

RobertFraass.com

Happy Hollow Club Brochure

Happy Hollow Club Centennial Brochure Copy

For REBEL Interactive

March 2007

One hundred years, 1907 to 2007. That's five generations of Omahans who have lived the joys and frustrations of this game we love, the game of golf, at our country club we love, Happy Hollow Club.

The Club holds the memories of your most-memorable golf moments: that time you nailed that impossible approach shot, the time you strung together that series of pars and birdies, fishing for errant shots that plunked into the Papio and Rock Creeks.

But your "Happy" memories, of course, are about much more than golf and the other sports. It's bonding with buddies or family over 18 holes on a sunny summer Sunday, laughs and drinks at the "Starlite Grill," taking a dip in the pool and those special dinners that commemorated a milestone in your life.

You cherish those moments, and we hope this book, in words and pictures, bring back those memories you and your fellow Club members hold dear. This book is for you.

The Founding

Eleven prominent businessmen, led by Erastus A. Benson (who founded the community of Benson), organized a corporation to form a new country club, to be Omaha's third, in 1907.

Soon after the corporation's first meeting on April 2, the group purchased property for the club site from Mrs. J.N.H. Patrick on what today is the area that includes Brownell-Talbot School along Underwood Avenue just west of North 52nd Street near Memorial Park.

The purchase of the 11 acres of property included the Patricks' two large beautiful homes, and the Patricks were noted for their lavish parties for Omaha society. In fact, the name "Happy Hollow"—for both the Club and the winding avenue—is believed to have originated from the Patricks' many festive gatherings.

For the golf course and other field sports, 90 acres to the west of the Patrick property were leased for 15 years. The main Patrick home was remodeled to provide a modern clubhouse. The adjoining home was converted into men's locker rooms and lounges.

The Grand Opening

The founders of the Happy Hollow Club moved quickly to get their new venture

up and running. The clubhouse doors were opened to more than 300 members on July 20, 1907, as part of the Grand Opening gala—no intoxicating liquors allowed. So many guests arrived that dinner was served in two sessions, one at 6 and another at 7:30 p.m., and an evening of dancing to an orchestra followed.

The golf course itself was completed in the spring of '08 and quickly became known for its difficulty and challenge to golfers' skills and dexterity. As one early member wrote, "The course is peculiarly interesting in that it presents to the golf fiend almost every known kind of hole."

Indeed, the purple and gold colors and ornate "H.H.C." logo of the Club became synonymous with the idea of challenging golf in Omaha.

The early "Happy" hosted other sports, too. A baseball team sported early success, and archery, lawn bowling and tennis were other sports enjoyed by Club members.

A Growing 'Happy' Makes A Move

Happy Hollow Club grew and flourished over the next 15 years with the usual financial ups and downs that country clubs face. As the end of the 15-year lease on the 90 acres drew near, directors began looking for a new home for their club.

They sold the clubhouse and 11 acres, purchased from Mrs. Patrick, in 1921 to Brownell Hall for use as a school. The two groups shared the space—Club members in the summer and the school in the winter—until 1924.

In searching for a new "Happy" home, the Club's stockholders and directors decided a spot away from the bustle of a growing Omaha would be ideal. On September 16, 1922, they ratified the purchase of 20 acres of farmland for \$85,000 and lease another 120 acres, with an option to buy, for \$425.

The location: seven miles from the heart of Omaha between Center and Pacific streets, the present-day home of Happy Hollow Club.

Langford & Moreaux, golf architects from Chicago, were hired to build the 27-hole golf course over 230 acres. Their estimate to complete the work was \$105,000, although the total final cost was more than \$150,000.

The new course—described as the best 27-hole links course in the Midwest—was opened to play on October 31, 1924. About the same time, bonds were sold and Club members assessed fees to raise the \$250,000 needed to build Omaha's first permanent country club home.

The construction of the clubhouse included two large porches—the one looking east is now known as the "Starlite Room." The third terrace of our present dining room was the porch on the south. The two lower levels of the dining room and the "Sandtrap" were built in 1958.

Saturday, May 30, 1925, saw the formal opening of the clubhouse with a dinner-dance gala that drew more than 400 members. The first golf tournament

soon followed on June 6. On July 4, the Club dedicated its new swimming pool, the first outdoor pool for a country club in the area.

A new standard for the country club lifestyle had come to Omaha.

Depression And The War

The good times for Happy Hollow Club were not meant to last, however, as the 1930s saw the Great Depression settle in over the nation. Like nearly all other business ventures, the Club naturally struggled. Membership and the Club's finances declined. By 1933, some of the Club's land was sold, and the course was reduced to 18 holes.

World War II also hurt Club membership. The golf course and clubhouse were open only on a limited basis and only five staff members were employed.

The struggles of the Club came to a head in 1947 when stockholders in the Club filed suit to order the sale of the Club to pay bonds and back interest. The directors of the Club actually welcomed the legal action as a way repay the stockholders and refinance and reorganize the Club so it could be saved for future generations.

After much legal wrangling and counterproposals, a financial reorganization was approved in Federal District Court on June 28, 1948. The plan outlined a procedure for establishing the club as a solvent corporation under the name "The Happy Hollow Holding Company." First and second mortgage bonds were paid at a rate of 40 and 30 cents on the dollar, respectively.

