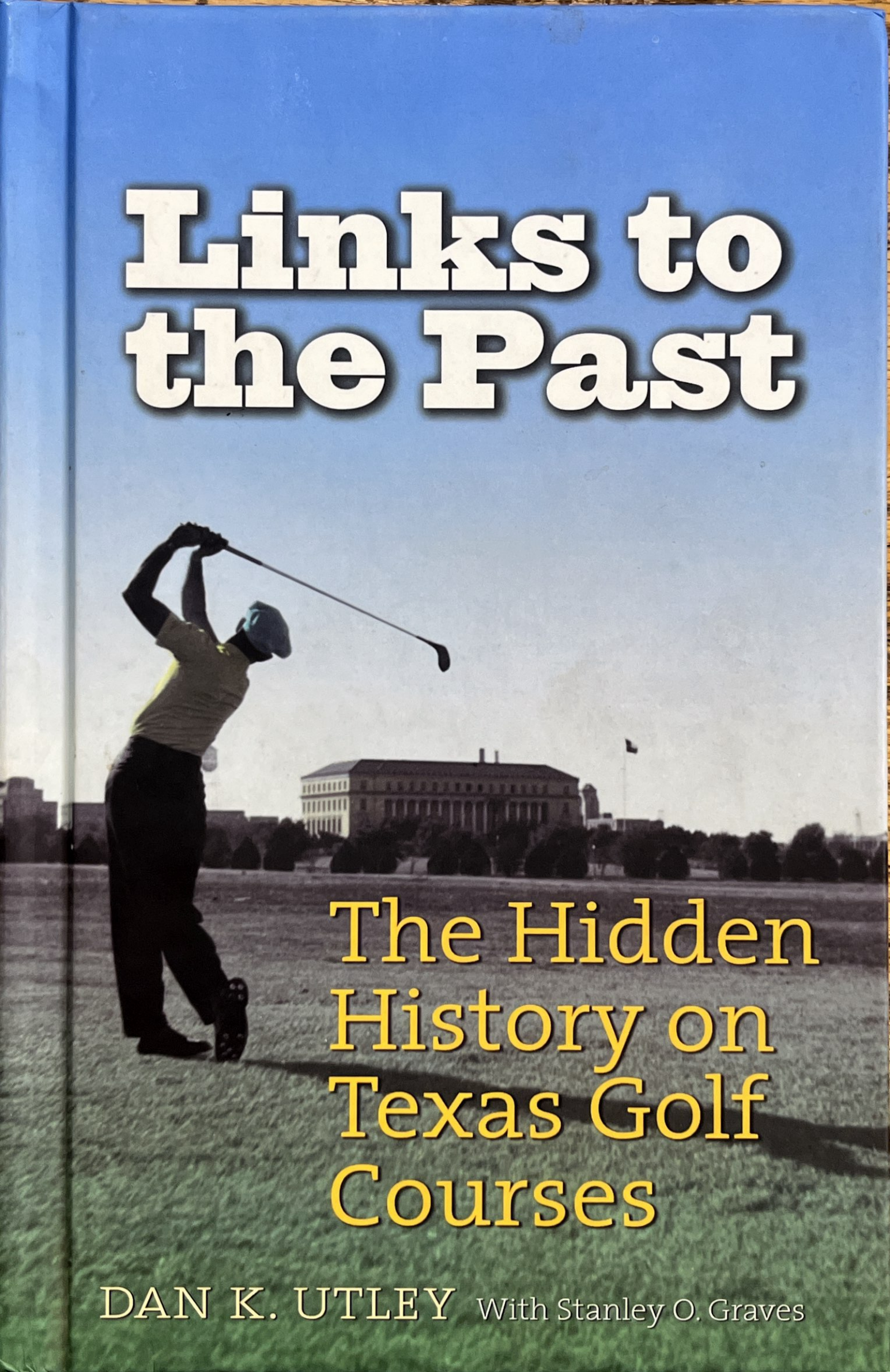
Links to the Past



The Hidden History on Texas Golf Courses

DAN K. UTLEY With Stanley O. Graves

8 BATTLE IN THE CANYON

CANYON COURSE AT MEADOWBROOK GOLF COURSE, LUBBOCK

SCORECARD FROM THE PAST

Currently: The Canyon Course at Meadowbrook Golf Course
Historic Name: Yellow House Canyon
Details: An eighteen-hole public course (thirty-six holes, including the adjacent Creek layout, originally Squirrel Hollow) northeast of downtown Lubbock; distance is 6,522 yards from the longest tees
Location: 601 Municipal Drive, Lubbock
Historical Context: Buffalo hunting, late-nineteenth-century Anglo-American–Native American warfare on the southern plains
Historical Type: Battlefield
Period of Significance: 1877
