



THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

A MEMORABLE HISTORY OF THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

A Large Practice Area and a Putting Course; Novel Ideas

Much has been written about Tillinghast's Ridgewood masterpiece that opened in 1929. But in addition to the 27 golf holes, there were other novel ideas that deserve recognition.

The practice putting green "Lilliputian course" was an innovation at the time the Ridgewood course was developed. When first constructed it was an 18-hole putting green. There were few practice putting greens at golf courses in the US at that time. The idea came to the club president, Charles W. Stockton, from his son, Kenneth, who had seen one at the Cruden Bay Gold Club in Scotland.

RCC's practice area was another idea significantly ahead of its time. It is possibly the first of its kind in the country. In the early part of the 20th century one's "warm up" usually took place on the course, often consisting of no more than a few practice swings. This is why most courses designed at that time, including Ridgewood's three, begin with a relatively easy hole that allows the golfers to sharpen their swings for the tougher holes that follow.

The original RCC practice range designed by Tillinghast had a triangular teeing area in the center and extended 300 yards to the south and another 300 yards to the north where golfers could aim at a well-trapped green. A small portion of the practice area was enclosed by shrubs and trees that allowed beginners and duffers (Tillinghast's term for golfers who were unable to break 90) to take lessons in private. With head professional George Jacobus' emphasis on teaching the game, it's no surprise that a greater practice area was in demand.

An enlarged practice area was opened Memorial Day weekend in 1958. It consisted of 15 additional acres of ground leased from Orchard Hills public golf course for \$1 per year. By 1963 the arrangement with Orchard Hills had soured. The tightfisted Board at the time passed on the opportunity to acquire the acreage. But club member Jack Anderson purchased the land for \$110,000 and sold \$1,000 bonds to participating club members. The club subsequently retired the bonds.



Helping long shots come in

The acquired acreage included the current entrance road. Originally Bergen Community College was permitted to use The Club's entrance road only as an exit in exchange for maintaining the road. Eventually, college traffic in both directions was accepted.

The action taken in 1963 by Jack Anderson made an invaluable contribution to The Club as we know it today. Bergen Community College was founded in 1965. After threatening an eminent domain claim to Club property, the college eventually seized the acreage of nine holes of the Orchard Hills course to build the campus. If the 15 acres had remained part of Orchard Hills or been sold to another buyer, the range would be far smaller and the club entranceway might look dramatically different. Previous to the shared entranceway with the College, The Club entranceway was through Abbott Road, a quiet neighborhood street just to the east of the current Country Club Way.

Although almost every country club now includes a practice putting green, the availability of a flat, hit-any-shot practice range within walking distance of the clubhouse is a rarity. Most early 20th century course designs did not plan for an accessible range. As a result, even on many of the most prestigious courses, a cart ride is necessary to reach ranges added many years later.



No shortage of short game practice area

