

Back in the Country... Bell Acres Stories

By Debby Rabold

Outdoor Pursuits...Golf Comes to the Sewickley Valley

This is the second article in the *Outdoor Pursuits* series, which explains how the Sewickley creeks and surrounding hills have long been popular destinations for outdoor activities.

A special thank you to Dave Moore of the Allegheny Country Club and Amy Richardson of the Sewickley Valley YMCA for sharing photos.



1893 During a visit to Massachusetts, Pittsburgher John Moorhead, Jr. first played the Scottish game of golf, which had recently been introduced to the States. After returning home, he set out six empty pea cans on the infield of the old Homewood horse racing oval where he taught the game to his friends. It was from here that interest in the new sport quickly spread throughout the city.

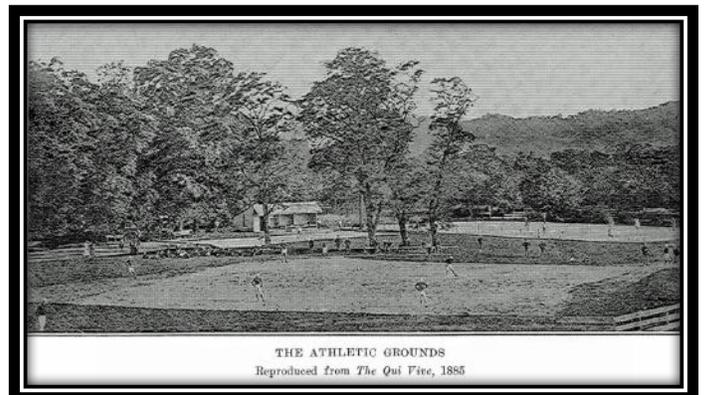
Golf in Sewickley Valley

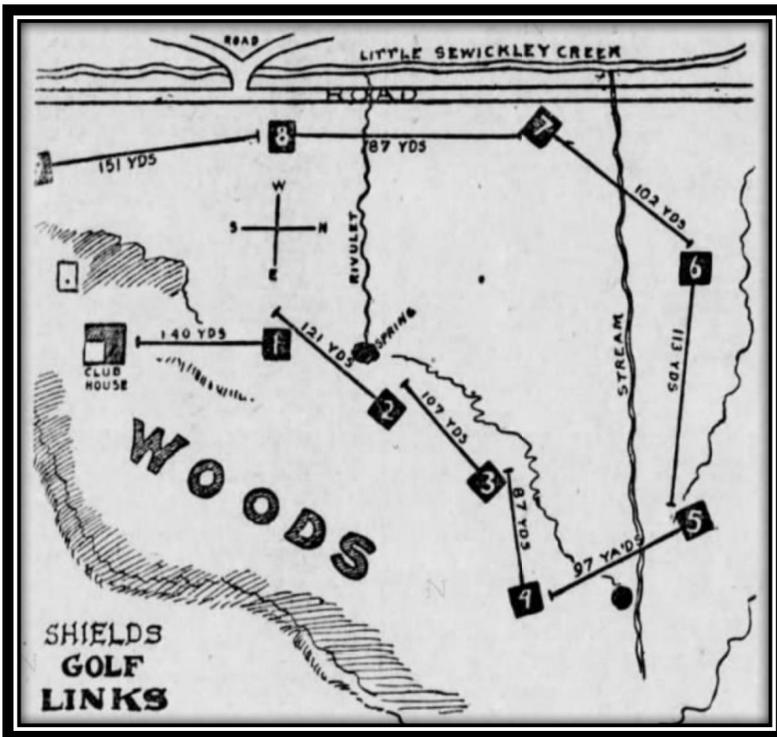
"Golf, that old and royal game, has invaded the Ohio Valley. The invasion was, however, made late in the year, and the invaders, after establishing a pair of links, one at Osborne and the other in the Lane in Sewickley, are now busily engaged in organizing a team for next year. The popularity of the game is rapidly extending down the Ohio Valley and teams are being organized in all of the suburban towns to the mouth of the Beaver River. The Sewickleyans have organized a link at Osborne and another is now evolving in Sewickley. The last has started for practice and the athletic grounds are being used by it. Part of the link lies in the athletic grounds and the ladies and gentlemen at the head of the club promise the athletics loving people of the borough a sport next season."
Daily Post 25 November 1896



Begun in 1882, the Sewickley Athletic Association leased five level acres from Eliza Cochran Davis (left) on which ball fields, tennis courts and a bowling alley were built. The park, which featured a spring and stream that flowed under large shade trees, was the scene of various athletic activities, as well as community events. The grounds were also used by the short-lived Osborne Golf Club. By the mid-1890s, the Association was no longer active.

