

**T**he sloping, hillside setting of the Mt. Anthony Country Club is ironic, symbolic, and most of all appropriate. The land stretches between the small-town urban bustle of Bennington, Vermont, on the lower side, and the stately homes of Old Bennington on the upper side. Likewise, the history of the club serves as a bridge between these different worlds, and tells the story of a club and a town coming together.

The early years of the Club are traced by former-Bennington College professor John D. Forbes in his 1944 booklet, *The Mount Anthony Country Club*.

"One summer in the early 1890's George Worthington of Cleveland, Ohio, and William White of New York, both ardent sportsmen, came up to Bennington and stayed at the Walloomsac Inn. One of them observed to the other that it was a pity that Bennington, in other respects an ideal place, had no facilities for playing the game of golf which had recently become so popular in sporting circles. They promptly resolved to remedy this lack and secured permission to lay out a few holes in Samuel Robinson's pasture down by the railroad underpass below the monument. This home-made links was most primitive with tin cans for cups and other tin cans on sticks for hole markers."

Even at this early date, town residents James C. Colgate and Frederic B. Jennings had already erected rudimentary links on their properties, and golf in Bennington, though primitive, was underway. Interest in developing a true country club began to fester amongst a group of Old Bennington residents and wealthy vacationers.

"These men met and formed a country club which they called the Mount Anthony Club. Officers elected for the year 1897, the first year of operations, were: president, John G. McCullough; vice-president, George B. Wellington; secretary-treasurer, George Worthington," reports Forbes. The site selected for the first Mount Anthony Club lay on the property of John Wool Griswold, and fell under the shadow of the mountain from which the club drew its name. The moniker of Mt. Anthony was given-Bennington's highest peak after Peter Anthony, local resident and descendant of Susan B. Anthony, fell to his death there around 1788. It was on this land, which today hosts the Camelot Village Shops, and stretches

to the border of what is now Southern Vermont College, that Bennington golf began in earnest.

While golf was the centerpiece of the new club, construction of a suitable clubhouse and tennis courts contributed to the prerequisite

country club atmosphere of the era.

It was a tennis match that highlighted the club's opening day ceremonies on July 5, 1897. On a day where temperatures reached 103 degrees, Lewis Perry of Williamstown, Massachusetts, defeated Mt. Anthony's George Worthington in the feature match, before an orchestra entertained members and guests at a reception.

Though the golf course had not been completed by the club's opening, Forbes relates that, "as fast as the individual holes were completed they were played on. By autumn one could get in quite a respectable game and a team was formed."

Both team and course quickly drew

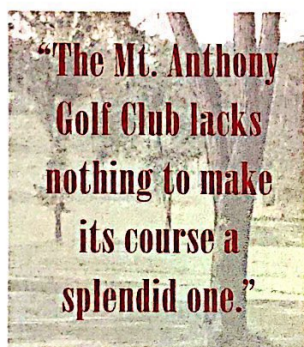
attention in the surrounding areas and beyond. Newspapers of the day were eager to chart the progress of this relatively young game called golf—and report on the high society that seemingly dominated the sport.

An 1898 article in the *Troy Budget* (NY) observed, "The Mt. Anthony Golf Club of Bennington are winning many laurels this season above and beyond possessing a most attractive casino and one of the finest 9-hole courses in the country."

The club would not rest on these newly-bestowed laurels, and set about to improve itself by hiring a golf professional of the highest caliber. Forbes documents the 1898 search. "It seems to have been in this year that William McDonald of Montrose, Scotland, was first engaged as professional. Philip B. Jennings was down in Charleston, South Carolina, on business and fell into conversation with McDonald at the Charleston club where he was working as pro and learned that he wanted to go to a cooler climate. Jennings, who was captain of the Mt. Anthony Club, signed him up on the spot."

Thus would begin a 32-year relationship that further strengthened the club's golfing image, and the quality of the course as McDonald did double-duty as greenskeeper.

By the following year, word had reached Boston of the marvelous mountain golf to be had in Bennington. The *Boston Herald* sent several reporters to Mt. Anthony to photograph and document the club's appearance. Part of a lengthy, hole-by-hole review published in the *Herald* on September 9, 1899 reads: "The course looks easy with its long, even rising and sloping fair greens, without a single artificial bunker anywhere on its velvety surface. At hardly any point is it more than 20 yards wide in the fair





greens, and at places on the round anything but a true driven ball obtains a lie in long grass, bushes or trees, and a badly hooked or sliced ball may roll off the beautiful tableland down in the direction of Bennington. The Mt. Anthony Golf Club lacks nothing to make its course a splendid one, surely nothing in surroundings, and it is proud of its historic setting."