Real estate investor John Hanson, who would later become a Club member, loaned the reorganized Club \$100,000 for a subdivision on Happy Hollow property.

Happy Hollow Club was saved.

A Happy 'Happy' Once More

With Happy Hollow Club on solid financial footing once again, the directors sought expansions and improvements.

- In 1949, the course was reconstructed in a north-south layout with fewer hills.
- In 1950, the clubhouse and swimming pool remodeling was completed. The "Gun Shack" and trap shoots also were built, thanks to private financing.
- In 1955, a building to contain the golf shop, snack bar and locker rooms were built. The patio to the east of the snack bar was added in 1967.
- In 1958, the present dining room and "Sandtrap" were built and a "teen-age room" was built in the former golf shop.
- By 1967, the course had been reconstructed again to prevent flooding, a water system was installed, a garage was built for golf course equipment

and the parking lot was repaved. The golf course reconstruction was done in time for a celebration of Happy Hollow's 60th birthday.

The renovations and increased membership helped make the Club one of the best country clubs in the Midwest.

But the improvements did not end there. Among other enhancements:

- In 1976, new locker rooms and an addition to the golf cart building were constructed, and the lower level of the club was redecorated.
- In 1979, new golf carts and accessories were added to the Club.
- In 1982, the "Sandtrap" was renovated.
- In 1983, a new lounge, to be called the "Water Hazard," was built adjacent to the "Sandtrap," which was relocated in 1984.

But the biggest change to Happy's golf course would begin in 1986 with yet another reconstruction of the course under the leadership of course architect Bob Lohmann. The plan called for expansion to a 21-hole course with four tees on each hole. The holes were reconstructed three holes at a time from 1987 to 1994.

In 1993, a new summer tradition at the Club was born. This was the first year the "Summer Bash" was held, and it has become an annual event ever since. Each August, Club members and their family and friends gather at the Club to dine on fresh lobster, listen to bands by the pool and cap off the evening with a fireworks spectacular.

Since that time in '93, the Club has seen many other improvements and changes:

- In 1995, new comfort stations were added on holes 5 and 15.
- In 1997, domes for winter play were built over four tennis courts. They are put up every autumn and come down each April.
- In 1997, a new exercise room was built and the old exercise room was converted into a wine cellar with dining for 12 people.
- In 1999, the Club took over the pro shop that John Frillman, the long-time Club professional, had owned and operated. Mr. Frillman retired in November 2001 and was replaced by Mike Antonio.
- In 2003, the ballroom and kitchen were remodeled and a new pub and two new meeting rooms, the board room and the conference room, were constructed. In 2006, the exercise room moved into the meeting-room space and the old exercise room was moved into the wine cellar.
- In 2005, the Club's new website (www.happyhollowclub.com) was launched.
- In 2005, the entire Club was made smoke-free.

By the mid-2000s, the decision was made for a dramatic golf course overhaul. The golf architect firm Jacobson Golf Course Design of Chicago was hired in 2006 to develop a master plan for course improvements to Happy.

To that end, the course was shut down for part of the summer of 2006 while the turf on the greens and fairways was killed off and replanted with a better turf variety. In addition, six holes were redesigned with remodeled bunkers and tee-box improvements. The 10th hole, in particular, saw a major revamping with a totally rebuilt green.

Six additional holes are scheduled for remodeling in 2007 with the final six to be completed in 2008. The newly designed course will present new challenges to Happy golfers who had grown accustomed to the course layout from 1994 on.

A New Century

What will the second century in the history of Happy Hollow Club bring? Sure, there will be more changes, renovations and course improvements. But more importantly, the Club will continue to be the place for the next generations of Omaha families and friends to gather, play a round of golf or a tennis match, relax in the pool, enjoy a fine dinner and forge memories that last a lifetime.

The Legend of “Putter Boy”

He has stood unchanged except for the ravages of time near the first tee of Happy Hollow Club since 1925. Atop a chunk of marble, the statue of a boy in a floppy hat lining up a putt has become the Club’s enduring symbol.

“Putter Boy,” as he has become endearingly known, commemorated the Club’s move in 1924 from today’s Brownell-Talbot School site to its present location. The little statue was presented to Club officers and directors in 1925 by Club members.

The little statue is one of only three known to exist. The original is the celebrated symbol of famed Pinehurst County Club in North Carolina. The story goes that Pinehurst’s first advertising consultant drew images of a young golfer decked out in a floppy white hat and baggy trousers in early advertisements for the resort. In 1912, local artist and sculptor Lucy Richards was asked by Pinehurst to create the sculpture, which doubles as a sundial, based upon the character.

Like the Club itself, Happy Hollow’s “Putter Boy” is a survivor—a stony witness to the life of Happy Hollow in both good times and bad.

As an *Omaha World-Herald* reporter wrote in 1967:

“The aging figure of a small golfer continues to stand on the chunk of marble anchored near the first tee at Happy Hollow.

“The little character appears a bit worse for wear, the golf club in his hands is broken and it’s doubtful if his platform is much good as a sundial any more.

“But still he stands defying the elements—and typifying the staunch Happy Hollow attitude that has refused to let flood or depression stifle its growth.”