While the Osborne club was listed in early golf directories, nothing is known of it other than the course was in use for a few months prior to the opening of the Shields Golf Club in 1897. The old Athletic Association grounds, bound by Nevin Avenue and what are now Hill and Cochran streets were sold for residential development at the turn of the century.





Young caddies were paid ten cents per round and three cents for each stray ball that was recovered.



"The Shields Golf Club is not yet a year old; but the infant organization is a big and vigorous one. The limit of membership, 250, was filled last year, and there is a long waiting list..."

With everybody eager to take up the new pastime things moved along at a rapid rate. The pretty clubhouse was soon built, and it became the center of a fascinating social life. A number of the people who made the pretty suburb a summer resort was as much interested in the golf club as were the Sewickleyites themselves.

The course is a little over a mile long; it was shorter last years, but great improvements have been made for the coming season.

The clubhouse has three nicely-fitted up rooms, but the porches are the favorite spots and it is usually there that the merry-making may be found when the links are deserted for a brief while."

Daily Post 8 March 1898

"The residents of the Sewickley Valley have formed a golf club, with Mr. James B. Oliver as president...It will be known as the Sewickley Valley Golf Club, and is expected that the links will be located at Shields Station, although the exact ground has not yet been selected. Mr. John Moorhead, Jr., who has had considerable experience, has been invited by the committee to give them the benefit of his judgement in locating the course..." **Pittsburgh Press 2 May 1897**

"The Shields Golf Club, which is hoping to have a formal opening of its new club house the latter part of next week, was largely made a possibility through the curtesy of Mrs. Amelia Shields and Mr. James B. Oliver, the president of the club, who have proffered the use of their lands lying in Little Sewickley Creek bottom for the golf tyros in this vicinity. The immense benefit to the new institution devoted to the newest branch of athletics this gratis use of grounds will be is evident immediately. The grounds are most delightfully situated, and the club house, when placed at the disposal of the members, bids fair to be the most picturesque "cabin" in the upper Ohio valley. The view from the porch will take in the valley of Little Sewickley Creek stretching from the bridge over Beaver Road to the old ice ponds and the hills forming the entrance to Rich Hollow, nearly a mile up the creek and directly overlooks the new stone bridge, in itself a thing of beauty." **Pittsburgh Press 6 June 1897**



James B. Oliver

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Poor course conditions at the Shields Club led to the construction of a nine-hole course at the nearby Edgeworth Club [left]. The course was laid out on the adjoining Way and Nevin estates on Beaver Road and opened for play in 1900. Built on prime residential property, the course had to be re-configured as building lots were sold and the amount of space available for golf grew smaller. A further disruption occurred in 1911 when the Woodland Road extension to Little Sewickley Creek was built through the course.



Edgeworth Club women took part in a 1908 driving competition. Annual course dues were ten dollars for men/five for women.

**Sewickley Valley Golf Club Formed**

*“One of the oldest golf clubs in this section has taken a new lease of life under a new name. The new organization is to be known as the Sewickley Valley Golf Club and will take over the course which the Edgeworth Club used for the past 10 or 12 years, and which they recently decided to do away with.*

*The membership has already swelled to large proportions and it is the intention of the greens’ committee to furnish the members with one of the best courses in this section of the state. Not only will there be weekly tournaments for men, but the women will have their share of tourneys as well.”*

**Sewickley Herald** 12 March 1913

World War I brought an end to the Sewickley Valley Golf Club. Early in the war, the Sewickley Valley Military Training Association drilled on the course and in 1918, the club was formally disbanded and the equipment sold.

**Sewickley Valley Golf Club.**

At a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the Sewickley Valley Golf Club on Thursday evening, May 16th, 1918, it was decided that during the War, the playing of the Royal and Ancient game of Golf would be abandoned on our links.

