

A. W. Tillinghast

While many interested in the history of golf are familiar with Tillinghast's work, he was not as prolific as many of his contemporaries and thus, to a degree, his legend is not as wide-ranging as such peers as Donald Ross, George Crump or Dr. Alister Mackenzie. Frank Hannigan, one of the stalwarts of the USGA (he still is a commentator on golf telecasts today), wrote an article in the May, 1974 issue of The Golf Journal titled "Golf's Forgotten Genius." Indeed, that epitomizes Tillinghast. Brilliant, however, under appreciated for his impact not only on golf course design, but for his contributions to the game itself.

In point of fact, Tillinghast was one of the most colorful characters in the history of the sport. Known as "Tillie the Terror," A.W., in addition to designing courses that by 1974 had hosted 35 national or international matches, was a fine player playing in several U.S. Amateurs and finishing 25th in the 1910 U.S. Open. He also wrote about the sport, traveled internationally to play (including much time spent at St. Andrews at the knee of the legendary Tom Morris), and wrote about the sport. He is credited with coining the term "birdie" to denote a one-under par score on a hole.

His courses are noted generally by smallish, sloping greens that place a premium on sharp iron play. While our BCC course does not feature a lot of frontal bunkers, his other courses do. Tillinghast courses generally do not have blind shots and offer wide landing areas for the drive (he was not a good driver of the ball!) Mounds are another telltale sign of a Tillinghast course. We all know of the sloping greens existent at BCC and while they are a trademark of his course design, some would fault his work as being a little on the harsh as well we know when facing a downhill 6-footer in the heat of summer!

His foremost courses include Winged Foot and Baltusrol (two courses at both sites), the Bethpage Black Course, the Ridgewood (NJ) CC, and the San Francisco CC. While Hannigan's article lists "The Binghamton CC" as one of his courses, it also notes that the Shawnee CC (in the Poconos), Irem Temple CC (Wilkes-Barre) and the Elmira and Oswego Country Clubs as other courses in our region that are Tillinghast creations.