Residents swing into newest sporting craze in 1895

Wagga Wagga Country Club

Wagga Wagga's big hit

at the archives
Wayne Doubleday

off has been a popular sport in Wagga since the Wagga Golf Club.

Residents took to the game with great enthusiasm – so much so that, by the mid 1890s, overcrowding had become a problem.

Unfortunately, the physical constraints of the racecourse links ensured that extension was not a viable option at that location.

New links

At a meeting, held at the Murrumbidgee Pastoral and Agricultural Association rooms on July 9, 1898, a group of about 60 enthusiasts – led by solicitor James Sheekey – decided to construct a new club on the foreshore of Lake Albert.

Mr D G Soutar, a golf professional from the Moore Park course in Sydney, was engaged to lay out new links on the 100-acre property.

The total length of the course was to be about 6000 yards with a half-mile frontage to the lake.

It was estimated that the cost of building the new course would be approximately $5000.

This did not include extensions to the clubhouse, the laying of law tennis courts and construction of a swimming pool, all of which were part of the committee's plans.

It was suggested that funding could be achieved by the issue of $10 debentures which would, in due course, be redeemed with the profits being reinvested into the club.

Plans for the clubhouse included a bar, kitchen, billiard room and members and associates locker rooms, while a verandah, to be constructed at the rear of the building, would be suitable for dancing or other social purposes.

 Provision was made on the preliminary survey for the use of a triangular area in the centre of the property as a nine hole miniature course.

The links were officially opened on Saturday, May 3, 1903 by the then mayor, Alderman Edward Collins, with approximately 400 people in attendance including visitors from Wagga, Nenty, Coolamon, Junee, Gannain and other clubs.

During the afternoon, about 70 pairs took part in a mixed foursomes event while a very successful social evening was held at the club house later that night.

Doing it tough

CONDITIONS for members were vastly different during the club's early years than they are today.

Access to the clubhouse, which was lit by "Gloria" kerosene lamps, was via a very bumpy dirt track and sheep were still being agisted on the course.

The course was often closed from August until March each year, as dandelion infestation made play impossible.

The greens, fairways and bunkers were covered in the weedy and many months of hard work was needed to restore the course to a playable condition.

Water was pumped from the lake and stored in a tank located close to the 10th tee.

This continued until after World War II, when town water was connected.

Like the rest of the local community, the Country Club did its best to support the war effort during World War II.

All services from the district were given honorary membership for the period of their service.

The proceeds from raffles and social functions were donated to various fundraising organisations such as the Mayors' Patriotic Fund and the Spitfire Fund.

In 1942, the 12th and 13th greens were made available for vegetable growing and a roster of members was organised to tend the garden.

A social evening saw more than $10 being raised to purchase cabbage and onion seeds, but unfortunately a combination of rabbits, hares and a poor growing season made for very meagre results.

Better conditions during the following year resulted in almost four tonnes of onions being harvested.

"Murder" on the golf course

WHILE pests such as dandelion, rabbits and hares may have made conditions difficult for greenkeepers and volunteer vegetable gardeners, crows were the most despised creatures at the Country Club in the early 1900s.

During the 1911 Country Club Open Championship men were hired to protect players from the wholesale theft of golf balls by a large gallery of crows.

The Daily Advertiser reported that the committee "wisely stationed a number of men armed with double barrels at vantage-points on the course and a few well-directed shots halted these menaces away.

As one player humorously remarked in the club house, "There seemed to be more gunmen on the course than in Chicago".

This tactic seemed to have only a temporary effect, as a few weeks later it was reported that three Country Club members recovered 70 golf balls from trees that had been visited by the birds.

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