The following inventory of materials in good condition belonging to the Club is on hand and is offered for sale as a whole or in part:

|                                          |                           |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>1 CADDY HOUSE (Frame) 12x16 Feet.</b> |                           |
| 300'— $\frac{3}{4}$ " Galv. Iron Pipe.   | 9 Lanterns.               |
| 1 Wheel Barrow.                          | 1 Cup-Cutter for Greens.  |
| 1 Horse Mower.                           | 9 Rims.                   |
| 1 Greens Mower—Caldwell.                 | 1 Case for Paper Drinking |
| 1 Roller.                                | Cups.                     |
| 1 Grindstone.                            | Shovels.                  |
| 1 Vise.                                  | Spades.                   |
| 50'— $\frac{1}{2}$ " Hose and Rack.      | Rakes.                    |
| 6 Chairs (Folding).                      | 1 Hatchet.                |
| 1 Saw—Cross Cut.                         | Waste Basket.             |
| 12 Galv. Iron Buckets.                   | Sheep Manure.             |
| 9 Sand Boxes.                            | 18 Markers.               |
| 9 Targets.                               | 1 Pail (Enamel).          |
| 9 Bulletin Boards.                       | 1 Pair Plyers.            |

The proceeds from this sale will be invested in Thrift Stamps or Liberty Bonds and held in the Treasury of the Club.

This material may be seen if appointment is made with the Secretary. Sealed proposals should be addressed to the Secretary and in his hands not later than June 10th, 1918.

**ROBERT R. MILLER, Secretary,**  
614 Nevin Avenue, Sewickley, Penna.  
Telephone 842-M Sewickley or 327 Coraopolis.

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GOLF COURSE TO OPEN

Y. M. C. A. Links, Put Off by War, to be Ready in the Fall.

The new Y. M. C. A. Golf Course expects to open this fall. A little over two years ago a joint letter was received by the directors of the Y. M. C. A. from Mrs. Henry W. Oliver and Mrs. Henry R. Rea, expressing their willingness to prepare in the meadow above and adjacent to the athletic field of the Association, a nine hole golf course and turn it over to the Association. This generous offer the directors gladly accepted.

In the summer of 1917, Mr. Davidson, the superintendent of the Oliver property, assisted by Mr. Jock Hutchinson, then professional at the Allegheny Country Club, cleared the grounds, laid out and planted the greens, but on account of the war and the need for farming land the fair greens were planted in corn and the product used to the best advantage.

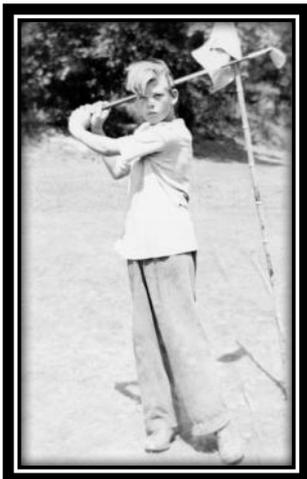
Sewickley Herald 29 March 1919

Sewickley Has Only "Y" Golf Course in America



Sewickley Valley golfers did not need to wait long for another course to open. In October 1919, nearly twenty-one valley acres of Oliver/Rea property between Blackburn and Backbone roads were prepared for a new nine-hole course. Operated by the adjacent Sewickley YMCA, the course formally opened in July 1920.

In 1937, Mrs. Edith Oliver Rea donated the land on which the course was built to the YMCA. The course operated until closing in 1948 when the site was donated to the Sewickley Valley War Memorial Association, a volunteer organization that converted the former course into a community park. The park itself became a memorial to those who served in the World Wars.



In June 1950, Sewickley Heights Borough Council unanimously approved a municipal boundary change that allowed for the park to be located within Sewickley Borough, which assumed responsibility for park maintenance. Not until 2007 did the War Memorial Association transfer ownership of the park to Sewickley Borough, minus nearly one acre given to the YMCA on which platform tennis courts were built.

Henry Ford was the Y's 1937 junior golf champion.

Dog Wrecks Plane

Twenty-four-year old Beaver Road resident Gus Hingst was a student pilot remembered for flying under the Sewickley Bridge, but his antics abruptly ended one Sunday morning in May 1931 after crashing a biplane next to the Sewickley YMCA.

With Hingst at the controls, he and a friend "borrowed" a plane from the Conway Airport and headed for Sewickley. Despite having earlier been denied permission by the Y to use its field, he landed at the YMCA where an excited Boston Terrier jumped into the spinning propeller and was instantly killed.



