

# KPGC History

Written by Dr. James W. Riley in 1987 and retyped in 2020 cleaning up spelling and grammar.

## PREFACE

Many people have expressed an interest in the past history of the Eureka Golf Course or what is now known as Kaufman Park Golf Course.

I have attempted to gather what facts are available. In the early years of the Eureka Golf Course, few, if any, records were kept and what records were kept have been either lost or destroyed.

All of the individuals who helped start the course are now deceased. The early history is simply what some of us remember and this is what I have tried to put together.

I am sure some of the facts may be, to some extent, inaccurate. Worst of all, some people's names may have been omitted but certainly not intentionally. Many people donated their time, labor, and money with little or any thanks but to simply try and maintain and keep Eureka Golf Course in operation.

Simply for the pure love of GOLF.

Dr. James W. Riley

The first golf course in Eureka was started around 1920, more or less. A coal dealer by the name of Mr. Danahay was encouraged by a Catholic priest from Washington, Illinois, to take up golf for health reasons. Whatever his problems were is not known. A 3-hole course was laid out north east of Eureka, just beyond the old Canning Factory, on what was known as the Hartman Farm. This is located just north of Shaft Street in Eureka. Just how long this existed or who besides the priest and Mr. Danahay played it, no one knows. No records exist, only the word of mouth.

The Eureka Golf Course had its beginning in 1921. A group of citizens had a meeting at the Commercial Club, which was on the second floor of the building just north of the present First Bank of Eureka. Arrangements were made to rent the pasture land or part of it from the farm belonging to the Kaufman brothers, just west of Eureka. At that time it was named the Eureka Country Club. The officers elected at that meeting were: R. J. Dickinson, President; Dr. N. Melaik, Vice President; V. H. Stump, Secretary. Directors were: Miss Laura Van Dyke, Mrs. Mary Dickinson, Professor Silas Jones, and J. W. Allen. Six holes were laid out and the greens were nothing more than a small circle mowed with a hand mower, A tin can was sunk in the center and this was the "green." A bamboo fishing pole with a white rag tied to it served as the "pin." Cows continued to graze on the grounds and they served as the fairway mowers and in part a fertilization program.

The Eureka Country Club later purchased a one-reel horse drawn mower that served as the fairway mower. The cows were fenced out but would frequently break down the fences and be right back.

I might mention at this time in 1921 or 1922, the community staged a huge pageant depicting the founding of this community. The stage was where the present 5th green is now. The audience sat on the side of the hill across the creek between number one green and the ninth tee. I was in the first or second grade at the time, but the whole school took part in it. The pageant was held in the afternoon as there were no lights for an evening performance.

The first so-called "Pro Shop" was in the front part of Stumpf's Drug Store. "Vin" Stumpf, the secretary of the Eureka Country Club, was the pharmacist and an avid golfer. He sold golf clubs. The "Pro Shop" consisted of a discarded hoar-hound candy barrel in which was a random bunch of golf clubs. Such clubs - all wooden shafts, thin leather grips - consisted of mid-irons or a 2 iron, Mashies or 5 irons, Mashie Cleek (Jigger or Mashie iron) or

4 iron, niblicks or pitching wedges, a few drivers, brassies (a wood number 2) and putters. The price range was from two to four dollars a club.

Golf balls were available and consisted of such brands as Kro-flites, Baby Dimples, Worthingtons, and Bullets. The latter were for the big hitters. In those days a ball cost thirty-five cents to fifty cents a piece. Floaters were also available. This ball would float when you hit it in the water. They were larger and a little heavier than the conventional balls.

Golf shoes with spikes were unheard of and most played in tennis shoes. Knickers were popular with men. Sport shirts were unknown at that time and a shirt and tie was the fashion with or without a sweater - some even wore a sport coat. Spiked golf shoes made their appearance in the late 20's and early 30's.

Golf tees were unheard of at that time. At each tee on the golf course was a bucket of sand and a bucket of water. One would take a dab of sand, wet it, and mold a small mound to place the ball on. That was the tee. There was also a dirty towel to wipe your hands on. Golf gloves were to come much later.

As the enthusiasm continued, a few members decided to build some regular greens. The money for these simply came out of some of the members' pockets. They simply donated it. This was around 1925. Roland Brubaker, later a caretaker, was in high school at the time and lived on the farm just across Route 24. He drove a team of mules and a heavy scoop to help build number 1 green. Number 7 green was built at the same time. It is the only green that remains as it was built. A beautiful fourth green was built where the present practice green is now. It was undulated, trapped with white sand and covered with creeping bentgrass. The tee for this hole was located just below our present 4th tee. There were more trees lining the fairway than exist now. It was a beautiful hole and just as tough as it was beautiful. Sadly its life was short as a tremendous flood occurred, washing out the old stone arch bridge which was the bridge for Cruger Avenue and for the traffic from Eureka to Peoria. When the flood subsided, the green was gone and in its place was a three foot deposit of gravel. No attempt was made to rebuild it.

