Revisiting Max’s Playground


The legend tells that Max built his nine-holer because he was denied membership in Berkleigh Country Club. Something about his unsavory reputation. Other than his penchant for brewing and selling beer illegally, Max did no harm. If fact, he did good. Max provided product for a thirsty population. They did not support prohibition. They supported brewers such as Max.

What’s more, Max operated a savings association that provided small loans that banks wouldn’t. He was generous to those in need. He never carried a weapon. If he couldn’t get what he wanted through negotiation, he walked away.

Unfortunately, those Max dealt with were not so inclined. Max was gunned down in 1933 at a hotel in Elizabeth, N.J. The perps were never apprehended. As the story goes, the hit was ordered by Dutch Schultz, one of the era’s notorious crime bosses, who didn’t want Max in his territory. Max was 33 and he died just at prohibition was ending. He also died before his golf course was completed.

Getting to the point. The GC’s research staff recently uncovered a hand-drawn yardage book from Green Hills. The drawings are displayed on this and the following pages. The yardage book is not vintage; it was created in the early 2000s. The numbers in the upper left, such as 1/10 and 2/11, designate the front and back nine holes.

To say Green Hills was quirky is understatement. The illustrations show each hole’s shape and features. What it doesn’t show is the severely sloping fairways. For example, the second hole pitched sharply to the left. A line of trees separated the second from the third fairway but tee shots off number two frequently ran into and sometimes across the third fairway. A flat lie was a rare thing at Green Hills.

The greens were small and featured knolls and valleys. Get on the wrong side of the green, or above the hole, and a two-putt was a good result. Each hole had two tees so an 18-hole round could be played with some variety. Seven holes had fairway markers that at most golf courses would designate 150 yards to the green’s center. Not Green Hills. The fairway markers varied from 155 yards to 161 yards.

When The GC’s photographer visited the site on July 23, 2016, he found that nature was reclaiming its territory. The sod on the greens and tees had been scraped away, the giant teeth marks of the monstrous mechanized earth mover leaving scars in the dirt.

Although the golf course is gone, The GC endeavors to keep the memory alive. This is the only place in the universe where you can see the Green Hills yardage book.

Enjoy!
3. All that remains of the third green is a scarred patch of dirt. The tee shot was uphill to a fairway tilted to the right. The tee can be seen in the distance, through the shoot of trees.

4. The fourth hole played as a sharp dogleg left. The trees to the left formed a border between the fourth and fifth fairways. The second shot was frequently played off a sidehill, downhill lie to a well-trapped green.

5. Golfers could cut the fifth hole’s dogleg, left, leaving a short second shot. The risk of hitting the tee ball in a waste area deterred many players from attempting the short cut. A power fade was the tee shot of choice. A yawning trap to the right swallowed many a shot hit just a few feet short of the green. The tiny putting surface featured a mound that was generally referred to as an elephant burial site.

6. The downhill par 3 sixth hole, right, was as difficult a one-shooter as a golfer would want. The long, narrow, angled green was protected by sand traps in front and out-of-bounds right.
7. The bare ground marks the site of the seventh green, set atop a plateau. From the front tee, number seven was a nondescript par 4. From the back tee, which was in front of the barn seen in the distance, number seven required a long drive and a mid-iron second shot to a green that was difficult to hold. The road to the right attracted many a stray shot.

8. What the eighth lacked in length it made up for with a rolling green. A ridge from front to back divided the putting surface. The careful golfer hit his tee shot to the correct side of the ridge.

9. The finishing hole was an easy par 4 from the front tee. Big hitters harbored dreams of launching a titanic drive onto the green. Many did just so. Even short hitters were left with a short pitch to the pin. Playing from the back tee was an altogether different experience. A ridge cut across the fairway at the landing site, kicking the ball violently to the right and robbing the distance. The long second shot was played to a flat green cut into the hill, with traps to the left and right. The house seen in the background was built just recently.