Nor did the club lack in terms of social extravagance. Forbes describes the lavish attire worn by members, the richly orchestrated events put on by the club, and the subsequent rift that developed between the wealthy members on the hill, and the town of Bennington below. "There were even those down on the flat, it was rumored, who referred to the club irreverently as 'Snob's Paradise,'" he reveals.

In the midst of the club's social exuberance, a desire grew for a move from the rented property to a site the club could call its own. In order for this relocation to occur, the club underwent a tremendous internal reorganization. Forbes admits in his book that the reason for the dissolution of the Mount Anthony Club, and the formation of the incorporated Mt. Anthony Country Club was never specified, but speculates that the motivation lay in the ability to raise funds. This new Mt. Anthony Country Club was chartered on October 10, 1905, and consisted of 167 members, 19 governing members, 143 subscribing members and five non-resident subscribing members.

Clearly a plan had long been in the works to move the club, as Forbes reports it was only four days after the incorporation that stockholders met and, "a constitution and by-laws were adopted and it was voted to buy the Clark farm for \$15,000 for the new club premises."

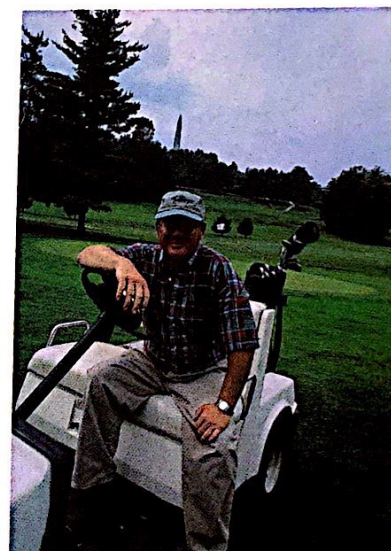
The new property, the club's cur-



DRAMATIC DROPS AND RADICAL RISES CALL FOR SHOTMAKING PROWESS. Patrick White

rent site, would draw its character and mystique from the omnipresent Bennington Battle Monument—a towering 306-foot-tall stone reminder of the Revolutionary War struggle which actually took place in nearby New York. As advertised by the club today, the monument is visible from all 18 holes, and the site is a singular and captivating place. The monument is a looming presence above the course, and a grand view of the Taconic Range to the north and east unfolds below.

With challenging hillside topography, the newly purchased property called for an architect capable of working within the limits of 1900's technology to produce a course worthy of its predecessor. The Bennington Banner announced on October 11, 1905, that such an architect had been found. "George Low, the well known professional golfer...has just completed the laying out of a nine-hole golf course for the Mt. Anthony Country Club and the work of getting it into condition will be commenced. He laid out the Burlington course, the one at Rutland and others. The location of this last one (Mt. Anthony) was especially pleasing to him."



TED PRICE IS THE ULTIMATE HANDS-ON OWNER. Charlie Brown

A week later on October 16, in another front-page story, the Banner reported in more detail on the internal organization of the club. J.C. McCullough was named to serve as president, and George Worthington as clerk and treasurer. The important appointment of greens committee was given to Worthington, G.B. Wellington and Dr. A.S.M. Chisholm, who "will have charge of laying out the new course and overseeing all necessary work that may



need to be done on the grounds." An additional committee led by George Worthington and Sayre McLeod was appointed to oversee the appropriate renovations inherent in renovating the Clark mansion to serve as clubhouse.

Financially, the club came to its new home in fine shape with \$21,000 raised for incorporation in shares of \$50. Despite the 1905 incorporation, Forbes reveals that not until 1906 was it, "voted to have the Mt. Anthony Country Club take over the assets and assume the debts of the original club. With the passing of this measure the transfer was complete and the Mount Anthony Club ceased to exist."

It was still another year, in 1907, before Low's course was declared fit for play, and the old Clark house had been adequately refurbished so as to serve as clubhouse.

The new course garnered attention and praise as quickly as the previous Bennington layout, and the 1909 Vermont state golf tournament was scheduled to be held on the fledgling layout. Following F.A. Martin's victory in this event, and a widespread enthusiasm for the course, the 1910 state tournament was also awarded to Mt. Anthony, a move that eventual victor C.L. Holden found to his liking.

