

Brookhaven: A Community's Golf Course

By Ron Feulner

At age twenty-one, Thomas Towers sailed from England to America, met Elizabeth Hoyt on board, and married her. They had three children, including a son, William.

In 1888, William Towers married Jennie Myers and soon after moved to an Adirondack town called Griffin, where he worked in a tannery and sawmill. In 1897, they left Griffin with their cows, children, and belongings for the long, dusty trek south to the Town of Greenfield, Saratoga County. They eventually purchased a farm on what is now Alpine Meadows Road—the same farm that would one-day become *Brookhaven*. Soon after his arrival, William's name appeared in a local newspaper:

Greenfield Center...was the scene of a shooting affray on Thursday night. Byron Place and William Towers engaged in a fight in Henry Bishop's barroom and were demolishing the furniture and bar fixtures at a great rate when the proprietor interfered and shot Place. Morning Star, Glens Falls NY, 1899

Life for William, Jennie, and children continued on the farm. One of their daughters, Jennie Towers Pattist would later write:

Remember... the dried apples and sweet corn; we didn't have too many sweets then, black strap molasses, horehound candy, and licorice. Then there were the sleigh rides with the buffalo robe and soap stone, then ride down to the village to a box party, oyster supper, or a jack-wax party at Ira Holmes'.... One of my fondest and cherished memories is recalling the sight of Pa and Ma going down across the meadow and creek on a Sunday morning.

They raised fourteen children and acres of strawberries on the sandy foot hills of the Kayaderosseras Range. They also built a dairy business, delivering milk from their cows to local families, but, apparently, Willam still had time for recreation:

South Corinth Farmer's Mystery is solved....How William Towers, a South Corinth farmer, stole his own horse and did not know it, has been uncovered by the Saratoga police. Towers went to police headquarters in Saratoga and reported to Commissioner King that his black mare and buggy had been stolen from the shed of John Callahan, in Van Dam Street. Towers said he came to town in the morning and tied the horse under the shed. He admitted to the police that he had visited several cafes during the day. About 8 o'clock at night he went to the shed and the horse was gone. Inspector Crandall was detailed on the case. The horse was finally located at Barnett's livery stable. Barnett said that the proprietor of Davis' blacksmith shop in Long Alley had brought the horse to

the stable, with the statement that a man had brought it there to be shod and had failed to return for it. Davis did not want to leave the horse in the shop all night, and took it to the stable. Inspector Crandall learned that Towers himself had taken the horse to the blacksmith shop. Towers declared that he had no recollection of taking the horse from the shed and driving it to the blacksmith shop. *The Amsterdam Evening Recorder*, Friday, December 15, 1916.

When William's son, Earl, returned from WWI, William sold the farm and dairy business to him. William, who was fond of saying that he "wanted to die with his boots on," bought a store in South Corinth and ran it for a while before becoming a fire warden at the Spruce Mountain Fire Tower, where he died in 1929. On the day of his death, he called his grandson and asked him to deliver supplies. When the grandson arrived, William was found dead next to the tower from where he apparently had fallen after suffering a fatal heart attack.

William's son, Earl Towers, married Beatrice Bishop, and they continued running the farm and delivering milk to local customers while raising their seven children. When NY State passed a mandatory pasteurization law, Earl Towers teamed up with another local dairyman and in 1933 built the *Gill-Towers Pasteurization Plant* in Corinth and continued to produce and peddle milk to their customers.

Earl and Beatrice's oldest son, Earl Jr., grew up working on his parents' farm. He remembers milking in the morning, then loading several cases of bottled milk in the passenger seat of their pick-up truck and heading out to pick up forty quart cans of raw milk from local farmers while delivering bottled milk to customers along the way. The forty-quart cans were delivered to the family's pasteurization plant in Corinth before returning for the evening milking at the farm on Alpine Meadows Road.

