



Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son, stripes one at Ekwanok Country Club.

Don't Know Much About History? Play Golf!

BY TOM BEDELL

What do Vermont, golf, a president, the French, the British, Native Americans and revolutionary soldiers have in common? It's not really a riddle. It's just that besides the usual pleasing aspects of golf—the game, the natural surroundings, the companionship—there are several golf courses in the state that can jumpstart a few history lessons and get you appreciating our state's grand past.

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Crown Point Country Club The venerable Crown Point Country Club, in Springfield, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, takes its name and Revolutionary soldier logo from the Crown Point Military Road. While that road is sometimes known as Vermont's first interstate, construction of it actually began before there was a Vermont (or a United States, for that matter), around 1759, during the British battles of the French and Indian War. The Brits wanted a supply line from the Lake Champlain forts—Crown Point and Ticonderoga—across the Connecticut River to what is now Charleston, New Hampshire. A Captain John Stark was directed to cut such a road through the wilderness, and with the help of about 200

rangers, he did just that—the roughly 20-foot wide road, ultimately stretched about 78 miles.

Though changed, rerouted and improved upon over the years, the Crown Point Road served its purpose well—at least through the Revolutionary War, when colonial troops used it to send aid to Americans at Ticonderoga.

Parts of the road still exist, such as the one which runs along a few holes on Crown Point's back nine, and two markers nearby show where.

Mount Anthony Country Course

By 1777, John Stark was a brigadier general—only now he was a veteran of the Continental Army, having fought at Bunker Hill and with Washington at Trenton and Princeton. Stark was called upon to help defend the Bennington Continental Storehouse, in what was then the Republic of Vermont.

The storehouse needed defending from troops led by General John “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne, who was in need of supplies and horses to help him hold Fort Ticonderoga (which the British had recaptured from the Americans).

Against highly trained troops, Stark made a successful stand with a mainly untrained militia. The victory was so decisive that it marked a turning point in the Revolutionary War, spurring morale and increased troop enlistment on the American side. It also resulted in a legal state holiday in Vermont on August 16, the day of the battle.

Interestingly, the Bennington Battle didn't actually take place in Bennington, but in New York State. The Bennington Battle Monument, however, is in Bennington at the site of the old Continental Storehouse. The monument is the tallest structure in the state at 306 feet, which is

one reason it stays prominently in view on almost every hole of the Mount Anthony golf course. Best day to play the course? August 16, naturally.

Brattleboro Country Club Okay, Rudyard Kipling never played at the Brattleboro Country Club, which didn't exist when the British poet and novelist lived in Vermont from 1892 to 1896. But it would have been a likely choice if it had, and the town of Brattleboro is now quite cognizant of Kipling's presence because of Naulakha, the Dummerston home Kipling had built and which today is open for short rental visits through The Landmark Trust.

Guests to Naulakha should definitely consider a visit to the Brattleboro Country Club because Kipling's guests—such as Sherlock Holmes' creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, played golf with the British

author. Kipling's clubs are on display at Naulakha. And Kipling is also noted for being one of the first to play in winter with golf balls he colored brightly.

Kipling wasn't just winning Nassaus while here. He wrote several novels, including his two *Jungle Books* and *Captains Courageous*, and many poems and short stories.

Ekwanok Country Club No, Abraham Lincoln never played golf. But his only son to survive into adulthood did, and eagerly, even though he didn't take up the game until his fifties. When Robert Todd Lincoln—Chicago lawyer, Secretary of War to two presidents, and Minister to the Court of St. James—did start playing, he moved in pretty good company. No less a golf luminary than Charles Blair Macdonald convinced Lincoln to join up as a charter member of two of the country's founding golf courses, the Chicago Golf Club and The National Golf Links.

Another friend, Lincoln's Chicago law partner, Edward Isham, retired to his native Vermont in 1899, becoming the first president of the Ekwanok Country Club. Macdonald won the club's first President's Cup (the Isham Cup) in 1901. Lincoln, who had previously spent a summer in Manchester with his mother, finally moved there as well, and was quickly elected president of the club in 1904. His Manchester mansion, Hildene, now a popular tourist destination, was completed there in 1905. Lincoln remained president of the club until his death at Hildene in 1926.

The Walter Travis-designed Ekwanok is one of Vermont's most exclusive clubs, but visitors can delve into Lincoln's life at Hildene, and then play a round at the Walter Travis-designed Equinox course, next door to Ekwanok. ■

Tom Bedell's golf rounds are the stuff of history, provided one subscribes to the "history is bunk" theory.

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