

PAR FOR OUR COURSE



Black '86, Stults '42, Clarks '31 & '35 leave a family legacy in Peddie golf

By Danielle Mooney

Peddie is one of the few prep schools that can claim an 18-hole golf course as its own. Nestled away down South Main Street across from Cox's Preschool, the back of the course borders the New Jersey Turnpike. If you look closely going south right past Exit 8, you might catch a glimpse of a cart and golfer on the back nine.

The grounds of the course were originally the 44-acre farm of Hightstown's Black family. In 1876, Joseph Hinchcliff Black started Village Nurseries, a business that has been continuously owned and operated by the family to the present. Today, it sits further back on the land.

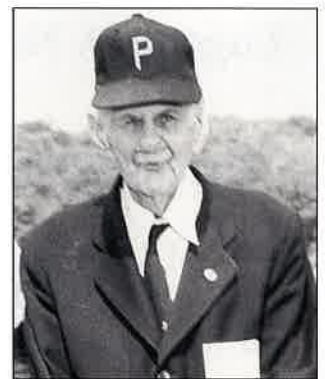
Black's son, Walter C. Black (Peddie, 1886), was an avid golfer and a true Renaissance man, sometimes holding four jobs at one time. He served on the East Windsor School Board for 54 years and was Peddie's treasurer for 31 years, serving as trustee from 1890-1915. In 1961, the *New York Herald Tribune* lauded Black as the "nation's oldest tax collector" at age 94 after serving East Windsor Township for 59 years. Black was on the first Peddie football team. He took up golf at the age of 60 and won a local tournament in Florida three years later. Playing until he was 90, "He was known to shoot his age," recalls Charles S. "Cappy" Stults III, grandson of Black.

Black became treasurer of Peddie when it was drowning in debt and living off the uncertain generosity of a few benefactors. Determined to make the school self-sufficient,

Black made Peddie debt-free in five years, helping add many much-needed buildings to the campus.

Black's daughter, Nettie, married C. Stanley Stults Jr. '42, father of Cappy and owner of an insurance company in Hightstown. Stults laid out the original 9-hole course on the grounds of the nursery in the 1920s with the help of several local businessmen, some of them Peddie alums. It seems that the original design was worked around the trees in the orchards - not the usual way to lay out a golf course. The Black and Stults families, with a select group of friends, enjoyed the use of this 9-hole course until the Depression hit in the late 1920s and they could no longer afford its upkeep. The Black family sold the course to the Peddie School for one dollar in exchange for life rights to use the course for Walter, his wife Sarah, and their children.

The Black family home was located on the land that now belonged to Peddie, but the school gave Walter and Sarah the rights to stay in the house



Walter C. Black, Class of 1886, served as school treasurer for 31 years. He and his in-laws (The Stults Family) sold the golf course to the school for one dollar during The Depression.

until their deaths. The golf course remained relatively unchanged until the early 1950s, when it was expanded to 18 holes.

"This course is unique in that it was expanded hole by hole," explains John Bolla, who has been the golf pro at the course since 1980. "Usually, when someone wants to build a golf course, they find a piece of land, bring in a golf course architect, and he designs the entire course. The Peddie course had nine holes for years, and then they started expanding by putting another hole in when they found the time."

This meant that members could play the nine holes and the tenth through 18th could be added whenever time allowed and placed wherever space permitted without disturbing the rest of the course.

In 1954, the current clubhouse was built, and aside from several changes in the position of the first tee, the course has changed little since the 1950s. The parking lot was expanded to accommodate the growing membership, and, as a result, the first tee was moved.

One of the interesting results of building the course through an old orchard and nursery is the unique species of trees on land that has remained untouched since the 1920s. Just off the 10th hole are large conifers, spruce and pine that are the towering remnants of the area's first Christmas tree farm.