The economic state of the Mt. Anthony Country Club, like many other clubs of the era, mirrored the economic state of the country, and as such was susceptible to peaks and valleys. After opening the century with a decade-and-a-half of relative prosperity, Mt. Anthony felt the effects of the nation's pre-World War I woes. Forbes sheds some light on the internal strain, as "reflected in the minutes of the club in Mr. Colgate's suggestion that William McDonald, the pro, be compensated for the decline in his income from lessons, sales of supplies, etc., during the 1914 season by a bonus of \$50

from the club. This was quickly voted."

As was also common among social and sporting clubs of the time, a series of benefits was conducted at Mt. Anthony during the war years to support the nation's overseas efforts. In addition, a War Tax was levied on dues.

Forbes notes that the war had a lasting influence on the club. "After the war the general character of the country seems to have changed. The old members were dying out. Many were no longer interested in golf and dropped their memberships. The club's finances began to become involved. Gradually, too, new names ap-

peared on the committee lists and control of the club began to shift gradually down the hill into Bennington."

Efforts to guide the club through this period of turmoil were further complicated by the loss of several founding and key members. F.B. Jennings, the club's president, passed away in 1920, and George B. Wellington's death the following year left a significant vacuum in the club's power base.

By the early 1920s, membership had dropped from a 1905 high of 167, but that total began to rise again in the mid 1920s, reaching 183 by 1924. Forbes describes this period as one of excitement, with younger members taking an interest in such non-golf activities as performing "a group of plays at the yellow barn behind the old Academy Library on Monument Avenue."

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With Vermont's own Calvin Coolidge in the White House, the nation entered into a period of financial and social prosperity. With little

notion of The Depression which lurked around the corner, the Mt. Anthony Country Club, and the nation as a whole, took the opportunity to celebrate.

Forbes recalls this time fondly: "The membership went over the 200 mark, McDonald and his wife were presented with a bonus on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of their coming to the club, "treasure hunts" were a popular diversion, and the club was in a ferment

over the lack of a swimming pool."

The year 1930 brought the club their pool, but also took McDonald, the long-time pro who had played a large role in the club's development. The presidency of the club also changed hands, as J.C. Colgate turned control over to P.B. Jennings. Even the protective mountains of Vermont could offer no resistance to the spread of The Depression, and by 1932 the Mt. Anthony Country Club began to feel the effects of this national tragedy. It was an event that would begin to change the club forever.

Committees were created to plan social activities within the club—not the extravagant affairs of years past, but rather "fun" activities perhaps designed to fight the emotional affects of The Depression.

"The tennis courts were flooded for



skating by the second week in December and by mid-January the members were doing Telemarks and stem Christies all over the fairways and the club house was doubling as a ski hut," writes Forbes.

Cost-cutting measures at the club included a 10 percent cut in pay for new pro Jack Parr, and Jack Wisted, the club's first official greenskeeper. McDonald had performed both duties during his stay, and the luxury of employing both men came at a cost.

It was on June 10, 1933 that the sign was hung—a sign that signaled for all to see that the Mt. Anthony Country Club had fallen to the forces of economy. The simple sign posted at the club entrance read, "Visitors Welcome," and from that point Mt. Anthony ceased to be a bastion for the Old Bennington wealthy, and would become a part of the entire Bennington community.

J.C. Jerome, grandson of founder James C. Colgate and himself a one-time president of the club, remembers that pivotal time in the club's history. "Just before World War II, they started to take greens fees. Before that you never had greens fees, there were guests of members. But then the small sign went out, and after the war it was pretty obvious that you couldn't be quite as uppercrust and had to come more into the public. And slowly but surely that's what happened—and properly so."

The move away from operating as a strictly private club was not a hidden one, and was reported in the Banner on November 18, 1933. "It was learned today...plans are underway to offer membership at the club to residents of the town at unusually low

rates...the Country Club, which up to now had fulfilled a definite but rather restricted need among the interests of Bennington, may become the center of community sports activities."

Along with the move to welcome the public, dues for members were dropped to avoid losing numbers from

es. The Mt. Anthony Corporation, the new corporate name of the Mt. Anthony CC, was controlled by a three-member board of directors—James C. Colgate, Hall Park McCullough, and William H. Wills. Only one year passed before this arrangement was abandoned in 1938, and shortly thereafter the club

came dangerously close to being abandoned itself.

"Mr. Colgate was utterly discouraged with the lack of interest in the club displayed by the members and pointed to the very tangible results of this indifference in the club's financial position ... Taking a realistic point of view he saw only one way to solve the problem and that was to liquidate the club," Forbes reveals.

