

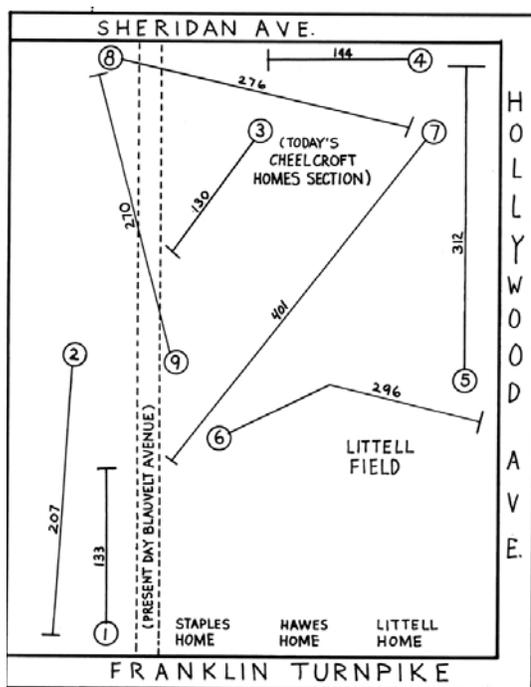


THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

A MEMORABLE HISTORY OF THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

History of The Ridgewood Country Club

THE HO-HO-KUS GOLF CLUB



Ho-Ho-Kus Golf Club course layout

A few men started playing Golf at Ho-Ho-Kus in 1890 with home-made sticks and gutta balls. These men later formed the Ho-Ho-Kus Golf Club which eventually moved to Ridgewood on Maple Avenue and became Ridgewood Golf Club, and in 1910 The Ridgewood Country Club.

The Ridgewood Country Club's founding fathers organized the Ho-Ho-Kus Golf Club in 1893, the first such entity in the state of New Jersey. Among other early New Jersey golf clubs, Lakewood, Morris County, Montclair, Glen Ridge, New Brunswick, and North Jersey (then known as Paterson) all came into existence in 1894 and Baltusrol, Essex County, Plainfield (then Hillside), and Rumson (originally Seabright) first took an interest in golf in 1895. The Morristown Field Club was organized in 1893, with golf in 1895; the Moorestown Field Club started in 1892, but did not have a golf course until 1898.

The golf course was a rudimentary one at best and the land was leased from a local farmer named West for \$50 per year; the rental later was raised to \$75, then to \$110 to compensate West for his loss of income from the hay he could no longer grow. West was elected the club's first honorary member on March 26, 1898.

Little else is known about the Ho-Ho-Kus course, aside from the fact that member Stuart C. Rowbotham is credited as the architect and there was no clubhouse. A barn owned by J. B. Staples, golf captain of the club during the late 1890s, was the closest structure and was used to store golf clubs and maintenance equipment. Its location, down behind the Staples home on the Turnpike, very likely determined the placement of the first tee.

It is unlikely that many changes were made at the club during its first few seasons as the country suffered through a depression – President Cleveland's "Luckless Years" – during the mid-1890s.

But in 1897, with the new McKinley administration in place in Washington, the nation's economy rebounded. Golf clubs reacted quickly, Ho-Ho-Kus among them. The first order of business was the extension of the golf course to nine holes, in accordance with plans submitted by Rosencrantz, Rowbotham, and Staples. Work was completed by May and according to the 1901 Golf Guide, the course played at 2,169 yards, with individual holes measuring 133, 207, 130, 144, 312, 296, 401, 276, and 270 yards, respectively. Annual dues at the time were \$10 for men, just \$5 for women. The greens fee was twenty-five cents.

MAPLE AVENUE: THE RIDGEWOOD GOLF CLUB

Ridgewood Golf Club.

Date Event

Self

Opponent

SELF.	OPP.	Holes	Yards.	Bogies	SELF.	OPP.
		1	357	5		
		2	142	3		
		3	262	4		
		4	381	5		
		5	350	5		
		6	533	6		
		7	357	5		
		8	345	5		
		9	312	4		
		Score for 9 Holes	Total Yards	42		
			3019			
ADD SCORE FOR 1ST 9 HOLES						
TOTAL FOR 18 HOLES						
HANDICAP						
NET						

This card measures six inches diagonally across.

