

Michigan's Century-Old Golf Courses



Harbor Point Golf Club

By Art McCafferty, Publisher and Kelly Hill, Managing Editor

There is a most interesting Michigan map on the wall at Mission Pointe Resort on Mackinac Island. The map highlights Michigan's development and also lists the population of the state in its earlier days. At least two of the top-five population areas were in the north. Perhaps that is why many of our early golf courses were established there.

It was during an era when cruise boats plied the Great Lakes and brought vacationers from Chicago to Harbor Springs or Mackinac Island. Detroit vacationers were taken to Mackinac Island, the Les Cheneaux islands or Sault Ste. Marie. In the Upper Peninsula, Michigan mines were in full production and places like Houghton-Hancock and Iron Mountain were densely settled.

What better way to spend one's vacation time in beautiful Northern Michigan than on the links? Here is a quick look at Michigan's courses that were established during that era, over a century ago.

Harbor Point Golf Club (1896)

This course was listed on GOLF Magazine's 1995 list of "The First 100 Clubs in America."

Located on South Lake Shore Drive in Harbor Springs, Harbor Point is a classic course that is challenging but not overwhelming and meticulously maintained. It is semi-private from late June through the first week in September and fully public in the spring and fall.

Two ponds come into play on three holes. The fairways are narrow and were built on rolling terrain. The greens are undulating and some of them are elevated. Originally designed by David Foulis, course architect David Gill added three new holes and redesigned the other 13 in 1972. Harbor Point is a relatively short test of one's game, as the forward

tees measure just 5,034 yards and the championship tees stretch to only 6,003 yards.

This club opens up to the public after 1:30 p.m. daily, during the summer months.

Wequetonsing Golf Club (1896)

In 1888, New York's St. Andrews opened. Six years later it provided the site for the nation's first invitational amateur championship. 1894 also was the year when some pioneering Michigan golfers teed it up at Roaring Brook Course in Harbor Springs. Roaring Brook Course is gone now, but Harbor Point and Wequetonsing Golf Club remain. According to Nancy Duray of Harbor Point and 'Red' Wilson of Wequetonsing, these two Harbor Springs courses opened for play in 1896.

One of the more colorful character's in Wequetonsing's storied history is former caddy master Ford A. Moulton. In 1972, Moulton was featured in the Harbor Light, the weekly newspaper of Harbor Springs.

"When the majority of summer residents arrive in the Harbor Springs area and start to play golf, those playing at Wequetonsing Golf Course will undoubtedly say hello to a man who is starting his 25th year as caddy master at the course, Ford A. Moulton." the Harbor Light story read, in 1972.

"Now 67, Ford, as everyone called him, remembers when he had 175 caddies under his direction. Those times have

passed. "Now I am down to about 60 caddies. The reason is other jobs. Kids are looking for other jobs, not caddying. The boys are getting younger and smaller every year," he said.

In his 25 years, Moulton served under three golf pros, starting with Cliff Booth, then Lee Kosten and then with Frank "Red" Wilson, who was the pro in 1972.

John J. Wilson is now the head professional at Wequetonsing. "He still trains new caddies on the 18th green, next to the caddy master's shop, and the instruction is based on 25 years of experience," the Harbor Light story read. "I have enjoyed my 25 years here at the course. The most memorable things I can remember is a hole in one on hole 10 by Ernest Breech, and the day that Red Wilson tied the golf course record. Those would have to be the things I remember best," Moulton said. "There hasn't been too many changes in the course in 25 years, mostly just the enlarging of the tees. This is a very beautiful course," he concluded.

A private course, Wequetonsing also is not particularly long, given today's standards. Wequetonsing usually plays 5,201 yards from the front and 6,150 yards for the average club member.

Les Cheneaux Club & Golf Links (1898)

Located in Cedarville, in the eastern Upper Peninsula, Les Cheneaux is traditional links in its essential features. The nine-

hole Les Cheneaux Golf Club was laid out and chartered by the early members of the Les Cheneaux Club and was ready for play in May of 1898.

Play is from the water and back to the water, sand and water are both natural hazards, as are forest and rock, and the design of the grounds is dictated by the land, not imposed on it. By 1900, the club had posted both a professional nine-hole record score of 38 (by W.V. Hoare) and an amateur record of 41.

