

Compiled by Kevin Mendik, May, 2009 with additions to the chapter from *The Life and Work of Wayne Stiles*, published in 2008.

Pine Brook Country Club (FNA Pine Brook Valley Country Club)

Organized 1924, admitted to Allied Membership in the U.S.G.A. on January 9, 1925. Joined the Massachusetts Golf Association in 1925. Name changed in 1944.¹

For those who appreciate what Wayne Stiles did when he laid out a golf course, Pine Brook is a great example. Over a dozen original greens remain, including the practice green (the original 2nd green). There are many places where well hit shots don't quite reach the point on the putting surface that they need to achieve in order to ensure that the next shot will be a putt. The original 1st hole (now 17) is a great example of Stiles' use of the false front that can easily result in a longer subsequent shot as the ball rolls back down the slope past the previous lie. There is the great par three second hole (originally #4) where the top of the flag can be seen, but not the putting surface. Well struck balls will often spend more time rolling back down the false front than they did in the air. Bunkers are on both sides. There are the ubiquitous elevated greens set in a rock outcropping with towering deciduous trees guarding the site. The entire property consists of only 106 acres, plays today to merely (by today's standards) 6360 yards, but has significant relief, as do many of the great Stiles layouts. From the slopes of Weston's Doublet Hill to the brook that originally came into play on 7 holes, the only flat areas are the tees.

When the course opened in 1924, it played to 6,410 yards, quite substantial for its day. By today's standards, many of the holes are not long, but offer the same challenges from the forward tees as from the back. Today's course plays 50 yards shorter from the tips, but the green sites and approach shots remain key to protecting par just as they did when Stiles laid out the course. In many places, a booming 300 yard drive straight off the tee will result in trouble, overshoot a dogleg or simply roll off the mostly canted fairways.

From the perspective of many folks who frequent the course, the greens are the best part. Pine Brook boasts 13 original greens, including the practice green (formerly #2) and the 15th green which have both been expanded.² On the other side of the coin, the bunkers have been softened considerably, many have been removed and in some cases locations have changed. Stiles' routing is intact.³ In 1947, a few years after the original locker room burned down, the club began increased use of the main house for dining and functions, and today's routing was established.⁴ One corner of the new cart barn sits less than 30 feet from the first tee, and it is still physically connected to the original clubhouse.

¹ Personal conversation with Bob Crowley on 25 April 07. The members bought the club and changed the name. BC was Asst. Pro 1957, Head Pro 1962-1989, Director of Golf 1989-2008.

² Today's original greens are as follows according to Mike Iacono (soil/core samples) and Bob Crowley: 1,2,5,7,9,10,11,12,13,14 and 17. 15 and the putting green have been enlarged.

³ See 1927 Plan from *Pine Brook Valley Country Club*. 1927. Private Collection, Kevin Mendik.

⁴ Personal conversation with Bob Crowley on 25 April 07.

Stiles was faced with some unique design challenges at Pine Brook. The aqueduct from the Weston reservoir had been built in 1901 across what is now the first hole, bisects the tee boxes on 18, crosses under the 3rd fairway and abuts the 6th tee. It only features prominently into today's opening hole, where the tee offers a view of the green, but as with the 7th hole, the next shot is blind. In fact, the course offers blind shots either from tee or approach on two thirds of the holes.

The course sits on land once owned by three prominent Weston families⁵ and the clubhouse was originally designed for textile merchant Francis A. Foster by Boston architect James Kelley. The house was completed in 1895-96 and many exterior features of the Renaissance Style brick mansion are extant today, although there have been substantial modifications and expansions.⁶

The club's first President was David Stoneman, one of the driving forces behind the club's founding. B. Loring Young, a portion of whose land was leased to develop the course, was one of Pine Brook's early prominent members. Most likely, Mr. Young paved the way for the club's acceptance into Weston, although he did not sit on any boards or committees. He was the Speaker of the Massachusetts House from 1921 until 1924, was a Weston Selectmen from 1910 until well in to the 1930's, and often boasted of being one of the only non-Jewish members of Pine Brook.⁷ When Pine Brook was founded in 1924, golf had come to the masses in terms of public courses, yet there were virtually no private courses with predominantly Jewish memberships. Pine Brook was one of the first in the country. To get a sense of how significant this was, at that time there were few if any Jewish people living in Weston. It was rumored then that the land sold to build the golf course was done so with the provision that none of the club members would live in Weston.⁸ Pine Brook today is still predominantly a Jewish club, although the membership is much more homogeneous as is the case at most of the Boston area's private clubs.

The club has always valued its high level of conditioning as it has been since its beginnings. An add depicting Pine Brook that appeared in the April 1924 issue of *Golf Illustrated* touted the "Diamond E" brand of high quality seeds supplied by the Thomas W. Emerson Company. The first superintendent was Delbert Theall, who was in charge of construction for Stiles and remained there until the early 1930's. Howard Farrant, formerly at The Country Club followed him and remained until Dan Brennan took over from 1962 to 1965. The following year Doug Johnson came to Pine Brook from the Framingham CC and began his tenure by rejecting the U.S.G.A.'s recommendation to rebuild seven of the greens.⁹ He was one of the first to cut all the fairways short to encourage root growth and used a triplex mower instead of the commonly used gang mower. He also aerified greens, but not by removing the plug as is common today, but by a form of deep slicing, top dressing and rolling. This allowed them to be used, sometimes within hours of treatment. Keith Gavin followed him until Mike Iacono arrived in 1992.