ATTEST

Maple Avenue scorecard

By the turn of the century, however, there was unrest at the club. Most members lived in Ridgewood and found the golf course, about a mile and a half away, not readily accessible. Also, there was general dissatisfaction with the quality of the course. After several attempts (1898–1900) to lease the adjacent Littell field failed, the search began in earnest for a new site, one closer to home in Ridgewood.

The club offered as much as \$6,000 to purchase the Voorhees estate at the intersection of Hollywood Avenue and West Saddle River Road, to no avail. Finally, on February 27, 1901, a five-year lease was secured on two of three properties owned by Joseph Edwards, on Maple Avenue, at \$900 per annum.

A professional was hired to lay out the new links and John Hawes, golf captain at the time, prepared the grounds, assisted by the club's more seasoned players. A fund of \$700 was set aside for the construction of a clubhouse and a motion to change the club's name to the Ridgewood Golf Club carried on March 30. As the club prepared to move, the old grounds were kept up for play during April and May of 1901.

The new Maple Avenue golf course opened in 1901, although still in rather primitive condition at the time. It cost \$500 to build. A sprawling, good-sized nine-hole course of 3,019 yards, it grew to 3,132 yards within a few years. Only one hole on the course (No. 2) was in the par-3 category. Actually four holes were listed on the scorecard as "half-pars" (4.5 or 5.5), the actual par on a given day depending, as was the custom elsewhere, on the direction of the wind. The club was one of the few in the country with greens piped for water. The greens fee was increased to fifty cents and the annual dues were doubled to \$20. Initially, three tennis courts were provided.

One of the club's first official acts at Maple Avenue was to join the United States Golf Association on August 5, 1901. In later years the club also joined the New Jersey State Golf Association (1903), the Metropolitan Golf Association (1907), the Women's Metropolitan Golf Association (1908) and the United States Lawn Tennis Association (1909).

By 1908 the Ridgewood Golf Club boasted 167 regular members. The club added a fourth tennis court that year and beautified the pond, which previously had been a swamp-like eyesore. The club was entering the third year of its second five-year lease from Martha Edwards and negotiated a two-year extension, at \$945 per year, through May of 1913, with options through 1918. Mrs. Edwards had sold part of the golf course property to the Paramus Land Company of M. T. Richardson and the club had also extended its lease from him through 1913. During 1908 the club voted against renting property owned by Graydon, Bogart, and Mastin to the north across Linwood Avenue for a second nine holes.

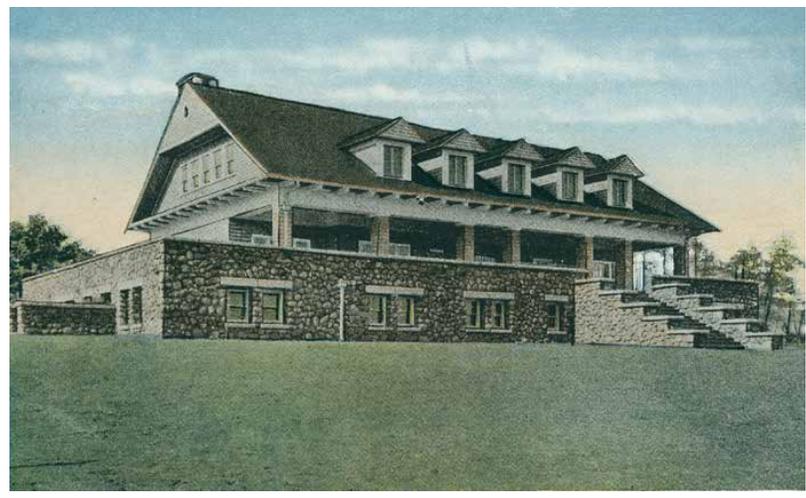
But dark clouds were beginning to appear on the horizon in 1908. A trolley line was routed through club property, cutting an eighty-foot-wide path across the first fairway and ninth tee, west of the brook.

