

Merion Leads Way In World of Sports

By ROBERT W. LESLEY
President, Merion Cricket Club

IN 1865, just after the termination of the Civil War, fifteen young men founded the Merion Cricket Club. The dues were \$2.00 a year. They played cricket on Colonel Owen Jones' lawn and had for their dressing room a space around the pump at Wynnewood School. A little green box in the entry way of the old school house was the locker room for bats, wickets and balls. At that time cricket was the main sport among Philadelphia athletes and several other Clubs were in existence. English traditions and Victorian standards accompanied the growth of cricket in Philadelphia. It was not until 1873 after post war luxury had made its appearance that, with the growth of cricket and of cricket members, ground was purchased at Ardmore where a small comfortable house was built. In 1879 tennis, a new game, was introduced by Merion ladies and, later on, more ground was secured and a ladies' and juniors' club house was built. In 1892 when Allen Evans, the Vice-President, and A. J. Cassatt, the President, and a group of men including Clement A. Griscom and William P. Henzey, decided that the Club and neighborhood needed a larger home and better facilities they purchased a tract of twelve and one-half acres with two houses on it at Haverford, now the present site of the main club house. They then created by alterations and improvements the first country club house or neighborhood club house that Merion ever had. This first house burned down in January 1896 and again in the period of its reconstruction in September 1896, and was finally rebuilt in 1897.

In these early days many cricket matches with foreign teams were played, such as Lord Hawkes' team, Prince Ranjitsinshi's team, Cambridge University's eleven, Australian eleven and the Marylbone Cricket Club.

The Victorian and Quaker influences of the period made it seem necessary to separate the sexes so the new club house had plenty of doorways; so many in fact, that it was almost a house of doors and in order to emphasize the necessity of separation of the sexes a brass rail, now abandoned, was put on the porch so that they could not trespass on each other's preserves.

In the late 1880's golf began to make its appearance on the Griscom Estate and other private estates and the Philadelphia Country Club constructed a small course as did the Devon Hotel at Devon. The Merion members,

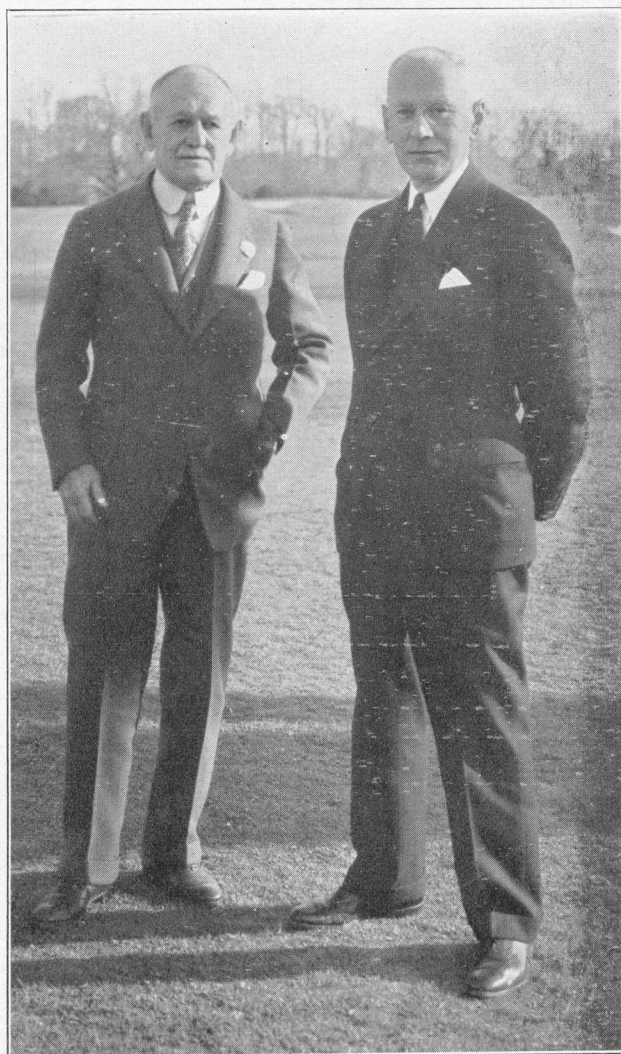
always foremost in sports, were carried along with the tide, and to Charles S. Farnum, Rodman E. Griscom, Alan and Hugh Wilson, Walter B. Stephenson, Charlton Yarnall and Robert W. Lesley the advent of Merion in the field of golf is due. These gentlemen sought proper facilities for golf and organized the Merion Cricket Club Golf Association. Land on the north side of the Pennsylvania Railroad, about a mile from the Merion Cricket Club, was secured and a nine hole course was laid out. An old farm house standing on the property was used as the first club house.

After considerable negotiation the Merion Club management, still devoted to its original love of cricket, was willing, after considerable discussion, to absorb the Merion Cricket Club Golf Association and add this important sport of golf to Merion activities.

In 1898 a small golf house was built, with lockers and baths, and in 1900 when golf became very popular, additional ground was obtained and through the generosity of the late Clement A. Griscom, who gave free use of a large portion of one of his farms, a full eighteen-hole course was built. This course in 1909 was the scene of the first United States Golf Association Tournament played

on Merion's links. This event was the Women's Amateur Championship which was won by Miss Dorothy Campbell, a Scotch girl, who is now Mrs. Dorothy Campbell Hurd, one of Merion's best golfers and winner of many other championships in the United States and abroad, including British, Canadian and Scottish titles; the British in 1909-1911, and the United States in 1909, 1910 and 1924.

With a change in mentality from the early days after this era to the more rapid days of the 1900's, cricket began to slow down and golf to advance in demand and number of players. Consequently when Merion's first golf course was found to be too short for satisfactory championship play, with the development of the rubber cored golf ball, it was necessary to do something of a radical nature. A new location was sought and in 1912 127 acres were purchased on Ardmore Ave., south of the Pennsylvania R. R. and some two miles from the main club house at Haverford. Hugh I. Wilson and his Green Committee laid out Merion's first 18 hole course on the new land and it is what is



Robert W. Lesley, left, President of Merion Cricket Club, and Frank M. Hardt, General Chairman of National Open Tournament Committee.