

10 Blue Hills History - Golf in the Blue Hills

Aside: Franklin Park (just up Blue Hill Avenue from the Blue Hills), designed by Fredrick Law Olmstead in the 1890s, was the site of the first public golf in the US. In 1890 George Wright was a sporting goods store owner and he ordered a set of golf clubs and a dozen golf balls from England. When he attempted to play in Franklin Park, he was advised by the police that he would need a permit to play golf there. So, he obtained a permit from the Boston Parks Commission to play golf there on an experimental basis. On Dec 10, 1890 they laid out a course of 10 holes and the first round of golf on municipally owned land was played there. ^[i]

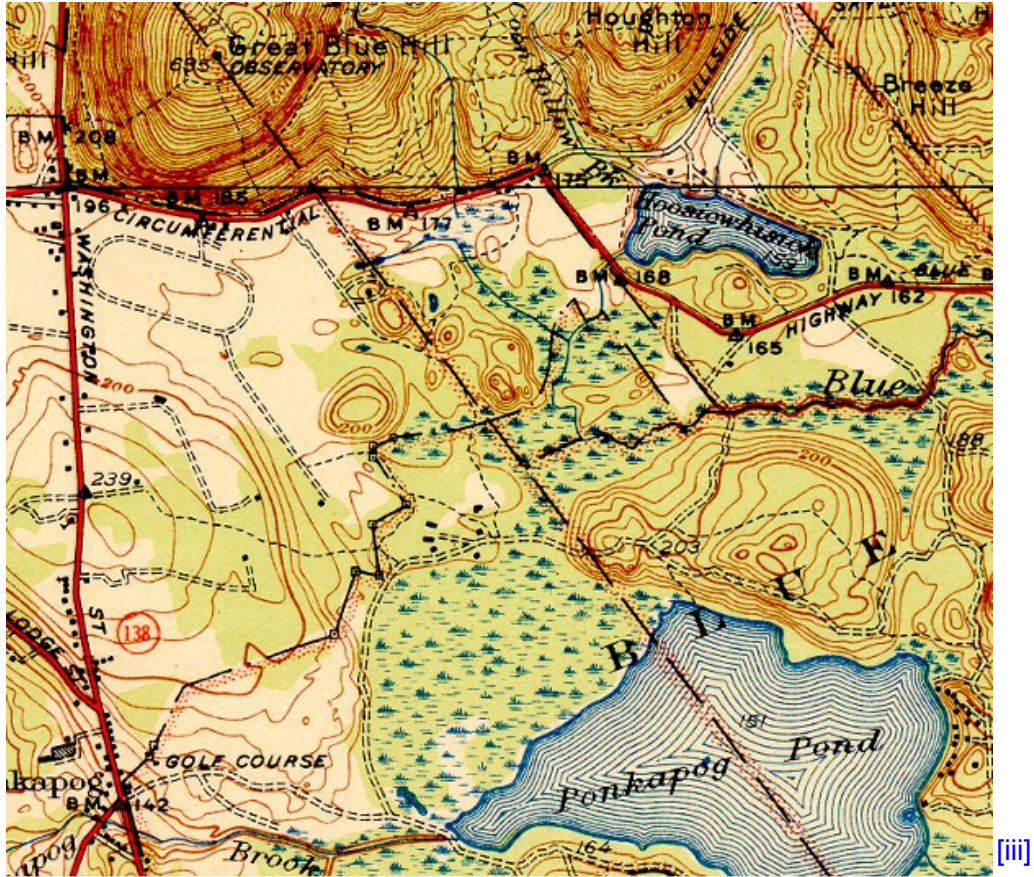
So, with that background, let's look at the history of golf down Blue Hill Avenue at the Blue Hills.

OK, when I say golf at the Blue Hills you probably think of one of two places: Ponkapoag, or Granite Links. But those are just the 'new courses'. I want to start with the first Blue Hills golf course... at Houghton Pond.

Yep, that's right, golf at Houghton Pond. Before the Blue Hills even became the Blue Hills Reservation in 1893.

