

# **The Rise of the Municipal Golf Movement and its Influence on Frederick Law Olmsted's Franklin Park**



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In 1905 John Charles Olmsted, son of the pioneer landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, was asked to address a meeting of the American Society of Landscape Architects. His speech was more of a reminiscence of work he and his father had done for the city of Boston over the previous 35 years. His observations were filled with much pride; but there seemed to be an equal amount of regret. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in his portrait of Franklin Park.

Although believing that, "...Franklin Park [was] probably the best piece of work...done by its designer", John lamentingly described all those "disappointments in execution" that had altered a project that he himself "had a more or less responsible share in." Nowhere was he more critical than in his attack on golf in the park's Country Meadow.

"The introduction of golf-playing is an unwise sacrifice of the pleasure and comfort of many in the quiet enjoyment of the park," claimed Olmsted, "not only are the attractive and harmless sheep driven out...what is worse, the nerves of the visitor are further irritated by the anxiety as to being hit by the hard and swiftly driven balls".<sup>1</sup> To understand his anger it would help to understand the idea behind the design.

## **Franklin Park**

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<sup>1</sup>J.C. Olmsted, "The Boston Public Park System", **Transactions of the American Society of Landscape Architects 1899-1908**, p.52.

As part of the Boston Park System Franklin Park was to be unique in that it alone was to function as a "park" in the manner the Olmsted defined the word. Each other part of the system, whether it was the Muddy River Improvement or the Arnold Arboretum, was designed to fulfill a particular need. Franklin Park's role, or "service" as Olmsted once put it, was that of *rus in urbe*; a complete escape from the city while still within its environs.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, similar to Liverpool's Birkenhead Park which he was so enamored of in his early adulthood, this landscape could also help foster the democratic impulse by being a real "people's garden".<sup>3</sup>

Like Central Park 30 yrs earlier, Frederick Law Olmsted's plan for Franklin Park was to provide a place that was both healthy to the body as well as to the spirit. To the average citizen, living in a city without the benefit of modern sanitary practices, a park would be a healthy oasis. The park might also help cleanse the mind of the parkgoer-"Scenery, he decided, worked by an unconscious process to produce a relaxing and 'unbending' of faculties made tense by the strain, noise and artificial surroundings of urban life".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, "Report of the Landscape Architect Advisory" **Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Parks for the City of Boston 1881**.p.16.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, **Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England**, 2vol, (New York: G.P. Putnam) 1852, 1.,p.79

<sup>4</sup>Charles E. Beverage, "Frederick Law Olmsted's Theory on Landscape Design",**Nineteenth Century**, Summer 1977, p.40. Olmsted was very influenced by John Ruskin, and the Swiss Physician Johann Von Zimmerman who spoke of the salutary effect of scenery. He was also acquainted with Horace Bushnell, the Connecticut Clergyman

Olmsted also believed that the physical form of the landscape could be developed towards a greater social end. The city seemed to be with filled distrust, competitiveness and lack of "communitiveness"<sup>5</sup>. Hopefully the park's atmosphere could negate these malevolent feelings.

**Consider that the New York Park and Brooklyn Park are the only places in those associated cities where, in this eighteen hundred and seventieth year after Christ, you will find a body of Christians coming together...all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none,...each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile.<sup>6</sup>**

Albert Fein, a noted urban historian, has described Olmsted's work as "Social Architecture".<sup>7</sup>

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who was a great believer in the "unconscious" mind and it's effect on man.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, "Notes on the Pioneer Condition", in **The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted Vol.5**, Victoria Post Ranney ed., (Baltimore:Johns Hopkins Press) 1990, p.657. The noted sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies would later describe this sense of community as *Gemeinschaft*.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick Law Olmsted, **Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns**, a paper read before the American Social Science Association on Feb 25 1870, (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press), p.18.

<sup>7</sup>Albert Fein, **Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition**, (New York: George Braziller), 1972, p.18.

To attain these noble aspirations Olmsted used landscape design as an instrument of social change. In particular, it was the English Romantic Landscape Style that he viewed as the best antidote for the negative effects of urban living. Within this method of design there were 4 substyles: the picturesque, the pastoral, the gardenesque, and the sublime. Olmsted worked almost exclusively with the picturesque and the pastoral.

The picturesque - the copious effect attained by putting layer upon layer of vegetation within a limited area - can be found throughout many of Olmsted's parks. For example, at Scarboro Pond in Boston's Franklin Park, Olmsted combined dense, lush planting around the perimeter of the water with rustic, rough hewn stone bridges creating a scene that would help countervail the angular sterility of the city streets. But even this, Olmsted felt, was secondary to giving the city dweller the feeling of "openness".

"The beauty of the park...should be the beauty of the fields, the meadow, the prairie, of the green pastures."<sup>8</sup> Consequently John Charles believed, as did his father, that the Country Meadow was a key element in Franklin Park's design. To "nerve-wearied visitors" seeking escape from the confines of the city it seemed a shame to him that they should be banished - like the sheep - from wandering about this greensward. Furthermore, this scenery was to be enjoyed in a "receptive" way like music or art. Not with "exertive" forms of recreation like "chess or athletic sports"

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<sup>8</sup>F.L. Olmsted, **Public Parks**, p.23

which the Olmsteds felt had no place in the country park. To those people looking to "receive" the antidote of natural scenery golf was a very improper "exertive" activity indeed.<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, as Olmsted was lamenting the demise of the Country Meadow in Franklin Park, other cities, many of them with Olmsted parks of their own were drawing up plans to give their citizens the opportunity to play this increasingly popular pastime.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Rise of Sports**

The introduction of golf within urban parks was a manifestation of a general sports boom that occurred after the American Civil War. Fifty-two percent of modern day sports came into being in the 1800's with a majority of these developed during the last quarter of the century.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for this growth are varied though most are tied to directly, or indirectly, to the so-called "Second Industrial Revolution" of the post-war era.