In 1957, Earl Sr., his three sons grown and following their own interests, sold his cows. He turned the dairy processing plant in Corinth over to Earl Jr. and Earl Jr.'s brother, Dave. They continued to buy milk from other farms and run the processing plant.

While the Towers family had been getting established in the dairy and farming business, other area industries were also thriving. The first paper making mill opened in Corinth in 1869, and several mills followed, some eventually destroyed by fire. In 1898, the International Paper Company was organized and purchased the then existing Hudson River Mill. Through the years that followed, the Hudson River Mill became a world leader in the industry.

In 1923, International Paper Company decided to add a group insurance plan for its employees. The company was willing to pay the greater part of its cost, with employees contributing the rest. The response was immediate and overwhelming as nearly 100 % of the employees signed up. Under the insurance agreement, the dividends were to go to the company, but the

company decided to pass them back to the employees. Since the amount per employee was small, the mill supervisor decided that it would make more sense to donate the lump sum dividends to some kind of association comprised of all the employees who had signed up for the insurance. EMBA, or the *Employees Mutual Benefit Association* of the International Paper Hudson River Mill, was organized for this purpose. EMBA's constitution stated that the object of the organization was to cooperate with the Company:

1. Promote the general welfare of employees.
2. Promote and administer financial and other benefits in the form of life insurance, sickness, and disability insurance.
3. Promote through proper measures the health, safety, financial security, and social entertainment and recreation of its members and their families.

In 1942, the EMBA News bulletin was published for the first time to keep the boys in the military informed of mill and hometown news.

When the war ended, the International Paper Company's mill in Corinth was booming and EMBA was becoming ever more active in finding creative ways of funding itself. With the support of O. B. Beyer, mill manager, the organization built bowling alleys in the commissary, basketball and softball teams were organized, and eventually tennis, fishing, hunting, boxing, and golf were added. A sports fund was provided by the mill management, which financed little league baseball as well as other community activities.

In 1957, EMBA installed new bowling alleys in Community Hall and leased and operated the nine-hole *Bend of the River Golf Course* in Hadley to satisfy the mill employees' growing interest in golf. Soon, the committee, chaired by Bert Edwards from the mill, realized that the employee interest in golf had expanded beyond the capacity of the Bend of the River course, and they began thinking about building a new golf course. During the summer of 1959, a photographer and helicopter were enlisted to photograph from the air the land between Greenfield Center and Corinth, looking for a suitable site.

The committee eventually chose the Earl Towers, Sr. farm on Alpine Meadows Road in South Corinth as a potential site. Mr. Towers agreed to sell but reserved about 2 ½ acres, where his and his son's houses were located. Since EMBA was not structured to buy property, in November, 1960, a new corporation called the *O. B. Beyer Recreation Park Corporation* was formed.

In December, 1960, 370 acres of land were purchased from Earl Towers, Sr. and his neighbor, Madeline Towers, for \$18,600. Before the purchase was finalized, George J. Pulver, golf pro at both McGregor and Saratoga Golf and Polo clubs, was retained to walk the property and determine its suitability for golf. His report was favorable as he observed, "a rolling terrain,

sand and topsoil availability for building greens, and a good water supply from the Kayaderosseras Creek flowing across the property.”

Pulver’s son, George Jr., who was a good golfer in his own right, said:

My father took me up to the Brookhaven site during the winter, and we shoveled a bare spot in the cow field where he was thinking of placing one of the tees on a dogleg hole. After we got the tee shoveled, we stood facing Northwesterly, toward the old ski area, and he had me hit balls with my driver toward the tallest pine tree in that direction. He was getting older and couldn’t hit the ball as far as I could. Each time, we would find the hole in the crusted snow where the ball landed, and I would spray the snow around the spot with fluorescent paint while my father calculated the flight distances with a tape measure and transit. He was trying to decide where to locate the dogleg on that hole.

There was also a pond on the property and my father asked me to fly the balls over it while he noted the landing sites of each ball. This eventually became the ninth hole and later (after the course was expanded) the eighteenth.

