

Woods Hole Historical Collection
P. O. Box 185
Woods Hole, MA 02543

REGISTER
Woods Hole Golf Club
1898 - 2009

1 box

WOODS HOLE GOLF CLUB

HISTORY

Henry H. Fay, a member of a prominent Woods Hole summer family, was the prime mover in the formation of the golf club in Woods Hole. Subscribers to the club, also Woods Hole summer residents, held their first meeting at Fay's Boston office on December 19, 1898. The group voted to call their organization "The Woods Hole Golf Club" and to be incorporated under Massachusetts laws. On December 29, 1898, this corporation leased land for its golf course from Joseph Story Fay, Henry H. Fay, and Sarah B. Fay. The corporation continued to lease the land until 1916 when it bought the land outright from the Fay family. The following year the club purchased an adjacent Fay parcel that allowed the club to expand to an 18-hole layout.

The original clubhouse resembled an oversized Cape Cod Cottage with little more than one very large room and a porch, built near the 11th tee. A new clubhouse – located about where the 10th tee had been, on a knoll overlooking Buzzards Bay - was built in the early 1920's. This building, which has undergone extensive renovation over the years, is still in use as the clubhouse.

Two superintendents oversaw many changes to the layout of the golf course during their tenure. Milton Fish was the club's first superintendent. He served in that capacity for 46 years and oversaw the 1918 expansion to 18 holes. In 1948, Herman "Dutch" Wessner took over from Fish. He had worked as an assistant for several years under Fish and then served as superintendent for the next 44 years. Wessner was responsible for a 1960's make-over of the course which was designed to maintain the natural terrain.

In 1929, the club founded a caddy camp which became one of the best in the country. That first year there were 56 boys enrolled under the supervision of George Faxon and five assistants. The boys were first housed in tents in back of what is now the 15th fairway. When those tents began to leak, Faxon received permission to build cabins. The camp seems to have been operated sporadically over the years, but in 1953, it was closed for good. By 1964, the camp had fallen into disrepair and was demolished.

In the early 1950s, club membership had declined to less than 100. Both the clubhouse and course were in need of extensive maintenance. According to Dutch Wessner, "There just wasn't enough money to support the club." It was the local members – those with the least money - who saved the course. These members realized that in order for the club to survive, it had to reach out for new members beyond Woods Hole's summer residents, to its year-round residents and other Cape Codders. Fundraising efforts included many social activities and golf tournaments open to non-members. These activities piqued the interest of townspeople, summer residents, and retirees. Membership grew and money came in. There has been a long waiting list for membership for many years. The volunteer

efforts of new members and the influx of funds allowed the needed renovations to be completed. The community spirit which was engendered during these growth years continues to this day.

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SCOPE

The Woods Hole Golf Club collection contains several documents revealing the history of the club. Included in these are copies of its 1898 lease agreement and 1917 deed with the Fay family. Several articles, the 75th Anniversary Booklet, and the 100th Anniversary booklet provide a detailed look at the club's beginnings and the changes which occurred over the years. Information on its caddy camp is provided in these booklets as well as in a 1950 Caddy Camp Year Book and a 1930 photo of the caddy camp crew. Membership Directories from 1929, 1958-1959, and 1985 document the growth of its membership through the years.

BOX LIST

- 1-1. History of land acquisition: copies of 1898 lease agreement, map of leased pasture land , 1917 deed, articles about the club's history
- 1-2. Miscellany: 1920 list of members receiving loads of stone from golf links.
- 1-3. Members' Directories: 1929, 1958-1959, 1985
- 1-4. 75th Anniversary Booklet: 1899-1974
- 1-5. 100th Anniversary Booklet: 1899-1999
- 1-6. Caddy Camp: 1950 Year Book
- 1-7. Caddy Camp: 1930s photo of crew
- 1-8. Photo Restorations of caddie camp photo and postcards showing club, 2009.