John Betts, an eminent sports historian, cites the decline of Puritanism, the shift from a rural to an urban mindset, the impact of immigrant and frontier conditions and the promoting of sports by energetic sportsman as major factors in the sports boom. Technology, he felt, also played a

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<sup>9</sup> J.C. Olmsted, **Transactions of A.S.L.A.**, p.52.

<sup>10</sup>Tom Bendlow, "Municipal Golf: A widespread form of public recreation-some suggestions for instituting it and supervising it", **American City**, July 1916, p.3.

<sup>11</sup>Marvin Eyler, "The Origins of Contemporary Sports", **Research Quarterly**, Spring 1961, pg. 86.

significant role: the growth of railroads and the weaving of telegraph lines from city to city allowed for mass transit and mass communication. Teams could now travel great distances and have the scores of the games instantaneously known in their hometowns helping to fuel public interest. The Kodak camera allowed the capturing of sports highlights while the halftone process let them make their way into print.<sup>12</sup> All of these factors helped to give birth to a sporting "community" sharing a common language and history.

One of the more interesting aspects of looking at the development and promotion of sports in the late 19th century is how it mirrored, in many ways, the American park movement of the ante-bellum North. For example sports, like parks, were touted as giving physical relief from the strains of city living."Golf has the merit of being a real cure under real physiological conditions... the man of 70 looks 50 and the man of 50 has the appearance of 35."<sup>13</sup> The golf swing also was thought to be a great cure for the dreaded "sluggish liver".<sup>14</sup>

Sports could also open up new opportunities for certain groups of society. Ann O'Hagen, in an article entitled "The Athletic Girl" declared that "absolutely no other special achievement on the behalf of women is so important and so far reaching in its results, with the single exception of

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<sup>12</sup>John R. Betts, **America's Sporting Heritage, 1850-1950**, (Reading, MA:Addison-Wesley), 1974, pp. 8-18.

<sup>13</sup>Editorial, **Golfing Magazine**, quoting The Hospital Medical Journal of London, pg.77.

<sup>14</sup>Bendlow, **Municipal Golf**, p.5.

the improvement of the legal status of women, than the [sport] revolution which has meant as much psychologically as it [does] physically."<sup>15</sup> Sports brought to all people a feeling of individual accomplishment in a society that was becoming increasingly homogenous and regimented.

Athletics might also help better that society. Most proponents of sporting games championed the concept of "fair-play" and "sportsmanship" believing these principles would be carried into the person's everyday life. "In this age of appreciable Change, Americans engaged in a quest for meaning - the moral side of a search for order - in which the fusion of contemplation and action loomed as an aching need."<sup>16</sup> Frederick Olmsted once said he had sold "being for doing" expressing perhaps the feelings of those people in the late 19th century who looked nostalgically towards an inaccessible uncomplicated past while looking apprehensively towards an increasingly competitive future.

Like the park movement that preceded it, the sport movement as a democratic influence was often more theory than practice. Douglas Noverr believes that sports played a role in promoting social reintegration and new connections within a community that had been displaced by

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<sup>15</sup>Anne O'Hagen, "The Athletic Girl", **Muncey's Magazine**, August 1901, p.223. Many people believe that Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color line in 1947 was as significant as any moment in Civil Rights history.

<sup>16</sup>Donald J. Mrozec, **Sport and the American Mentality 1880-1910**, (Knoxville: Univ. of Tenn. Press), 1983, p.250.



industrialization.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately the sporting clubs of the upper class were as far away as the carriage roads of Franklin Park to the person working within the factory's walls:

**The golf links lie so near the mill  
That almost every day  
The laboring children can look out  
And see the men at play<sup>18</sup>**

Although sports movement looked to help the body, the mind, and society through the rigors of spirited athletic competition it remained confined to a relatively small group of Americans and was predicated on a pay to play basis. Even those city dwellers who could afford the equipment needed to find the space on which to play. Consequently, almost from the beginning, many involved with sports cast their eyes covetously towards their "empty" public parks.<sup>19</sup> Nowhere was this more true than with those persons who wished to chase a tiny white ball across miles of open ground.

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<sup>17</sup>Douglas Noverr, **The Games They Played: Sports in American History 1865-1980**, (Chicago:Nelson-Hall), 1983, p.14

<sup>18</sup>A poem by Sarah N. Cleghorn circa 1900 as quoted in **Saga of American Sport**, John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith eds., (Philadelphia :Lea & Febiger), 1978, P.162.

<sup>19</sup>Alexander Von Hoffman, "Of Greater Lasting Consequence": Frederick Law Olmsted and the Fate of Franklin Park", **Journal of the Society of Architectural History**, Dec 1988, p.339. Hoffman notes the irony that Olmsted's use of the pastoral style, having no visual center, made the space look empty and therefore available.