Then he would come home and work on our old maple dining room table with his maps and drawings designing the course. He didn’t have a draftsman’s stool, so he would stand up. He wanted to stay with the original Scottish concept of using the land the way nature had shaped it. He felt very strongly about this and wanted to design the course around the contours of the land. He was fond of saying that, ‘The natural terrain of our mother earth should be undisturbed in the building of golf courses. Just as the gentle curves of a woman’s body have been forever preserved in the visual arts, so too, nature’s landscape should be preserved by the golf course architect.’ He loved Brookhaven and wanted it to be his final contribution—his epitaph. He especially loved the fact that it was going to be a working man’s course.

Later, in 1973, George Pulver sent a letter to Al Mattau of the *Saratogian*, reiterating his desire to design a course around the natural beauty of the land. He wrote:

I must confess in all modesty the land and its beauty was there—my effort simply was to design a golf area and not molest the beauty. I shall keep trying.

Construction work with bulldozers began in the summer of 1961. Pulver often spent his day off (from the other golf courses where he was employed) at Brookhaven, hitting golf balls across the farm fields to test and fine tune his design while supervising the bulldozer operator who was clearing trees and fences.

Others volunteered and offered their time and equipment to speed the project along. Robert St. Lawrence donated his two-yard bucket loader for the summer, which expedited the removal

of stone walls and the digging of the foundation for the clubhouse. Scrap iron pipe was welded together by mill welders to create a watering system for the first nine holes.

Work continued into the summer of 1962. Scrub trees were bulldozed and pushed into large brush windrows down the middle of some of the fairways. Jim Smith, mill employee and chief of the Greenfield Fire Department, arranged for a fire engine to stand by as the piles were burned. The town and village of Corinth officials also donated the use of heavy equipment as they felt that this was a project to benefit the entire community.

In March, 1962, George Pulver was out on the course in knee high boots, studying drainage off the newly shaped greens, making certain there were no pockets where water could accumulate. When satisfied, he supervised the mix of two parts soil and one part sand from the farm and another one-part peat from a local Greenfield bog to be laid down on the greens in preparation for seeding. In September, after all nine greens had been covered to a depth of eight inches with this mixture, seed and fertilizer were added before a local Boy Scout group was called in to stomp the mixture down, compacting it to six-inches.

The fairways were also being prepared for seeding. International Paper Co. had been developing a new product called *Turf Fiber*, which was a green mixture of pulp fiber, grass seed, and fertilizer mixed with water, forming a slurry that could be sprayed from a tank truck on to the raw soil. A new tank truck was diverted from its original destination and brought to the Brookhaven project, where the experimental mixture was sprayed on parts of fairways 1, 4, and 5.

The clubhouse, equipment building, and pump house were also under construction. Earl "Bud" McKnight remembers, as a millwright at the mill, working on roof trusses for the club house. Harold Jones, a mill employee, said, "Everything done at the mill had to have a work order for auditing purposes. The work order for the golf course had its own designation as "Repairs at the lower yard."

The winter of 1962-63 had little snow cover and the new greens and fairway grass suffered. By March, the greens were still under a layer of ice. But with hard work and constant care, under George Pulver's supervision, the course was ready to open for play by August, 1963. The next problem was getting enough water where it was needed during the late summer dry spell. With the Kayaderosseras Creek running through the property, there was plenty of water; the problem was getting enough electricity to run the pumps, and, in addition, the old pipes (from the mill) had scale build-up, which often resulted in their plugging. These problems persisted until 1967, when a new system was installed.

The clubhouse was finished by adding windows from the old drafting room at the mill. The cooking range, walk-in cooler, serving table, and dishes came from the Community Hall dining area. Interior furnishings came from second-hand stores and area sales.

In August, 1963, when the course opened, the restaurant area was leased to Mary Earls while the course itself was being maintained by mill employees under Pulver's supervision. The public immediately responded; a majority of the mill golfers joined the club, as did many local and regional golfers.