Intending to make his escape from the dog's angry owner, Hingst tried to rev the engine, but the damaged propeller led to engine failure. The plane tipped and crashed into a clump of trees along Blackburn Road. The sound of the crash attracted not only doctors and nurses from the nearby Sewickley Hospital, but also the police and hundreds of onlookers.

Hingst and his passenger were treated for cuts and scrapes, but were otherwise unhurt. The plane's owner arrived to find it damaged beyond repair. Charges against Hingst were later dropped.

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**QUAKER  
VALLEY  
PAR 3  
GOLF COURSE**

**IS NOW OPEN**  
Memberships Now Available  
**CLUB RENTALS**  
**9 HOLES**  
Total 1065 Yards  
PRO SHOP &  
REFRESHMENTS  
OPEN 7 A.M. 'TIL DARK

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CAMP MEETING ROAD  
1 MILE NORTH OF  
LEETSDALE  
DIAL 741-5260

During the summer of 1965, another nine-hole course opened in the Sewickley Valley, this time on Camp Meeting Road in Leet Township. E. J. Heinlein owned and operated a twelve-acre course on the former Methodist camp meeting grounds opposite the D. T. Watson Home.

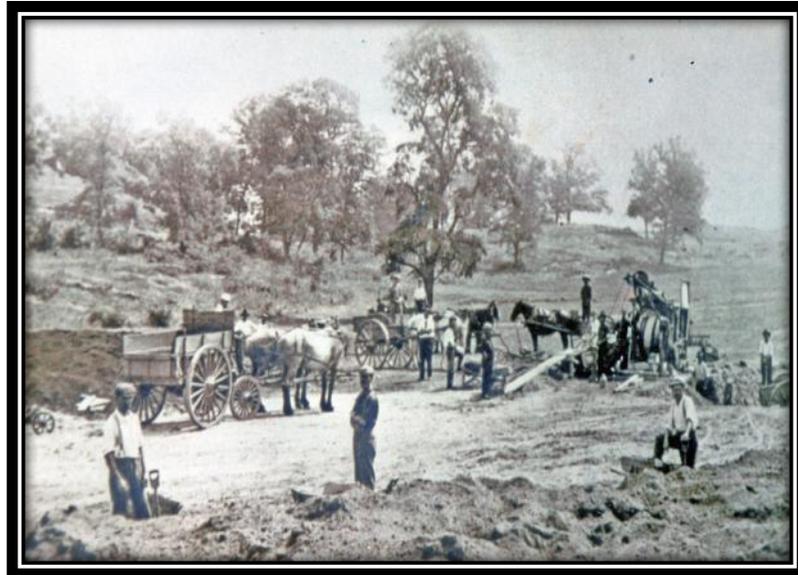
For short time during the 1970s, the Brown family of Leetsdale leased the course and operated the business until the land was sold for housing. By 1985, the site was being developed into the *Olde Sewickley Highlands* subdivision.

# Olde Sewickley Highlands

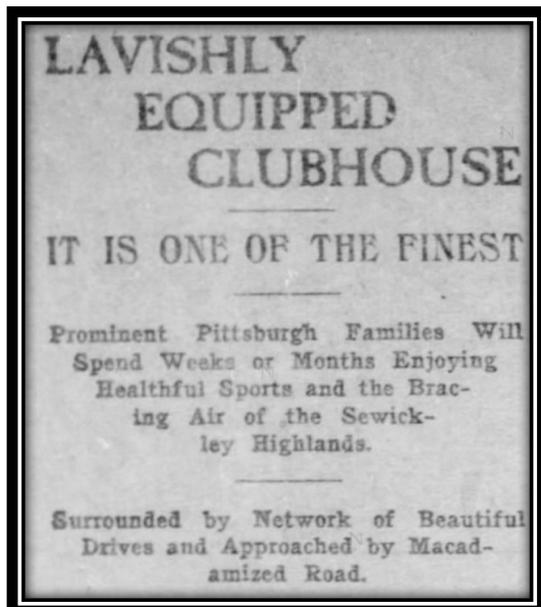
While the nine-hole courses are now gone, two venerable eighteen hole courses remain within the Sewickley Valley, the Allegheny Country Club in Sewickley Heights Borough and the Sewickley Heights Golf Club in Bell Acres Borough.