Eventually, the club conceded the right-of-way and received \$600 as compensation from the North Jersey Rapid Transit Company. The first hole was given a dogleg to the right to maintain its length, but the ninth tee had to be moved from the bluff to the ladies' tee west of the brook. At the same time, the tee for the fifth hole was moved back on the dike to the west of the pond, adding 120 yards to the hole, including a 108-yard carry over water. Construction of the trolley line, which was to connect Paterson and Suffern, was completed through Ridgewood by February of 1910.

In 1909 the club was again jolted when the village announced tentative plans to condemn club property and build a parkway through the site. The Paramus Land Company had offered the village some land west of the bluff on the golf links, provided that an access road be built connecting the site and the nearest public road (Linwood Avenue). The club drafted a formal reply, citing its significant contributions to village life and the potential loss of prominent members who had originally been attracted to the village because of the club and its excellent golf course.



LINCOLN AVENUE: THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB



Ridgewood Country Club Lincoln Avenue 1910

There is no question that the village's action spurred the creation of The Ridgewood Country Club and the purchase of the Lincoln Avenue site, both in 1910. The members felt insecure operating on leased land, subject to so much encroachment. They wished to purchase their own property, as Arcola had done in 1909.

The Ridgewood Country Club was conceived in February of 1910 and legally incorporated on April 14 of that year. The two clubs merged on November 8, 1911. At the time of the merger, approximately half of the members of

the golf club also belonged to the country club, which claimed 126 members. The terms of the consolidation gave country club members the use of the grounds of the golf club and golf club members, in turn, the right to join the new country club without paying an initiation fee.

The reorganized club's first major action was the purchase, on September 22, 1910, of a 102-acre parcel that was partly in Ridgewood and partly in Glen Rock, bisected by Lincoln Avenue. The New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad formed the western boundary of the property, at the foot of a steep hill where the railroad provided a flag stop. Two streams flowed through the terrain, Wagaraw Brook at the western side and Diamond Brook along the eastern boundary. Both were dammed to form ponds, which were used as water hazards on the golf course and for ice skating during the winter. Wagaraw Pond was twelve hundred feet in length and three hundred to four hundred feet wide and its setting in a sheltered valley made it ideal for winter activities.



"Billy Goat" Course Lincoln Avenue

Work began on the new golf course in May of 1911. The first nine holes, all located east of Lincoln Avenue, were cleared, graded, and seeded that summer by the Union Building and Construction Company. The members were advised concerning the design of the holes by Jack Hobens and David Hunter, golf professionals at Englewood and Essex County, respectively. The \$5,000 budgeted for the project was overrun and additional funds were needed to purchase the grass seed.

Although a budget of \$8,000 for the second nine holes was authorized on February 15, 1912, work did not begin until the following winter, when the

land was cleared. The course, which was designed by Alex Finlay, was seeded during the spring of 1913 and sixteen holes were ready for play by August 30. The remaining two holes were completed by the time the clubhouse opened two months later. In the interim, two holes were "doubled up," both playing as shorter holes to make the eighteen.



Donald Ross, one of the preeminent golf course architects of the century, visited the club on May 26, 1914 and suggested several improvements to the original design, most significantly the placement of the bunkers. Ross is said to have called the site “one of the most beautiful spots for a golf course in America.”



