



NEW YORK CROQUET CLUB

# HISTORY

by  
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*F*rom its founding in 1967 by Jack Osborn and S. Joseph Tankoos as the first serious club for six-wicket croquet in America, the New York Croquet Club has imparted its own profound vision of the game, in small or large measure, to every club and player who followed. The club has produced some of the game's finest players and most well known champions like John Osborn and Kiley Jones, and the foremost teachers of the game, Bob



Kroeger, Teddy Prentis and John Osborn. The first set of American croquet rules, vastly different from the version that had been evolving in England for more than a century, were literally pounded out on the Central Park lawns of the New York Croquet Club. The New York Croquet Club, with this new set of rules, served as the cornerstone in the foundation of The United States Croquet Association.

Over the years, many

from the New York Club have served in leadership roles in the USCA including Robert Clayton, Mike Gibbons, Jim Erwin, it's current President, Rich Curtis and most recent past President, Dick Brackett. Due to the vision of its early founders, sustained and enhanced by its members through the years, the New York Croquet Club serves as a symbol of excellence to the world of croquet.

*New York Croquet Club  
October 2000 Osborn Cup*

## Prelude

Although heavily disputed like most everything else in the sport, legend is that croquet was first played in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century by French peasants who used crooked sticks. These first players may have been crook-wielding shepherds. "In time the game became known as paille-maille or ball-mallet. The game seemed to languish for a few centuries, until it was taken up by Scottish golfers during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century possibly to practice their golf game. When James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1604 he brought his paille-maille equipment with him to London along with his golf clubs. Paille-maille was anglicized to Pall Mall in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when Charles II played the game with his courtiers in St. James Park. At this point channel crossing seems to be the game's most vivid characteristic. It appears to have migrated back to France in 1830 when a French doctor invented a new version of pall mall for his patients to play and called it croquet from the French "croche," or shepherd's crook. For some years, it was played in spas in the South of France where British tourists saw it played there and carried it across the pond again"<sup>1</sup>.

In 1850 an ivory turner and apparent entrepreneur named John Jacques II began making croquet equipment in London. He introduced the game officially at the Great Exhibition of 1851 for which he won a Gold medal and a lot of notice. Jacques produced a set of rules for croquet, which were published from 1864 to 1870. Used as a basis by later players to develop the modern English rules of play, Jacques' rules were not the first drafted for the game. *Croquet's first rule book was published in England in 1861 and it was called Routledge's Handbook of Croquet.* Wide use of Routledge's handbooks together with Jacques equipment created wide popularity for the game in the 1860's.

By the 1870s croquet was becoming very popular in the United States especially in New York Society. According to Captain Mayne Reid, from his Treatise on Croquet with Notes and Commentaries:

<sup>1</sup>Hickock, Ralph, "Croquet History", *Sports History*, 2002. Updated Feb. 28, 2002, <http://www.mauicroquetclub.org/history/SportsHistory.htm>

*...tropical summer don't call for violent muscular exertions and its moral: in no country in the world are there so many of the youth of both sexes fitted by refinement to having the leisure to indulge in this delicate sport and nowhere else is the full circle so certain to appreciate its purity and give it full patronage.*

So began croquet's initial appeal in the United States. Croquet surpassed lawn tennis in popularity and as more people played more clubs were formed, more croquet sets manufactured and more rules published. Then, as now, the need for uniformity in the game asserted itself. Milton Bradley published Croquet, Its Principles and Rules and Spaulding produced its Official Croquet Manual of 1880, which came with pictures of croquet players posed to show how the game should be played. Indeed, the year before its publication the Spaulding rules were officially adopted by what appears to be the first convocation of its kind, the National Croquet Congress, which was held in Chicago on September 23 and 24 in 1879. This Congress, however, was no more official than the National Croquet Association of New England, which was founded in 1882. Formed to set up a uniform and universally accepted code of rules, the National Croquet Association held its first national tournament and convention in 1882 with twenty-five clubs gathering from cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Norwich, Connecticut. Of particular note to this history, the convention met on the grounds of the very first New York Croquet Club at 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. Clearly, the New York Croquet Club served even at its beginning as a cornerstone club for the development of the sport.