## **The Rise of Golf**

In terms of popularity, golf was a relative latecomer within the United States. The game though is thought to be an ancient sport, one of the first signs of its existence being an edict in 1445 banning it in Scotland - supposedly it was interfering with archery practice. The game however was not be suppressed and with the eventual backing of royalty, golf kept gaining in popularity.<sup>20</sup> In 1754 a committee was established to institute one set of rules for the game. This date, when the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrew's was formed, is traditionally regarded as the birthdate of modern golf.

Around the same time the Scots were setting down rules an entry was made in the manifest of a ship leaving the Port of Leith for Charleston, North Carolina. Stored away with the wool and scotch were "96 gouff clubs, one iron ditto and seven dozen balls".<sup>21</sup> For the next century golf persisted as an ethnic tradition within the Scottish-American community. It was not until the end of the 19th century that golf would filter into the general public.

The first organized golf club was The St. Andrews' Golf club in Yonkers (the apostrophe was moved one space to avoid confusion). Founded in 1888, it consisted of a group of friends, more

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<sup>20</sup>Chris Plumridge, **The Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Golf**, (New York: Exeter Press), 1988, p. 9. At Mary Queen of Scots trial she was accused, among other things, of playing golf in Seton Fields the day after the death of the Earl of Darnley.

<sup>21</sup>John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith, **Saga of American Sport**, (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger), 1978, p.39.

often called the Apple Tree Gang, who played the game in one of the member's orchards. Three years later the first "designed" course was laid out for the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club by Willie Dunn.<sup>22</sup> By the early 1890's the time was ripe for golf to be introduced to the Boston area, which it was, via Pau, France!

In the summer of 1892 Florence Boit returned from her "Grand Tour" and was to spend some time resting with her uncle, Arthur Hunnewell, at his Wellesley estate. Soon after settling in she inquired where she might find a golf course to play since she had purchased some clubs in France where she learned the game. Apparently her uncle's answer was: "What's a course?". Quickly, a six hole course was laid out on the lawn of the estate as well as those of neighboring relatives. Situated amid the gardens of the Hunnewell estate it must have been a scenic course if nothing else. Soon guests were being given exhibitions by Miss Boit and Hunnewell, of this new and somewhat strange game. Hunnewell also thought that golf might be of interest to his friends at the Brookline Country Club. Apparently he was right, for in November of 1892 the club earmarked \$50 dollars for the layout of a golf "court".<sup>23</sup> Six months later Hunnewell and two other members christened the course with an exhibition before a sizable gallery. Hunnewell, given the honor at the first tee, proceeded to strike the ball directly into the hole. The crowd

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<sup>22</sup>"Willie Dunn", **Golfing**, June 1895, p.345. Willie is also given credit for course a designed at the Biltmore Estate for George Washington Vanderbilt and Shelburne Farms in Vermont.

<sup>23</sup>Elmer Osgood Cappers, "Willie Campbell: First Golf Professional at the Country Club Brookline, Massachusetts.1894-1896", (**Unpublished**), p.6., Mr. Cappers is the Historian for the club and was a great help in researching Willie Campbell.

thinking this was the object of the game, like shooting a basketball, clapped politely but were somewhat disappointed with the rest of the round.<sup>24</sup> Eventually the club members came to realize the difficulty of the game. In 1894 the club brought from Scotland its' first golf pro, Willie Campbell.

### **The Push for Public Golf**

After the founding of St. Andrews' and Shinnecock Hills golf spread rapidly through what a writer for the New York Times called "The Smart Set". From the shores of Newport to the fields of Southampton golf seemed destined to join Polo and Yachting as a pastime for the "idle rich". Fortunately in New York city there were people who did not want golf to remain a captive of the upper class. In the spring of 1895, bowing to a vociferous group of golfers, the "public spirited" New York City Park Commission founded the first public golf course at Van Cortlant Park in the Bronx.<sup>25</sup> **Golfing**, the country's first golf magazine, sounded like Frederick Law Olmsted when they noted: "In England these public links are found everywhere; indeed, old St. Andrews itself is, in a sense, public property. It is a blessing that we in America...have taken up this phase of the game"

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<sup>24</sup>Jack Mahoney, **The Golf History Of New England**, (Framingham, MA: Wellesley Press) 1973, p.29.

<sup>25</sup>**New York Times April 5 1895**

The course was so popular that by 1899 the City hired Tom Bendlow as its golf pro and made plans for him to lay out 9 more holes next to the original 18. This expansion was to perhaps resolve scenes like this N.Y. Times report:

**"The biggest problem is the players do not follow common etiquette. Players who had just driven from the tee found others following before they had reached the green, and amid a mass of flying balls, wild shouts of warning, and inextricable confusion that sometimes occurred, it is a wonder that serious accidents were averted and that any enjoyment was obtained"**<sup>26</sup>

Add to this the fact that caddies used this raucous atmosphere to "unmercifully fleece" the golfers and it is amazing that cities from across the country were looking to make their own golf courses.

By the turn of the century committees from across the country came to visit the course it being the subject of "commendation and approval".<sup>27</sup> In the fall of 1895 delegates from the cities of Boston and Philadelphia visited Van Cortlant to see if they wished to follow New York's example<sup>28</sup>- At least one of them did.

