

Yeamans Hall Club – Something Unique

In retrospect, it seems perfectly natural that the Yale Golf Team of 1926 would journey from New Haven to Charleston to play the inaugural round of golf at Yeamans Hall Club in the Spring of that year. After all, Seth Raynor, the course architect, designed Yale's renowned 18-hole layout only a few years earlier and James Gamble Rogers, who designed buildings for the University ranging from the Yale Club in New York to Harkness Quadrangle on the campus itself, also served as the architect for Yeamans Hall. The grounds themselves, described by Fredrick Law Olmsted, Jr. as "diversified and picturesquely undulating" and possessing "intricacy and mystery," must have made the Yale team feel even more at home as they evoked a feeling reminiscent of the New England countryside.



1926 Yale University Golf Team
courtesy of the Yale Banner & Pot Pourri

This round of golf in 1926 represented the culmination of a journey, which had begun more than ten years earlier. In the Summer of 1915, Mr. Olmsted visited the thousand-acre plantation granted by the Lords Proprietors of Carolina in 1674 to Lady Margaret Yeamans, widow of Sir John Yeamans. Mr. Olmsted had been asked to render his professional opinion about the plantation's suitability "as an admirable winter resort development." Over the course of the next ten years, the Olmsted Brothers' firm worked with the organizers of the Club together with fellow professionals, Seth Raynor and James Gamble Rogers, to bring to fruition their collective vision of all the property could be.

On his initial visit to the property, Seth Raynor stated:

There is no doubt in my mind about your being able to build a magnificent golf course amid such surroundings: the nature of the ground, with the gently rolling contours and fine drainage certainly invites the architect with the irresistible force to create something unique. You have a situation here that makes one feel contented.

On April 20, 1925, ten gentlemen met at the Downtown Association in New York for the organizational meeting of Yeamans Hall Club. The Club itself opened its first season in February 1926. It received an enthusiastic reception from visitors to the Club during the abbreviated initial season of only three months. Ray Gardiner, president of the

Massachusetts Golf Association, visited Yeamans Hall during that period and described the golf course as “perfect.” He explained:

When I say perfect, I mean a course where, when you leave it, you can't think of a single weak hole. You know there are many courses which you like, but about which you may say, "It's a good course except for that sixteenth hole," or some other. Here, on the other hand, is a course, which I can't criticize either as to the character of hole, contour, or greens, or the trapping.

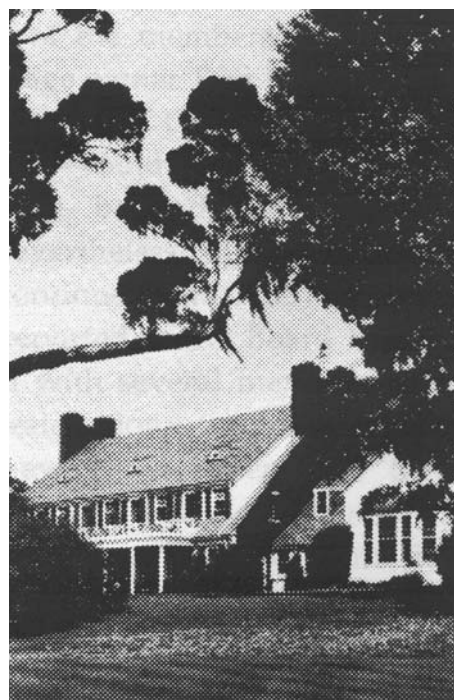
The 1927 season represent the first full period of operation for the Club and enthusiasm for the fledgling enterprise remained high. Grantland Rice visited in December of 1927 and told a local sportswriter that he had never found “a better or more beautiful place to rest.” In addition to the beauty of the grounds, Mr. Rice applauded the golf course as well, “... taking the lay-out and scenic background into consideration, I think it is the most marvelous golf course in the Country.”



While some of his enthusiasm might be the result of embellishment by a gracious guest who, after all, penned the words “it matters not that you won or lost but how you played the game,” many of the initial visitors to Yeamans offered similar praise for both the Club’s ambiance and its amenities.

The collaborative effort of the professional team of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Seth Raynor and James Gamble Rogers had helped the organizing members of the Club achieve the vision of “an admirable winter resort” first described by Mr. Olmsted in 1915.

The first few years of the Club’s operation witnessed a continuation of the Club’s initial success. Major buildings were constructed including the Clubhouse, Pro Shop, Caddie House and several quadrangles of cottages to house visiting members. The Clubhouse itself, capable of accommodating 200 guests, was completed April 12, 1928. It was



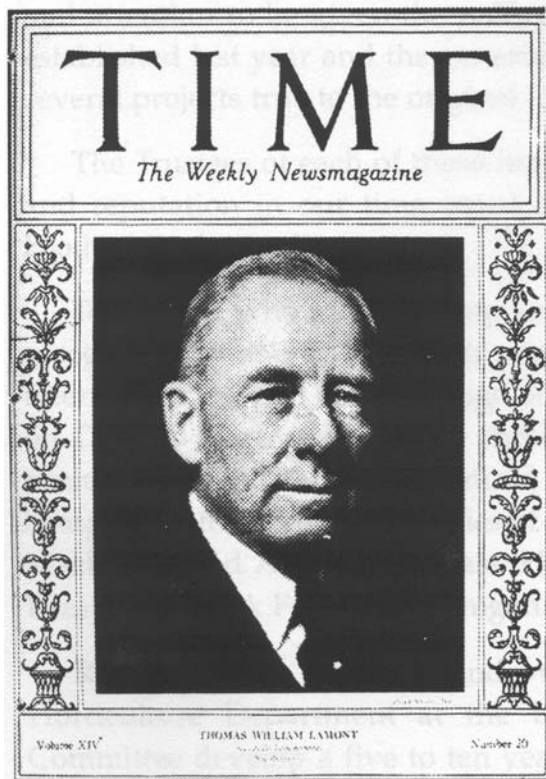
Yeamans Hall Main Clubhouse from the 18th Green

subsequently described by the local newspaper as follows:

The skill of a well-known architect, James Gamble Rogers, of New York, was employed in designing the clubhouse, the center of the life of the great recreation and residential estate. Appropriate to both the landscape and to the purposes of the club, the building is of a simple design, with a country Colonial architectural motif, and contains all modern conveniences. It is pleasing to the eye, but not ornate. In laying out the rooms primary considerations were the outlook, ventilation and sunlight, the sunlight, which falls with magic touches in the glades and against the dense vegetation.

Also during the first four years of operation, a number of private cottages were built on the grounds. Thus, as the decade of the 20's came to a close, Yeamans Hall was well on its way to its proposed full development of two golf courses and over 200 privately owned cottages.

However, world events intervened and the steady pace of construction activity, which characterized the first several years of the Club's history ground to a halt in the wake of the 1929 crash. The extent of the economic upheaval across the United States



November 11, 1929 TIME Magazine
Thomas William Lamont
"He felt the Helm Respond"

began to be felt at the Club during the 1932 season when a large number of members resigned. Prior to that time, it was as if the stiff upper lip resolve of the membership—perhaps epitomized by cottage owner Tom Lamont who characterized the events of October 1929, as “a little distress selling” – could keep the Country's economic problems beyond the gates of the 1932 season continued into 1933 when the Club's Secretary reported to the Board that he had corresponded with several members who had submitted resignations, urging them to reconsider. But in every case, except one, “they felt obliged with much regret on account of business conditions to withdraw from the Club.”

From the more comfortable perspective afforded us in 1996, the old saying “every cloud has a silver lining” may be repeated. For the interruption in the Club's development caused by the Great Depression, as unpleasant as it was for earlier members,

has permitted current members to enjoy an environment remarkably similar to that, which existed more than 70 years ago. The stately Clubhouse, the purity of the golf course, the presence of only 35 private cottages on the entire 900-acre property and the natural beauty of the grounds themselves capture the tranquility of an earlier time.

With the exception of the changes, which time and Mother Nature inevitably bring, Yeamans Hall is a community quite similar in both character and physical condition to the property visited by the Yale Golf Team 70 years ago.

Time and nature do, of course, take their toll and through the years succeeding generations of members have provided stewardship of all that we enjoy so much- the challenge of the golf course, the beauty of the grounds or simply the general feeling of contentment produced at Yeamans as described by Seth Raynor so many years ago.

Most recently, this stewardship has taken the form of two funds established by the Board to enhance the golf course and the grounds, respectively. By their very names both funds convey a sense of appreciation for those who brought the Club to life.

The Friends of Seth Raynor was founded in 1987 and has enabled much greater care and attention to be given the golf course. The Friends of Frederick Law Olmsted was established in 1995 and the generosity of the membership has enabled it to undertake several projects true to the original Olmsted Brothers design. The Friends of James Gamble Rogers was established in 2000 and has aided in the recent refurbishment of the clubhouse dining rooms and several of the clubhouse sleeping rooms.

The Trustees of each of these funds have recently retained professionals of a caliber and reputation in our time equal to that enjoyed by Seth Raynor and Olmsted Brothers in the 1920's.

Tom Doak, who is developing a master plan for certain aspects of the golf course, is recognized as one of the leading golf architects in the country today particularly in interpreting the golf course design of the premier architects of the past. His recent article on Donald Ross, contained in the United States Golf Association Journal published in conjunction with the Men's United States Open, examined Ross' talent for design in comparison to his contemporaries of that era including Charlie Blair MacDonald, Alistair Mackenzie and A. W. Tillinghast. His recent golf course design projects include High Pointe and Black Forest in Michigan.

Rick Webel of Innocenti and Webel in Locust Valley and Dr. Mike Dirr of the Horticulture Department at the University of Georgia are helping the Grounds Committee develop a five to ten year plan for the care and cultivation of the property. These two gentlemen are well known to the Club for their magnificent contributions

following Hurricane Hugo when they took the lead in formulating a plan for the replanting of Yeamans following that 1989 storm.

Mike Dirr is Professor of Horticulture at the University of Georgia and is widely published. Dr. Dirr received the Medal of Honor from the Horticulture Society. Rick Webel and his firm have been involved with some of the most significant landscape projects undertaken throughout the United States. For a great many years, they have been involved in the design of the international headquarters of Milliken & Company as well as many of that company's facilities throughout the world. In addition, Innocenti and Webel prepared the landscape design for the BMW plant in upstate South Carolina. Several years ago they provided the master landscape design plan for the Vice-President's residence at Blair House. Rick has recently been retained by Augusta National Golf Club.

As we approach the Club's 75th anniversary, we have the opportunity to benefit from a collaborative effort of professionals who are leaders in their field much as the membership has benefited from the beginning from a similar effort undertaken by equally talented professionals so many years ago. On November 22, 1996, these three gentlemen addressed the membership in the Club library.

Each was received so warmly that the Friends of Frederick Law Olmsted and the Friends of Seth Raynor determined to prepare this collection of materials to serve as a permanent record of both the evening gathering and the day-long collaboration which preceded it and to serve as well as a permanent expression of the Club's gratitude to Mike Dirr, Tom Doak and Rick Webel.

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of Frederick Law Olmsted

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December 26, 2001
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Board of Governors Meeting, 1996