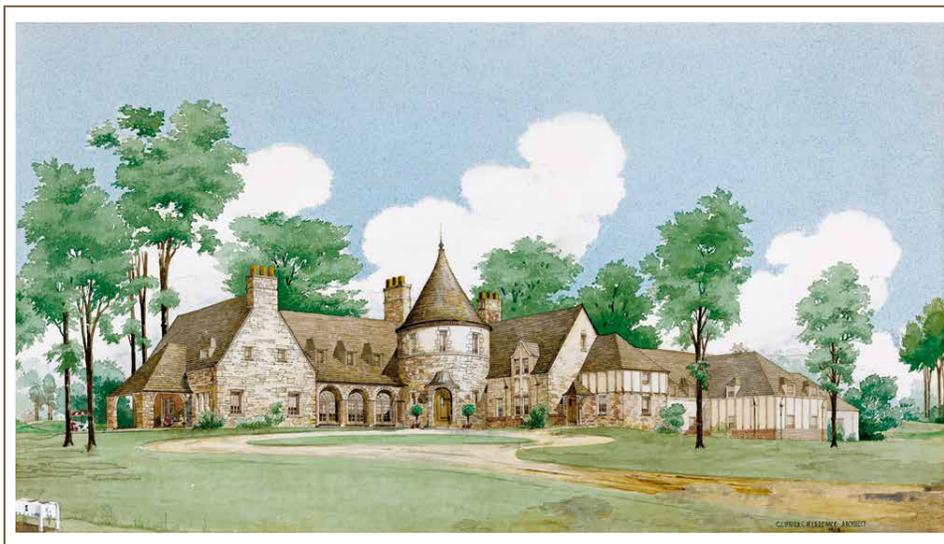
Lincoln Avenue course layout

The three-story clubhouse eventually included a high-class restaurant/café, a grillroom, a dancing pavilion, ten bedrooms on the second floor, a billiard table, two bowling alleys, and a cigar stand downstairs. The members also enjoyed tennis, archery, trap shooting, curling, ice-skating, skiing, and tobogganing at the club. The two tennis courts, which were located within twenty-five yards

of the clubhouse, were flooded and frozen over for the winter, creating an artificial ice rink where the club’s hockey team played.

From a golfing standpoint, the major event at the Lincoln Avenue course was the thirty-six-hole Professional Invitation Tournament held on Thursday, September 22, 1927. A field of thirty-one competed, including Gene Sarazen, Craig Wood, Leo Diegel, Joe and Jim Turnesa, Willie MacFarlane, Bobby Cruickshank, and Bill Mehlhorn. The local press billed the event as the “greatest galaxy of golf professionals ever to gather in New Jersey.” A gallery of thirty-five-hundred turned out to witness the proceedings.

PARAMUS: THE MOVE TO MIDLAND AVENUE



Watercolor of clubhouse by architect Clifford Wendehack

Watercolor of clubhouse by architect Clifford WendehackThe club’s move from Lincoln Avenue to its present home was some four years in the making. There was talk of change as early as 1925, but it was not until May 26, 1926, that a committee was appointed to consider the pros and cons of the Lincoln Avenue site – clubhouse and golf course.

The committee completed its work over the summer of 1926 and reported back to the stockholders

on September 27. Regarding the Lincoln Avenue clubhouse, the committee found it seriously lacking in locker room and kitchen space.

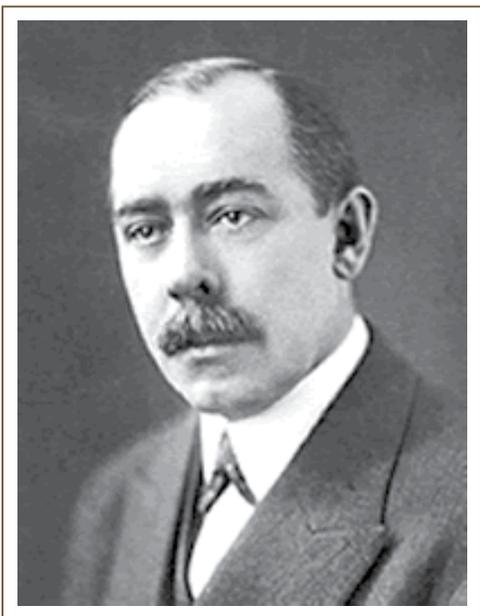


Although the committee acknowledged that the golf course was picturesque and readily accessible, they did identify several serious problems in the course design. There were many narrow, parallel fairways that posed a constant source of danger to the members. Also, the course was set up to penalize a hook severely, with no such punishment at hand for the slice. The extreme “billy goat” slopes of the fairways not only fatigued most players, but also were hard to maintain. And at approximately 6,000 yards, the course could not be considered championship caliber.

Although the committee did not make a specific recommendation that the club move, it did make some suggestions should that course of action be adopted. They recommended that enough land for thirty-six holes be purchased and that thirty-six holes be designed but only eighteen built initially. They also suggested that the Lincoln Avenue property be held until the new course was playable and that the property east of Lincoln Avenue be sold first.