## **Golf in Franklin Park**

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<sup>26</sup>**N.Y. Times March 12 1899**

<sup>27</sup>**New York City Department of Parks Annual Report 1899 p.23**

<sup>28</sup>**"Editorial", Outing, Dec 1895, p.675.**

Golf has been a part of Franklin Park's history almost since the inception of the park itself. Less than 6 years after Olmsted unveiled his **General Plan for Franklin Park** the minutes of the Boston Park Commission noted a letter they had received from a Mr. George Wright requesting that he be allowed the "privilege" to play golf in Franklin Park. Arguing that it would not draw of crowd nor ... "cause noise or injure shrubbery" [sic], he closed the letter by saying "[He] would guarantee that if granted the privilege all will be well".

The story goes that Wright, who owned a sporting goods store on Washington Street, had ordered some cricket equipment from England. To his surprise the box he received was instead filled with golf clubs and golf balls. Trying to make the best of it he set out for Franklin Park to give the game a try. Unfortunately, a policeman on duty at the park was not sympathetic to his aim citing the danger to people walking. Wright though, would not be denied, so he sent the forementioned letter to the Park Commission.<sup>29</sup> Amazingly, although both Frederick Law Olmsted and his son John Charles were present at this meeting, permission was granted, albeit on an "experimental" basis.<sup>30</sup> What is even more unusual is that the commission almost never granted at this period in time requests for any active recreation. A group of boys from Roxbury had less than a month earlier asked to use the Playsted for football during the fall months. The board voted not to allow them use of the field even though this was a part of the park that was set

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<sup>29</sup>Mahoney, p.27. Wright would later say that his initial written request was denied but the park minutes say different.

<sup>30</sup>**Records of the Minutes of the Boston Park Commission, Dec 7, 1890.**

aside for such "exertive" recreation.<sup>31</sup> While there is no evidence of impropriety between Wright and the board it is interesting to note that Wright's sporting goods store did do business with the city.<sup>32</sup>

So with permit in hand on Dec 10th 1890 George Wright and three of his friends set out to the park. Armed with their golf clubs and **Badminton Library's Rules of Golf** they traversed what is now part of the zoo and what Olmsted had called Sargent's field. Earlier in the day Wright had sent one of his employees, John Smith, to the park to "design" a golf course. This young man apparently was even less familiar with the game than Wright, for not only did several of the six fairways criss-cross, the holes themselves were made square. To complete the scene, twigs were found and topped with pieces of ripped flannel for flags.

It must have been quite a sight as the foursome, wearing Scottish golfing caps, wandered about the park striking what was then a feather stuffed leather ball towards little twigs . "Everyone was extremely happy throughout Wright reported, although his stockboy/golf course architect was not so impressed: "There's too much walking and hill-climbing for the game to go over".<sup>33</sup> A reporter from the Boston Herald was also less than enthusiastic: The Royal game of Golf was

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<sup>31</sup>**RMBPC, Nov 17, 1890**

<sup>32</sup>**RMBPC Dec 14, 1896** The fact that Wright was a Hall of Fame Shortstop with the Boston Red Stockings probably didn't hurt his chances with the gentleman.

<sup>33</sup>Mahoney p.27

played on local grounds yesterday for the first time in the history of this city...But when the contest came off spectators were conspicuous by their absence."<sup>34</sup> Wright also became weary of the game, especially after he and some friends broke their clubs while trying to play in the wet sand at Revere Beach. Although George Wright can be given credit or blame for introducing golf into Franklin Park it was a Scotsman who help to establish it as a permanent feature of the park landscape.

As mentioned earlier, Willie Campbell was hired by The Country Club of Brookline to become their first golf professional. From 1894 until the end of 1895 Campbell fixed clubs, corrected golf swings and helped improve the club's "links".<sup>35</sup> While he was involved with helping the rich and famous with their slices he also became an active proponent of the public golf. Very impressed with New York's efforts at Van Cortlant Park he thought that "lack of these public links [were] the greatest defect in the game." To help gain support he looked to Park Commissioner John Andrews but apparently was rebuffed with the excuse that "the time was not ripe".<sup>36</sup> Perhaps Willie employed the same arguments that H.S. Wagner used promoting municipal golf in the 1920's. Wagner pointed out to a meeting of park executives that golf courses were originally established in Scotland on common land over which each inhabitant had

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<sup>34</sup>Boston Herald, December 11 1890

<sup>35</sup>Cappers, p.9.

<sup>36</sup>"Willie Campbell" Golfing, Sept 1895, p.345 In 1897 the mayor of Buffalo supposably lost an election due to his golf playing which was still considered elitist. Andrews may have wanted to stay clear of the game.



some right. He also noted that most Scottish courses are community rather than private undertakings.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the reason, the city eventually acquiesced to their golfing constituency and Willie Campbell was hired by the city as Franklin Park's first golf pro.<sup>38</sup> Edward C. Hodges, the Commission's chairman, was the apparent sponsor of golf in the park and he arranged it so that Willie could charge 12 1/2 cents per round along with "what he could make of it" by selling his services.<sup>39</sup> Besides this Campbell was also authorized to design formal golf holes - which he did immediately. There are no drawings of these 9 original holes though one might suspect they are approximately where the solid lines are in a 1914 plan. These 9 holes were altered in 1901<sup>40</sup> along with the adding of 6 holes (dotted lines) to act as a beginner's course.<sup>41</sup> For the comfort of the golfers the Schoolmaster Hill Shelter was converted into a golf house, the alterations being

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<sup>37</sup>H.S. Wagner, "Benefit of Municipal Golf", **Parks and Recreation** March/April 1924 pp.34-35 Wagner was the Park Director for Summit County Ohio, another Olmsted Project.