Presumably the game continued to be played at 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue at least through the turn of the century, although there is no continuing record of that club's activities. The sport hit something of a low point in the late 1880s when it was banned in Boston for causing 'immoral behavior.' The New York magazine *Living Age* editorialized, "*The ingenuity of man has never conceived anything better calculated to bring out all the evil passions of humanity than the so-called game of croquet.*" Players were known to make use of the time between turns to do a bit of tipping and gambling on a match's outcome. The game may have been outlawed in Boston, but participation in the sport increased elsewhere sufficiently for the game to be accepted into the Olympics in 1900 and 1904. An

American won in the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, playing a game that was unlike the English game. "Called Roque, a word created by slicing off the "c" and "t" from "croquet", it is played on a court of hard packed dirt with hard rubber balls, narrow wickets and short mallets. The court is enclosed by baseboards and played by caroming shots off the boards. Roque became the dominant form of croquet played in the United States in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century"<sup>2</sup>. As this version of the sport ascended, the National Croquet Association, which had been formed to further the English version, grew dormant which would have affected the first New York Croquet Club. The confusion caused by the many different forms of the game being played and the varied rules being produced by the toy set manufacturers contributed to the growing lack of interest in the game in the United States after the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Croquet was revived in the United States, at least in the Northeast, when Herbert Bayard Swope, Sr., executive editor of the New York World and the first American to win a Pulitzer Prize, began playing the game on his estate at Sands Point, Long Island. He had seen it played in England when he was a war correspondent during World War I and brought the game back to the United States. At that time the Algonquin Round Table crowd became involved in the sport. According to his son, Herbert Swope, Jr.:



Herbert Bayard Swope, Jr.

*My old man began playing over there [England] during and after the war...We had a summer house in Great Neck and used to play down there and that was the time when they started the Algonquin group, so called, which was the group of intellectuals and writers and actors who formed the group and where they used to eat lunch every day. The group included Alexander Woollcott who was a critic on the World...a very good croquet player; and Robert Benchley, who was the Editor of Life; Dorothy Parker a fabulous wit who had an office with Benchley, Gerald Brooks, the man after whom we named a croquet tournament we had on Long Island during the 30s and 40s--the Gerald Brooks Memorial Challenge Cup. They had several tournaments at our house and across the road at Margaret Emerson's...Averell Harriman played there. He was the toughest rival, I had. We played nine-wicket. Our lawn was vast. One could drive a ball away from a clump of pine trees and it would travel into a drive down to East Shore Road by Manhasset Bay.*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, Swope's lawn was so big that players had to scream to one another to be heard. It was complete with sand traps, bunkers, and a rough. When it became too dark to see in the evening, Swope had his guests ring the court with their cars and turn their lights on, oblivious to the fate of the cars. Other competitors on Swope's lawn included playwrights Moss Hart and George Kaufman; artist Neysa McNein; cartoonist Franklin P. Adams; playwright Charles MacArthur; and Harpo Marx, who helped popularize the sport on the West Coast. This was a highly competitive group. A story is told that Harpo once interrupted a meeting between Alexander Woollcott and Eleanor Roosevelt by banging practice shots up and down the hallway outside Woollcott's apartment. It is said that Woollcott deserted New York, probably over a lost game to Swope, for a retreat on Neshobe Island in the middle of Lake Bomoseen, Vermont. There Woollcott held weekend visitors captive, refusing to let them return to the mainland until he had beaten every one of them. "*Impossible in victory, irascible in defeat,*" was how one guest referred to him.