Signature Hole of History: Given the nature of the historic site, all holes share in the overall story of the Yellow House Canyon Fight, but number one, a par-five, 593-yard hole, gives golfers a strong test from the start. For historical perspective, playing roughly south in the general direction of the 1877 battle site, number eight is a par-five, 477-yard hole.

The Course of History

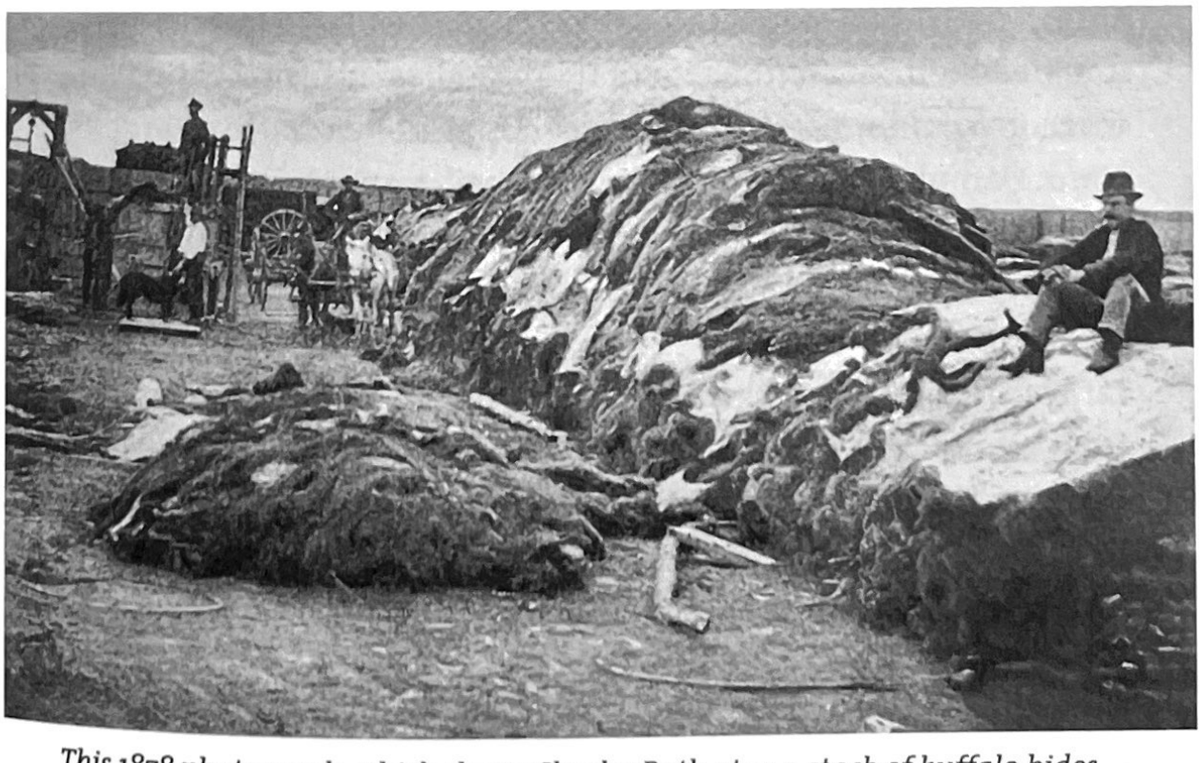
Yellow House Canyon, or Yellow House Draw, is a significant natural cut in the Caprock Escarpment north and east of Lubbock that stretches into Crosby County and farther southeast. The name comes from a natural feature in Hockley County known as Casas Amarillas. The canyon is an erosional feature caused in part by the

