

## **A History of Eaton Country Club**

Debbie Kramer presentation to Eaton Rotary Club

July 18, 2022

Recollections are from William H. Hiestand, Wed, Sept 28, 1983

In about 1912, Walter G. Shannon, who was an insurance agent in Eaton was called to Chicago by his company to attend a meeting. After a morning session, one of his friends told him that he was going out to play golf that afternoon. He asked Walter to join him. This was the first time Walter had been on a golf course. In playing a round, "W.G." he was called, fell in love with the game. His friends gave him a couple of old clubs and he proudly came home to pursue the game. He lived at 623 East Main Street\*, where Jake Earley now lives. He collected lots of corn cobs with which to practice, because he had no golf balls.

He soon contacted some of his friends, namely: Walter Tyrrell, Fred Filbert, Hugh Gilmore, A.J. Hiestand (1874-1954), and Robert Hiestand, and told them of the wonders of golf. They suggested they look around for a place where they could put in a couple of holes and play golf. After a search for a location they found a lower field where holes number 5, 6, and 7 are now located.

Some 40 acres composed the entire farm which was owned by Elam Fisher. After long dickering an agreement was reached to buy all 40 acres for \$8,000.00 and an option was taken. Then to raise money, a corporation was formed, stock was issued and townspeople were solicited to buy stock as a civic project. J.E. Parker, Sr. was active in many ways in the organization. He influenced H. H. (Chuck) Hawkins, who was an employee

## A History of Eaton Country Club

of the J.E. Parker and Co., to take the job of Secretary-Treasurer. He also influenced Elam Fisher to sell the land for the original amount, without an increase in price. As the years past, the option was to run out March 15, 1920.

It was getting serious because the purchase price had not been raised. So AJ Hiestand and Griff Rensman came to the rescue. They loaned the Club the \$8,000 at no interest, to pay the option and they took a deed for the land as security. This deed was recorded on March 15, 1920. During the next year, the money was raised and the Eaton Country Club paid off Hiestand and Rensman and received their deed which is dated February 26, 1921. The first step had been a success. In the meantime, with the option taken, the Eaton Country Club Company was organized and the shares of stock were being sold at \$100 per share.

So the Eaton Country Club was organized. They established rules of operation, set the annual dues at \$25, and elected officers. Arrangements were made to proceed with the development of the golf course and its operation.

The lower field was disked and grass planted. Ab Tyrrell (Walter's brother) was hired as caretaker. Ab Tyrrell had a horse and together with a single small mower, which he hitched to the horse, mowed the fairways by leading the horse around. The greens were formed by using a hand mower which was set very low, right out of the fairway. A hole in the middle of the green was a can which was seldom moved. It was difficult for a man leading a horse with a small mower to cut all the grass. Walter Tyrrell was a stock buyer and he had purchased a large number of sheep. He suggested the

## A History of Eaton Country Club

sheep be turned loose on the course to keep the grass down. It worked fine, but sheep have no respect for golf greens, but the problem was solved by placing a broom at each green. No one seemed to mind if the green had to be swept before he putted. Also, there was no such thing as a wood tee as we have now. At each tee was a wooden box with sand in it. You would get a big pinch of sand and construct it to a point and tee your ball in that manner.

Number 1 tee was located opposite the iron bridge, next to tree by the Iron Gate. You can still see the small raised tee there.

In 1920 the members talked about a clubhouse. The location created a controversy. Some of the members wanted the clubhouse locate on the present site, and some wanted it located on the present Number 8 tee so the clubhouse could be accessible from the iron bridge. The present location won by a very close vote and building began July 1921.

Country Club Minutes show new Clubhouse turned over to Members January 2, 1922. Harvey Hiestand designed the building. Beck Brothers & Riley were contractors, John E. Parker agreed to build the fireplace. He collected stones from all over the county for the fireplace. Others contributed time, material, and labor. The clubhouse was quite a contribution to Eaton, and for many years the social activities centered around it. Bridge parties and dances were numerous and added to the social life of Eaton. The Eaton Country Club prospered and became a valued asset to the community.

In 1927 a financial depression affected the Club. Members had a problem paying the \$25 dues. At the annual meeting several had not paid. Remarks

## A History of Eaton Country Club

were made to the effect that the Club needed the money to operate and if the members did not pay their dues, they should be denied the privileges of membership. The By-Laws stated the method of payment and the President William H. Hiestand had to enforce them to the extent that several people were denied the privileges of membership. It was a difficult time.

The golf course needed changes. Nothing had been done to modernize it. Bill Sime was consulted to recommend the necessary changes. We borrowed about \$4,000 and hired Burns and Curry to do much of the work. Number 3 green was changed and enlarged to its present size. Numbers 6 and 8 were also enlarged (as a matter of fact all the greens were enlarged).

The hill at Number 7 was cut back and the ramp built. Previously the hill had extended farther East making a blind shot to the green.

The pro at Miami Valley Country Club at this time was Nipper Campbell. Nipper had come from Scotland. He also played in many US Open Championships & won the Scottish Open. Around his house he had a large bed of creeping bent grass. Our board purchased enough of that bent grass to plant on all of our greens. Nipper and his crew prepared the greens and planted the grass. Nipper Campbell also instructed us in the care of the greens, and as problems arose, he would be consulted and advise us on the proper procedures.

And during the Great Depression in 1933, the Board called emergency meeting to save club and drastic action was taken. The By Laws were suspended and the Board was given total judgement on dues, members billings and financials.

## **A History of Eaton Country Club**

During the subsequent years many things have been added to the course and to the clubhouse. Certainly one of the biggest improvements was the acquisition of the field to the West. It changed Number 9 hole and added a shag field. The clubhouse was enlarged by enclosing the porch at the South side and building the dining room to the East.

We should not forget the heritage left to us by those early pioneers for a golf club. Hard times, yes; but they had the vision and determination to create a valued asset for our community. Let us then appreciate what they left us and make it a continued and valued part of living in such a fine place as Eaton, Ohio.

Excerpts from: William H. Hiestand  
September 28, 1983

### **As Given to Eaton Rotary Club**

**By Debbie Kramer**

**Monday, July 18, 2022**

Some interesting facts about early golf course:

1. There was a caddy shack located beneath the present #1 tee. The boys would sit there and play cards until they got a caddying job
2. On present Number 1 fairway, north of the gully, you have seen a depression. That was the location of the skeet shooting place. A

## A History of Eaton Country Club

small building housed a boy who would release the clay birds which were broke all over the fairway. It was a problem to clean up the mess, so the Club ended the skeet shooting soon after

3. 1923 the Cincinnati Reds played golf at ECC and gave an exhibition baseball game against local players
4. In 1928 the Eaton Rotary Club was granted permission to hold 2 meetings per year in Clubhouse. They also conducted a Golf Tournament with participants in a 50 miles radius.
5. At one time there was a tennis court at the Club and they were excellent courts. The courts were located on the present Number 5 fairway some 140 yards south of the present tee. You will notice a flat place in the fairway where they were located. In 1930 the board sold the tennis nets for \$ 17.50 the only time mentioned in minutes.
6. That for a short time we had an island tee in Crystal Lake before the Lake was presented back to the city of Eaton in 1931
7. November 1943 a fire nearly destroyed the Clubhouse. Insurance paid \$6,092.61 for damage of rebuilding rafters & roof.