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After introducing the game of golf to Pittsburgh, John Moorhead, Jr. organized the first course West of Philadelphia, the Allegheny Country Club (1895). The club's first home was the former Walker Farm framed by Benton Avenue, California Avenue and Brighton Road in the Brighton Heights section of what was then Allegheny City. Moorhead is pictured on the porch of the farmhouse that served as the clubhouse (right).



As golf grew in popularity, the club realized a larger facility was needed. In 1901, one-hundred-fifty acres of the former Sewickley Dairy Farm in Sewickley Township were purchased and construction of an eighteen-hole course, clubhouse and tennis courts began almost immediately.



A Splendid Eighteen-Hole Course

"In a most beautiful region of rolling farm country 150 acres purchased by the Allegheny Country club from the old Dairy farm tract provides one of the very first 18-hole courses in the country, of which nearly every point is overlooked by the artistic club house, located on the highest point of the course. The club house and course are in the very midst of the new section which has been settled back of Sewickley by some of the wealthiest families of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. Here now are handsome residences on every hand, where formerly the herds of cows of the Dairy farm ruminated among the acres of a country district which the farmers around about little dreamed would be anything else."

Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette 24 November 1901



“One hundred fifty acres in the heart of a hilly farming district, offering the best of the beauties so typical of Western Pennsylvania, from this tract which the Country club purchased for its summer home. Absolutely wild and rural, no sign of urban civilization greets the eye in any quarter except where the homes of some of Pittsburg’s wealthiest men, crown the hills in the distance out beyond the first nine holes of the golf course. These homes, the owners of which are members of the club, for the most part, are so widely scattered as not to interfere with the rural harmony of the landscape, which otherwise presents nothing but wooded hills, ploughed fields, wormwood fences and grazing cattle.”

“Here within a little over a half an hour’s time by train, speedy horse or automobile, the Pittsburg business men, who form the membership of this organization, can whirl away from the heat and bustle of the Smoky City and while the cries of the newsboy are still echoing in their ears, be accosted with the “want a caddie, mister” of the golf bag urchin.”

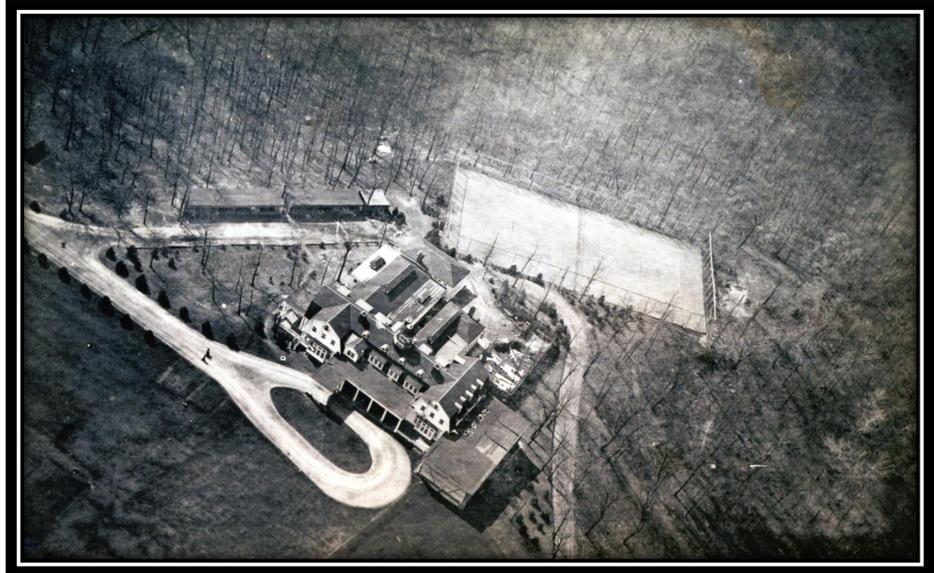
“Here the business man, who is also an ardent follower of the bewitching summer pastime which has made so many captive, will find something besides golf, raised to a plane of perfection never before enjoyed about Pittsburg. The summer home back on the hills-for home it will be for many during a long period of the summer’s heat, will offer advantages of country club life, such as never before enjoyed.”

“The club can also be reached by means of another road termed the “backbone” which is much steeper and approaches the club from the rear. This road continues out past the rear of the clubhouse to the beautiful Little Sewickley creek valley, which offers probably the prettiest drive about Pittsburg. The beautiful drives available to the members form one of the great features of the new location as the Little Sewickley road can be reached in about 15 minutes after leaving the clubhouse.”