Enthusiasm for the sport grew, caused in part by the famous players at Sands Point. The 1929 publication of a handbook called the Modern Croquet Instructions for Play and Rules of the Game as used by the Brooklyn Croquet Club, Union Croquet Club, Prospect Park Croquet Club, Long Meadow Croquet Club and Manhattan Croquet Club indicates lots of croquet activity in New York in the late twenties and early thirties. At the end of the thirties the nine-wicket game migrated to the West Coast where it was popularized by Samuel Goldwyn and Daryl Zanuck. According to Swope, Jr.:

*The game really switched to Hollywood at the end of the thirties with Daryl Zanuck and Sam Goldwyn (after seeing it at our place). Daryl was very good and had a court in Palm Springs and in Beverly Hills. So the game gradually shifted out there. Dorothy Parker went to work out there and Kauffman went and wrote some things for Goldwyn. Moss Hart became good [at croquet] in Hollywood, not in New York. Moss was not much of a player in New York: he was too busy writing successful plays.*

Apparently, croquet was played just as avidly out west as it was in

the east. When he was Secretary of Commerce, Averell Harriman found himself in San Francisco where he endured a week without croquet. Feeling despair, he flew down to Palm Springs to play with Zanuck, arriving at 11:30 PM. The two played on a lighted court until 4:00 AM when a satisfied Harriman boarded a plane for Washington. Gambling was popular at Zanuck's Hollywood court where stakes were as high as \$10,000 a game. Known as the "Terrible-tempered Mr. Bang," Zanuck's playing was the reason croquet became popular after World War II. "*Zanuck has the true croquet spirit. He trusts no one but himself; never concedes--no matter how far behind he may be--and he hates his opponents with all-enduring hate,*" according to an article quoting Moss Hart. Zanuck hosted many notables on his court well into the Fifties such as Louis Jourdan, George Sanders, as well as East Coast players who became charter members of the New York Croquet Club including television producer William O. Harback, theatrical producer Nick Vanoff, and author Peter Maas.

Although the level of play in Hollywood was well publicized as top notch, the East Coast players still regarded themselves as the best. In order to settle the score, a one-time only East-West tournament was played in 1946 at movie director Howard Hawk's ranch. The East Coast squad consisted of Tyrone Power, agent Fefe Ferry and captain Moss Hart. Zanuck and Howard Hawkes led the West Coast team. The West won the first game, the East the second. By the third game it was evening and the lights had to be turned on. The tournament lasted a staggering continuous eleven hours. One story coming from the event is that at a critical play which required Power to drive Zanuck's ball as far as possible, Hart, his captain, walked up to Power and whispered "*Remember Daytime Wife.*" *Daytime Wife* was a true flop of a film produced by Zanuck and starring Power. Hart's reminder created the desired effect causing Power to send Zanuck's ball flying. In the end, the East won as a result of a mishit by Zanuck. The East Coast team was embittered though by the size of the championship cup awarded to them, which, so they said, was invisible to the naked eye.

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## The Beginning

As croquet play continued on the West Coast, the game in the East was entering a new and important era that would give birth to the New York Croquet Club. Croquet was being played at the end of the fifties and early sixties in the two Long Island communities of Westhampton Beach and Southampton as well as in Spring Lake, New Jersey at the Green Gables Croquet Club, which was founded in 1957 by Mrs. Carvel Linden. The Southampton group was comprised of those who played in both Southampton and Palm Beach. This axis included Lillian Phipps, whose rolling lawns were used in Palm Beach and Long Island; Mrs. Lloyd H. Smith, who had converted her tennis court into a croquet lawn; and Andrew Fuller, whose lawn in Southampton had been set up

for traditional English six-wicket play with the assistance of the Duke of Marlborough.

According to Robert Liberman, a former Chairman of the New York Croquet Club from 1978 to 1980 whose stepfather was Joe Tankoos, co-founder of the New York Club, *"There was a group in Palm Beach and Southampton, Lillian Phipps and Andy Fuller. They had this little group, which extended to Bermuda, because my stepfather and my mother summered there. Hilda and Duncan McMartin from Canada [were there] before the Youngs were, the Finsnesses played."* This group played six-wicket croquet, traveled throughout the year and played on each other's courts.



