

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge-1861

The Story of Polo in Indian Hill

Polo has been called “the emperor of games”, “hockey on horseback”, and “the game of kings”. Invented in Persia between the 6th century B.C. and the 1st century A.D., the game eventually spread to India where British regiments adopted the sport. It became the rage in England in the 1870s. American publishing magnate James Gordon Bennett witnessed a polo game and brought the game to the U. S. Legend has it that the first polo match ever held stateside took place in New York in 1876. Within a decade, clubs sprung up all over the East Coast. Polo’s golden age came during the 1920s and 1930s when it was an Olympic sport and attracted crowds of up to 30,000 at international matches.



Polo is a team sport – a contact sport played on horses. The game is a test of coordination between a player and a horse, as well as the team work of the group. It can get rough and dangerous when fighting for a ball or slamming into an opponent. The sport is elitist because it is expensive. Players have to purchase between 1-4 horses (polo ponies), saddles and tack, join a club, and stable, train and maintain the equines. Also they have to equip themselves. Polo appeals to a socially exclusive group.

In Cincinnati, polo was first played after World War I at the Riding Club, an indoor arena on Asman Avenue in north Avondale. Several of the Riding Club families moved to Indian Hill in the 1920s when Camargo Realty began selling property. In 1924, Camargo Realty signed a contract with “The Polo Group” agreeing to install one regulation size polo field and another practice field at the brand new Camargo Club. It took 2 years, but by late summer 1926, the main field (300’ by 150”), named No. 1, on Camargo Club Drive, No. 2, north of Shawnee Run Rd. on the current day driving range, and a smaller practice field west of Camargo Stables had been built.

The inaugural September 1926 match between the Camargo Club Team and the Memphis Hunt and Polo Club took place on a Sunday afternoon on No. 2 field. The Camargo players were Lucien Wulsin, Frederic Flach, who was replaced later in the game by Learner Harrison, Timothy Goodman, and Harrison Smith. The *Enquirer* reported that “Polo at Camargo brought out society in brilliant array.” The Memphis team and entourage were feted with luncheons and a Saturday night dinner dance at the Camargo Club. Spectators enjoyed the 17-3 match and all the attendant social festivities.

Soon thereafter Camargo scheduled matches at home and away with the aforementioned Memphis club, Chicago’s Oakbrook, the 138th Field Artillery from Louisville, the Miami Valley Hunt and Polo Club from Dayton, Carranor from Toledo, and other clubs from Lexington, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Indianapolis. Polo’s popularity increased and polo balls, mallets, and other gear were sold in

Camargo’s golf shop. Parking spaces along the sidelines of the field were reserved for a fee. Camargo men and women practiced the game indoors at the Riding Club during the winter, and a youth polo club for ages 12 -15 was formed. Avid players included O. DeGray Vanderbilt, David Pollak, Lawrence Taft, Bill Albers, Chester Kroger, H. C. Yeiser, Burton Closson, and Warner Atkins. Club members vied for positions on the 4 man Camargo team, and sought prizes in multi- state competitions. A Camargo women’s team, the “Girls Team”, played indoors. Some of these “girls” were Mrs. Harrison Smith, Mrs. Hayden Chatfield, Mrs. Robert Black, and Miss Virginia Kittredge.

The 1932 and 1933 Camargo Club team made a reputation for themselves, but by the end of that decade polo ceased to be played in Indian Hill. In its heyday, it attracted athletic horsemen and women, and crowds of enthusiastic aficionados. Even today the Camargo Club logo contains a polo mallet which reminds members of that bygone era.



1931 Camargo Club Team