Falmouth Country Club (1929 - 1937)

by Maria C. Ward

They’re going to build a motorway
Through me back garden
No one can explain why I came to be chosen
They’re going to build a motorway
They’re ripping up the trees
Soon the lorries will be zooming through
Me cabbages and peas.
They says to ease the traffic flow
A bit of my back garden had to go
Well I dunno
I suppose that those who started it must know best
And I wouldn’t like my vegetable patch
To stand in the way of progress.
This Irish ditty by Len Rosselson may be a metaphor for the new Route 28 bypassing West Falmouth built in 1960, but the history of this land from the late 1920s until now is a bit more complicated.

In 1928, the Reverend Dr. D. Brewer Eddy, a summer resident of Chapoquoit Island, decided there was a need for a golf club in West Falmouth for both permanent residents and a vast army of summer people who could not get day privileges at the currently oversubscribed golf courses in Falmouth. With the help of Boston and resident investors, the new Falmouth Country Club was formed. A deed recorded December 19, 1928, shows acreage purchased from Charles Swift (25 acres at $50/acre), M.W. Murray (20 acres for $625) and Frank S. Lambert (21½ acres for $900 cash and $300 in stock). This land was on the east side of the main highway in West Falmouth (currently Route 28A) including Telegraph Hill and property to the east.

Wayne E. Stiles of the golf architectural firm Stiles and VanKleek was hired to plan the course. He estimated that the cost would be $3000 per hole. His rendering pictured an initial nine hole course (to be expanded to eighteen holes) constructed through the woods of a rugged but picturesque countryside. He envisioned most of the tees and many greens high enough to afford views of Buzzards Bay with a prevailing southwest wind only adding to the ideal location. The clubhouse plan was to use a large private home on the property that needed few alterations.
The grand opening was July 4th, 1929. Two hundred people visited the clubhouse with its grand view of Buzzards Bay. The Harvard Rhythm Kings provided “high grade” dance music through the afternoon. Weekly club dances were promised on Friday nights for the young people. Thursday afternoon bridge parties began July 11th for the purpose of adding new equipment to the club house.

However, building membership rolls was difficult. 1929 records show the golf course open to anyone for a small fee. A drought in 1930 devastated the property. The 1932 fees were $1.00 per round for Falmouth residents, higher on weekends. Summer visitors paid $35 for a family membership and $25 for individual members. At the same time investors appealed for help from golf enthusiasts. They could neither make a profit nor pay off any of the 6% interest to bond holders. Maintenance was always a problem; equipment breakdowns hampered keeping up the fairways and greens.

The Great Depression of the 1930s is cited as the main culprit in the short life of the golf course. As early as March 31, 1932, The Falmouth Enterprise has a long lead article describing a meeting between Dr. Eddy and the Succannessett Club, a Falmouth men’s club. The header to the article made an offer that was not taken up.

The article reveals that the clubhouse building, too expansive and ambitious, had been returned to the
Crowell Realty Company, from whom some of the original acreage had been purchased. The golf club directors were willing to cede to Falmouth managers the responsibility for a quicker response to problems (broken tractors etc.) and plans for change and course improvement (money to be handled in Boston). They hoped the Succannessett Club members could help collect membership dues owed, take in greens fees, and extend local membership. The trade-off was because the original investors were unwilling to incur any more debt propping up the golf club. Falmouth did not assume the responsibilities.

The golf club did not open in 1938. The fairways and greens reverted to their original state. The holders of the first mortgage of $15,000, issued in 1928 at 6% interest, still unpaid, foreclosed upon the property. At a directors meeting held at his home on Chapoquoit Island on August 14, 1938, Dr. Eddy announced that there were notes outstanding of $27,133.27, of which he personally held $20,633.37. Other than the land, he declared the only assets were “the wood in two shacks, the water pipes in the ground, and equipment not worth $10.” On April 1, 1939, the land and property of the Club were foreclosed legally by public sale on the grounds. In a letter to the stockholders and bondholders dated May 11, 1939, Dr. Eddy writes of his personal regret. “Circumstances have been against us from the beginning. The primary failure was in the unexpectedly large cost of construction, far beyond the original estimates [$9,000 vs the quoted $3,000 per hole]. In the last analysis, it was the depression which robbed a fine community plan of final success.”

As first mortgagee, Dr. Eddy became a major owner of the foreclosed grounds. He later gifted the property to his son, David B. Eddy, George R. Collins, and Blair Scanlon, the trio of stewards for the country club in 1935. Thus begins the second part of the “motorway through me back yard.”