(left to right)  
Andrew Fuller  
Louis Gourd  
Gates Davison  
Herbert B. Swope, Jr.  
Irene Osborn,  
Jack Osborn

Croquet in Westhampton was played at the Westhampton Mallet Club, which was formed in

1960 and whose leadership included Ned Prentis, John David Griffin and Jack Osborn. Play started in Westhampton in 1959 with a group of friends and a nine-wicket croquet set. According to Jack Osborn in an article in the New York Times, *"It was a Sunday afternoon, someone produced a backyard set with little rubber-headed mallets and thin wickets--everything I now deny--and we started playing with it in a joking way."* The next time they played, it was no



joking matter and from then on their play was serious. The Westhampton crowd soon learned that the six-wicket game was being played in Southampton. As Jack said, "*Fifteen minutes from one another, we represented a microcosm of the problems of American croquet--two sets of rules and a mutual disregard.*" Nothing could be done to bring them together until a group from Westhampton went over to England's Hurlingham Club in 1966. Led by Walter Margolies and including Homer Langdon, Henry White, and Jack Osborn, the Westhampton group challenged players from Hurlingham and were soundly beaten, a victory of experience over exuberance. "*Being beaten by John Solomon, whose autographed mallet I still use, changed my game completely,*" Osborn remembers. "*I was beaten 26-8, but playing on that 100-year-old field cemented me to real croquet. I will always treasure every one of those eight wickets.*" During this trip John Solomon suggested that the only way croquet would advance in the United States would be if a viable system of playing were developed. Osborn began to play vigorously in Westhampton and soon became better than his fellow club members. Having outdistanced his opponents and quarreled over a handicap rule, he left the Westhampton club. Together with a few fellow Westhampton players, Osborn enlisted Andrew Fuller to create a workable codification of rules based on the English six-wicket game. The basis for the formation of the New York Croquet Club had been set.

Together with S. Joseph Tankoos, Jack Osborn gathered a group of 30 charter members and founded the New York Croquet Club on March 21, 1967 at a meeting at the New York Athletic Club. The thirty gentlemen [see appendix] comprised a cross section of croquet enthusiasts from New York, Long Island, and Connecticut. There were experienced croquet mavens with high profiles and links to the sport's heralded past such as W. Averell Harriman and Herbert Swope, Jr.; Westhampton players as well as members of the squad that had traveled or would travel again to Hurlingham including John David Griffin, Dupratt White Taylor, Laurence Stapleton, Homer Langdon, David Seininger, Ned Prentis, and Henry White; links to Southampton including Andrew Fuller; big business leaders such as Edgar Bronfman and Robert Sarnoff; and many from the entertainment world including William O. Harbach, Peter Duchin, Nicholas Vanoff, Jay Rossbach, and Peter Maas and Michael Maas. These charter members played the game to a greater or lesser extent, were enthusiastic about the club and, importantly, many had recognizable names that were sure to gain



Jack Osborn

media attention. As Teddy Prentis said, "*The founding of the New York Croquet Club was the backbone of the thrust by Jack and Joe for growing croquet in America.*"

Herbert Swope, Jr. was made the first president of the New York Croquet Club in 1967, an important choice since his father brought croquet back to the United States in the twenties and he could provide the important link to the sport's legendary past in America. Having known and played most of the important croquet players in the United States, Swope provided important help in the early years of the club and in subsequent years with the development of the United States Croquet Association. For a long time Jack Osborn shared an office with Joe Tankoos at 635 Madison from which they ran the New York Croquet Club. While Jack Osborn provided exuberance and a brilliant vision in his effort to develop croquet in America, Joe Tankoos, sharing Jack's vision for the sport, served as the engine that drove the club in its early years. He served as President of the New York Club from the early 1970s to his death in 1976.