Work was immediately begun expanding the course to eighteen holes; by August, 1971, they were all open to play. In 1974, Earl Towers, Jr. left the family dairy processing business in Corinth and was hired to help Al Steel, who was then running the course. Soon after Junior began work, Al Steel died and Earl Jr. was made Green's Superintendent, working under the direct supervision of George Pulver.

Towers was paid for a forty-hour week but found himself often going out on the course on weekends, especially if the greens needed whipping after a heavy dew. Earl said, "By Monday morning, there was always a good supply of grass to cut." Ed Vredenburg also worked on the course. Earl said, "Ed had some kind of background in raising trees and was good at making things grow." Earl continued, "George Pulver was a good boss, but he never could figure out how Ed and I got so much done in such a short time. Back then, we were still planting trees and doing other things, as well as taking care of the course." Earl lived in the house adjacent to the clubhouse (one of the houses that his father had kept when he sold the farm). One night, Earl looked out his window and saw flames coming from the clubhouse. He told his wife, Barbara, to call the fire department while he ran over and grabbed the outdoor hose and began fighting the fire. "I managed to save the clubhouse," Earl said. "The fire started because somebody dumped ash trays in the waste basket."

Earl continued:

Al Steel's wife, Cammy, worked as book keeper and also ran the pro shop. She was really friendly and good at her job. When she got behind, she would call my wife, Barbara, over to help. Barbara worked winters in the school, so in the summer, she was available when needed. My daughters also worked sometimes; it was kind of a family affair.

Bert Edwards, chairman of the *O. B. Beyer Recreation Park Corp.* (owner of Brookhaven) said:

After completion of the eighteen holes, George Pulver concentrated his efforts on training Earl Towers, Jr. and his assistant Ed Vredenburg as greenskeepers. In this he was eminently successful. Led by J.R. [Earl Jr.], who was raised and worked with his father on the property, they became an excellent tandem. Earl was a most knowledgeable and dedicated Head Greenskeeper. He was persistent in his efforts to improve the property

and overcome the problems of maintaining good greens. During his 15 years in that capacity, Brookhaven became a well-known and attractive test of golf. [Note: This quote came from page 19 of a twenty page document titled *O. B. Beyer Recreation Park, Inc, dba Brookhaven Golf Club, Its Genesis and Operation*. This document has no author listed, but is thought to have been written by Bert Edwards.]

In 1982, the aging George Pulver wrote Earl a letter, which he often did after visiting the course. Pulver said:

In my slow ambling way, I am about the course quite a good deal. I must say that you have met the challenges of course upkeep, in fact, with your small crew, you have advanced it.

When George Pulver died, Earl Towers Jr. was one of his pall bearers.

George Pulver died on January 16th, 1986; he was eighty-seven years old. He was a graduate of Saratoga Springs High School and Albany Business College. His wife, Martha Walsh Pulver, a champion golfer in her own right, had died five years earlier, in March, 1981.

Pulver had worked as a golf professional at McGregor from 1924 to 1962, at the Saratoga Golf and Polo Club in Saratoga Springs from 1933 to 1972, and worked the winter of 1926 and 27 as an assistant pro in Nassau and the Bahamas. He spent the winters from 1929 to 1941 as a pro at Tarpon Springs, Florida.

He had designed the first Saratoga Spa course and the Brookhaven course. He not only understood golf, but he related it to others and made it his life's work, first as a player and then as a teacher and architect. "He was one of the grand gentlemen of golf," said a friend, Mike Coleman. Pulver was one of the oldest members of the Professional Golf Association, a founding member of the Northeast New York Section and the founder of the Northeastern Golf Superintendents Association.

Al Mottau, the Saratogian's golf columnist, said:

He grew up in golf. He was amazing in his golf knowledge. He could explain a swing in new and old ways, he viewed it as a profession. He felt being a pro was an important job. He was part of the old school. He worked on clubs. He was one of the old craftsmen. He could restructure the club to fit each individual style.

