

While browsing through some old St Andrews Minute Books (1923- 1957) which came into my possession when I salvaged them from a rubbish bin when the Club was moving from Lower Maraval to its present location, it struck me forcibly that many members may not know that St. Andrews Golf Club is now officially 114 years old which makes it one of the oldest Golf Clubs in the Americas and almost certainly the oldest in the Caribbean. Of course, the fact that our Club has been in existence for over 100 years should be a source of great pride.

Members may also not be aware that over this period of time its members played golf at four different locations. Starting on the Savannah in 1891 the members used the Queen's Park Hotel as a Club House till about 1898 after which the Club made arrangements to use the Trinidad Turf Club Members' Stand which was much more convenient as the first tee of the Nine-Hole Course was on the inside of the race track close to the winning pole.

It could be of interest to present day members, many of whom drive around the Savannah on a daily basis, to trace the direction of the course on the Savannah. The first hole was played towards the Cemetery and the second was a dogleg around the cemetery and there was an "out of bounds penalty" for hitting a ball over the cemetery. The third was played west towards Queen's Royal College and the next - north towards the Hollow. There was a green in the Hollow - that hole was called "IN" followed by another called "OUT". The course then ran east past President's House and then south with the ninth green quite close to the first tee opposite to the Turf Club Members Stand.

St Andrews' Members used the Savannah for 28 years up to 1919. So far as I know there are no records available for that period i.e. prior to the move to St. James, and I am relying on information given to me by my father who incidentally was the only member to play on all four courses. He joined the Club in 1917 and died 1983.

The Club then moved to what they thought would be a less public and safer environment at St James on a short renewable lease from Government. There the members built a small two-storey Club House located almost exactly where the St Mary's College Pavilion presently

stands. The members parked their cars near the river and walked across a narrow rickety wooden bridge to the Club House.

A nine-hole course was laid out on this flat piece of land which extended into Federation Park, which once again they shared with grazing cattle. As a consequence the greens had to be fenced with barbed wire (the same applied on the Savannah). At St James, golfers also shared two fairways with the Mounted Branch of the Constabulary who had a priority over golfers whenever they wanted to practise their manoeuvres or train horses and riders. The Club Minutes of the time recorded several instances of frustration and inconvenience when golf was held up or cancelled.

By 1926 there was evidence of a desire to move to a better location. Some negotiations took place with Mrs. Rapsey to lease the Aranguéz Savannah and a green was built at Aranguéz as a trial. However, for one reason or another, the project was abandoned.

Unknown to the Members of the Club at that time and in particular, the President and Committee, the problems they faced with the terms of their lease of government land would only get worse and, like so many Clubs that flourished at that time, and failed to acquire their own private property all went into extinction sooner or later. A good example being the all powerful Trinidad Turf Club whose members did not secure their own freehold property. The clock was ticking and their ultimate demise is now written in the sands of time.

The frustration of playing golf at St James became so acute that at a meeting on January 13, 1930 Item (11) of the Minutes of that Meeting reads as follows:

“ In view of the fact that the Acting Governor has on several occasions himself warned us that “the links may be required shortly for public purpose”, it was decided not to repair or paint the Club House.”

At that same meeting Robert Sellier was asked to make an appointment with Colonel De Boissiere for the Club President, Packer Hutchinson, the Secretary and himself to inspect the Champs Elysees Estate with a view to seeing if it is possible to have a Golf Course there.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this decision by the Acting Governor to warn the Club of their uncertain future which had a major impact on the future of Golf in the north west of Trinidad.

The Committee's decision to seek an alternative site and thereby acquire their own freehold land was seminal and lovers of the game who have joined the Club during the past seventy-five years are heavily indebted to them for their courage and foresight.

As an indication of the crisis facing the Club at the time, the Committee met again a week later on 20 January 1930.

The matter of the meeting by Committee members, Hutchinson, Sellier and Henri de Boissiere with Colonel De Boissiere arose and it was reported "that the area in question was covered in bush and Col. De Boissiere was prepared to sell the parcel of land for £20 per acre". The Colonel estimated the area "to be about fifty acres". It was agreed that an arrangement be made for the Committee to closely inspect the land in question.

It has to be assumed that the Committee was impressed by what they saw on their visit to the site because at a meeting on the 3rd February 1930, the Secretary was instructed to ask Col. De Boissiere whether he would be prepared to give the Club an option to purchase an additional 50 to 57 acres if they agreed to buy the 50 acres which he had indicated he was prepared to sell.

At a meeting held on 13 February 1930 the Committee "asked Mr. Macgillivray to survey the land suggested by Col. De Boissiere for a Golf Course".