The committee itself looked at nine parcels of land and found that three of them were particularly attractive, each containing in excess of two hundred gently rolling acres set well back from public highways. As chairman of the committee, Judge Stockton made the following report to the stockholders on December 8, 1926:

Your committee, under the authority conferred at the last meeting, has secured expert advice upon nine tracts of land. Six of these, upon such advice, were dismissed from consideration; and options have been taken upon the most highly recommended by the experts. This tract consists of 170 acres of land known as the “Proctor property” (in rear of old Board Farm) and, in addition, some adjoining land on the north and south. It was reported as being entirely suitable for a first class golf course. The portion optioned begins 2,400 feet east of Paramus Road and runs southward to Sprout Brook, and is principally cleared fields with some woods on the high points where the natural location for a clubhouse would suggest itself. The soil is sandy loam, warm and mellow. The entire tract is well drained and it is estimated that a course could be made upon this land at a minimum cost and that the cost of maintenance would be lower than most golf courses.



A. W. Tillinghast, Golf Course Architect

The “expert advice” alluded to in Stockton’s letter came from club professional George Jacobus and Albert Warren Tillinghast, the preeminent golf architect of the 1920s. Tillinghast was quite enthusiastic about the gently undulating, beautifully wooded 220-acre tract, calling it the equal of any golfing property in the Metropolitan district. To place his comments in proper perspective, note that Tillinghast had built the twin courses at both Baltusrol and Winged Foot several years before coming to Ridgewood!

On August 9, 1927, after arranging to lease the Lincoln Avenue property through March 1, 1929, the club sold that property to the Ridgewood and Glen Rock Realty Company for \$447,000 in cash, further stipulating that the new owners could not use any part of the property for the maintenance or development of a rival golf course.

The club purchased the Proctor property that same day, and on August 30 entered into an agreement with Tillinghast to design and build a twenty-seven-hole golf course, with Tillinghast receiving 10 percent of the construction costs as his fee. Tillinghast appeared at a stockholders meeting on September 8, at which he described in detail his plans for the new course.



Later that year the firm of William H. Tucker and Son was contracted to build the course. Experienced contractors, and architects as well, the Tuckers were responsible for such courses as North Hills and Preakness Hills, both of which they built in 1927. The elder Tucker was an Englishman who came to this country before the turn of

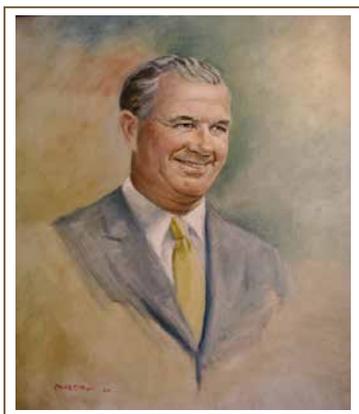
the century as a combination golf professional and greenskeeper. It was he who built the original courses at Ardsley and Maidstone and revised the Saint Andrew's course at Mount Hope. The Tuckers also gained fame as the builders of the original baseball field at Yankee Stadium.

The Tuckers ran into financial difficulties and notified the club on December 28, 1928, that they would not be able to complete their contract. Apparently, their bid was too low and they were unable to meet their payroll toward the end of 1928. The course was completed by the club under Tillinghast's supervision, with funds from the bonding company that took the Tuckers over in bankruptcy.

To design its new clubhouse, the club turned to Clifford C. Wendehack, who like Tillinghast was the leading practitioner in his field during the 1920s. Construction started in late August of 1928 and progressed smoothly.

Clifford Charles Wendehack was the fashionable name in golf clubhouse design during the 1920s. North Jersey Country Club was his first design, the one that made his reputation. He later built clubhouses for such clubs as Winged Foot, Hackensack, Mountain Ridge, Rock Spring, Yountakah (in Nutley), North Hempstead, Bethpage State Park, and North Hills (now the New York City public Douglaston Golf Course).

GEORGE JACOBUS: A PRO FOR THE AGES



George Jacobus

The half-century that George Jacobus served The Ridgewood Country Club was the textbook model for the club professional for several generations. Indeed, teaching was the essence of his life, until his untimely death following a heart attack on July 22, 1965, at age sixty-seven. His posthumous election to the PGA Hall of Fame on July 27, 1983, was a fitting honor following a career of outstanding leadership, dedication, and service to the golf community at large and to one club in particular. Making the game enjoyable for others was his greatest pleasure.