The first caretaker or greenskeeper was Earl Battet, who came in 1924. He lived in Eureka and mowed the fairway with a horse drawn mower. He helped in the construction of the greens. He stayed here a few years then accepted a job as greenskeep in Rome, Illinois. This was quite a posh country club even by today's standards. It was located on the banks of the Illinois River. The golf course is now gone, but the club house still stands.

William Kescher was the next caretaker, or “Shorty” as he was known. Living accommodations had to be built. This was nothing more than a tar paper covered building consisting of two rooms, located on what is the out of bounds line at the bottom of the hill on number 6 fairway, below the “bird house.” A well was dug in the valley on the line of the 6th and 7th fairway. It was simply a hole in the ground, no brick lining, but it did have a cement platform and an iron pump. Everyone stopped for a drink out of the single rusty tin cup that hung there. The water was cold and delicious. This stood until the middle 30’s when the pump stopped up. The platform was removed and a scum of dead ground squirrels was found on the surface of the water. The well was sealed.

In the late 20’s, Harry Kiblinger became the next caretaker. He chose to live in town and the tar paper shack was torn down.

A small building, about ten by fifteen feet, was erected just west of the present 9th green. There were large door-like sides that could be raised up and opened. The open side was screened. You paid your green fees here and you could also purchase soft drinks, candy bars, and golf balls. Later on he carried a few golf clubs. Daily fees were 35 cents a round, and a family membership was \$15.00 per year.

In the early 30’s we experienced terribly hot and dry summers. A gasoline pump and several hundred feet of hose was mounted on a hay rack. Water was pumped from the creek to the greens. It was a meager stream that it pumped. The greens were hard as a rock and the grass consisted mainly of “quackgrass” and other assorted weeds. Fertilizer and weed killers were still no concern or even available at that time. Times were tough as it was in the depths of the Depression. In spite of the hard times, the course remained in operation and there were many regulars who continued to play. There were regulars from Washington, Illinois, that you could set your watch by the time they would tee off. Dr. Zinser, Mr. Roehm, Bill Engel, Mr. Belsely, Bob McClaren - all now deceased.

In 1935 the Eureka Country Club changed its name to the Eureka Washington Country Club, and I think it stayed that name until it was renamed Kaufman Park in 1948.

An interesting side light in the early 30’s was that the American Legion set up a rifle range located just east of the 4th tee. The targets were located across the creek behind the 2nd green. The team practiced quite often and as you were coming up the 3rd fairway, you could hear the bullets snap high above your head.

A few club matches were scheduled with other clubs such as Lacon, El Paso, Fairbury, and Maplewood Country Club in Bloomington. Maplewood no longer exists as it fell victim to the Depression. A dinner was always served after the match right on the course by the wives of the hosting players.

Over the years the golf course has had very few players off the Circuit play here. In the 30's Gus Moreland would play here on occasion and Abe and Al Espinosa would play. Abe would sometimes put on an exhibition. Their sister lived in Washington and when they came to visit here they would come out and play at Eureka. Abe, in later years, spent considerable time with his sister and would be out at the Eureka Golf Course early in the morning and would gladly play with you. He was in his 80's and still played superb golf.

Jane Renner, a PGA Circuit player, played here one time in an exhibition. Her brother Jack Renner stopped here one day. Introduced himself to no one but only used the practice greens.

Walnut Creek presented the same problem then as it does today, occasionally flooding, but then the creek meandered through the course in a horseshoe manner, making it easier to flood. Weeds were abundant along its course.

There were two foot bridges. They were quite elevated to stay above the flood level. Two telephone poles were used as the supports and oak planks nailed across. They were about two feet wide, slightly slanted. There was a tremendous spring to these bridges, and it was really a hazardous experience to walk across them. There were no railings. The tractor bridge crossed the creek about where the 5th tee is. It was a sagging affair made of cables stretched across and planking laid across the cables. It was strong enough and supported a tractor and mower. It survived many floods.

Dip nets were stuck in the ground along these water holes. They were cane poles with a kitchen sieve taped on one end. You could retrieve your ball from the water if you could see it. The mortality of these dip nets was high as kids would steal them for fishing poles.

The little "shack", as it was known, was located west of the 9th green. It was moved, for some reason unknown, to the middle of the present parking lot. It was surrounded by three nice shady oaks, now gone. There was no black top and the dust thick. Any car that drove in would stir up a stifling cloud of dust that would engulf everything.

In about the middle or latter 30's, Harry Kiblinger left the course and Earl Barrett was re-employed, but this time it was necessary to build a place for him to live. This was a

one-story home just north of the present Pro-Shop with a large screened-in porch. The “Shanty” remained in the center of the parking lot and served as a canteen and a place to collect daily fees. Mr. Barrett stayed about a year, and I believe was forced to leave due to ill health, either he or his wife.

