

A Short Life for Fairport's Miniature Golf Course

A miniature golf course in Seabreeze is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Opened in 1930, it is the oldest course in continuous use in the United States. That same year, two men were intent on bringing the phenomenon to Fairport. Their business might have thrived, except the chosen location became a matter of contention in the community, and led to its demise.

James Finnegan, a school teacher, partnered with concessionaire Edward "Zip" Dunn to establish the Fairport Recreational Park, with the intent to build a miniature golf course and concession stand. Dunn owned a lot at the corner of West Church Street and Hulburt Avenue, and had obtained a permit to operate a gas station on the lot. When neighbors protested, the plan was abandoned. Soon after Fairport established a zoning ordinance, which took effect in January of 1930.



A miniature golf course and concession stand operated briefly in 1930 at 119 West Church Street. This house was built on the same lot in 1964.

Zip Dunn's corner lot was in a residential AA district, per the recently created zoning ordinance, meaning commercial businesses were not allowed. However, on July 2nd, 1930, the Village Board granted Dunn and Finnegan a temporary permit to operate the miniature golf

business and related concessions, for a period of up to three years. The idea of a three year temporary permit rankled nearby neighbors, and within days a delegation appeared before the Village Board of Trustees. W.B. Hanks, attorney for Fairport, stated that the Board's action was legal, although attorneys from Rochester representing the residents disagreed with his position. The Village attorney also advised that a Board of Appeals could modify or cancel the permit. Meanwhile, construction of the miniature golf course continued.

A hearing before the newly created Board of Appeals was held on July 21st, 1930. Arguments on both sides were heard, and soon after a recommendation was made to the Village Board of Trustees to cancel the three year temporary permit. The same week, with construction complete, James Finnegan opened the course to the public. Just a few days later, the Trustees, whose members included the father of Finnegan, heard the recommendation of the Board of Appeals, but chose not to act.

For the next few months Fairport Recreational Park thrived. Golfers putted, lemonade and hot dogs were consumed at Zip Dunn's concession stand, and lawyers argued the case. In mid-October Supreme Court Justice Willis K. Gillette ruled that the Board of Trustees failed to enforce the zoning ordinance. The decision was appealed by the village, but was upheld by the Appellate Division.

James Finnegan pursued a short-lived effort to have the zoning ordinance repealed, gaining the signatures of a large number of residents on his petition, but the effort failed. Finnegan lamented the decision to shut down the miniature golf course, saying, "...this was a park, a place for both young and old to amuse themselves. It was betterment, if anything."

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

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