<sup>38</sup>Cappers, p.13., Elmer Cappers believes that the members of at The Country Club fired Willie due to his stance on public golf. Of course their loss was Franklin Park's gain.

<sup>39</sup>**RMBPC, Dec 21, 1896**

<sup>40</sup> George H. Sargent, "Golfing 'round the Hub", **Outing Magazine**, May 1899, p.131. Sargent describes three holes as being 120, 542, and 498 yards long, these were in 1901 altered to become the 6th 4th and 7th holes respectfully as shown on 1914 map.

<sup>41</sup>**RMBPC, March 15, 1901.** The city authorized \$400 dollars for this revision and addition .

drawn up by Alexander W. Longfellow,<sup>42</sup> and golf club racks were installed for the golfer's convenience.

Willie never got to see these changes. He died in November of 1900 not yet 40 years old. The Campbell influence did continue though, as his wife Georgina took charge of the course after his death.<sup>43</sup> This arrangement did not last very long. In 1901 the city took over the management of the increasingly popular attraction.

The playing of golf in Franklin Park increased dramatically during the first few years of this century. In 1904 the Annual Report of the Park Commission reported that 47,469 golfers availed themselves of the opportunity of walking the Country Meadow.

Even though the course was closed on Saturday afternoons, Sundays, and public holidays, there were still some who were unable to live with golf. The Park Commission received numerous complaints from people wishing to negotiate the field without being pelted with golf balls. Mrs. A. J. Sinclair wrote a stinging letter about her experiences with the risk of being struck. The

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<sup>42</sup>**RMBPC, March 20 1901.** Longfellow was the nephew of the poet. His firm designed the Arnold Arboretum's Hunnewell Visitor's Center.

<sup>43</sup>Cappers, p.13. Mr. Capper's was told by Georgina's descendants that she was the first women golf pro in America. This would pre-date New York City's by 70 years.

matter was referred to the Superintendent asking him to appease the lady.<sup>44</sup> One golfer who played at the park told of a "choleric" old gentleman who persisted in walking directly in the line of his play. Even when FORE! was shouted the man refused to give way. On the third shot the old man turned and threatened to have the golfer arrested if he hit him. The duffer tried to explain the game was to hit the ball towards the green but the man fired back "That's all right, but just don't you dare hit me!"<sup>45</sup> There was one gentleman who wanted the golfers and the sheep out of the meadow complaining about the desecration of the grass.<sup>46</sup> There were some sympathetic to their complaints.

In 1910 the city asked the Olmsted Brothers firm to give their impressions and advice on the park system that their father had designed.<sup>47</sup> In words similar to the earlier speech before the A.S.L.A. the report calls for the removal of golf from the Country Meadow, "first during busy times and later entirely", and justifying this stance in a true utilitarian tone "for the greater good of the greater number".<sup>48</sup> As was usual the Commission ignored most of the firm's advice. Even if they had given it thought they would have had to decide by September 19th 1913 for this was

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<sup>44</sup>Cappers, p.13.

<sup>45</sup>Sargent, p. 132

<sup>46</sup>**RMBPC, May 11 1897**

<sup>47</sup>Cynthia Zaitzevsky, **Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System**, (Cambridge MA:Belknap Press), 1982 , endnote 53, p.248.

<sup>48</sup>In "Report of the Olmsted Brothers" **Boston Park Commission Annual Report[BPCAR] 1911.** p.76.

the day Boston again to hear "The shot heard around the world" - this one fired by a young man from Brookline.

Francis Ouimet grew up on Clyde Street just a chip shot from The Country Club's 17th green. Involved early in his life with athletics he would eventually come to learn and love the game of golf. He first started experimenting with it in his backyard playing over a 3 hole course he and his older brother had laid out. His clubs were from Wright & Ditson's Sporting Goods Store where he worked as a stock-boy. Growing tired of his homemade course he would trespass across the street but was soon wary of the endless chases with irate greenkeepers. Eventually he convinced a friend to go to Franklin Park since they could play there "unmolested". Setting out by way of public transportation they had to make a half dozen changes before finally reaching Blue Hill Ave. Then it was another 3/4 mile walk to the clubhouse. Then after playing "six full rounds", they reversed the procedure arriving home "completely exhausted".<sup>49</sup> From this humble start Ouimet's star would burn brightly in the sporting world. In September of 1913 Francis would, over the course of 4 days, struggle with and finally vanquish the world's top golfers Harry Vardon and Ted Ray; all within view of his front porch. After this dramatic U.S. Open victory the whole town, in fact the whole country, looked for a place to golf. By 1915 the Park Commission realized that the course would not be able to handle the amount of people wanting

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<sup>49</sup>Francis Ouimet, **The Game of Golf: A Book of Remembrance**, (Hanover MA:Halliday Press) p.35.

play and it was "obvious" that 18 holes were needed<sup>50</sup> This sporting event/recreational provision paradigm can also be seen in the establishment of lawn tennis in Franklin Park after Eleonora Randolph Sears became all the rage winning mixed doubles 4 times. The building of the Kelly Rink in Olmsted Park during the early 1960's might also be traced to the success of the Boston Bruins during that period.<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately the expansion of the course would have to be put on hold. In 1918 to help the war effort the Committee of Public Safety was granted permission to tear up the links and plant vegetables.<sup>52</sup> With the "return to normalcy" golfing greens replaced collard greens and golf came back with a vengeance as the city decided to make Franklin Park a "Championship Course".