In the late 30’s - 1936 to be exact - Roland Brubaker became the Pro and caretaker. The little shanty in the parking lot was abandoned, and he moved into the house vacated by Earl Barrett - that is, he moved in his golf stock. This became the Pro-Shop and “Rollie”, as he was known, carried quite a line of clubs, balls, and shoes. He would always give you a good deal.

He had a real interest in the club and would attend some meetings held for greenskeepers and began to use fertilizer and weed killers. The greens began to improve. Along about this time, more land was acquired from the Kaufmans. This is where the present number 2 green lies. This was actually a marsh, but by draining it they were able to construct number 2 green and lengthen number 3. This was still pretty marshy for a few years and with a good rain, it was impossible to even walk in that area.

The pump on the hay rack was abandoned and an electric pump was installed just west of the 5th tee. Hoses were still used, but during this time water pipes were laid to the greens. This was a tremendous stride and greens continued to improve.

Rollie was a good cook and it was during his reign that the “stags” were organized. He would have a fish fry on the day of the stag after which there would be some lively, if not lucrative, card games held on the screened-in front porch.

Frank Kaufman died in the late 30’s, but his brother Ben took over the farm and continued to permit the golf course to exist. It was through the Kaufman family that they put the land in a trust to be operated as either a park or a golf course. A board of trustees was appointed, and they chose to operate it as a golf course. The course now belonged to the Eureka Washington Golf Course and a self-perpetuating board was appointed to operate it. There are two stipulations in the trust. One - that no liquor shall be sold on the premises, and number two - if the golf course failed to operate as a golf course for a year, it would automatically go to Eureka College. The course then became officially known as Kaufman Park Golf Course.

Now in about 1942 there is a definite gap in the history created by World War II. How the course survived was a miracle. It survived but just barely. Many of the men had gone off

to war. Gas rationing and lack of play made it tough. Many people, too numerous to mention, pitched in and helped. Rollie Brubaker was still around and gave a hand and also instructed the volunteer to help. The war ended in 1945.

Paul Leman took over the course. Paul was a local boy who had helped during the war. Between Paul and Jake Gerber, who had returned from the service, these two revived the course. This lasted for about a year or two. In 1949 Willis Ramoley and his wife took over the operation of the club. In 1951, Merle Wuethrich took over the management. He ran the course for one year. Merle left to go with his brothers and form the Wuethrich Oil Company. Once again the search was on for a caretaker.

Rollie Brubaker came back, not full time, but to help from 1954 to 1956. His son Ben actually ran it while convalescing from poliomyelitis. Ben left to help his father run the par 3 golf course west of Washington. His father had purchased the land and built the course.

Rollie was still a state policeman and in his off duty time, he would help his son, Ben, with the Eureka course. He was also a Justice of the Peace and would sometimes hold courts in the pro-shop.

Rollis gave up Eureka and Frank Nickel took over as greenskeeper from 1957 to 1962. It was while Frank Nickel was caretaker that our present pro-shop was built. The plans were drawn up by a local architect, Tom Howell, charging nothing for his services. The original plan was for a two-story building with a dance floor and kitchen, but for financial reasons it could not be done as originally planned by Jack Bangston, George Riley, and Walter Lenze.

At this time the meandering Walnut Creek was straightened out to alleviate the frequent flooding. Gilbert and Compton, engineers and earth-movers, accomplished this.

The present tractor bridge on number 2 was built while Frank Nickel was caretaker. Most of the work was donated by members of the club. Oak planking donated by Jim Anderson had to be hauled from Fairbury, Illinois, where Mr. Anderson's sawmill was located.

In 1962 Harvey Slagell left a course in Fort Wayne, Indiana, that he partly owned and managed, to take over Kaufman Park. He helped rebuild the 3rd, 4th, and 9th green. He designed and with the help of some high school boys, built them. Harvey was well versed on fertilizer and green treatment. He helped the course a great deal. He was an individual with a winning personality. He promoted golf equipment and would always make you a good deal.

Rick Wuethrich followed in Harvey Slagell's footsteps in 1971 and did a good job managing the course until 1980. Rick, with the help of Pat Flanagan, ripped up 3 green and

built a new green. The green was a tiny postage stamp resembling 8 green with a steep hill on the west side of the green. The hill was about half as high as the hill fronting number 8. Rick and Pat built a new green complex which is what golfers play today. Rick left and Rich Hoadley became the course manager. As always, the course lacked money, but under Rich Hoadley's experienced hands the greens improved even more. In 1987 much of the watering system was replaced as well as an automatic sprinkler system for all the greens. With continued improvements, the play has increased to an unbelievable number. There are plans for continuing improvements.

This pretty well sums it up. I am sure some things may be a little off, date wise, but this has simply been an effort on my part to get some of the past history in writing.