

# Country Club was first started here in 1924

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the first in a weekly series of articles devoted to the founding of the Neosho Golf and Country Club and history of the Neosho Golf Course.

By Bill Ball

What was once known as the Crystal Springs Realty Co., holding company for the Neosho Golf and Country Club, with 30-foot wide fairways and roughs where you could never find the proverbial lost ball, has turned into one of the finest golf courses in Southwest Missouri, the Neosho Municipal Golf Course.

Two persons who know probably as much or more about the course are Jim Woolfenden and Harry (Fuzzy) Swanson.

"If you think it's rough now," Swanson said, you should have seen it back when I was caddying. It had fairways about 30 feet wide and if your ball ever got in the rough you better just take a stroke and put a new ball in play. You'd never find it.

"We had players who had slices and hooks who were in trouble all the time. They kept wanting to cut the brush back on the right or on the left. We had lots of fun."

The Neosho Golf Course was laid out by Perry Maxwell of

Oklahoma, one of the world's top golf architects. He is the same Perry Maxwell who laid out Tulsa's Southern Hills, one of the nation's great golf courses.

The Neosho Golf and Country Club, Inc., was formed in March of 1924, according to articles of incorporation, "for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a clubhouse and suitable grounds and of having and enjoying a place of common and friendly intercourse, for the purpose of advancing by rational amusements, study and practice the mental, moral and bodily health of ourselves and our associates; and for the purpose of cultivating and improving by study and practice the social, moral, mental, religious and physical life of the members of the association; and to secure by lease, purchase or otherwise, land for such use and purposes and it is hereby expressly agreed and declared that this corporation is not organized for any business purpose or pecuniary profit whatsoever."

The first officers of the group, according to the articles of incorporation were Charles Haas, president; H. G. Geyer, vice president; E. L. Mahan, secretary and W. I. Peck, treasurer.

Members of the board of directors were Charles Haas, E. L. Mahan, Frank H. Reed, W. M. Guthrie, J. F. Johnston, L. D. Rice, Harry I. Stewart, Frank O. Rudy, T. H. Jones, James J. Hazen, D. L. Buxton, W. I. Peck and H. G. Geyer.

The course started with nine grass greens, and were watered by pipe furnished by Neosho Ice Co., with water from the spring. However the grass greens were abandoned due to the cost of maintenance and replaced by sand greens at the same locations.

The first professional at the course was Ren Smith, brother of Horton Smith, well known professional golfer, who was also

a professional at the course.

The organization started with 100 members who paid \$100 each. Woolfenden recalled, "Very few people had ever played golf before. The best golfer we had in town was J. H. Jazen, the head of Neosho Nurseries. He was an eastern college graduate and he taught us how to play, so to speak."

Swanson recalled, "We had 12 caddies and I was one of them. We got to the course early and put our name on the board. The first name on the board was first out and so forth. We got paid 35 cents a round for singles, 50 cents for doubles and 75 cents for triples. We could carry three bags easily because the golfers only carried three or four clubs at that time. We used to make about \$4 on Sundays and \$2 on Saturdays. That was good money in those days, and what was best we got to play golf too."

Woolfenden said, "Those caddies really worked hard and played golf too. We have some of our finest golfers from these caddies and some of our finest citizens."

Both men recalled that the golf course was a beehive of activity on the Fourth of July. "We used to have flag tournaments and fireworks on the hill," Swanson said. "Bill Dougan used to tie his plane to a big hickory tree next to number five fairway and charge \$1 for taking passengers over the city."

But the golf course ran into trouble and in 1926 mortgaged the club to O. W. Rice for \$10,000.

During the early 30s, the Neosho Advertising Club, the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce did its bit to keep the club operating after the Neosho Golf and Country Club was abandoned.

Rice finally had to foreclose on the mortgage in 1934 but continued to operate the course to get some of his money back.

NEXT: The course once again becomes a popular place in Neosho.