

Forward, into the Past

Revisiting The "Lost" Cragmoor Country Club

by Geoff Walsh, *PGA*

Rising majestically from a mountain plateau 1,857 feet above the valley, *The Cragmoor Inn* opened in 1904. Under the guidance of Austa Densmore Sturdevant, a remarkable visionary, artist, and renaissance woman, the Inn flourished for decades. With the promise of clean, cool, invigorating air, the 105-room Cragmoor Inn became a getaway destination for many a harried guest. Vistas of unparalleled beauty were visible; ever changing, yet ever remaining the same. The profile of the Shawangunk Mountain Range to the east remains constant. The promontory today known as **Sam's Point** juts out notably from the ridge. The rolling hills to the west and the Catskills to the north provide Cragmoorians and visitors a comfort and promise that suggests this view will remain forever undisturbed.

In 1924, on land leased from, and adjacent to, the Cragmoor Inn, a nine-hole golf course, reputed to be one of the best in the east, had its beginning.

The firm of Wayne E. Stiles, Golf Architect, was hired and construction began in the autumn of 1924. Mr. Stiles had an office in Boston and partnered with John Van Kleek, who ran a branch of the company in St. Petersburg, Florida. Mr. Stiles built more than sixty courses between 1924 and 1932, mainly in New England. The 1920s are widely recognized as the Golden Age of course design, and Mr. Stiles's designs placed him in direct competition with the most prolific and preeminent golf architect of the twentieth century, Donald Ross. Mr. Ross worked out of a Rhode Island location, and the two vied for many course designs in the northeast. Many compare the works of

Wayne E. Stiles with Donald Ross's, certainly a compliment to Mr. Stiles's abilities. His courses remain highly respected to this day.

Under the direction of Mr. Stiles and his site foreman Leonard Marl – a native Cragmoorian – six holes were ready for play in the spring of 1925... and the game was on. With the addition of three holes, the nine officially opened in August 1928. Soon, plans for another nine holes on adjacent land owned by Mr. Inness received consideration. In keeping with the conditions of ownership, Mr. Inness agreed to deed the tract of land to the *Cragmoor Company, Inc.* at a cost of two shares of preferred stock per acre. Those nine, never built, apparently became a casualty of the economic crises of the 1930s.

The course measured a substantial 2,900 yards. It possessed challenging green complexes, wide fairways, and deep bunkers. The fifth green was located directly in front of the Inn. Many players stopped briefly for refreshments or lunch, and continued. This unusual routing is hauntingly similar to the famed Pine Valley Golf Club, which is widely recognized as the greatest golf course in the world. The fourth green is located so near the clubhouse that many members either play the four holes as a warm-up or stop for a quick bowl of Pine Valley's world-famous turtle soup before tackling the devilish par-three fifth hole.

Records indicate the *Cragmoor Country Club* gained corporate status in 1926. Annual memberships required the purchase of not fewer than five shares of preferred stock or twenty-five shares of common stock in the *Cragmoor Company, Inc.* Guests of members were allowed a once-a-year privilege to play, but only if residing within three miles of the *Cragmoor Golf Club*. Guests of the Inn would pay a greens fee of \$2.50 on Saturday, Sunday, and holidays; \$2 on weekdays; \$12 weekly; \$40 monthly; and \$85 for an annual pass.

Karl Collings of Landsdowne, Pa., served on the Golf Committee as the Club's first Chairman, along with four other members appointed by the Board of Governors. ➔

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