



BY BOB LABBANCE

THE STORM

"Whether we turn to the temples of Greece, to the aqueducts or baths of Rome, to the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages or the palaces and churches of the Renaissance in no case will we find the perfected structure for the

special use until after years of fumbling and experimentation leading by trial and error to a gradual mastery of the problem," wrote architect Clifford Charles Wendehack in his monumental 1929 work *Golf & Country Clubs*.

"We must remember," he continued, "that the clubs at the outset were small in membership, that the funds available were limited, that the more or less ramshackle farmhouse or even a half tumbled down barn might seem a welcome addition to a leased acreage." But by the end of the 1920s Americans had put their distinctive, and grandiose stamp on the ancient game. "Having built up the fabric of elaboration and being accustomed to greater conveniences and equipment in this country than abroad, architects and building committees entrusted with the construction of new clubs find no alternative but to keep pace with the times." In other words, an apple tree at the first tee no longer satisfied members as it once had served St. Andrew's, America's first golfing outpost in Yonkers, New York.

Though the physical structure took on many sizes and shapes, a good clubhouse became essential to the long-term health and prosperity of a successful golf club. Today you can buy balls at the golf warehouse, pick up a snack at the local convenience store, and put on your shoes in the car, but what would golf be without a place to unwind with buddies, and spin the tales of your adventure after a round?

"What an institution it is, the clubhouse, and the bar," states golf professional and television commentator Peter Alliss. "I often think that the golf club bar is built before the course, and is really the key factor in the club."

The first such gathering place for Vermont golfers was a second floor room in the Arvin Harrington home on Church Street in Dorset, and

ABOVE LEFT: MONTAGUE'S CLUBHOUSE IS QUINTESSENTIAL VERMONT; COMFORTABLE, CORDIAL, AND COZY.

ABOVE RIGHT: EVERY CLUBHOUSE NEEDS A PORCH WITH A VIEW LIKE BLUSH HILL'S.

LEFT TOP: THE ST. JOHNSBURY CLUBHOUSE WAS PART OF THE ORIGINAL FARM, PURCHASED IN 1923, AND REMODELED SEVERAL TIMES FOR GOLF.

LEFT BOTTOM: WOODSTOCK'S RETREAT IS WELL APPOINTED AND TASTEFUL.

Photographs by Bob Labbance unless otherwise noted.

starting in 1886 the original members at the Dorset Field Club would gather there to exchange stories and appreciate the early golf clubs that Harrington fashioned to equip his merry band of Scots. It's likely that at least one shelf in the small room was reserved for a bottle of single malt scotch.

Shortly afterwards the group moved across the street to another private residence, before building Woodruff Hall, a permanent home that included "parlors for ladies and gentlemen, a dancing hall fitted with a stage for entertainments, card rooms, a shuffle board and all modern conveniences," according to club records. The dedication took place in August of 1896.

The following year would see three golf club houses built in Vermont, starting with a June 12, 1897 opening of the Rutland Golf Club. The contract for construction of a 22-foot square building was awarded to J.E. Betts on April 30, and he did not disappoint the membership in discharging his obligations. The opening was attended by 300 members and guests less than six weeks later. "The house is a simple, square affair of tasteful construction, with fireplace within and abounding piazzas without, perfectly adapted to its purpose," commented the *Rutland Herald*, also noting Betts as the winner of the opening day competition.

A gathering place of similar size and design was dedicated at the Hillside Golf Club about a month later. It replaced a simple shed twelve-foot-square that had served this forerunner to today's well-appointed Equinox layout. The Mount Anthony Club in Bennington chose to renovate an abandoned school house from the Mt. Anthony Seminary, and opened on the fifth of July with Goldsmith's Orchestra for entertainment and a tennis match in 103 degree heat.

Woodstock would use a tent from its inception in 1895 until 1899 when a golf house was opened, while the players at Mountain View in Greensboro stored their clubs in an upright piano that served at the first tee until 1904. The piano gave way to a tiny room which, according to founder Franklyn B. Snyder, "furnished a bit of **SHELTER** where nails served as lockers, and where at least tobacco and matches could be kept dry during the torrential showers."

TOP: THE INTERIOR OF WOODSTOCK'S FIRST CLUBHOUSE, CIRCA 1900.
Courtesy of Lyle Pearsons

LOWER LEFT: THE ORIGINAL CLUBHOUSE AT MOUNTAIN VIEW IN GREENSBORO MAY LOOK SMALL, BUT IT REPLACED AN UPRIGHT PIANO.

Vermont golfers today expect more from their refuge, a trend that began in 1900 when Ekwanok unveiled its first retreat. A stately, three-story summer cottage style building, it set a new standard, still to be emulated today. Unfortunately the beautifully appointed structure burned to the ground in October of 1938.

In the modern era, a lounge, men's and women's locker rooms, function rooms and offices are standard at the private clubs, and overnight accommodations for special guests are occasionally found. As the number of members grows so must the square footage of their facility. Graham Goldsmith, a highly-regarded Burlington architect and member at the Burlington Country Club, recently planned the renovation of their hilltop oasis, creating a modern, functional and attractively understated building perfectly situated at the heart of the golf course. "The views from the grill room down the ninth and eighteenth fairways are perhaps the key to the whole layout," wrote BCC House Chairperson Paul J. Danis. "We have received only compliments from our membership. They are enjoying spending time in their beautiful new clubhouse and as a result are supporting it financially to a much greater degree."

Goldsmith successfully navigated a potential morass that the National Golf Foundation cautioned architects about as early as 1956. In *Planning the Golf Clubhouse*, Harold J. Cliffer wrote, "Management by committee system has important repercussions on all matters of club operation and particularly upon the subject of building. Few architects, until they have had the opportunity to tackle a clubhouse design, are aware of the complexity of the problem."

Peter Post, president of the Board of Directors at the time recognized this handicap. "We are all aware of how hard it is to work with committees and to arrive at consensus for designs. Working with 525 members of a country club must be unbelievably difficult," he wrote Goldsmith. "One of the telling testaments to the quality of the job you performed is the fact that even members who were adamantly opposed to the project have become converts."

Clubhouses currently in planning may include all the amenities that have been added over the years plus retail space rented to golf service-oriented businesses, room for year-round golf simulators, a synthetic indoor putting green, instruction tee with driving net, library and exhibition space, a computer center for accessing weather data and web sites on the Internet, and fitness rooms.

Clubhouses of this grandeur are still rare in Vermont, and the range found on our tour of the state extends from funky to first-class. If they keep the tobacco dry and please the membership, they serve their purpose. Come along and find a comfortable place to put your feet up.

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