The first Peddie golf team was organized soon after the acquisition of the land in 1930 under the advisorship of faculty member Robert H. Stevens. The team played other schools in the area. In 1932, advisor William Boyd brought the Peddie team to the Eastern Interscholastics in Greenwich, Conn. Five years after the first students put on the spikes and picked up the woods and irons, Peddie won the state championships, as well as the Eastern Interscholastics captained by Edward W. Clark '35. This feat was repeated in 1940 when an undefeated team again won the Eastern Interscholastics under captain James M. Thompson '41. The following year, the team was again undefeated in secondary school ranks, trouncing both Blair and Lawrenceville and bringing home the state championship once more.

In 1943, Philip Hood took over as golf coach, and his 1945 team went undefeated. His teams blew through the 1950s, clinching the state championships in 1950, 1951, 1955, 1956, 1957 and 1958. That last year, Conrad Decker III '58 won the medalist and match play championships.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Peddie hosted numerous tournaments for men's, ladies' and state juniors'. By 1977, under the leadership of golf club professional Harry McQueen, the club's membership was at a maximum of 280 players. Two clubs dropped out of the Trenton District Golf Association, which forced some of the area's better players to find another course so they would be able to play in some of the district events.

One of the best golfers to come off the Peddie links is S. Ashton Clark Jr. '31. A member of the earliest Peddie team, Clark has spent his life on the golf course. He served as a member of the Palm Beach Golf Commission from 1982 to 1995, serving his last year as its chairman.



Conrad Decker Jr. '33 (above), father of Conrad Decker III '58, who won the medalist and match play championships in 1958, was one of the early "builders" of the golf course. Long retired, he is shown in a recent photo outside the golf course clubhouse.

In photo on opposite page is Peddie's 1935 golf team with Coach Boyd, just a few years after the school started its first competitions. That year it took its first state crown.

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S. Ashton Clark Jr. '31

"When I hear the name Ash Clark, I think of golf," said Ann Herman, chairman of the Palm Beach Golf Commission. "It's synonymous with golf. He happens to be a very good golfer and a nice person."

During his 70 years of playing, he twice made a hole in one, the first as a teenager in 1932 at the Ridgewood Country Club in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He had to wait a while for the second - 60 years to be exact - in Palm Beach. Clark was captain of the first Peddie golf team and remembers it with fondness.

"I enjoyed playing with such a congenial group of boys," Clark said in an interview in May. "We practiced every day and did quite a bit of traveling and we all got along so well. What more could you want in a team? The



Robert Panfili '94 (above) won the State Championship and rewarded Trustee Mort Goldfein '59 with his winning golf ball at graduation. Below, in an article from The Palm Beach Daily News, is a photo of Ash Clark's team circa 1931. He was captain of Peddie's first team and was a member of the Palm Beach Golf Commission from 1982 to 1995, serving as its chair the last year.

camaraderie was wonderful." He reminisced about playing with schoolmates Fred Schramm '30, Ralph Klink '31 and and Dudley Ward '31. "Peddie was one of the few schools that had the opportunity to play and practice on their own course. That really made a difference."

Current Trustee Mort Goldfein '59 remembers playing with Conrad Decker. He was on several of the state championship teams of the glory 1950s. According to Goldfein, the team played every evening. "The whole team, especially my friend Gabriel (Galindo '59) would compete all week to see who would play in the match on the weekend. I have great memories of racing the bell back for dinner in the evenings. We had it timed perfectly - we had to putt quickly and get back for dinner."

Goldfein remembers one harrowing match against Trenton High School that was played at the Trenton Country Club. On the last hole, Goldfein had to sink a fairly easy putt to win the match.

"The course was right next to the Trenton Mental Hospital and the patients had been watching us," he said. "As I got up to putt, they suddenly began yelling. I broke my concentration and missed the putt, losing the match."