Though there have been some changes since the very early years, such as lengthening some holes, the essential character of the links has changed little. Many of the hazards are overgrown piles of the fieldstone cleared from the original fairways and the perpetual hazards of the forest and rock outcrops remain challenging.

Les Cheneaux is open to the public and plays 2,852 yards from the middle tees. For more information, visit: www.lescheneaux.org/recreation/golfing.html.

Wawashkamo Golf Club (1898)

Wawashkamo Golf Club is a semi-private club on Mackinac Island. The course was designed by Alex Smith in 1898. This nine hole gem has been pretty much untouched in its lifespan. One of the bunkers on the course was actually dug by soldiers on the



Tom Bendelow

Island during the times when the Island was under attack.

Saginaw Country Club (1899)

A Saginaw businessman, Charles Davis, noticed the growth of golf on many of his travels to the Eastern part of the United States in the late 19th century. Upon returning from one of his trips, he staked out a nine hole course on his property in 1898. In 1899 the Saginaw Country Club was formed.. In 1909 the nine hole course was purchased and a few years later a

second nine was designed by Tom Bendelow .

Washtenaw Country Club (1899)

In the fall of 1898, two young, entrepreneurial Ypsilantians, Cora (Cornwell) Henry, having just returned from a summer vacation on Martha's Vineyard, and I. Newton Swift, a student at Yale, introduced their friend, Daniel L. Quirk, Jr., to "a wonderful game" being played on the East Coast.

Convincing a friendly farmer on the west edge of Ypsilanti to allow them to sink three topless tomato cans in his freshly-cut hay field, the threesome invited friends to join them for the new game of golf. Enthusiasm for the game was infectious.

On July 11, 1899, a group of 15 Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor residents met and officially formed Washtenaw Country Club. Signers of the Articles of Association included A.A. Van Cleve, S.E. Dodge, R.W. Hemphill, Jr., E.C. Cornwell, J.B. Colvan, H.S. Platt, Charles D. Church, Henry W. Douglas, William Gardam, David B. Dodge, D.L. Quirk, Jr., I. Newton Swift, W.L. Pack, Duane Spalsbury and David R. Morford. On July 18, 1899, the club was incorporated.

Golf in Ireland...

