

1929 U.S. OPEN: WINGED FOOT'S ARCHITECT

Cultivating a masterpiece

**A.W. Tillinghast spared
little artistry when he
mapped out Winged Foot**

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In the eight decades since its opening, the names associated with Winged Foot Golf Club comprise as impressive a list as there is in golf. Bobby Jones won there. Craig Wood and Claude Harmon taught there. The roster of members has included everyone from Tommy Armour to Fred Corcoran to Arnold Palmer.

All have played an integral role in the club's rich history. Yet no figure was more important than the man who took an amorphous plot of land and shaped it into two of the finest golf courses in the world.

If Albert Warren Tillinghast had only been a golf-course architect, that would be one thing. But Tills was a little bit of everything. He was an accomplished player. He was a writer, a historian, an entrepreneur, not to mention the man widely credited for coining the term "birdie." In the heart of the Roaring '20s, he was the consummate bon vivant.

In American golf's formative years, Tillinghast was an eccentric but influential presence in practically every aspect of the game. And even now, on the eve of Winged Foot's fifth U.S. Open, his imprint is everywhere.

Consider some of the golf courses Tillinghast designed in Westchester alone: Winged Foot, Quaker Ridge, Fenway — each among the finest courses in the country. Outside of the immediate area there are Baltusrol and Ridgewood in New Jersey, Bethpage Black on Long Island, San Francisco Golf Club in California. Along with contemporaries Alister Mackenzie and Donald Ross, Tillinghast was at the forefront of what is now known as the "Golden Age" of American golf course architecture. The difference with Tillinghast was that he might have been a more intriguing subject than any of his courses.

Born into wealth in North Philadelphia in 1875, Tillinghast was affluent through the early part of his life, flunking out of a handful of schools, and pursuing only what interested him. As it happened, one of those interests was golf. It was during an 1896 trip to Scotland with his father that he first met the legendary Old Tom Morris, and it was over the course of his ensuing visits with Morris that Tillinghast developed his interest in golf course architecture. His curiosity was rewarded in 1907, when a wealthy family friend, Charles Worthington, commissioned the unproven Tilling-

hast to design a course along the Delaware River in Shawnee, Pa. The venture was an immediate success, and the new designer was quick to capitalize on it by convincing Worthington to host a professional tournament there, the Shawnee Open. "He did it as a means of advertising his work because he knew all these players would come and talk about it," said Philip Young, the author of the biography "A.W. Tillinghast: Creator of Golf Courses." "He was very shrewd in that sense."

Indeed, Tillinghast's career soon took flight. He was hired to design courses in Florida, in Texas, and in



Associated Press file photo

Did you know?

All three of Hale Irwin's

U.S. Open victories — 1974

at Winged Foot, 1979 at

Inverness in Toledo, Ohio,

and 1990 at Medinah, Ill.

— were played on courses

designed or renovated by

A.W. Tillinghast.

California. In 1916 came an overhaul to Quaker Ridge in Scarsdale, and in 1918, he was commissioned to design two new courses for Baltusrol, which by then had already hosted two U.S. Opens. Along the way Tillinghast cultivated a reputation for being life to its fullest. He drank heavily. He would disappear from his family for weeks on end. A lover of the theater, he seemed to go out of his way to invest in Broadway shows that were sure to lose money.

Still, the fact that Tillinghast had already authored such impressive work in 1921 proves that the founders of Winged Foot had grand ambitions when they contacted him that year to locate a site and design their two courses. This was an architect at the top of his game, and Winged Foot's

organizers, derived from the membership of Manhattan's New York Athletic Club, offered a simple mandate: "Give us a man-sized course."

"After that time no one who creates golf courses ever worked with freer hands," Tillinghast later wrote in *Golf Illustrated*, where he briefly served as editor. "But always there was the admonition, 'Man sized,' and as the various holes came to live they were of a sturdy breed."

Sure enough, the strength of the two courses earned Winged Foot rave reviews from the day it opened in 1923, and it took only six years for the club to land its first U.S. Open, which Jones won in a playoff. For Tillinghast, the Open's arrival in June 1929 was in many ways the crowning moment of his career. And yet within months, his fortunes would dramatically turn.

With the stock-market crash in October 1929, the Golden Age of architecture came to an abrupt halt, with courses closing faster than they were being opened. After spending years bouncing from one lucrative project to the next, Tillinghast's immense talents were forced to go long stretches without an outlet. And the money he had earned and spent so freely was suddenly running out.

Which is not to say Tillinghast completely vanished from the public eye. First came his work on the courses at Bethpage State Park, a massive work-relief project where his most creative splash was the imposing Black Course. And then came a consultant's role for the PGA of America, in which he toured the country and, among other things, supervised the removal of 4,427 bunkers at courses nationwide (Tillinghast believed the invention of the sand wedge had rendered many sand traps obsolete).

By then, though, Tillinghast's penchant for late nights and frequent adult beverages was beginning to catch up with him. Toward the late '30s, his health was declining. After a heart attack in 1940, he moved in with his daughter in Toledo, Ohio, where he died two years later after a second heart attack at age 68.

By the time of his death, Tillinghast had become a forgotten figure in golf, and yet in the years since he has enjoyed a remarkable revival. There is a Tillinghast Association composed of devoted admirers. There are modern architects who cite Tillinghast's design principles like scripture. And, of course, there are the golf courses. The 2006 U.S. Open will be the 11th played on a Tillinghast course, and Winged Foot especially has remained faithful to the designer's intent.

In its eighth decade, the West Course remains a man-sized layout, big and bold and rich with character — not unlike the man who designed it. ●



Courtesy of Winged Foot Golf Club

LOCAL LEGEND

A look at courses in the Lower Hudson Valley that have been associated with A.W. Tillinghast, above:

Original Designs

Club/course (formerly known as)	Location	Year
Baileys Park CC	Mount Vernon	N/A
Dellwood CC (Mountain View Farms)	New City	1920
Elmwood CC	White Plains	1920
Fenway GC (Fenimore CC)	Scarsdale	1924
Knollwood CC	Elmsford	1925
Old Oaks CC	Purchase	1925
Pleasantville CC	Pleasantville	1917
Quaker Ridge GC	Scarsdale	1918
Saxon Woods	Scarsdale	1930
Scarsdale GC	Hartsdale	1923
Winged Foot GC	Mamaroneck	1923

Renovations and Additions

Club/course	Location	Year
Bonnie Briar CC (RA)	Larchmont	1923
Metropolis CC (RA)	White Plains	1929
Mount Kisco CC (RA)	Mount Kisco	1920
Siwanoy CC (R)	Bronxville	1936
Sleepy Hollow CC (RA)	Scarborough	1928
Sunningdale CC (RA)	Scarsdale	N/A
Wykagyl CC (RA)	New Rochelle	1931



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For a complete list of the 85 courses designed by A.W. Tillinghast and the renovations and additions to 118 courses he's made