One of Goldfein's dearest Peddie Golf memories did not happen on the course. "In 1993, I was handing out diplomas at Peddie's graduation," recalls Goldfein. "Bob Panfili had recently won the state golf championships and as I gave him his diploma, and shook his hand, in his hand was the golf ball he had won the championship with, and he gave it to me." Bob went on to play for the University of Jacksonville and pursued a professional career. He was followed by Justin Weber '94, who won the State Championship, and Barbara Paul '93, the first girl to play with the boys' team who went on to play professionally in the Southeast Conference.

Today, the golf club boasts a membership of 100 family memberships, 200 individual memberships, not including the faculty and staff who have automatic membership to the course as part of their contracts.

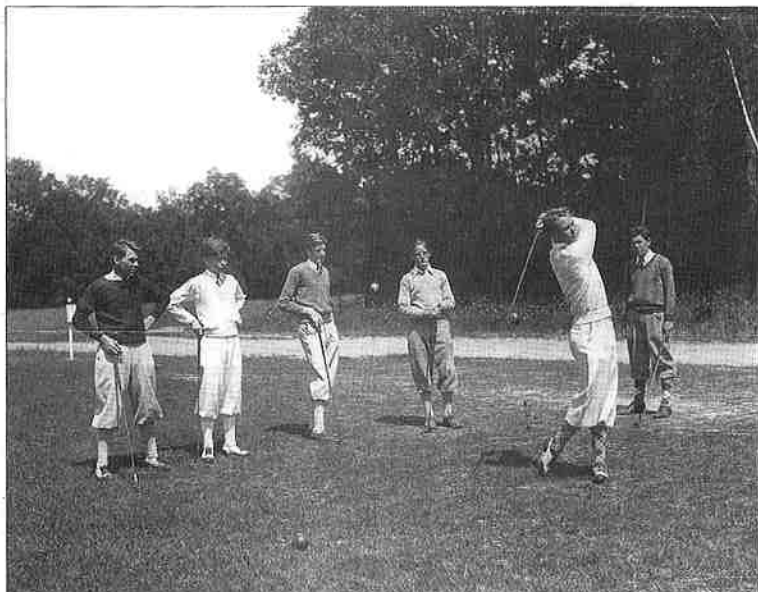
"The Peddie course is very challenging because of the tight fairways, and mature trees, along with the small and somewhat tricky greens," said Head of School Tom DeGray. "It is beautifully maintained and compares favorably with some of the nicest private clubs."

"The difficulty of the course and small greens reward accuracy and concentration," said Cappy Stults, whose family made a recent donation to renovate the clubhouse.

The course is open year round, and Bolla can remember only one year in the past 17 in which golfers were not able to play every month due to weather conditions.

"We have members who come from as far as Staten Island," said Bolla. "It's not that far to travel to a good course in a beautiful setting. They pass up courses in New York to make the trip down here."

EVEN AFTER A LIFETIME ON THE LINKS ...



Above: Ash Clark, shown swinging, served as captain of the Peddie School golf team in the 1920s. Now 84, he began golfing at about the age of 10. Below: Clark with the mounted hole-in-one ball he shot in 1992, when he was 79.

Sport still suits octogenarian to a tee

By MICHELE GELORMINE
Daily News Staff Writer

"Ash" Clark comes from a golfing family. His father and namesake, Sedgwick Ashton Clark, introduced him to the game. His brother Edward captained the Princeton University golf team. His son Fred worked as a golf pro and played on the Professional Golfers' Association of America Tour for one season.

Clark, 84, served from 1982 to 1995 as a member of the Palm Beach Golf Commission. He was chairman of the com-

mission in 1995. Clark was known for checking on the Palm Beach Par 3 Golf Course and seeing what was needed, said Ann Herrman, chairman of the Golf Commission.

"When I hear the name Ash Clark, I think of golf," Herrman said. "It's synonymous with golf. He happens to be a very good golfer and a nice person. He's given a lot of himself to the community."

Clark has played golf for more than 70 years. During that time, he has made two holes in one. But the time span



Daily News Photo By RUTH CINCOOTA