

Chatsworth Park South History

By Ann & Ray Vincent

Today in April of 2016, our Chatsworth Park South, located at the west end of Devonshire, is going through a renovation to remove lead shot and clay pigeon debris present since the Aqua Sierra Sportsmans Club first skeet and trap stations were built in 1952.



Ken Ulis and Bill Sesnon were world record holders at the two man team event in Dallas Texas in 1964. Bill Sesnon is related to the Porter family of Porter Ranch.

We need to travel back to the early 1880's to follow the history of the property and the families involved to get the big picture.

James Hill and family set up squatters rights on their homestead in 1886. Their 120 acre homestead eventually grew to 229 acres.

In 1952, their daughter, Minnie Hill Palmer, a widow aged 66 years and living at the Homestead Cottage, leased part of her land to the Aqua Sierra Sportsmans Club.

The Cottage remained her home until her 90th year, 1976. Minnie worked closely with the Chatsworth Historical Society and the City of LA to maintain the legacy of the Hill Homestead.

Ken's wife Beverly donated a shotgun pouch which has a "100 straight" pin attached to the Aqua Sierra Sportsmans club pin.



Beverly explained that the Aqua Sierra Gun Club was



not a public course. It was an exclusive shooting club, and members were invited to join.

Aqua Sierra Sportsman Club

Two homestead parcels were combined in the 1950's and 60's to create a 123 acre sports center at the west end of Devonshire, on what is today's Chatsworth Park South and part of Rockpointe.

There are multiple stories involved:

- The founding of the Aqua Sierra Sportsmans Club in 1949, and the building of two skeet and trap stations by 1951/52, before Minnie Hill Palmer sold the Hill homestead.
- The expansion of Aqua Sierra after the 1956 purchase of the Hill homestead by Henry Berkenkamp of Oroweat Bakeries. By 1959, there were five skeet and trap stations, a 90 foot hi-tower, one nine-hole golf course, a driving range, and two trout lakes. In 1959 it is advertised as the **Roy Rogers Sports Center**.



Roy was an accomplished sportsman and a big game hunter. Roy was also a crack shot at trap and skeet. In 1961 Roy competed at the Trap and Skeet championships in Gardena. Charlotte Berkenkamp, Henry's wife also competed at that same event.

The most important attribute was that you had to be able to shoot well. The group included quite a few Hollywood celebrities, including Clark Gable, Roy Rogers, Robert Taylor, Robert Stack, Robert Sterling, John Wayne, Charlton Heston and Walter Brennan. In 1958 there were over 200 paying members at the Club.



- The Chatsworth Historical Society has posted three related videos that can be downloaded for viewing, found at chatsworthhistory.com, under Presentations.
1. 1961 The Andy Griffith Show, Season 2, Episode 8, "The Perfect Female" (Skeet shooting at Aqua Sierra)
 2. 1959 Chevrolet Commercial - Trap Shooting at the Roy Rogers Sports Center
 3. In 1958 Roy Rogers buys Clark Gable's pump shotgun for \$600 at Aqua Sierra. An interview with Dusty Rogers.

Now let's talk about the Golf Courses and Trout Lakes.

Expansion of the Golf Courses

The first nine hole course completed in 1959 was known as the “white” course. In 1961, three additional nine-hole golf courses were added on the adjacent 48 acre Butler homestead parcel. This parcel was leased from the Scheplers.

In June 1959 Ashley Loafea is named the Pro of the Devonshire Golf Course.

In Nov 1960 the Devonshire Women’s Golf Club compiled a handbook on rules and etiquette on the greens, and announced that they would schedule tournaments every Wednesday from 8:30 to 10 am.

Construction of the red, yellow and orange courses began in Aug 1960 and was finished by June 1961.

In June 1961 there was a pro-amateur celebrity golf tournament featuring James Garner and other celebrities.

There was a Chatsworth Youth Golf Club formed in the early ‘60’s. It was sponsored by the Chatsworth Rotary Club and George Lorbeer was the advisor.



Ken Ditto shared some fun stories about how to play the courses. First, you were always polite to Minnie because you never knew when a ball was going to land in her yard. And there were unique hazards to watch for such as rattlesnakes. Also, lots of errant golf balls bouncing around from other golfers, since the fairways were very close together. Ken found the Out of Bounds marker above during the tear-down of the golf club, and donated it to the Chatsworth Museum. It had been located just outside Minnie’s vegetable garden.



The Palmer Trout Lakes

Mike Fender’s wife’s grandparents are Alice and Albert Biddison. Alice and Albert were caretakers of the Trout Lake, short 9-hole golf course, and the gun range during the 50’s and early 60’s. His wife spent a lot of time at the “Lake” and remembers her grandfather conversing with Roy Rogers on several occasions. Mike’s mother-in-law knew Minnie Palmer. Mike forwarded us pictures of the scale (seen at right) used to weigh the fish at the Trout Lakes. One paid by the pound for the fish caught.



Mike said that when the lakes were drained there were several very large catfish in the larger lake, one being close to 3 feet long.

There was a Fishing Shed where they would rent poles, and they would clean your fish for you.

There was a small pond for the kids, and a larger pond for the adults.



The decline of the sports center began in 1968, when Rockpointe began development on the 48 acre Butler parcel. In 1973 the City of Los Angeles purchased the 75 acre skeet/fishing/golf course site and it became today’s Chatsworth Park South.

What remains of the Sports complex today in 2016

- The Golf Pro Shop was moved onto the Homestead Acre and is currently the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum, home of the Chatsworth Historical Society.
- The Concrete Path behind the shotgun range stations, and a flagpole at a clearing behind the center station (also seen in 1959 Chevy commercial)
- The concrete foundation of the Fishing Shed at the Trout Lakes.

For more pictures, maps, and stories, view the presentation at chatsworthhistory.com, Presentations, Aqua Sierra and the Roy Rogers Sports Center.

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