George Pulver's father had been a blacksmith in Saratoga and was on call at the Saratoga Golf and Polo Club. That's how George had received his start in golf. He began as a caddy earning 15 cents an hour with the stipulation that he pay 15 cents for each ball that he couldn't find. The first day on the job, he lost four balls. "My first job actually cost me money," Pulver said at a 1972 dinner honoring him for his first 50 years as a professional.

Pulver's golf career had been interrupted by World War I. As a lieutenant in the British army, he was injured while serving in the trenches of Ypres. He returned home and began a long association with McGregor Links in Wilton in 1924. Though he was just starting out as a teaching pro and greenskeeper, Pulver was an excellent golfer in his own right. He set the then course record of 70 at McGregor on Sept. 8, 1925, shot a 66 at the Bahamas Golf Club, and in 1932 won the Northeastern New York Open Golf Championship and the Olney Redmond Trophy. In 1951, Pulver won the pro-amateur Northeastern New York Senior with partner Harold Wright.

During his last few years, Pulver shared his knowledge of the sport with one of his prize students, Wilton's Dottie Pepper. At the time of his death, Pepper was a junior at Furman University in South Carolina and an All American, one of highest ranked amateurs in the country.

"I have a lot of pictures of him on my wall," a grief stricken Pepper had said upon hearing of his death. "It's hard looking at them right now. He was like a grandfather to me."

Pepper was first introduced to Pulver as a youngster. "George used to watch Dottie swing when she was around 11 or 12," Lynn Pepper, Dottie's mother, said "...Dottie was at the point where she needed good instruction. She went and asked him to teach her, and they hit it off with a pretty close relationship."

In the summer of 1981, the 15-year-old Pepper won the New York State Women's Amateur and two weeks later won the New York Girl's Amateur.

Following each lesson, Pulver wrote a letter to Pepper detailing her progress and providing further instruction. He also wrote her letters before impending matches. On October 3rd, 1981, he wrote:

...from what figures I can casually gather, I would have to rate your game from five to eight shots better.... You are younger, stronger, and considerably longer. McGregor is a testing course where power off the tee can prove decisive.

The letter continues with more strategy and concludes:

Whatever the outcome of the match, you shall remain in my view, a magnificent striker of a golf ball.

There can be no doubt about the positive relationship between teacher and student and her family, as indicated by Lynn Pepper's praise of the man:

He was a great teacher, and he did it with such humility, he was such a gentleman. I don't know anyone who knew him who didn't totally respect this man.

On September 21st, 1981, George Pulver wrote a letter to Al Mattau of the Saratogian. He finished the letter with a post script that read:

P.S. Dottie is a sound, powerful, and exciting golfer. And what is more, she has brains and charm. I do not care to predict down the road, but she has both golf and business to turn to. She is pleasant, happy, and indefatigable.

In 1985, Dottie Pepper said:

He [Pulver] taught me how to win and how to think my way around the golf course.

On May 19th, 1992, nearly six years after George Pulver died, the daily Gazette ran an article by Bob Weiner describing Brookhaven. Weiner said:

Despite its modest length—6150 yards from the white tees and 6,527 yards from the blue—Brookhaven is a true test of golf. There is plenty of trouble to compensate for the relative lack of distance. Almost every hole is a dogleg, and there are numerous hazards that seem to suck up your ball like a huge vacuum cleaner. ...Golfers can get a good workout by walking the course, as there are plenty of hills and quite a bit of distance between greens and the next tees. And the scenery is magnificent on a clear day.

Weiner went on to say:

George Pulver, the head pro who gave LPGA star Dottie [Pepper] Mochrie her start, was the architect for the...course.

Gary John, manager of the Brookhaven snack bar, told Weiner:

Dottie Mochrie was a steady customer as a youngster. Dottie was our club champ, but then again, she was everybody's club champ at one time or another. I used to putt with her for Cokes, but she never bought a Coke....Mochrie's grandmother was a charter member of Brookhaven.