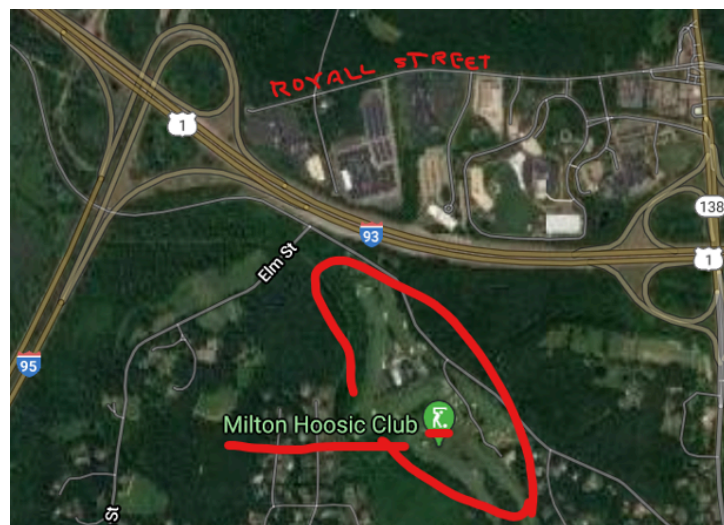
Hoosic-Whisick Golf Club

Founded in 1892, the Hoosic-Whisick Golf Club was the first golf course at the Blue Hills, and one of the oldest in the country. ^[ii] Hoosicwhisick was the original name of what we now call "Houghtons Pond."



1941 US Topo map, note “Hoosicwhisick”; and the “Ponkapog” spelling.

After starting at Hoosicwhisick Pond, the proprietors were forced to relocate to 70 Green Lodge Street, Canton, just across what is now Rt 93, when their original land at Houghtons Pond was taken to add to the Blue Hills Reservation in 1897. In 1946 Hoosic-Whisick merged with the Milton Golf Club to become the Milton-Hoosic Club.



Milton-Hoosic is now located on the south side of Rt 128/93 just across from Royall Street. Milton-Hoosic today is a 9-hole, family oriented, private membership golf course, which also offers tennis and a pool. While it's no longer "in" the Blue Hills, its roots are.

Aside: Why do 'we' now call it Houghtons Pond, not Hoosicwhisick Pond? Because of the "United States Board of Geographic Names", which in their "Decisions on Geographic Names in the United States, January through March, 1982" declared that...

[iv]

I guess it makes sense that somewhere there has to be *someone* who decides which of the many names used to describe every given pond, etc. gets to be the 'official' name.

(But don't ask *me* why the DCR map has it as "Houghton's", not "Houghtons". Maybe the Board revised its decision at some point, although I couldn't find any such record. Maybe someone at DCR just thought it needed an apostrophe and freelanced, because they (*unlike you!*) didn't know about the 'official' ruling.

For the record: They also standardized the spelling of Ponkapoag and Ponkapoag Pond at that time as well:

[Aside: Ponkapoag? Why *that* name? What was the Native American meaning of 'Ponkapoag'? That one is easy, Ponkapoag means 'sweet water', and it refers to the water from Ponkapoag Pond. [v]

These days we tend to think of spelling as pretty standardized, but it hasn't always been that way, and early on different people heard, and spelled, these names quite differently. Especially here in New England, with all the Native American names we use, it's good to have someone enforcing standardization, just look at the 10 different spellings of "Ponkapoag" that had been used.

Ponkapoag Golf Course.

Ok, *now* that we know how to spell it, we can talk about golf at Ponkapoag. Ponkapoag is the country's oldest public golf course. How did it come to be? Well, in 1926, the MDC filed a Special Report to the Legislature offering a portion of its Blue Hill Reservation for creation of an 18-hole golf course. In 1931, the Legislature authorized the MDC to construct such a course on the site of the former Redman Farm. [vi]

Originally an 18-hole course, it was designed by noted golf architect Donald Ross. [vii] In 1935, the MDC again hired Ross to add an additional nine holes to be built by the WPA (Works Progress Administration). The WPA also added an irrigation system in 1940. The course greenskeeper, Samuel Mitchell, laid out the last nine holes in 1952 to complete two separate 18-hole courses. [viii]

In 2015 DCR completed a \$5M renovation to historic Course #1 portion to improve it, as it had been closed since 2003 due to flooding. [ix] Ponkapoag Golf Course is now, again, a 36-hole

facility which also includes a putting green, driving range, snack bar, and pro shop. During the winter the course is open to cross-country skiing. And, as we know, if you hike around Ponkapoag Pond you get to walk *through* the golf course. There is also 'Maple Avenue' (a pedestrian walkway), which leads from the golf course parking lot through the course to Ponkapoag Pond and allows hiking in to the pond from Rt 138.