### **Golf in the 1920's**

The 1920's were the golden age for golf as duffers followed the exploits of Bobby Jones, Walter Hagen and Gene Sarazen. This was reflected at Franklin Park as attendance skyrocketed, reaching close to 75,000 golfers per year by the end of the decade. Another reason for this

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<sup>50</sup>**BPCAR 1915, p.10.** Arthur Comey, a noted landscape architect felt that 18 holes should be the minimum for a course open to the public. **Landscape Architecture, October 1920.,p.19.** This is now considered to be a cardinal rule in public golf course architecture.

<sup>51</sup>**Olmsted Park Historic Landscape Report,** Prepared by Richard Burck, Cynthia Zaitzevsky ed., Department of Environmental Management Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Draft Submission, 1986, Chap.5, p.6.

<sup>52</sup>**RMPBC. April 16 1918**

growth can be attributed to the overturning of the "Sunday Laws" regarding amateur sports in 1920.<sup>53</sup>

The city also went through a conversion. The course which had been "no-fee" since the city took it over from the Campbell was now seen as an untapped revenue source. Beginning a new "arrangement" in 1923 each golfer would now pay a "nominal fee" of either 10 dollars per year or one dollar per round.<sup>54</sup> In the first year of the course brought in \$19,683.<sup>55</sup>

The idea that golf could be a revenue enhancer was not ignored by other cities. Across the river in Cambridge plans were drawn up to use the north-west shore of the Fresh Pond Reservoir as a public golf course. Arthur Comey, a founding member of the A.S.L.A., championed the idea and had the backing of Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. whose firm had been involved with Fresh Pond 30 years earlier.<sup>56</sup> In 1932 the State Legislature granted permission for the city to use the water basin for a golf course. The work was completed under the direction of the Unemployment

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<sup>53</sup>Hardy, p.60. As late as the 1890's golfers had been arrested for violating the Sabbath. 9 Harvard students were arrested in 1897 and the next year The Country Club was raided and over 30 surprised golfers were apprehended.

<sup>54</sup>**BPCAR, 1924**, p.11.

<sup>55</sup>**1924 Annual Report**, p.57. This amount would have covered all the expenditures for Olmsted Park or 3/5 of the amount of the Fens.

<sup>56</sup>Arthur C. Comey, "Adapting a Park to Modern Needs", **Landscape Architecture**, Oct 1927, pp. 176-178.

Committee of the Cambridge Industrial Association.<sup>57</sup> Whether or not it was a good idea to put such a fertilizer dependent landscape next to a water source is debatable.

In the mid 1920's it was estimated that within the next 10-15 years there would be perhaps as many as 15 million more golfers needing 3,000,000 more acres of land.<sup>58</sup> Even during this land rush there were people within the municipal golf movement who were aware of the difficulty of combining public golf with a rural park landscape. Some were antagonistic towards what they saw as scenery created for "the cultured class" who had carriages in which to ride and enjoy it. It was to the great mass of people that the parks belonged, they argued, and it was their prerogative to exercise.<sup>59</sup> Others were more sympathetic and realized that golf and parks were not so antithetical. H. S. Wagner noted in 1925 that "we are not likely to see the duplication of fine scenic parks as Franklin Park...and golf is the one form of recreation that permits the retention of [this] park scenery." He also believed that golf could also create "fine, broad landscapes inside the city".<sup>60</sup> The Germans today are combining "nature" and golf. The playing area, which only makes up 30% of the course, is sacrosanct. But the rest of the land is "renatured" with great

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<sup>57</sup>City of Cambridge, Park Department Annual Report 1932, p.10.

<sup>58</sup>H.S. Wagner, "Municipal Golf --It's Relation to Park Land Acquisition Policies", **American City**, August 1927, pp.164-166.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Bendelow, "Municipal Golf", **American City**, July 1916, pp.2-4.

<sup>60</sup>H.S. Wagner, "Municipal Golf - It's Influence on Park and Recreation Affairs", **Park and Cemetery**, February, 1925, p.6.

consideration given to maintain the "genius of the place".<sup>61</sup> Today it is estimated that there needs to be 400 new courses built per year to keep up with demand.<sup>62</sup> Ideas like Germany's could provide breathing space between golfers and conservationists.

### **Golf in the Depression**

The depression severely curtailed the development of all sports. Golf, on which more money was expended for equipment in 1929 than on the combined total of baseball, football, basketball, boxing and tennis combined was possibly the hardest hit.<sup>63</sup>

The depression's effect on Franklin Park's golf course was negligible. Even during the most severe economic times the course still ran in the black. In fact it was during these years that the city spent \$30,000 to enact Donald Ross' design for the George Wright Golf Course at Stoney Brook. Most of the people who grew up in the Franklin Park neighborhood during this time remember golf being very much a part of the park experience; whether it was stealing golf balls

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<sup>61</sup>Tony Hiss, **Experience of Place**, (New York:Alfred Knoff Inc.), p.176. Karl Grohs a course architect says the first question he asks is not how many strokes the hole will take but how many birds and amphibians.

<sup>62</sup>Elizabeth Schroeder, "Plying Golf in the Park", Parks and Recreation, May 1991, pp. 42-43.

