

Top Designer? Perry Maxwell

Former Banker Has Planned 110 Links

By Bill English

A YOUNG Kentucky banker who came to Oklahoma for his health in 1905 is one of America's leading golf architects today.

Perry Maxwell settled in Ardmore, was a successful banker, didn't take up golf until "well over 30" and got into golf course designing by accident.

Ardmore folk called him to lay out the Dornick Hills Country club links, the state's first grass greens areas, in 1913 and he hasn't stopped since.

He gave up banking in 1919 to play a lot of golf and build golf courses. He continues a much-sought artist 37 years and 110 courses later, although he gets around on one leg nowadays.

An outspoken booster of Oklahoma and its ideal year-round golfing weather, Maxwell well remembers his first architectural assignment at Ardmore as though it were yesterday.

Dornick Hills was a \$10,000 project on 100 acres of a 300-acre tract he himself owned and a two-inch water line for the nine-hole layout cost \$2,500.

The remaining \$7,500 had to be spent carefully. "There was only one book on golf architecture then and I read it," he smiles.

It apparently was only enough to scratch the surface of his problem, so he immediately went east to study the better courses there.

He spent two months looking at layouts in Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Boston before returning to Ardmore to begin planning Dornick Hills.

IT was opened a year later in 1914 and Maxwell, after retiring from banking in 1919, developed another nine holes for the course, which was awarded the State Amateur and Open tournaments for the first time in 1924.

Since then he estimates he's laid out approximately 70 courses throughout the nation and remodeled 40 more, including the historic

Augusta, Ga., National and Pine Valley, N. J., clubs.

He remodeled 14 of the 18 greens at the Saucon Valley National club in Bethlehem, Pa., probable site of the 1951 National Amateur, and also worked over the Links club in New York.

Six of Oklahoma's better known private courses bear the Maxwell stamp and two of his others still are under construction—the Lake Hefner layout here and the new University of Oklahoma links at Norman—are his creations, too.

His productions in the state include Southern Hills and Indian Hills, both of Tulsa; Hillcrest in Bartlesville; Oakwood in Enid, and Twin Hills and the Oklahoma City Golf and Country club here.

He started Twin Hills in 1924 and it opened in 1925 with Bob Cruickshank as pro.

"There weren't five trees north of 63 street when we started on the Country club course in Nichols Hills in 1929," he recalls. Trees for the now heavily wooded plat had to be "manufactured," as he puts it.

Two of the nation's finer college links at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Iowa State college, Ames, are among his works.

MAXWELL believes Prairie Dunes in Hutchinson, Kan., is "the nicest canvas on which I've ever painted a picture." John Dawson, dean of America's active amateurs, calls it "the finest nine holes in America."

The true artist has an intangible price on his efforts—he wants them to be accepted just the way he plots them although he probably never is fully satisfied with any of his work—and Maxwell is an artist in that respect.

For example, he admits now he might have improved one of his courses by rearranging the order of two or three holes (not changing the length or character of any of them).

He doesn't say so but you get the impression he doesn't like to see an exacting par 3 hole he has conceived softened to a par 4 merely by adding a few more yards and a trap near the green or an exacting par 4 hole converted into an easy par 5 by the same process.

Strangely, the man whose advice and opinions on golf courses now are widely sought came to Oklahoma as a crack tennis player and



PERRY MAXWELL
Golf's top architect.

might not have become too interested in golf if he hadn't sprained an ankle.

IN 1924, he served on greens committee of the United States Golf association and also was president of the Oklahoma State Golf association the same year. He was vice-president of the state organization in 1917-20-23.

The bank? "There were five employees when I came to Ardmore in 1905 and 29 when I resigned in 1920, so I guess it was doing all right."

The loss of a leg doesn't stymie him, either. The trouble started from something as apparently unimportant as a mild case of eczema.

The leg had to be amputated in 1943 while Maxwell was remodeling a course in Bethlehem, Pa. There's an artificial limb in its place now. He was back on the job at Bethlehem after 23 days and offering no complaints.

He lives in Tulsa now but "home" to him is still Ardmore on 400 acres of the land he bought in 1913 and now adjoins Dornick Hills. The portion he kept is a dairy farm.

His health now—the reason he came to Oklahoma 45 years ago? "I guess I outgrew my trouble. I weigh 40 pounds more now than I did in 1905," he grins.

(NEXT—The Oklahoma PGA.)