[I don't want to get into the whole story this week, however take note that the land now occupied by the Ponkapoag Golf Club was leased by the Praying Indians to Charles Redman and later deeded to his son Robert and it has ever since been known as the Redman Farm.^[x] We will come back to this part of its history in another article.]



^[xi]

The Redman Farmhouse, 2173 Washington Street, Canton, Massachusetts 02021.

Today DCR leases this building to the Neponset River Watershed Association. You might not recognize the building... but you may have driven around it... it's located on Rt 138, right between the entrance and exit of the Ponkapoag Golf Course parking lot. (The cars in the background are parked in the golf course parking lot.)

And, just to be technically correct... "... administrative control of Ponkapoag Golf Course has transferred from the Blue Hills District to the Boston District. As a result, it is no longer administratively part of the Reservation..."^[xii]

Granite Links

Finally, the 'new course' is Granite Links. It is located 'over' two landfills and some of the old granite quarries that were filled in with soil from the "Big Dig".^[xiii] Think of it as "Recycling", in a big way. It all came together to use 900,000 truckloads of dirt from the Big Dig, which were

tentatively going to be trucked further away, to cap the landfills. As we will discuss in a future article, Quincy is “Granite City”, and the quarries that started there in 1826 continued into the 1960s. But when they closed, they left behind a landscape dominated by large holes, and piles of scrap rocks. Some of this was recycled into the portion along Ricciuti Drive where we hike, and others rock climb. Other parts were converted into the Granite Links golf course and soccer fields.

A look at the Granite Links golf course timeline.^[xiv]

1992 Quarry Hills Associates chosen to develop the 540-acre site.

1997 Quarry Hills Associates chosen to remove the soil from the Big Dig.

2000 John Sanford, selected to design Quarry Hills course.

2003 Last of the soil from the Big Dig trucked in.

2003 Milton 9 open.

2004 Granite 9 open.

2006 Quincy 9 open, and clubhouse completed.

So, the next time someone mentions golf at the Blue Hills, ask them which one of the *three* courses they are talking about.

Take care and be safe,

Bob Vogel

[i] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_J._Devine_Memorial_Golf_Course

[ii] <https://cantonmahistorical.pbworks.com/w/page/44184072/Hoosic-Whisick%20Country%20Club>

[iii] <https://web.archive.org/web/20160311165242/http://docs.unh.edu/MA/blue41nw.jpg>

[iv]

https://books.google.com/books?id=0M1Or7WqWv4C&pg=RA1-PA8&lpg=RA1-PA8&dq=hoosicwhisick+pond&source=bl&ots=uvhhUd7WaV&sig=ACfU3U2ePcS2phak7IhhxYsv6uhR-Gwy7A&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjWm5bF_rjpAhX5IHIEHf9UD58Q6AEwC3oECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=hoosicwhisick%20pond&f=false

[v] http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass_%20Historical%20Society,%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book,%20Chapter%201.htm

[vi] *ibid.*

[vii]

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/10/23/nation-oldest-public-golf-course-reopens-canton/P45Sd9CAe8KARKietfK98O/story.html>

[viii] http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass_%20Historical%20Society.%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book.%20Chapter%201.htm

[ix] <https://clubandresortbusiness.com/ponkapoag-gc-completes-5m-renovation-of-historic-course-no-1/>

[x] <https://ponkapoagcamp.org/history/>

[xi]

https://www.google.com/maps/@42.1915223,-71.117769,3a,31.8y,49.54h,97.65t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1spRcFR4ICJDp516LWpwqO_Q!2e0!7i16384!8i8192?hl=en&authuser=0

[xii] <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/10/mz/section-2-blue-hills-reservation.pdf> P2-22.

[xiii] <https://www.granitelinks.com/about/history>

[xiv] <https://www.granitelinks.com/about/development-timeline>