George's career in golf began at the Upper Montclair Country Club as an assistant in the pro shop of his uncle, Joe Mitchell, who served that club for nine years. When Mitchell committed to Ridgewood in the fall of 1914, George followed, with his first day on the new job being October 13, 1914. Mitchell started at Ridgewood in the spring of 1915 after spending the winter teaching at Gimbals' golf school in Manhattan. George served his uncle as an assistant clubmaker, and caddied some on the side. He turned professional the following summer, at age seventeen. When Mitchell, who was a charter member of the PGA and a leading tournament player, moved over to Montclair in 1919, George, then twenty-one years of age, stayed behind as Ridgewood's pro, becoming the youngest man ever to assume that position at a prestigious club.

Although slight of build, George was one of the longest and straightest hitters in the game. In 1925 he drove to the fringe of the green on the 392-yard seventeenth hole at the Lincoln Avenue course, an American record for distance that lasted thirty-two years until George Bayer hit one longer in 1957.



In 1928 George made Ripley's "Believe It or Not" when he played nine consecutive holes at Lincoln Avenue at 10 under par, following four birdies with an eagle, then four more birdies. George qualified for the U.S. Open in 1923, carding the same thirty-six-hole score as Walter Hagen that day. But George was not a consistent putter, nor did he care for the demands imposed by tournament golf. The essence of his life was teaching. He was deeply concerned about the future of the game, and this was manifested by his lifelong involvement with junior golf.

George also enjoyed a considerable reputation as a teacher of already proficient golfers. Paul Runyan, an outstanding teacher himself in later years, spent a full week at Ridgewood working with George. Others who matriculated at "Jacobus Tech" include Byron Nelson, Jimmy Thompson, Jug McSpaden, Chick Harbert, Clarence Doser, and Wes Ellis. At the club level, George was known to square someone's game between eighteens in the club championship.

George was also very active on the political side of golf. He served as president of the New Jersey section of the PGA for five terms (1929–1933) before becoming the first American-born professional, and the first ex-caddie as well, to be elected president of the national PGA organization. At age thirty-three, he was the youngest man to hold that office. He took over in December of 1932, and served an unprecedented seven years, through November of 1939. At the time of his death, George was the only past president of the PGA to have been honored with a solid gold membership card.

George also pioneered senior golf for professionals, and it was during his tenure as PGA president (1937) that the first PGA seniors tournament was held.

George Jacobus was nominated for the PGA Hall of Fame as early as 1962 by the New Jersey section of the PGA, which had honored him as Professional of the Year in 1960. Had he been elected that year, he would have become the first non-Tour player ever inducted. In the words of Jim Warga, a former assistant to George at Ridgewood (1946), then head professional at Forsgate and president of the section: "In years past every golfer elected to the Hall of Fame has been a player. It is time that someone who was instrumental in directing the PGA during some of its most important years be recognized. We in New Jersey are fortunate in having such a man. George Jacobus was our section's president for five years and after that he guided the destiny of the national body for seven years. At no time in its long history has the National PGA ever had a more capable leader."

George Jacobus died in 1965, and is buried in the cemetery to the right of 4 Center.

BYRON NELSON: PERFECTING HIS SWING



Byron Nelson at 1936 Metropolitan Open

I have engaged as Assistant, Byron Nelson of Texarkana, Texas. This young man has climbed to a prominent spot in professional golf during the past year. He is a very fine golfer and has, in my opinion, wonderful possibilities for becoming one of the big money-winners of the game. He has kept pace with the leaders in most of the winter tournaments, having finished in the money in practically every one. Byron is only twenty-two years old and has been professional at the Country Club of Texarkana for the past three years. In 1934 he finished second in the Texas Open, losing by one stroke to Wiffy Cox, and finished second in the Galveston Open, losing to Craig Wood by three strokes. He also qualified for the National Open last year. He will represent The Ridgewood Country Club in all of the major tournaments this summer and while on the job will play with the members and serve them in every way possible. – George Jacobus, April 1935



With this letter in the Tee Leaf, George Jacobus introduced John Byron Nelson, Jr., to the Ridgewood membership. George had met Byron, then a tall, skinny twenty-three-year-old, at the 1935 Masters tournament (called the Augusta Invitational in 1934–1935).