⁵ Foster, Young and Davis. See Fox, Pamela. *Farm Town to Suburb*. At page 545.

⁶ Fox at page 545.

⁷ Fox at page 557.

⁸ Fox at page 556.

⁹ According to BC, the agronomy group from Rutgers and University of Minnesota visited the course.

Mr. Iacono and his brother Vinnie, who is also a golf course Superintendent, have greenkeeper genes. Their father was also in the business, working for many years at Metacomet Country Club in Rhode Island, where Mike worked before coming to Pine Brook. Mike has strong sense of Stiles' design philosophy and the club's reputation for great turf all around. Through subtle clearing and mowing, he's recaptured lost tees and more importantly, pin placements. He has overseen the sometimes controversial reestablishment of fescue grasses in many locations around the club, which has brought a classic look and feel back to the course.

Also beginning to return are fairway bunkers, which Mr. Stiles used prolifically, as can be seen in the 1938 aerial image of the course. In the spring of 2009, work was completed on two sets of opposing fairway bunkers on the seventh hole. Their location plays as close as possible to those shown on the 1938 aerial photo of the course, all but one of which had been lost by 1952. For those who consider the hole a stern test today, consider that in 1938, the brook was still open across the fairway of not only #7, but #9 and #10, as well as where it is comprised of irrigation ponds today. Stiles also placed a large bunker directly on top of the hill that blocks the green's view from the second shot location of all but the longest hitters of today, and would likely challenge even their tee shots should it too be restored. Literally dozens of bunkers saw similar fates between years surrounding the Depression and World War II, which was all too typical of most courses during that time period.

The golf course was in great shape as early as 1927, when the club hosted the Massachusetts Junior Championship under the guidance of John J. Flattery, the first Club Professional.¹⁰ In June of 1930, the club hosted an exhibition four-ball match which pitted professionals Horton Smith and Leo Diegel against two of the areas leading amateurs, Fred Wright and Jesse Guilford. Smith's par 71 carried the day for the professional team.¹¹

The club survived the Depression and World War II, playing a part in the "Salvage For Victory" scrap drive, when a windmill on the property was dismantled to provide steel for the war effort.¹² Tournaments held at Pine Brook have included four NEPGA Championships, and the club has been the site of numerous qualifiers for regional and national amateur and professional championships.¹³

The club has seen its share of top quality playing members, with Stanley E. (Ted) Bishop leading the way in the 1940's. Mr. Bishop won the Massachusetts Amateur Championship, the New England Amateur Championship and the U.S. Amateur Championship, all in 1946; the Massachusetts and New England Titles being his second victories at those events. He was also a member of the 1947 Walker Cup Team. One of his most notable rounds occurred at the Woodland Golf Club, where he scored a 60 in a round before World War II.¹⁴ Mr. Bishop also had the distinction of giving Red Sox

¹⁰ NY Times, April 23, 1927. The 1927 Club Book lists Mr. Flattery as Club Professional at page 8.

¹¹ NY Times, June 30, 1930.

¹² Fox at page 150. See photo from 1942 Town Report.

¹³ Personal conversation with BC on 25 April, 2007.

¹⁴ U.S.G.A. Journal, July, 1949 at pages 7-8.

slugger Ted Williams a golf lesson on the roof of the Ritz Hotel in 1949.¹⁵ He often played in an event at the Quaker Ridge Golf Club in New York known as the William Rice Hochster Memorial Invitational, winning that event in 1951, 1953 and 1957¹⁶ and was the Pine Brook club champion multiple times. He lost his Amateur status for a few years beginning in 1930 when he became the Caddiemaster at Pine Brook. In 1957 Bob Crowley, the former Boston College Golf Captain joined the professional staff at Pine Brook,¹⁷ and became the Head Pro in 1962 after long time professional Edward Myers died of a heart attack suffered at the pro shop. Mr. Myers had joined the staff in 1929, following John Flattery.¹⁸ Mr. Crowley continued as Head Professional until 1989, and continued as the club's Golf Director until his death in 2008. He was succeeded by Kurt Sokolowsky, who stepped aside in 1995 for current Pro Keith Barber. Pine Brook also had a long time Assistant Professional; John Kelley served the club from 1930 to 1978.

Mr. Crowley was among the club's most accomplished golfers, winning the Massachusetts Open four times in 1957, 1962, 1966 and 1973. He holds the club's record of 63, which he did twice. One of those times was during a particularly good three day run when he shot a 61 at Charles River, one of his 63's at Pine Brook and finished up with a 61 at Woodland.

The latest chapter of Pine Brook's continuing efforts to remain in top shape culminated in the completion in 2007 of a new Turf Care Center, which was seamlessly integrated into the old facility's location where the Foster's barn had first been situated. It offers state of the art features, and ample room to maintain the club's turf care equipment.¹⁹

No doubt, Wayne Stiles would appreciate the Pine Brook of today.

¹⁵ Edward Wyner Archives. Photo appeared in the Boston Globe on January 11, 2007.

¹⁶ NY Times. June 20, 1957 at page 36.

¹⁷ *Golfdom*. February, 1957 at page 3.

¹⁸ *Golfdom*. February, 1962 at page 58.

¹⁹ At the first meeting of the Grounds and Greens Committee held in the new Turf care Center in late 2006, one of the committee members remarked that the flat screen TV in the workers common room was larger than the one in the men's locker room. The turf staff often need to watch the multilingual DVD's that come with today's equipment, and are often easier to understand than the written directions.