Even in the face of such doubt, Colgate was persuaded by Franklin P. Jones to undergo one final attempt at resuscitation. A group of local businessmen was

assembled to run the club for a period of one year on a "receivership basis." The eight-member group, labeled the Management Committee, would continue to operate the club—although ultimate control lay in the board of directors—if the arrangement proved profitable. It did, and so the Mt. Anthony Country Club was kept alive.

The 1950s was a period of slow growth, punctuated by a major setback when the old Clark mansion, renovated to serve as clubhouse in 1905, burned in 1957. "We had just done it over with rooms upstairs," recalls Jerome. "There were beautiful locker rooms downstairs, a terrace, full dining facilities, and I'm afraid the old clubhouse couldn't take the change."

A new clubhouse, one which still serves the club today, was built in

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#### MACC Pros

William McDonald 1898-1929	John Maurycy 1963-1965
Jack Parr 1930-1931	Luke Welch 1966-1968
Bob Whyte 1932-1946	Art Patten 1969-1972
Frank Stuhler 1947-1951	Tom Bushee 1972
Art Stuhler 1952-1953	Ted Price 1973-1982
Art Patten 1954-1962	Leo Reynolds 1983-1996

this important group. A full-club membership was set at \$25 dollars, with an optional \$15 membership allowing access to all club activities other than golf. As part of the cost-saving efforts, Parr was released as golf professional, and the club contracted with Robert Whyte and his wife to run the clubhouse on a concession basis.

Beginning in 1936 the internal and financial organization of Mt. Anthony underwent a series of changes designed to keep it afloat. "James C. Colgate and Hall Park McCullough offered to put up \$2,500 apiece to get the club out of debt provided the members agreed to raise another \$1,500 to recondition the property," according to Forbes.

Two new corporate entities were created to help revitalize the club's financ-

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sections on the same site. "After the fire we had to rebuild the club, and there was very little money," recalls Jerome. Jerome's mother, Hope Sloan, took over the mortgage on the club, with the help of the McCullough family who held a great deal of stock which they sold for \$1.

Jerome took over as president, and later general manager, and with financing in hand, the land originally purchased decades earlier for the purpose of expanding to 18 holes was finally put to that use in 1962. "Jack Wisted (who had served as greenskeeper since 1927) was instrumental in laying out the other nine," according to Jerome. "Again it was a question of not having enough money to put in at the time. I think we built it for \$49,000. The design, I still think, is excellent."

The design, featuring small, pitched greens and extraordinary views, made full use of the topography of the land, and blended with the old holes to form a unique 18-hole golfing experience. With this layout, general manager Jerome carried on the mission of bringing the town together with the club. "I knew it had to go public all the way," he recalls, "and I think it's worked out very well." In 1973 he solidified the club's modern era by hiring Ted Price as golf professional.

Upon the death of his mother, Jerome decided to put the club up for bid. In a 1978 *Banner* article on the impending sale, Jerome was adamant that the club remain intact as an asset to the community. "As far as dividing up the land and losing the 18 holes, we won't see that. There's a need here for an 18-hole course."

Of the many roughly-equivalent bids received, the offer from Mt. Anthony pro Price was accepted, and he took over the club on April 1, 1983. "Ted was obviously the man

## MONUMENTAL CHANGE

qualified to carry it along as a country club," recalls Jerome, "and that is part of the deed. It must be carried as a legitimate 18-hole course."

Support and interest from the Bennington golfing community has grown, and supplemented the work of Ted and his wife and partner Louise. Wise business decisions, such as the return of a year-round restaurant to the clubhouse, have further strengthened the club's foothold in the community.

Chief among these wise decisions was the hiring of Leo Reynolds as golf professional. Jerome, now a member of the club, echoes the sentiments of the community in his high praise for Reynolds' work. "Leo has done extremely well as pro. He is an excellent teacher, good golfer—he just knows the business." Leo's work with Bennington's junior and high school programs has continued and strengthened a long Mt. Anthony tradition.

For 14 years Reynolds made a solid team with the Price family. However, a new pro will be around to oversee the centennial celebration, highlighted by special merchandise, several tournaments and Anniversary Weekend in August.

One hundred years after the club's first official affair, Mt. Anthony will do it all over again this year to celebrate the occasion. Jerome feels this time around, the entire town will be involved. "We are extremely important to this community. There are still many private clubs out there, and that's their business. But I'm pleased here, we've got the town." And the town has a club to take pride in.

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*Patrick White is associate editor of Vermont Golf and has contributed enormously to the success of this issue. He was aided in his extensive research for this article by Cathy White.*

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