<sup>63</sup>Lucas and Smith, p.320.



and selling them for profit, as author Theodore H. White did,<sup>64</sup> or being involved with less larcenous activities:

**"My memories of Franklin Park are almost always associated with the Golf Course. I remember being on the 8th fairway looking down on the tee where my father and friends were teeing off. I can still see the ball coming to me through the air...The first time I caddied I was 12 years old...I will always have fond memories of carrying for my father."**

**Arthur Erskine of West Roxbury**

In terms of design, the most significant occurrence was the partial filling of Scarboro Pond in 1936 where the pond crossed the course - or vice versa.<sup>65</sup> Although the depression did not severely curtail golf in Franklin Park it did signal the end of an era.

### **Decline and Renewal**

Golf remained relatively popular in Franklin Park during and after the Second World War. Attendance did decline somewhat during the late 1940's, with only 23,000 golfers using the course in 1947.<sup>66</sup> Around this time period the golf house was moved from the Refectory to its present location. A steady rise during the 1950's saw the course rebound peaking with 51,324 rounds played in 1960. Maintenance too was relatively high, \$24,656 was spent on the course

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<sup>64</sup>**Franklin Park Notes: Franklin Park Coalition Newsletter May 1985.** White is best known for his book on John F. Kennedy, **The Making of the President.**

<sup>65</sup>**Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission on the potential designation of FRANKLIN PARK as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the acts of 1975.**

<sup>66</sup>**BPCAR 1948, p. 36.**

during the same year compared with just \$167.50 spent on Olmsted Park.<sup>67</sup> But after a slow decline in the mid-60's the bottom dropped out in 1968.

In 1967 the William Devine Golf Course (named as a memorial to a former park commissioner) had serviced 32,600 golfers - the next year only 16,951. What happened? In this single instance a good guess would be the racial climate during a riotous 1968. But this was just a symptom of a much broader issue.

The shift in demographics, or "White Flight", certainly played a part in this drop-off. By the late 1960's what had once been an overwhelmingly Jewish neighborhood, surrounding approximately half the park, had become the largest African-American community in Boston. There have been volumes written on the relationship, or non-relationship, African-Americans have had with golf. The Professional Golfers Association had, up until the 1950's, a "Caucasian Only" clause. In Atlanta it took a Supreme Court ruling to open up their city courses to all its citizens. Even at Augusta, a course that the Harvard educated "gentleman" Bobby Jones had founded, a black man was not invited to play until 1974.<sup>68</sup> In more recent times there was the Shoal Creek Club incident, which involved a P.G.A. sanctioned event being played at a club that overtly discriminated against blacks. This caused an uproar so great that the tour instituted a policy that forbade an event from being played at a club that discriminated. In this atmosphere it

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<sup>67</sup>**BPCAR, 1961** p.26.

<sup>68</sup>Guil Jones, "Past Greats" **Black Sports**, (July 1973), p.64-65, see also Noverr, p.245.

is not surprising that the course was not on the community's "A" list. This makes the tale of the Franklin Park Golfers Association even more amazing.

By 1970 the golf course saw less than 14,000 people walk what was left of it.<sup>69</sup> Suffering from public indifference and fear of crime the back nine holes were left to grow wild. Those die-hard golfers using the front nine usually had to play around abandoned cars and kitchen appliances to get to what was a green in hue only. In 1973 the Golf House was destroyed by fire and was left a burnt-out shell until 1978.<sup>70</sup> Out of this chaos arose The Franklin Park Golf Association, a group of men from the neighborhood who would not let the course die. Often using their own funds and borrowed equipment they battled to keep 6 holes open.<sup>71</sup> George Lyons, a member of the Association and current golf pro at Franklin Park explains: "The thinking was to keep the course open until money could be secured for its restoration." Eventually with the help of then Park Commissioner Bob McCoy they approached the Commonwealth, and with the co-operation of the city the renaissance began.<sup>72</sup> One of the early coups by the city was getting a grant from the state to reconstruct the course's irrigation lines.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>**BPCAR 1971, p.16.**

<sup>70</sup>**Revised General Plan of Franklin Park, City of Boston Parks and Recreation Department, 1980. p.45.**

<sup>71</sup>Michael P. Quinlin, "Franklin Park: Something for Everyone", Parks and Recreation, June 1991, p.96.

<sup>72</sup>**Phone Conversation with George Lyons 4/3/93.**

<sup>73</sup>**Franklin Park Coalition Bulletin Feb 1986.**

The majority of the funding for the restoration came from Mayor Flynn's "Rebuilding Boston" program. Out of the \$1.01 billion capitol improvement plan the Parks and Recreation department got \$120 million with \$1.3 million filtering down to the course. To help implement the rejuvenation of the course the city turned to Bill Flynn and his golf course management company. "When the city asked for bids for the Franklin Park work," Flynn recalls, "some reached as high as \$1.9 million. But Boston had only \$997,000 in available funding. I told them throw in another \$100,000 and we'd get the course in playable condition."<sup>74</sup>

The city also acquired the services of the landscape architectural firm of Johann Wagner & Assoc. of Framingham, Ma.. Working closely with the firm was Phil Wogan Jr., a golf course architect, whose father had worked for the city 50 years earlier on the course. Wogan described the course as a "shambles". His main job, as he perceived it, was to just get the course into playable condition doing most of his work around the tees and greens.<sup>75</sup> To help satisfy those people who viewed the course as an intrusion on the meadow he reluctantly set those sand traps near the roads below sight-level. Gene Bollanger of Johann Wagner Assoc. remarked that another goal was to give the meadow uniform texture and to contour the areas around the

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<sup>74</sup>Gary Larrabee, "Hands on with Bill Flynn", **Massachusetts Golfer**, Fall 1990, p.24-30.