While members played at their respective clubs or at home, Tankoos and Swope began the search early on to find a proper place to play in New York City. Swope got permission from August Hecksher who was Parks Commissioner during the Lindsay Administration in 1967 to have a course built at the Rambles in Central Park. August Hecksher seems to have anticipated the discussion over the Rambles with some eagerness. He writes in a 1967 memo to Sandy Pitofsky, a charter member of the Club, "*Just a note to tell you that I am looking forward to meeting with you on November 21...I understand that Jack Osborn and Herbert B. Swope, Jr. will be coming with you. It should be a lively meeting.*"

Hecksher did not like the chain link fence that surrounded the Rambles and stipulated that the club could have the area if it erected another fence. Tankoos agreed to remove the chain link fence and personally pay for the building of a new wooden fence. According to Swope,

*Augie Hecksher was the same year at Yale that I was at Princeton. We once debated against one another. We built the first one [croquet court] down by the lake in Central Park, but unfortunately we built it with a fence protecting the players. But the fence was built like a*

*stockade with tremendous blocks of wood forming it. It was really much too heavy so we gave that up.*

Without a fence, the Rambles was not available to the club. Tankoos took it upon himself to find another permanent place for the club to play and decided that the lawn bowling green across from Sheeps Meadow would be appropriate. He personally negotiated with August Hecksher and in 1972 received permission for the New York Croquet Club to play on those lawns. The club was restricted to play at certain hours on Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. August Hecksher's decision was based on the necessity to share the expense for the facility. To quote from a letter he sent on February 1972 to the lawn bowlers:

*To compensate for our restricted budget and insure greater cost effectiveness, we have to employ multiple uses for our facilities wherever possible...Croquet and lawn bowling are compatible sports since players of both games respect the physical facility. The matter of scheduling is perhaps more difficult, but not impossible, and we would hope for cooperation in this area.*

According to Robert Liberman, once Tankoos was able to negotiate for the bowling green, "It was the turning point. That was the beginning in New York [for the club as it is known today]." Hecksher's remarks on scheduling and cooperation were prophetic. They marked the opening round in what has become years and years of negotiation with the lawn bowlers for equal rights to the facilities, negotiations that have been a significant part of the responsibilities of every club president and many directors from 1972 to the present. Fortunately, members of both clubs co-exist in harmony now.

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## The Seventies

The seventies were a lively decade of development for the New York Croquet Club and for croquet in general. Some of the most significant advances came with the progress made on the codification of the rules that led to the formation of the United States Croquet Association and the marketing initiatives that Jack put into place to bring attention to the sport. In 1970 Joe Tankoos asked John Solomon to come to the United States for five weeks and give a clinic in New York, but he couldn't, so he sent Nigel Aspinall who was number one, instead. According to Teddy Prentis, "That changed the course of croquet in the US." Aspinall would spend five weeks or so in New York and spend the same amount of time the following year in Palm Beach. He did this for several years working with Jack on creating the American rules based on the English system and blending the nine-wicket game. Robert Liberman comments that they tried many new rules in an effort to tighten the game. They experimented with eliminating deadness, first at wicket six, then at one back, as well as exploring variations on the ball in hand rule. Until 1980 after a roquet one could do a split shot or shoot the striker ball from one mallet head's length away from the roqueted ball. They enlarged the court, established a set length of play and strict four-ball rotation. Elements of play now taken for granted were developed not without some high-pitched emotion. According to Jim Erwin, a New York Croquet Club President from the mid-eighties through 1989 and a new player in the late seventies,

*When I first started playing in '78-'79 the whole thing revolved around the strongest personality who'd make up rules as you went along. The rulebook used was vague, totally gray and very much personality dominated. It was almost like you'd take a vote on what the rule should be and how many older people you could get on your side to sustain your opinion.*

Experience has its virtues.