Yellow House River and other streams that drain into a complex to form the headwaters of the Brazos River. It is an area of relatively flat plains flanked by pocket canyons, steep walls, minor draws, eroded ledges, and boulders. In historic times it was a landmark well known by Anglo-American hunters and Native Americans, who followed the native buffalo (American bison) across the plains, albeit for different reasons. The animals were a vital source of food and clothing for Native Americans, providing materials for ceremonial and utilitarian purposes as well. For Anglo-American buffalo hunters, the shaggy hides were the prize and, as historian William C. Griggs noted, were like "gold dust waiting to be panned." In their quest for the money part of the animals, as they viewed it, the hunters saw little use in the meat and bones, often salvaging only the tongue for immediate consumption and leaving the rest to decompose. To the Indians, such wanton destruction was not only unimaginable and unforgiveable but also precipitated an end to their freedom and way of life. The commercial harvest of buffalo, especially during what has been termed the Great Slaughter of the 1870s, became a flashpoint between the two cultures.[1]

One of the legendary encounters on the Texas plains during that decade took place at Yellow House Canyon. The events that spawned the skirmish, however, began much farther afield in different locales. One was the 1876 establishment of Camp Reynolds, also known as Rath City, in what is now the southern portion of Stonewall County. This supply settlement for the buffalo trade grew up around a store opened earlier by Charles Rath, who had abandoned a similar operation at the ill-fated Adobe Walls farther west. Small bands of hunters and skinners ventured out from this and other buffalo camps into more remote areas to set up frontline hide camps, bases from which they hunted their prey and collected hides. One such man was a hunter named Marshall Sewell (Sewall), originally of Pennsylvania. Fellow hunter John R. Cook described him as an educated man who, although not a "professed Christian," treated others fairly and courteously and refrained from drinking, smoking, and cursing. Cook also noted that he was "a man of hopeful, optimistic tendencies," which may have accounted in part for his actions on February 1, 1877. Alone

and without reason to fear for his personal safety, Sewell set up his hunting stand along a sizeable buffalo herd in the area of present Dawson or Borden Counties. From his vantage point, he reportedly killed buffalo at will with his long-range .45-caliber Creedmoor Sharps rifle, ceasing only when he ran out of ammunition. As it turned out, though, Sewell was not alone; observing his harvest that day were a number of Native Americans gravely disturbed by the slaughter they had witnessed.[2]

While a series of concerted state and federal actions, including punitive military actions by Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie, resulted in a general subjugation of Native Americans along the southern plains by the mid-1870s, unique and extenuating circumstances led to the presence of a small tribal band in the area of Sewell's camp in February 1877. A Comanche and Apache band from Fort Sill, Indian Territory, was in Texas, with or without official dispensation, to hunt buffalo in order to augment their meager government pro-



This 1878 photograph, which shows Charles Rath atop a stack of buffalo hides somewhere in Kansas, documents a typical hide-yard operation of the type that utilized buffalo pelts harvested from the Texas plains and other locales. Visible in the left rear is the press used to prepare the hides for rail shipment. Courtesy Legends of America Photo Prints.

visions. The leader of the group was a Quahadi chief, Black Horse, who directed the attack on Sewell as he endeavored to connect with his approaching companions for resupply. Among the Indians that day was captive Herman Lehmann, who provided an account of the aftermath of Sewell's death: "We then went back to the body of the hunter we had killed and took two scalp-locks from his head, cut a gash in each temple, and thrust a sharp stick through his stomach." Buffalo hunter Cook was among those alerted about the attack and tasked with investigating the action. Arriving near the site around midnight, he and his companions buried Sewell in a shallow grave the following morning and covered it with mesquite branches. Within two hundred yards of the corpse, Cook observed, lay "21 bloated unskinned buffalo carcasses."[3]

Back in Rath City, a punitive expedition, including Cook, soon formed and on March 4 headed out against the tribal band. After a number of thwarted efforts and only a single encounter with an Indian scout, the group eventually identified the Indian encampment at Yellow House Canyon on March 18 and prepared for battle. Griggs noted that "the hunters tightened their horses's [sic] girths and tied their hats to the rear of their saddles" before dividing into three groups to maximize surprise. Upon the order to charge by Hank Campbell, the hunters sprang their trap. At first the attack went as planned, with the Indians caught off guard and forced to scatter. As they realized that they far outnumbered the rapidly advancing hunters, however, the Indians valiantly rallied, temporarily driving them back to seek the safety of canyon outcroppings, from which they laid down a withering fire that then forced their foes to fall back as well. Soon an extensive prairie fire, set by the Indians to provide themselves cover, broke the ensuing lull in the fighting. Amid the smoke appeared first one rider, who the hunters quickly shot dead, and then another, who was believed shot from his horse but managed to escape. The second rider was Herman Lehmann, who later wrote of that moment: "My horse was killed. I dropped down behind him and fought there for a while, but it got too hot for me and I ran back to the bluff but in the run I was shot in the leg. I was using a long-range buffalo gun at the time and I think I hit the mark with it several times." Lehmann added that he