Pittsburgh Daily Post 12 May 1902



"The opening of the new clubhouse and golf course of the Allegheny Country Club at Sewickley Heights, was the chief event of interest among local golf players yesterday. In fact, many of the scheduled events at other courses suffered on this account, the members being absent. A wedding and a number of receptions at the new clubhouse added to the attractions. All day long there was a stream of carriages and automobiles in the direction of the new grounds." **Daily Post** 18 May 1902



There was interest in creating a community of expansive country estates with the new country club serving as its social hub. Following municipal elections in 1903-04, voters in then Sewickley, Ohio, Aleppo and Leet townships approved the creation of Sewickley Heights Township from portions of the existing townships. Originally located in Sewickley Township, the club became part of the new Sewickley Heights Township, which in time, was divided into Sewickley Heights and Sewickley Hills boroughs. The country club is now situated in the heart of Sewickley Heights Borough.

The Allegheny Country Club offered the Valley's only eighteen-hole course until joined by the Sewickley Heights Golf Club that opened for play on July 1, 1961.

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**Country Club  
Golf Course  
To Be Built**  
Sewickley Heights  
Layout Will Be  
20th In County

Planned recreational communities were relatively new in the late 1950s. At the time the Sewickley Heights Golf Club was being planned, another country club community was proposed for nearby Franklin Township where North Hills Field Club, Inc. hoped to build as many as 5,000 homes, two golf courses, pools, tennis courts and a ski run on 800 acres with an option on an additional 1,300 acres. Interestingly, the proposed eighteen-hole course would be for men only, while women and mixed play would be

permitted on the nine-hole course. Both the Sewickley and Franklin projects resulted in the townships hurriedly becoming boroughs.

*"Newest trend in this field is to construct golf courses, sometimes called country clubs, as adjuncts to residential developments. Typical of these and perhaps the lushest is Sewickley Heights Golf Club which will serve Sewickley Heights Estates, and the North Hills Field Club, which is planned as part of North Hills Field Club Estates."*

**Pittsburgh Press** 18 June 1961

## 'Self Defense' Forces Change To Prevent More Land Grabs

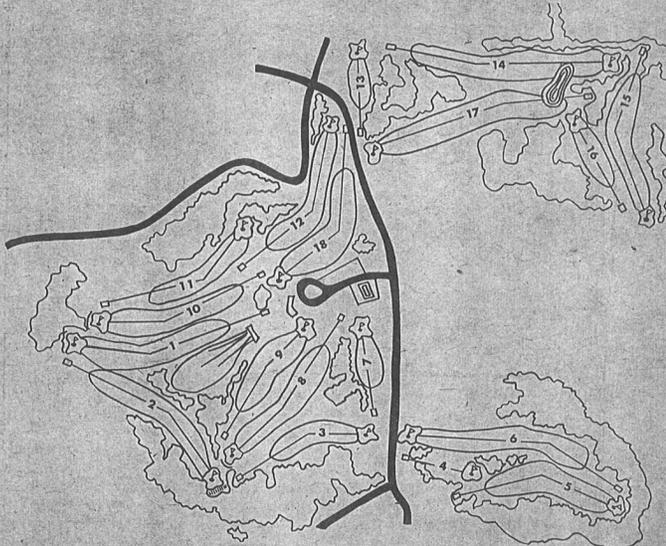
In the municipal hierarchy, second class townships may be annexed by boroughs and first class townships. In the late 1950s, both Sewickley and Franklin were second class townships at the mercy of neighboring communities wishing to expand their borders.

Throughout the 1950s, Sewickley Heights Borough annexed large swaths of neighboring townships and was thought to be eyeing Sewickley Township's newly proposed golf course community along Backbone and Camp Meeting roads. In a move of self-preservation, Sewickley Township officials quickly gathered more than the required number of property owners' signatures on a petition requesting borough status that was personally delivered to officials in Harrisburg. Having previously lost much of its acreage and tax base to Sewickley Heights in 1904, the township could not afford to lose anything more. Court approval for borough status was granted on March 14, 1960, the official birthday of Bell Acres Borough.