By 1976, the codification of the American rules had progressed enough for Jack to gather the leadership of five eastern clubs and have them agree on a code of play and set forth rules for six-wicket play. Leaders included Herbert Swope, Jr., S. Joseph Tankoos, and Jack Osborn of the New York Croquet Club; John Lavalley, Milton Holden, and Andrew Fuller in Southampton; David Seininger, Walter Margolies, Charles Andrews, Ned and Ted



(left to right)  
John Young  
?  
Herbert B. Swope, Jr.  
Jack Osborn

Prentis, and John David Griffin of the Westhampton Mallet Club; S. Joseph Tankoos and Archie Peck of The Palm Beach Croquet Club; Hal Finsness, Mal Martin, John Young, Jr., Hilda McMartin, and Dick Pearman of the Bermuda Croquet Club; and members of The Green Gables Croquet Club in Spring Lake, New Jersey. These clubs are the founding members of the United States Croquet Association. Members of these clubs had been playing with each other, on each other's lawns, traveling to each other's clubs for friendly games and for tournaments for over a decade. In fact, the first six-wicket croquet tournament held in the United States took place in January of 1969 in Palm Beach, when the New York Croquet Club accepted Joe Tankoos' challenge to play at the newly formed Palm Beach Croquet Club.

Tankoos founded the Palm Beach Croquet Club by setting up a small croquet lawn behind the Colony Hotel, which he owned in Palm Beach. It was a doubles competition, as all croquet tournaments were in the early years, and single elimination match. The Palm Beach Club won, but only after the matches had been postponed for a day so that the participants could go to Miami to watch Joe Namath and the New York Jets play in the Super Bowl<sup>3</sup>. In addition to Lil Phipps' lawns in Palm Beach, the court at the Colony provided another venue for the caravan of croquet players which moved with the seasons from Long Island to Bermuda to New York and now included those who played in Westhampton and New Jersey. "When I first started playing the game it was an old boys' network, much more social than it is now. It was the same group of people in Palm Beach as in New York and as in Bermuda," reflected Jim Erwin. But the group was now seriously confederated into an asso-

<sup>3</sup> Osborn, John and Kornbluth, Jesse *Winning Croquet From Backyard to Greensward*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1983. p26



Teddy Prentis

ciation formed by the efforts of many, but significantly by Jack Osborn.

During the seventies and through the eighties the New York Croquet Club existed on two levels. The first encompassed the daily life of the club where members could be characterized by their show of energy and devotion to the game. The second was the publicity-driven dimension in which Osborn was establishing a strong marketing effort to grow the sport in the United States using the New York club as his platform. Of the first, Robert Liberman says,

*Joe [Tankoos] did a lot: the tournaments, the trophies, the sandwiches. There was no board we just did it. Joe and Teddy and Jack and I schlepped the food, got the parking permits, we could park right in the park. We had parties at Mortimer's and dinner parties and cocktails at people's houses.*

Teddy Prentis taught clinics and the courts were active in the afternoon. There were at least three or four people on the courts on any day. Members seemed to be suffused with the exuberance that first comes with discovery of the sport. For Jim Erwin, a former Club president and Champion player:

*The first time I ever played was when Robert Liberman was President. I thought he brought a lot of panache to the game. A lot of energy was around, due to Liberman and Tankoos and Jack...Teddy Prentis was giving clinics. I went to some. He told me everything I was doing was wrong and I thought 'I'll never play' after going to two. He was a great friend of Bobby's [Liberman] so it seems to me that that was the beginning of croquet. I thought Bobby was a very positive influence in the game.*



Richard Pearman  
Margaux Hemingway

The New York Croquet Club is built on the strength of its membership and the leadership and style the members exhibit from one generation to the next. As Erwin recognized Liberman's ability so Liberman admired the playing skill of Richard Pearman, a renowned National Champion from Bermuda who played in the early years of the New York club:

*He was so cool. He would come into the office, take his suit jacket off, roll up his sleeves, go the courts and just*



Bob Kroeger



*demolish people. Dickie Pearman was so elegant. He played like the English, very aggressively. He'd go to attack on the opening move, run six or seven wickets, and go and hide if it didn't work.*

Erwin has remarked, as well, on the simplicity of Pearman's play.