and his Indian companions made several assaults, but the hunters successfully repelled each one. Aware of the overwhelming odds against them, the hunters sent several men out in an effort to secure reinforcements, but at least one, described as a "big fat black man," faced quick capture by the Indians. Cinched tightly by them in tribal regalia, including a war bonnet, and forced to run back to his line, the man fell dead from shots by his companions, who mistook him for one of their foes.[4]

What had been a ten-hour battle came to an indecisive end with nightfall. Under the cover of darkness, both groups fell back to safer positions, with the hunters setting fires along the way as a means of diversion and in hopes of obscuring their trail. There were no further encounters, however, and the men returned to Rath City on March 27, concluding a twenty-three-day expedition. News of their fight spread quickly, and in early May a detail of the Tenth Cavalry, out of Fort Griffin and under the command of Capt. P. L. Lee, encountered the tribal group at Silver Lake (Quemado) in present Cochran County, forcing its surrender and subsequent return to Fort Sill. The fighting at Yellow House Canyon, while producing no conclusive victory for either side, nevertheless remains a significant event in Anglo-American–Native American relations on the Texas plains, making the end of an uncertain era punctuated by myriad cross-cultural hostilities. What followed in due course was the settlement of the last frontier in the state, an area defined in large part by a rich history strongly associated with its indigenous people.[5]

Historians have long conjectured about the exact location of the battle, which likely centered on grounds south and southwest of the modern Canyon Course. While the supposed battlefield represented the nexus of the 1877 encounter, the fighting extended well into present Mackenzie Park, and the various movements of hunters and warriors, especially in the early phases of the encounter, no doubt crossed what is today the golf course. These early maneuvers—in effect a series of thrust-and-parry actions from both sides during the course of the engagement—depended on the cover of canyon walls and outcroppings that today form a natural backdrop for the area's cultural landscape.

The Course *in* History

Nearly fifteen years after the fighting in Yellow House Canyon, the relatively new town of Lubbock was designated the seat of government for Lubbock County in 1891. The city grew steadily in its early years but began to experience rapid growth in the 1920s, in part because of the new Texas Technological College (Texas Tech) and its development as a railroad and hospital center for the southern plains. In 1920 the population was 4,051 people, but in just ten years that number increased almost five fold. A reflection of that growth was the announcement in the *Lubbock Morning Avalanche* in September 1928 of a new municipal golf course. Slated for development in Yellow House Canyon "on the new Plainview–Amarillo highway," it reflected the sponsoring work of local real-estate dealer John W. Jarrott. Building contractor W. G. McMillan supervised the work, and "Boney" Bonebrake of the Hill Crest Country Club in Amarillo designed the layout. Arthur Allen "Boney" Bonebrake, only twenty-eight years old when he took on the Lubbock project, was something of a golf phenomenon in the plains. Born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1900, he held a number of course records in his home state before becoming a golf instructor and taking up the job of designing courses on his own. Little is known of Bonebrake otherwise, for he tragically died of heart failure at Borger, Texas, in 1930, only two years after his work at Meadowbrook and just nine days after his thirtieth birthday.[6]

The course in Yellow House Canyon—now the Canyon Course of Meadowbrook Golf Course at Mackenzie Park—opened on April 12, 1929, as a nine-hole course, but work began immediately on a second nine that opened for play that September. A newspaper advertisement at that time boasted of "perfect greens and Bermuda fairways" a "mere four minutes drive from the main business district of Lubbock." It also included an inset entitled "Attention Ladies" that noted: "This course is ideal for your game. Additional tee boxes have been installed near the hazards so that you might cross easily and without the necessity of long shots. You'll like this course after you play it."[7]

Meadowbrook became a major component of a larger recreational area in 1935, when the federal government announced plans for a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) unit to develop surrounding acreage as a state park named for Colonel Mackenzie, whose cavalry forces traversed the general area in the 1870s in expeditions against various Native American groups. Following CCC project protocols, the City of Lubbock secured rights to the proposed site—547 acres—that included the course and a small city park. Additionally, the county offered Shannon Park and its existing amenities as well as the use of its heavy machinery for road building and other infrastructure work. Federal approval for a state park (designated SP-52) came in the spring of 1935, and the first enrollees camped at the site in July of that year. The young men were members of Company 3820(V), a unit composed of World War I veterans (thus the "V" in the designation). The initial company failed to develop as planned, though, and in 1936 the CCC

No Pushover for Duffers

About this time next year, a lot of golfers are going to be having a lot of fun playing on the new Meadowbrook golf course.

