

## Golfing in Wawarsing

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Golf became a popular sport in the Town of Wawarsing after the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when some of the more forward thinking resort owners realized its potential. Most of the original nine-hole courses are gone, but the course at one of our leading area resorts has earned national prestige.

Ellenville is proud to be the home of the *Nevele Grande Resort & Country Club*, begun in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Charles Slutsky and his family as a small farm and boarding house on what had been the Weinberger property in Leurenkill. At that time it was called the *Nevele Falls Farm House*. Son Joseph and his wife Yetta developed the famous resort known as *The Nevele Country Club* at the original site. Charles and son Ben moved to adjacent land which Charles owned and began a second boarding house named *Falls View Farm House*, later shortening it to *The Fallsview*. For more than three-quarters of a century, descendants of Charles Slutsky operated the *Nevele* and the *Fallsview*, side by side.

A current description from the *Nevele Grande* web page says, in part, an “800-acre family resort with accommodations available in two beautifully situated resort hotels, the *Nevele Grande* and the *Fallsview* are only steps apart.”

Their combined golf courses have created a magnificent 27-hole championship golf course, redesigned by Tom Fazio and Robert Trent Jones, Jr. The course is rated four stars out of a possible five by Golf Digest and has been awarded five stars (out of a possible five) by golfcourse.com. It has been judged “one of the best resort courses in America,” and the *Nevele Grande*’s owner, Mitchell Wolff, recently described the course as “challenging, a great course” which draws golfers from many states. PGA Professional Jan Urso, *Nevele Grande*’s Director of Golf, oversees the Golf School which offers programs for everyone from absolute beginners and casual weekend players to low handicap golfers. Regular PGA events are held here.

The *Nevele Grande* complex is clearly a tremendous asset to the Town of Wawarsing area and the only local resort where the golf course is so noteworthy, but township history reminds us of other early hotel facilities that also offered golf as recreation for their guests.

*Barrow Farms Inn* on Rte. 55 in Napanoch became the *Napanoch Country Club* in 1925 and, for several decades, maintained a nine-hole, par-3 course. Francis Irwin, reminiscing about the years he worked there as a caddy, talked about the course being on the other side of the stream, with the ninth hole at the gate. The *Napanoch Country Club* was an “invited club,” with membership only by invitation. Many local young men worked as caddies at the club, including Jim and George Barthel, Jim Plunkett, Francis Irwin, and the Eck boys, among others. The property later became a health facility known as *Camp Napanoch, Inc.*, and still later was sold to Yeshiva Karlin Stolin of Beth Aaron Veisare Rabbinical Institute.

The famous *Yama Farms Inn* opened in 1913 on 1,300 acres just outside Napanoch across **Honk Falls Bridge**. Owner Frank Seaman dreamed of an inn that would be



From a 1960s(?) postcard touting the *Nevele Hotel Golf Course*, courtesy of Barbara Hoff.

similar to a private club where one would entertain his friends. There would be a flat room rate with no other charges. He hoped to meet expenses, but did not expect to make a profit.

*Yama-no-Uchi* (Home in the Mountains) had its own dairy farm, trout ponds, an extensive poultry farm (which included squab breeding for improvement of the flock of thousands), and a variety of activities and sports which, from 1923, included a golf course on the premises.

A 1931 booklet distributed by *Yama Farms*, “designed to supply strictly matter-of-fact information,” announced that “Mr. Frank Meehan of Philadelphia has taken advantage of the natural contour of the land, and built a nine-hole golf course immediately by the Inn. The general comment of the past few years has been, ‘It’s a sporty course without being too hard.’ A professional is in attendance at the golf house near the first tee and caddies within call.”

The extensive *Yama Farms* collection at the *Ellenville Public Library and Museum* includes a printed list of “Caddie Regulations” which is currently on display in the permanent *Yama* exhibit. The regulations included “Caddies must not swing player’s clubs or take them from the bag except upon request” and “Caddies must keep off the putting greens at all times except to hold the flag when employed.” More importantly, in the light of the general *Yama* philosophy of no other charges or tipping, caddie fees were established at “fifty cents for nine holes for class A caddies” down to “thirty cents for class C, and in same proportion for additional holes played.” The regulations urged guests not to be over liberal in classification and reminded “No tips to or ball purchases from caddies permitted.”

An “Addendum” to Katharine T. Terwilliger’s 1982 book *Napanoch, Land Overflowed By Water* provides a fascinating introduction to the intriguing history of this unique hotel.

Both the *Homowack Lodge* in Spring Glen and the *Tamarack Lodge* in Greenfield Park, following the pattern of local summer boarding houses which became resort hotels, offered nine-hole golf courses on their premises. Dave Levinson, an outstanding hotelier and community-minded resident, was born in the six-room boarding house that had been built by Max Levinson in Greenfield Park in 1903. The senior Levinson had been an immigrant from Minsk, Russia, who named his dairy farm *Tamarack*, the Indian name for the stately pines that graced his property. Dave took over the hotel operation in 1932, along with his eight sisters. They went on to found and operate other hotels in the area and in other states. When Dave and his wife sold the *Tamarack* in 1986, the hotel had grown to cover 400 acres and included more than 300 rooms and a bungalow colony. ↗