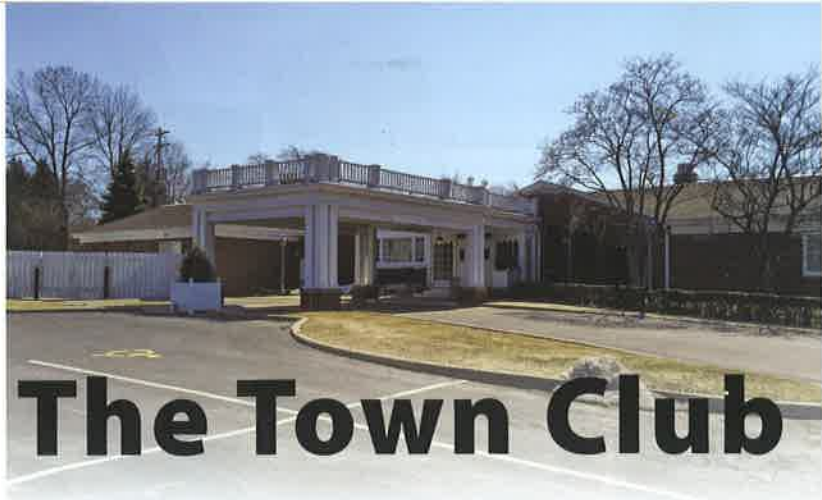


Fox Point



by Douglas H. Frazer



The Town Club

THE TOWN CLUB at 7950 N. North Santa Monica Boulevard opened in Fox Point in 1955 but its history started a half century before then.*

Thomas Henry Spence led the founding of the Club in 1901. Fresh out of Yale and about to embark on a legal career in Milwaukee (joining his father's firm, Quarles, Spence & Quarles), Spence identified a need for "a gathering place for tennis, ice-skating, squash, bowling and parties...a place children could come and be watched...an 'in-town' club near everyone's home." Other prominent near north residents agreed.

Spence succeeded in raising funds to buy property and build a facility on the northeast corner of North Farwell Avenue and Brady Street. William D. Van Dyke, the father of past Village President William D. Van Dyke, Jr., was one of the initial organizers. The facilities included four tennis courts (three hard clay, one all weather), two squash courts, several bowling alleys, as well as a clubhouse, cocktail lounge, and ballroom. During the winter, the tennis courts were flooded for use as a skating rink.

The facilities were comfortable but not fancy -- and family-oriented. The Club hosted many gatherings, parties, cotillions, receptions, balls and other social events.

But The Town Club was always first and foremost a tennis club. It hosted tournaments and attracted many of the world's finest tennis players. One of the Club's own, Frankie Parker, rose from a "shag" (ball boy) to the winner of the U.S. Open in 1944 and 1945.

On November 5, 1953, a fire destroyed the facility. The Town Club set up temporary headquarters on the top floor of the Shorecrest Hotel, then as now at 1962 N. Prospect Avenue. After considerable debate, a new location offering greater space in Fox Point was settled upon. It was also more convenient for the many members who had already moved to the north.

The easy availability of a liquor license was an equally strong consideration in selecting the Fox Point parcel. For many years Charlie Riemer had operated a tavern on the site on the parcel close to the railroad tracks and streetcar stop -- a location convenient for Fox Point Club

members heading to or from the city (the clubhouse, set back east of Lake Drive, was just north of Calumet Road), Fox Point Club golfers, and other day trippers. P.J. Manhardt eventually took it over and ran it as Manhardt's Tavern until the mid-1930s. It turned out the liquor license, long dormant, could easily transfer to the Town Club. Thus, the clubhouse design sited the bar on the northeast side of the building to come within the geographic restrictions of the liquor license.

The Town Club in Fox Point opened to great fanfare on November 5, 1955 -- two years to the day after the fire. Interestingly, the directors envisioned and drew up plans for a large arched-roof tennis complex just across Bradley Road connected by an overhead walkway. The plan, however, never advanced.

Facilities now consist of eighteen tennis courts (fifteen Har-Tru clay courts and three hard-surface courts), four platform tennis courts with a warming house, a bathhouse with locker facilities, a snack bar, two outside pools, and a colonial club house. The main facility has a living room, dining room, bar, grill and various meeting and banquet rooms. The basement includes complete locker room facilities for men and women. At the southern end of the clubhouse are a terrace and an open air dining pavilion.

The platform tennis courts are lit for night play but the lights go off at 10pm.

The Club is organized as a tax code section 501(c)(7) organization operated for pleasure, recreation and other non-profitable purposes, and is governed by a board of directors. The Club offers various membership categories and charges membership buy-ins and dues consistent with those classifications. The Club has about 500 members. Members in good standing may propose new members to a membership committee. The board of directors makes final membership determinations. Memberships are not transferable. The Club welcomes individuals interested in becoming members.

The Town Club has worked hard to bring national and international tennis competition to Milwaukee. It hosted the 1957 and 1959 Western Open Tennis Championships. The Club also served as host for the United States National Clay Court Tennis Championships in 1966, 1967, and 1968. In 1969 the Club hosted one of the first grandmaster's professional tournaments. The Club is now the venue for the annual Milwaukee Tennis Classic presented by Marquette University -- the longest running college tournament in the country. The event is open to the public.

The Town Club's bywords might be class and continuity. After 113 years, the Club still is, in the words of T.H. Spence, "a good place for good companionships, good friends and good family fun."

* I am indebted to several excellent histories of the Club. The first and most comprehensive is Liza Tuttle's *The Town Club, The Centennial Celebration 1901-2001*. The second is an introduction-length *History of the Town Club* co-authored by village resident Charles C. Mulcahy.

Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the Village Board, other Village Board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.

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