Many individuals have worked their hearts and souls out at Brookhaven. From millwrights to golf pros, from greenskeepers to bookkeepers, they have all given their best to this community-based project. There are too many to name, but if you had to choose two people most responsible for Brookhaven having been built, and being what it is today, I think most individuals would agree that tops on the list would be George Pulver. However, George Pulver could not have done it alone, for the purchase of the land, design, construction, and maintenance of the course all took large sums of money. Of course, in the beginning, International Paper and their employees were responsible for most of the financial support, but a mill is nothing without the people who are positioned to make those decisions.

From the beginning, Herbert J. “Bert” Edwards was the mill man who maneuvered the project from its inception through a maze of setbacks and challenges to the final product—a working man’s course to be enjoyed and taken pride in by an entire community.

While Edwards was a no-nonsense business man, he must have also had a lighter side. In the early years, he created a hand-out sheet for players, giving pertinent information about each hole, including its name and a little poetic description of how to play it. The sixth hole read:

Waterloo—Split those tall pines down the middle; that will help you solve the riddle. If you are straight, you should pull through, If not, you’re at your Waterloo.

On August 11th, 1980, George Pulver wrote Bert a letter; his opening words were:

I ponder on the long years we have worked together. My association with you and Brookhaven, has been a happy one. From a tangle of Adirondack flora, International Paper now has a pleasant and playable 18-hole golf course.

Pulver continued:

... IP [International Paper] must be given credit for acquiring the land, enormous help in initial construction and operation during its formative years. Clearly, this help was critical.

George Pulver finished by saying:

You [Bert Edwards] have resisted the demands of the few, for the good of the many. You have tried to run the club with class and tradition. Certainly there could have been no Brookhaven without Edwards.

According to Chris Baker, current General Manager of Brookhaven, Edwards was the white-collar man at the mill who found the potential site, hired George Pulver, and helped to secure the mortgage to buy the property. Baker said:

Somewhere along the line, I think Bert Edwards even had to put his own house mortgage up to make it all happen. He was the one who handled the politics. At one point he told me not to make the final payment on the Brookhaven mortgage. I’m not sure why, but I think that there was a faction at the mill who wanted to turn the course over to the State of New York.

About that time—it was my first year on the job as course manager—a group of men in business suits were out walking the course—looking everything over. I think there was a movement at the mill to trade the course for some of the State’s woodland. I think that may be why Bert told me not to pay the last mortgage payment—it may have been his

way of holding things up. I'm not sure about all of this, but I do know that Bert fought to keep the course and keep it with George Pulver's original design. It is a course that utilizes the land's natural contours, and it doesn't necessarily give a long ball hitter the advantage. It was designed to be all about risks and rewards. I still have players who tell me that they had to use every club in their bag, a testament to George Pulver's creativity.

Both George Pulver and Bert Edwards believed in the natural beauty of the place, and they didn't want the course modified in any way that would challenge that. They both would have been repulsed by the idea of reshaping the course in any way.

Bert Edwards came from downstate (Westchester County) where he graduated from Yonkers High School before attending Manhattan College where, in 1941, he received a B.A. in Business Administration and Education. Edwards married a Yonkers girl, Claire P. Kelly, and continued to live in Yonkers a short while before moving to Glens Falls and then to Corinth where he lived for many years on Hamilton Avenue. He was employed for 32 years (until his retirement in 1977) at the International Paper Company as the assistant to the Director of Industrial Relations and Personnel. He died April 10th, 2007.

In 2010, with the International Paper Company mill in Corinth closed and gone from the area, the O.B. Beyer Recreational Park Corporation's board members decided it was time to dissolve the corporation and end their ownership of Brookhaven. The course and surrounding acreage was offered to the Town of Greenfield as a gift with the stipulation that it always remain a recreational area. On September 10th, 2010, Town Supervisor Richard "Dick" Rowland and the rest of the Town of Greenfield Board voted unanimously to accept the gift.