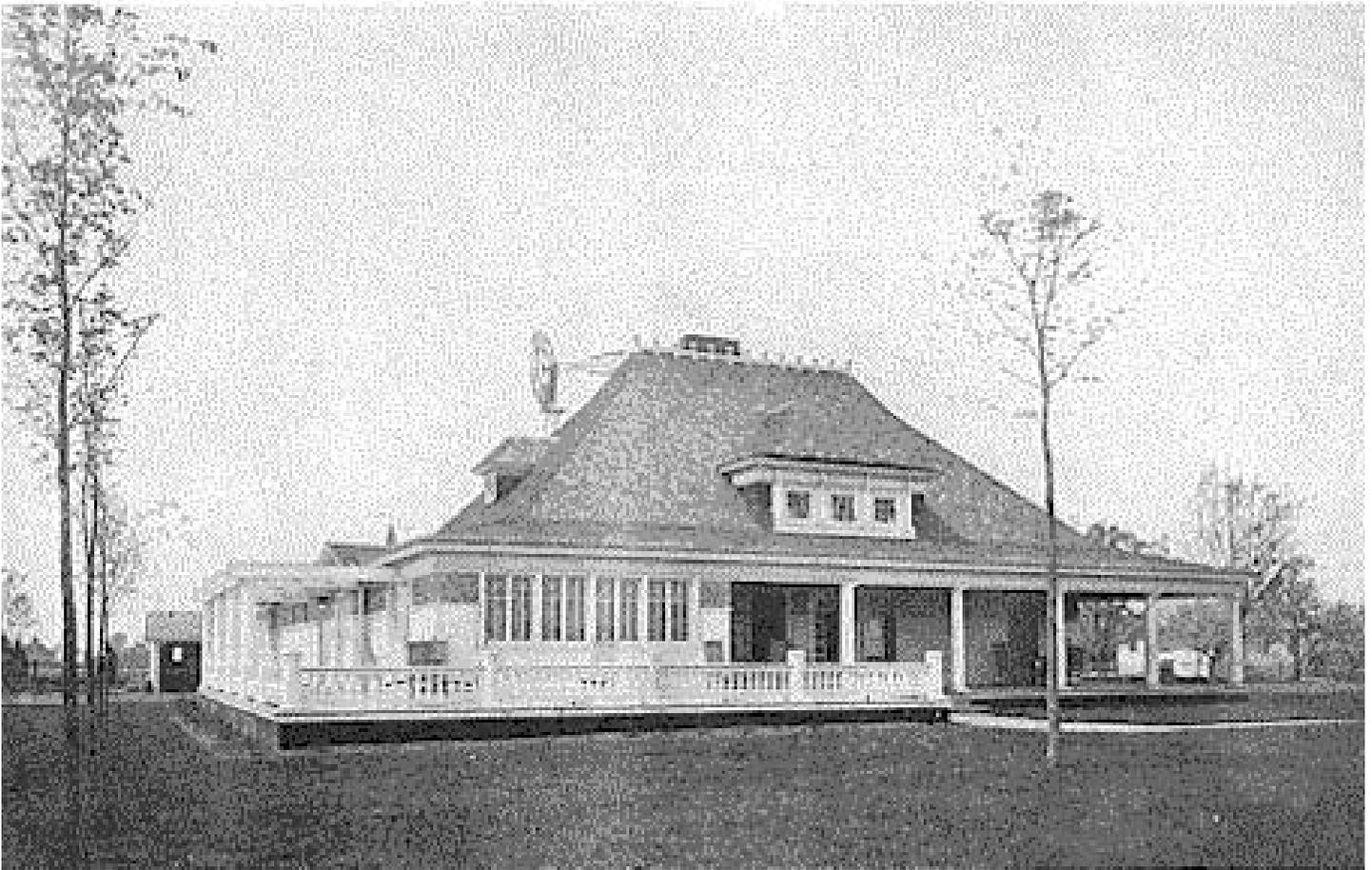


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Saginaw Country Club

While it has been acclaimed “the second-oldest golf club in Michigan,” Washtenaw actually is the third. Detroit Country Club was started as a nine-hole layout in about 1889, while Saginaw Country Club opened its course in early 1899, a few months ahead of Washtenaw.

For more information, visit: <http://washtenawcc.com>.

Ann Arbor Golf and Outing Club (1890)

The Ann Arbor Golf and Outing Club is a small private club in Ann Arbor located on 38 acres just south of the University of Michigan's football

stadium. As indicated by their website, the actual date of the Club's formation cannot be verified but it is generally thought to be between 1890 and 1903. The club has nine holes of golf that play to a little over 2500 yards. Facilities include a clubhouse with dining rooms and a tennis house with two courts. They do sell a book of their hundred years of golf in the clubhouse.

Sault Ste. Marie Country Club (1906)

Ranking among the oldest golf courses in the state, the Sault Ste. Marie Country Club will turn 100 years old this summer. Over

the past century there have been many stories that have evolved concerning the course. Among the more interesting historical notes is that former club pro John Rueter designed the original "Bulls eye" putter while working at the Sault Country Club. He sold the patent rights to Acushnet, and the "Bulls eye" went on to become the best-selling putter of all-time under the Titleist brand name.

The Sault course has also had its list of prominent players. One that stands out is former club member Vonnie Colby, who won the Upper Peninsula women's championship in 1949 and 1951 and went on to play on the LPGA Tour. Golfers have the option of



Washtenaw Country Club

joining the Country Club or just paying greens fees to play this public course. The daily rates are \$16 for 9 holes and \$25 for 18. Annual golfing memberships are available starting at \$420. Past members may rejoin the country club for an anniversary special of \$100.

Once a private club founded by a group of Union Carbide employees, the Sault golf course has been a 9-hole layout for most of its existence. But in the mid 1980s, the course was expanded to 18 holes, all of the ponds were added and three of the old holes were also redesigned. A fund-raising project was spearheaded by club member Roger Paris; well-known Michigan architect Jerry

Matthews designed the new layout.