Franklin Township had the same concern as its neighbor. Because the Field Club's developer did not agree with the township's large lot requirement, plans were being made for the new Field Club Estates to become a borough and secede from Franklin Township before annexing what remained of the township, thus clearing the way for smaller building lots. The plot was discovered when plans for the new borough were mistakenly sent to township officials who immediately sprang into action and obtained borough status in August 1960. It should be noted that Franklin officials were also a bit concerned that the newly created boroughs of Bell Acres and Sewickley Hills might have thoughts of expanding their borders, yet another reason for obtaining the protection provided by Franklin Park's borough status. Because of financial difficulties, neither the Bell Acres nor Franklin Park golf communities materialized as originally planned.

December 10, 1959      Address—Sewickley, Pa.      THE HERALD

### Ground Broken For New Golf Course



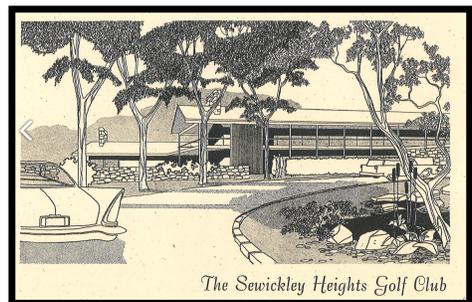
(Village Photos)

Construction started Nov. 16 on a new 18-hole, 197-acre golf course, described as one of the finest in the East, which will be surrounded by 300 large lots of an exclusive residential development on Camp Meeting Road, Sewickley Township.

The course, to be known as the Sewickley Heights Golf Club, will be laid out on a gently rolling plateau over looking the Ohio River. There will be no grades over 5% and the 6,772 yard course can be extended, by using the 90-foot tees, to championship length of 7,132 yards. Approximate yardages and pars for the holes are: 1, 458 yards, par 4; 2, 441 yards, par 4; 3, 325 yards, par 4; 4, 158 yards, par 3; 5, 400 yards, par 4; 6, 533 yards, par 5; 7, 191 yards, par 3; 8, 408 yards, par 4; 9, 325 yards, par 4; 10, 466 yards, par 5; 11, 383 yards, par 4; 12, 416 yards, par 4; 13, 175 yards, par 3; 14, 533 yards, par 5; 15, 458 yards, par 4; 16, 216 yards, par 3; 17, 525 yards, par 5, and 18, 383 yards, par 4.

In November 1959, Pittsburgh newspapers announced the ground breaking for an 800-acre golf community in the heart of Bell Acres where the newly formed Sewickley Heights Estates, Inc. investment group planned to build an eighteen-hole course surrounded by 300 luxury homes.

Leasing 200 acres from Sewickley Heights Estates, Inc., the Sewickley Heights Golf Club opened for play 1 July 1961. Groundbreaking for the clubhouse was held in May 1962 with the first section of the building opened in June 1963.



Luxurious residential refinements...in a Country Club setting

# Sewickley Heights Estates



Enjoy gracious living... a sanctuary of privacy, yet not isolated... luxurious, natural-setting homesites in a country club atmosphere... beautiful Sewickley Heights Estates. Created around the 18-hole course of Sewickley Heights Golf Club, this 820-acre community includes carefully planned bridle paths which connect with existing paths of surrounding communities. Superb homesites, none less than one acre, are enhanced by natural woods and parks and spring-fed lakes which make this the most desired residential community in Western Pennsylvania. Sewickley Heights Estates is located near fine schools—both private and public—churches, shopping facilities, and is just 35 minutes from Pittsburgh.

Information on Sewickley Heights Estates may be obtained by writing or calling:  
GEORGE BRO'S, Frick Building, Pittsburgh 19, CO 1-3100  
MURRER AND COMPANY, INC., 401 Broad St., Sewickley, PO 1-7354  
JOHN C. PHILLIPS COMPANY, 519 Frick Building, Pittsburgh 19, AT 1-958



After investing more than a million dollars in site development and infrastructure, which included relocating a section of Backbone Road, and the sale of eighty homes, investors in Sewickley Heights Estates, Inc. ran out of funds to complete the project as planned. However, a modified project continued after the property was purchased by Mellon heiress Cordelia Scaife May in 1977.

Mrs. May purchased 628 acres of the original tract for a combination conservation/development project that ultimately resulted in a portion of the undeveloped land being set aside for nature parks and a smaller portion sold for the Beech Ridge Drive sub-division. In June 1985, the Sewickley Heights Golf Club exercised its option to purchase the property it had been leasing and where after sixty years after opening, golfers continue to enjoy play on this hilltop course.