Because that's the kind of a course they're building at Meadowbrook these days—a golf course for pleasure. It is being designed to give Mr. and Mrs. Average Golfer a chance to shoot some ego-tickling scores.

By that we do not mean that the new Meadowbrook course when it is opened for grass greens play next spring, will be a pushover for all the duffers in town, an easy mark for the better than average players, a careless frolic for the par-busters. To play the course correctly one must be armed with virtually every shot known to golf, because there will be times and occasions calling for every club in the sack and every angle of backswing.

Source: From Collier Parris, "A Golf Course for 'Fun,'" *Sportometer, Lubbock Evening Journal*, June 2, 1939, 4.

reorganized it as a "white junior" unit of younger men. The personnel at the park changed continually, but the company remained in place until 1941, when the nation's attention focused on possible involvement in another world war. During their time at Mackenzie Park, the "CCC boys" built stone entrance portals, roads and trails, bridges, a refectory, and large swimming pool. According to historian James Wright Steely, chronicler of the Texas state park system, the state retained ownership of the land following the completion of the work of the CCC, and the City of Lubbock oversaw the daily operations of Mackenzie Park. That arrangement changed in 1993, "when the state traded its land for property at Lubbock Lake Landmark State Historical Park." Since then full ownership and responsibility of the park has resided with the city.[8]

During the years of the CCC operations at Mackenzie Park, the city expanded and improved Meadowbrook to make it more appealing and challenging. Work began in 1939 to lengthen the course overall and to add new grasses and an irrigation system. As local sportswriter Collier Parris reported:

> The new greens, fellow duffers, are going to be very neat. In situating them, [course manager W. G. "Bill"] McMillan and Professional Joe Byrne have utilized natural topography, contours and hazards. Some of them are in very tricky spots indeed and if one shoots over and past them, one is going to exercise one's vocal organs in no uncertain terms; some of them lie flat enough, some curve upward from the back, based on the natural curves, rises and falls of the grounds; some are wider in front than in the rear, and vice versa. But all of them are big, strong healthy fellows that should make putting a pleasure.[9]

Through the ensuing years, the city has contracted for redesigns of the course, most notably by designers Warren Cantrell (1950s) and Bob Lohmann (around 1990). Lubbockite Cantrell, a native of Hill County, interned as an engineer with the noted Abilene architect David S. Castle. In 1928 he designed the Stamford Country Club, staying on as a pro and then later serving as the pro at the Abilene

Gone to the Dogs

Pro-Manager John J. (Jay) McClure of Lubbock (Tex.) Meadowbrook GC has a prairie dog sanctuary right next to his municipal course. The dogs are protected and are one of Lubbock's main tourist attractions. However, McClure estimates that even though the prairie dogs are well fenced in, with wiring going down 10 feet under a high masonry wall, they escape and set up new diggings on the course and driving range. He estimates that over 10,000 golf balls have been lost down the dog holes on the driving range alone.

Source: From Herb Graffis, "Swinging around Golf: News of the Golf World in Brief," *Golfdom*, Aug. 1965, 78.

Country Club. He continued as a golf designer and worked on such courses as Ranchland Hills in Midland, Tascosa in Amarillo, and Rolling Acres in Corpus Christi. In Lubbock he designed the Hillcrest Country Club, redesigned and worked as the pro at Meadowbrook, and was the golf coach at Texas Tech in the 1950s. A prominent leader in professional associations, he twice served as president of the Texas PGA. When interviewed in 1957 about his distinguished golf career, he recalled in particular his friendship with some of the game's greats, including fellow Texans Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, and Gene Sarazen. "You know," he said, "most of the great golfers have been Texans anyway." Cantrell died in 1967 at the age of sixty-one and was posthumously inducted into the Texas Golf Hall of Fame in 2010.[10]