



Wayne Stiles (with John Van Kleeck)

Golf Course Architects

When one thinks of American “Golden Age” era golf course architects, C.B. Macdonald, Donald Ross and A.W. Tillinghast are usually among the first names that come to mind. That would sit just fine with **Wayne Stiles** who, unlike many of his counterparts, rarely sought the limelight and preferred to let his designs speak for themselves.

Wayne Stiles was born in Boston in 1884. He was trained as a landscape architect, starting as an apprentice with the firm Brett and Hall in 1902, moving up to junior partner, and eventually founding his own firm in 1915. His first professional golf architecture work involved the drafting of an existing conditions and topographic plan for Brae Burn in March of 1915. In the fall in 1915, he was hired by the Nashua Country Club in to lay out a new course for them which opened in 1916. He continued to design golf courses from Maine to Florida and as far west as St. Louis into the 1940s, and was second only to Ross in terms of the number of golf course architecture projects in Massachusetts.

Like many of his contemporaries including Ross and Walter Travis, Stiles was an accomplished golfer, holding a low single digit handicap just after the turn of the century. Like Ross and his brother Alex, Wayne and his brother Harry were top amateur golfers competing in numerous tournaments including the Massachusetts Amateur Championship. The Stiles brothers were members at Brae Burn GC in Newton MA from 1905-1916, where Wayne won the Handicap Cup in 1905, the Quaigh in 1911 and was runner up in the Club Championship in 1910, when he was listed by *American Golfer* as one of the state’s top 25 golfers.

Stiles visited every property he is credited with designing, often spending considerable time walking and surveying his properties, first identifying the best locations for the greens (usually elevated), and then routing the holes to link them. He was known for creating greenside mounds that would feed into the putting surface, incorporating natural slopes, numerous blind shots, false fronts, and using staggered approach bunkers with challenging visual clues. He was contracted to design the course at Wildwood Golf & Country Club (now The Shore Club) in 1921, and the course was unveiled in 1923.

That same year, Stiles teamed up with **John Van Kleeck**, a native of Florida who was the first golf course architect to graduate from Cornell. By 1925, Stiles & Van Kleeck had offices New York, Boston, and Florida where Van Kleeck was then based, having married a woman from St. Petersburg. The partnership dissolved in 1931 with Van Kleeck going on to work with Robert Moses, serving as the supervising architect for the New York City Parks Department, improving a number of municipal

courses including Van Cortlandt Park and Pelham Bay. During World War II he was invited to Venezuela to work on the Valle Arriba in Caracas and he spent over a dozen years in South America, designing golf courses and private estates. His work spanned as far west as the Albuquerque CC and as far north as Whiteface Mountain in NY.

Stiles died in 1953 of lymphoma, and Van Kleeck passed away in 1967 at the age of 79. Stiles and the company of Stiles & Van Kleeck are credited with designing approximately 150 courses, 77 of which still exist today.

1

¹ For more information about Wayne Stiles and John Van Kleeck, please see *"The Life and Work of Wayne Stiles"* or visit www.waynestilessociety.org.