On the 3 March 1930 the Secretary "placed a map of the land at Champs Elysees before the Committee". Messrs. Sellier and De Boissiere were requested to meet with Col. De Boissiere

for a discussion on the price of the land but they asked to be excused as interested parties (J. D. Sellier & Co. were Col. De Boissiere's Legal representative and Henri de Boissiere may have been related). Donald Mc Bride and Geo. de Nobriga agreed to meet with Col. De Boissiere.

On 28 April 1930 the Committee appointed a Sub-Committee to deal with the "establishment of a Club" at Maraval comprising Messrs. George de Nobriga, Frank Haynes, Robert Sellier, B. H. Rose and the Secretary, Henri De Boissiere. They were asked to report within one month.

On Thursday 22nd May 1930 the Committee agreed to adopt the Sub-Committee's recommendation of forming a new Club and acquiring land at Maraval for the purpose. Unfortunately the report does not appear in the Minutes and is therefore not available.

On the 10th June 1930 the Secretary reported to the Committee that he had a very unsatisfactory response to his circular letter to Members in respect to the proposals for the formation of a new Golf Course in Maraval. However, in retrospect, it should be noted that only few circular letters ever get a significant response from persons receiving them.

In spite of this setback the Committee persisted and finally at a Meeting of the Committee on 22 September 1930, it was decided to adopt the report prepared by Messrs. Geo. De Nobriga and Frank Haynes (copy attached) and place their proposal before a Special General Meeting of the Club to be held on Monday 6th October at 8:30 p.m. at the Queen's Park Hotel.

The meeting was duly held and (50) members attended. The only question recorded was asked by Mr. Mc Bride who wanted to know "when Government would require the Golf Club to give up the Golf Course at St James?"

The Colonial Secretary who was present was unable to say when the Club would be asked to give up the land in question. Mr. McBride then moved and seconded by Mr. D. Fraser that the Committee, acting as Trustees of the Co. to be formed, be authorized to purchase 90 acres

more or less of the Champs Elysees Estate at Maraval and \$1,000 be advanced to Col. De Boissiere from Club funds. There were apparently no dissenters. Those present reads like a "who's who" of Trinidad Government, Business and Commerce of the time, and many of these family names remain prominent in Trinidad and Tobago today as per the following listing:

It is not easy because of the passage of time to select the individuals who should be given the credit for ensuring the future of St Andrews Golf Club and therefore golf in the north west of Trinidad (i.e. Port-of-Spain). However, it would be fair to say either my father, Robert Sellier, or his golfing friend, Henri De Boissiere, or both of them first mooted the idea of Champs Elysees Estate, Maraval. Much credit must also be given to Messrs. Packer Hutchinson, B. H. Rose and Donald McBride who took his time to join the group but in the end his support was invaluable. Finally Messrs. De Nobriga and Haynes, who did all the hard work of getting members to put up their precious hard-earned cash in the middle of an international recession, is remarkable.

Mr. De Nobriga, who was so instrumental in promoting the land purchase, was determined that a golf architect should be involved in the course design and, through personal contacts in London, got one of the best golf course designers in the world, H. S. "Harry" Colt to do the job which so intrigued Mr. Colt that he agreed to do it for nothing. Incidentally, H. S. Colt was responsible for many famous courses on both sides of the Atlantic including Wentworth, Sunningdale and St Georges Hill in the United Kingdom and the famous Pine Valley in the United States.

The Company sold some of the peripheral Champs Elysees property to help finance the new course and part of the property was unsuitable for Golf. This area was sold after the war and is now St Andrews Terrace.

It took four years to arrange the finance and then build the first nine holes which were all on the south side of the Golf Club Road and nearly two years to build the Club House. The second nine was completed in 1938. Therefore the Club was 39 years old when its members

acquired their own freehold property and (43) years before its members no longer had to share their Golf Course with tram cars, grazing cattle, mounted constabulary, football, cricket and, not to forget, horse racing.

According to the Minutes of a Special General Meeting of the Club held on 22 October 1934, it was proposed that the members of the Club approve the proposals set out in the agenda attached. There was some discussion and on a motion proposed by Robert Sellier and seconded by Clifford Trestrail the members unanimously agreed to the Committee's Agenda with an alteration to the tenure from five to ten years and also to change the commencement date from July 1934 to 1st January 1935.

So it came to pass the members of St Andrews Golf Club after 43 years of playing golf on land leased from Government now determined their own destiny through a Company controlled by members of the Club.

In another article, we will attempt to trace the Club's relationship with Maraval Lands Limited and the move to its fourth location further north in the Maraval Valley.