Enjoy a casual round of golf, and watch a freighter cruising through the St. Mary's River while you putt on the 17th green. Or take on a serious round on the challenging layout. To post the lowest scores possible, a successful golfer has to play "aggressive, but conservative," according to fifth-year Sault club pro Jim Sipes. The course has many wide-open fairways which can favor long ball hitters. However, "postage stamp" size greens put a premium on approach shots, and a 60-degree pitching wedge is a prized club to have in your bag. "There are times when you need

to be aggressive and times when you need to be conservative," Sipes said. "Knowing the situations to employ that theory is the only way to be successful. You can't overpower this golf course."

While challenging the course, Sipes suggests to jump on the par-5 first, fourth and 17th holes, and try not to get more than bogey on Nos. 9 or 10, which can make or break a round. The 360-yard ninth hole is a long par-4 which features a green guarded by a bunker on the left, while water and out-of-bounds loom on the right. The 355-yard, par 4 No. 10 features a tee shot over a pond. Most will lay up which leaves a difficult,

long approach shot of around 180 yards to a narrow green.

The country club offers its members use of the clubhouse, dining area and banquet room, bar and pool. A fine dining menu includes dishes ranging from several seafood specialties to prime rib and steak. The current club membership of 302 features 74 percent American and 26 percent Canadian, although the percentage of players is nearly the opposite ratio.

The country club has approximately 44 employees, manager Laura Kempfort said. "It's a team effort to keep everything running smoothly from mid-April to mid-October," Kempfort said. "It's like being with a second family. We're lucky to have a very good staff."

The club membership includes many longtime golfers, as well as a influx of second generation members and new members. Lifetime members (50 years or more) include Ken Bailey, Larry Brownlee, Don Findlayson, Harold Stevens and Cora Lee Gustafson. There are four leagues which play at the club. The Elks League plays Monday nights, followed by the Ladies League on Tuesdays, Men's League on Wednesdays and Seniors on Thursdays.

Superintendent Michael Smith and his staff spend approximately 90 hours per week keeping the course in finely-tuned condition. "Mike Smith and his crew keep the course in great shape," Sipes said. "They really do a great job. As far as the membership, this is the fifth golf course I've worked at and the

members here are more friendly than anywhere else I've been."

The biggest annual event is the 36-hole, medal play Lock City Open men's tournament, which draws around 180 golfers. The club hosted the U.P. Men's championship last year and the women's championship the previous year. This year there will be a 100th anniversary, two-person, member-guest scramble on June 2. Men's and women's club championships as well as a junior tournament and the annual Old-Grand Dad event are other marquee events. For a complete list of tournaments contact the pro shop at (906) 632-7812.

Hillsdale Golf & Country Club (1907)

Hillsdale Golf and Country Club was formed in 1907 by Hillsdale citizens who contracted the Spaulding Company of Chicago, Illinois to design a nine-hole golf course. Scotland native Thomas Bendelow laid out a very challenging design with emphasis on the short game. The 5,775-yard course has humbled many a fine golfer over the years. The clubhouse opened in 1910 and has been an institution in the area ever since.

Located on the west side of Baw Beese Lake in Hillsdale County, the Hillsdale Golf and Country Club is a one-of-a-kind establishment. A challenging nine-hole course with beautiful views of the 420-acre lake provides for a relaxing round of golf.

The course is accompanied

by a beautiful dining room overlooking the lake, a grill room for that after-round drink, and a banquet room that can be rented for meetings. An expansive deck overlooking the lake is often used for the club's varied social calendar filled with fun events.

Bendelow designed the challenging 5,775-yard course with emphasis on the short game. The course is known for excellent greens and course conditions geared with the player in mind.

With a PGA professional always available, one's golfing experience will be more than pleasant with opportunities for lessons, club fitting, and merchandise. Tee times are readily available, and leagues and tournaments are scheduled throughout the summer.

After a round, whether you choose the Baw Beese Dining Room for an elegant dinner, the Grill Room for the casual social after golf, or the outside deck terrace overlooking magnificent Baw Beese Lake, the facilities may exceed your expectations. The club can accommodate a luncheon for 10, a casual barbecue for 50, or a gourmet banquet for 100.

The recently remodeled clubhouse, overlooking the lake, is central to the social events of the club, which include theme parties, live entertainment, bridge groups, a euchre club, wine-tasting club and private parties. Additional amenities include a lakefront swim area, great sledding, boat-slip rental, and reciprocity with other Golf Association of Michigan clubs. For more information, visit: <http://hillsdalegolf.com>. **MG**