establish the popularity of golf in Manchester. Besides being the local golf course, the site also served for community fireworks and other celebrations.

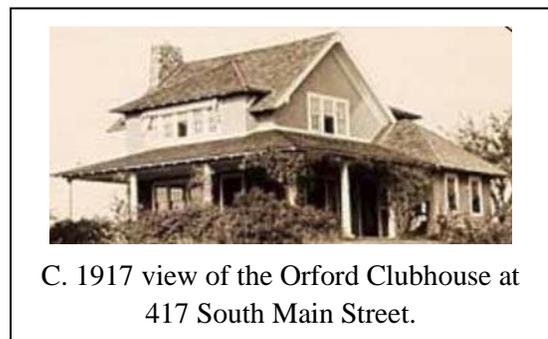


A newspaper article from 1897 noted that a local builder constructed the Orford Clubhouse in two days. It was 20 by 30 feet and divided into two rooms, a locker, and a club room. Besides local golf activities, the building hosted town receptions. The Orford Club was an organization that the Cheney family oversaw and maintained.

The land just south of the course, where a tennis court currently stands, was the home of Timothy Cheney, one of the oldest houses in town. Its dismantling in the 1960s, sparked the creation of the Manchester Historical Society.

Interestingly Orford allowed women to join, according to a 1900 *Connecticut Magazine* preserved at the Manchester Historical Society. This magazine on state golf courses notes, “There are a number of young women in the club who are good players and some of the ladies are officers of the organization being represented on the committees.”

The Cheney family set aside the land by the Globe Hollow Reservoir for a new nine-hole golf course in the early 1900s. After playing on it for a few years, the family brought in Tom



Bendelow and Deveroux Emmet, who were top golfers of the time. They set out an 18-hole course which has remained basically the same since 1917.

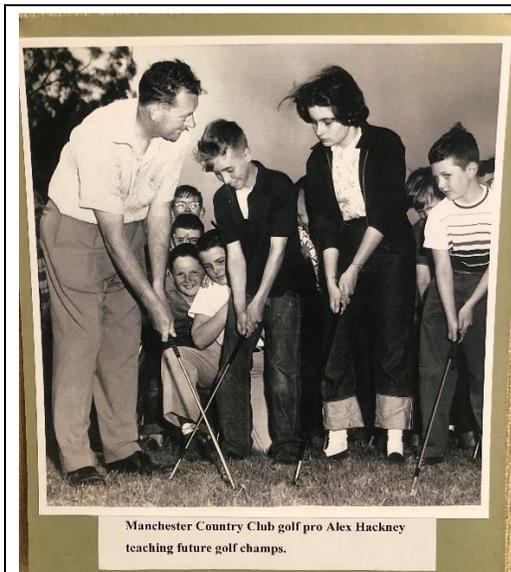
Besides the current golf course on South Main Street, there were other courses in Manchester.

Just off Slater Road, the road many people use today to get to the mall, there was a nine-hole course called "Red Rock." This course was in operation until the early 1970s. The expansion of the highway and the development of the area caused the owners to close and sell.



Unfortunately for residents, Fox Grove Golf Course off Keeney Street also closed about the same time. This 270-plus-acre site sold to developers, and by 1973 the land became house lots on Nutmeg Drive and Briarwood Drive. The Army and Navy Club's golf league had played at Fox Grove.

Closures and redesign also struck in the 1980s as the Minnechaug Golf Course just over the Manchester line in Glastonbury remodeled from 18 holes to 9 holes. The remaining land sold off as house lots. Located just south of the Manchester Country Club, this Glastonbury course had provided this young observer in the 1960s and 70s an almost endless green lawn along South Main Street.



Former Manchester Country Club pro Alex Hackney shows kids how to play golf.



Sign at Country Club, 305 South Main Street. Spring, 2020.



Bob Kanehl, board member, Manchester Historical Society