Before the first round, Jacobus told Augusta pro Ed Dudley, “I’m looking for a new young assistant, a decent sort of fellow who has a good possibility of becoming a good player.” Dudley knew Byron from Texas, and introduced him to George before the first round. George interviewed Byron then, checked him that day, and hired him the next day before the second round. (Byron finished ninth in the tournament.)

To be successful in those days, a young pro had to get a position at a club in the Northeast, and so Byron accepted on the spot. His salary for the summer was \$400, plus half his lesson fees, and he was to start immediately after the Masters. Byron drove back home to Texarkana, packed up, and drove for two and a half days to Ridgewood. “I had never seen a clubhouse so imposing and elegant before,” he later recollected.

Byron quickly found Ridgewood to be as difficult to play as Augusta National. His best score at Ridgewood, while working at Ridgewood, was a 68. Byron returned on June 29, 1947 and made it a memorable occasion, shooting a course-record eight-under-par 63 over the 6,804-yard East-Center course.

The playing highlight of Byron’s first season at Ridgewood was his victory in the New Jersey Open, which he won by three strokes with a 288 score at Monmouth Country Club. He won \$400 for his victory, and also won the Pro-Am preceding the tournament with Ash Clark as his partner.

Byron served as a referee at the Ryder Cup matches at Ridgewood that fall. Afterward, he flatly predicted that he would be a member of the United States team two years later. He was. The contestants’ golf bags and their golfing attire impressed Byron, and helped motivate him.



Byron Nelson at 1936 Metropolitan Open

Byron himself considered his victory in the 1936 Met Open at Quaker Ridge the real confidence builder that boosted him to greater heights. The Met Open was considered a “major” at the time, one of the “Big 4” on tour, and the field that year included Gene Sarazen, Paul Runyan, Johnny Farrell, Willie MacFarlane, Tommy Armour, Craig Wood, Henry Picard, and Vic Ghezzi. All had won, or would soon win, a major title. Byron bested them all, with rounds of 71-69-72-71=283, giving him a two-stroke advantage over runner-up Craig Wood. For his efforts, Byron won the princely sum of \$500, a welcome plum for a young man who barely had lunch money the last day of the tournament. He couldn’t afford lunch in the clubhouse, so he had a hot dog and Coke, which he ate outside.

Byron Nelson came to RCC hoping to perfect a repeating hook-free swing. Toward the end of 1936 season, he became convinced that he had been successful. (Indeed George Jacobus incorporated Byron’s techniques in his own teaching.) In Byron’s own words, “The mechanics of my swing were such that it required no thought. It’s like eating. You don’t think to feed yourself.”

And so Byron left Ridgewood and quickly found success on the Tour. Among the fifty-two tournaments he would win on the Tour were the 1937 and 1942 Masters, the 1939 U.S. Open, and the 1940 and 1945 PGA titles. In



1945 alone he won eighteen of the thirty-five tournaments he entered, and his scoring average for the year was an unbelievable 68.33, a figure no other player – before or since – has even approached.

In all Byron played on three Ryder Cup teams before retiring at the peak of his career at age thirty-six after the 1946 season. He was named Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press in 1944 and 1945. Needless to say, “Lord Byron” played his way into golf’s Hall of Fame.



Plaque commemorating Bryon's shot off the flagpole

Byron used part of his earnings as a professional golfer to buy a ranch, which he named “Fairway,” in Roanoke, Texas, on the outskirts of Fort Worth. He died there in September 2006, at the age of 94.

Looking back, Byron credited George Jacobus and Ridgewood Country Club: “That period of time I spent working with Jacobus was the most important of my career. The time I had to practice and the encouragement I got from George as well as the membership was so helpful. It wasn’t long before I became more steady with my game, more confident that I really knew what I was doing, and after I came out of there in 1936, I really never had a problem.”

Perhaps Byron Nelson’s most memorable moment at Ridgewood Country Club came when a group of caddies, well aware of Nelson’s deadly accuracy, challenged him to hit the flagpole. They threw fifty-five cents on the slate floor of the patio outside the pro shop, along with three golf balls, and dared Byron to hit the pole 100 yards away with his 3-iron. Byron missed on his first attempt, but after making a swing adjustment, was successful on his second try, and walked away. A plaque has been placed on the patio commemorating the shot.