<sup>75</sup>**Phone Conversation With Phil Wogan 4/5/93.**

greens.<sup>76</sup> Wogan wished he could have done more but between budget considerations and certain pressure groups his hands felt somewhat tied. There were still those who would have preferred the course be reduced to 9 holes or, even better, be gone entirely. One problem that Wogan could not address and that he saw as being a significant problem was drainage on the course. Since the 19th c. this has been a dilemma in the Country Meadow. A Franklin Park Master Plan published in 1990 cited drainage as a major problem the entire drainage system being "undersized and in poor condition".<sup>77</sup> A proposal has been made and accepted to build an artificial lake on the right side of the 9th green near the Abbottswood area. This would be fed by 2 tributaries running above ground from the 18th and the 6th hole. This would hopefully alleviate some of the drainage problems.

Barring a few wet feet the rebirth of the golf course was looked at as part of a general upswing for the park as a whole. To get in on the good feelings several companies donated time and money to the course. The Five Cents Savings Bank of Boston has given money for a junior golf program looking to copy Atlanta's municipal golf program which has put 16 minority youths in college via golf.<sup>78</sup> A couple of years ago Boston Park Commissioner Larry Dwyer and members

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<sup>76</sup>**Phone Conversation with Gene Bollanger of Wagner & Assoc. 4/14/93.**

<sup>77</sup>**Franklin Park Master Plan 1990**, Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Prepared by: Haverson Company, Inc., Boston, MA 1990.

<sup>78</sup>Editorial: "The People's Golf Course", **Boston Globe May 29 1989.**

of the Franklin Park Golf Assoc. traveled to Atlanta to attend a conference dealing with junior golf programs.<sup>79</sup>

The official reopening of the golf course in 1989 had Chi-Chi Rodriguez as a special guest who gave a free golf clinic to hundreds of local children. "There was an incredible feeling of elation that day" remembers Commissioner Dwyer. The continued success of the course is a combined effort added Patrick Harrington, deputy commissioner: "as landlord the city ensures the park's upkeep, stability and public accessibility. The Golf Management group gives the course a professional and technical dimension that ensures quality greens, solvency, and profitability for the city. And the community group provides the hands-on, daily operational aspects plus the collective memory of the sweat equity that went into reviving the course".<sup>80</sup>

One can argue whether or not it was proper to place a golf course in a meadow that was designed and held precious by the persons who conceived it. We know that the Olmsted's thought that golf was "unwise" and inappropriate to their vision of an urban park. But we should look closely at what the course has brought to the neighborhood and the city who the park ultimately serves.

For one thing, it has provided a healthy, although "exertive", activity to the over 40,000 people who avail themselves of it each year. Whether it helps one to "unbend" the mind is debatable,

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<sup>79</sup>Editorial: "Breaking the Green's Color Line", **Boston Globe August 17 1991.**

<sup>80</sup>Quinlin, p.97.

but it does help leave the city behind for the four hours you're playing. Olmsted argued that sports can have a sanitary effect on one's physical and mental health but it is only natural scenery that can be a true antidote.

No matter if this is true, the fact remains that in contemporary America it is much easier to fund a golf course than an empty meadow no matter how beautiful. The only thing empty space seems to attract is abandoned cars and apathy. People want to be entertained. That is why the Arnold Arboretum seems to be filling the role that Olmsted originally envisioned for Franklin Park. But Olmsted would have argued that the Arboretum could not function in this role. In fact, he was quite explicit in his instructions that no type of "curiosities" or any thing for the "advancement of science" find their way into the park.

The park was designed in a time before automobiles, before television, and before a philosophy of design, rooted in West European thought, would be challenged by an increasingly diversified populous. Perhaps the most indefensible argument is that the park should be preserved as a work of art. A landscape architect I spoke to who was involved with a Master Plan for the park used as a criteria, "whether golf was good or bad for the park" as if the park was a sentient being. He felt the course was, in his words "a black thing". If one is to treat the park like a work of art then one should also realize that Olmsted himself believed that "Service precede[ed] Art" and that utility should direct the aesthetic impulse.

If the service of the park is to be salutary to the body and mind than there is certainly enough ammunition on both sides to justify keeping or removing the golf course. But if the goal of fostering "communitiveness", is just as important then surely what golfing has brought to Franklin Park is to be lauded. A feeling of community brought the course back from the brink of oblivion and has been instrumental in maintaining it. It has become arguably the most racially diverse 125 acres in the city. The Boston Globe calls it "desegregation in reverse" with a 50-50 ratio of black and white players. Would this happen without the course?

**Visitors often with their families, enjoy picnicking along the rim of this lush oasis. Franklin Park is rich in mature plantings - trees tower overhead and shrubs meld in a cascade of foliage. As foursomes move from one golf hole to the next they are so surrounded by dense greenery that they lose all sense of being in the city. The good that has already come from restoring this course goes far beyond giving golfers a place to play. This is a course where golfers of all races and ages and both sexes come together in harmony. They will come away the better having enjoyed each others company along the links.**

**"Common Ground" Boston Globe 1990**

**Thus you see...all classes coming together with a common purpose...each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile.**

**Frederick Law Olmsted, Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns**

1870



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