Future plans for building their own summer houses on this land were stymied when the state took major parts of the former golf club to build a new section of Route 28 with the Brick Kiln Road access. With a 30-day eviction notice dated July 8, 1959, the state took parts of the 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 7th holes. As George Collins lamented

Header to the March 31, 1932 Enterprise article.

Falmouth Country Club
West Falmouth — Route 28

NINE HOLES OF GOOD GOLF
50 cents per day

Reduction for Week, Month, or Season
You are invited, with your friends, to make this your golf home

Beginning in 1935, three young men who were to figure prominently in the care of this land became the managers. They were David B. Eddy Jr. (the son of Dr. Eddy), Blair Scanlon, and George R. Collins. Receipts for 1935 and 1936 show how dire the situation was. 1935 had 31 seasonal members, gross receipts of $1069.47, expenditures $825.62 leaving a net of $243.85 split three ways for $81.28 per young manager. The split was $40 per manager in 1936 and only totaled $25 each in 1937.
to Blair Scanlon in a September 2, 1963, letter, “Although Christiane and I are still enthusiastic about the 5th green, ... it seems out of the question for us to build out there. The 4th tee, also a scenic spot, has been ruined for a home by the noise of traffic on the Route 28 by-pass. And as you are well aware the more practical sites that all three of us had thought to use on the 7th ridge have been completely wiped out by the roadwork. The engineer who designed the bypass by laying a ruler on the map, thereby exterminating turtle ponds [destroyed was a pond actually named Turtle Pond], ruining the bluff for miles, etc., should have his head examined. A half-dozen gentle curves between the Canal and Woods Hole would have preserved a lot of spectacular American scenery for the future. At that time I tried to talk them into moving the road back east a couple of hundred yards, but I had no effect ...”

[An interesting side note of grander plans for this road construction comes from The Falmouth Enterprise, August 10, 1956, concerning the continuation of the Route 28 bypass, as they then called it. The road was envisioned to continue to Woods Hole to the south with an offshoot to Teaticket. “A new Highway would cut through Highfield’s woods and join Woods Hole Road approximately at the Quissett standpipe.” Another road was described thus: “An interesting part of the state’s tentative blueprint is a wide road through Goodwill Park across Gifford Street and to Teaticket.” It even predicted “an eventual bypass of Teaticket.” As the Irish ditty says, “Well I dunno.”]

In a May 27, 1961, letter, with land conservation already on their minds, David Eddy and George Collins “agreed to consult together before conveying any of our land ... to a third person.” With this in mind, in exchange for a deed to Eddy’s land, George Collins donated $2700 to the Unitarian Service Committee, a cause dear to the late Dr. Eddy. Thus Collins said, “We made our piece large enough now to be really worth saving.”

A continuation of the Scanlon letter of September 2, 1963, says, “Meanwhile our general concern with what was going on here on the Cape with so little real planning brought us in contact with the rather active, if belated, conservationist movement here. Considerable progress is now being made in preserving the swamplands, back-lands, etc., that are important for the life cycle of these parts.”

Real estate companies had other ideas. There were numerous “grand” plans for developing the open land. Although Country Club Estates was built on some of the land, Collins refused all offers for his land, despite the persistence of the buyers. Example: A May 14, 1974, letter from Jason Nash Real Estate in Falmouth reads,

“I have a qualified interested buyer for parcels of this land. With your permission I would like further to inspect and appraise this property for my client and yourself.”

That drew the following reply:

“Dear Mr. Nash,

Our land is posted. If we find you on it we will shoot you.

Does that answer your letter.

G & C. Collins

Copy of this with xerox of your letter to Jack Hough.”

To everyone’s satisfaction, The 300 Committee was formed in 1985 with the “goal to save 300 acres to celebrate the town’s 300th anniversary” in 1986. “Article 1, Special Town Meeting April 8, 1986 sponsored by the Falmouth Conservation Commission and the Falmouth Planning Board” proposed the purchase of thirteen parcels of land
amounting to 425 acres. Town meeting members overwhelmingly approved the purchase. Thus the Collins Woodlot, under the stewardship of The 300 Committee, was preserved with the promise of “wildlife protection/passive recreation/green belt.” George Collins sold his 49.3 acres for $327,000. Trail maps of this acreage, the shaded area between Blacksmith Shop Road and Brick Kiln Road, augmented by later purchases including Blair Scanlon’s 47.7 acres in 1995, are available at The 300 Committee website.

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About the Author

Maria C. Ward has been a member of the Spritsail editorial board since 2005.