Bob Kroeger, now one of the game's foremost teachers, took a train down to New York in 1977 with his Dad and a friend in order to play in Central Park. This was Kroeger's first exposure to six-wicket croquet having played only backyard croquet until that point. He remembers seeing Jack Osborn and Teddy Prentis, Art Boehner and Robert Liberman on the court. Osborn welcomed him and invited him to play a game. Kroeger used Joe Tankoos mallet: *"The first mallet I played with in New York was Joe Tankoos' . I couldn't believe it was Joe Tankoos' mallet! I didn't have one with me and someone told me to go into the clubhouse and get one. It was a thrill."* Kroeger traveled to New York after seeing an article on croquet in The New York Times. The press had begun to play an important role in the development of the club.



Libby Newell

Osborn was actively promoting the New York Croquet Club through the media. As Libby Newell has said, *"The New York Croquet Club was the cornerstone from which Jack could spread the word."* In 1977, he established the first USCA National Championship. It was hosted by the New York Croquet Club and was the first of nine consecutive Nationals that would be held in New York. For the first time since 1882 a National tournament could justifiably take place because for the first time in almost 100 years there was a widely accepted code of rules on which to base play. Played on two half-size courts with only sixteen single entrants and only 30 people in attendance, the tournament was small. Archie Peck won the singles championship with Jack Osborn as runner-up and Jack and Archie took the doubles championship beating Nelga and John Young. By 1979 only two years later the tournament had grown to a competition of thirty-two top ranked players from across the United States and Bermuda. Importantly, it ushered in the first USCA Croquet Ball to benefit the Croquet Foundation of America and its inaugural Hall of Fame inductions.

These are noteworthy events because they represent a strategic and massive marketing effort supervised by Jack Osborn.

According to Teddy Prentis, "*The first croquet ball for the USCA and Hall of Fame was Jack's first major thrust for publicity.*" The Hall of Fame had been created to honor the sport's legendary players. Herbert Swope, Jr. was named Director of the Hall of Fame and the first inductees included New York players Averell Harriman, Herbert Bayard Swope, Sr., Alexander Woollcott and Joe Tankoos. The Croquet Foundation of America had been set up that same

year by Jack and Archie Peck to provide funds to the USCA for educational purposes. The Croquet Ball, hosted by the New York Croquet Club was the inaugural celebration to launch the new organizations and to celebrate the National. These annual events continue to the present. The ball began the first of many "black tie and sneakers" dances, which featured Celebrity/Pro exhibition matches. Faberge Incorporated underwrote the ball, which



1977 USCA National Championships

*included in the photo:*  
 Teddy Prentis  
 Nelga Young  
 John Young  
 Cathy Tankoos  
 Arthur Bohner  
 Jack Osborn  
 John Osborn  
 Archie Peck  
 Bob Liberman

was the first time corporate sponsorship had been used in the United States for croquet. It set in motion many more years of effort by Jack to find and secure corporate sponsorship. Playing host to the Nationals and the Croquet Ball for the next nine years represented a significant endeavor for the New York Croquet Club and became one of the central focuses of its energies and resources. According to Luis Mejia, the longest serving Board member of the New York Croquet Club,

*The Club and the Croquet Foundation and the Croquet Ball and everything else were always held in New York [until 1985]. Actually I co-chaired with Jim Erwin the last annual ball that was given in New York. In those days we had Patek Phillippe, Rolex, Moet and Chandon as sponsors. It was sort of a world-class advertising event. And, of course, because of all these honorary and charter*





Luis Mejia  
(with Ashley Formento,  
Loretta Cooper,  
Matthew Warnecke)

*members and inductees we could attract a lot of people. It was a lot of work for everyone. I remember Jim and I put a lot of work into doing this stuff. I remember helping Jim set up tents at 6:00 in the morning. And there were bleachers, so they used the whole lawn. Everyone, everyone really worked hard. And they were big successes.*

the seventies, Jack hired Valerie Jennings to generate publicity on behalf of the Club and the sport. He had always aimed at cultivating a high profile membership and with Jennings on board could make use of the club membership as well as the contacts she had through her work in public relations with Faberge. Jennings was charged with organizing celebrity events and getting network television coverage.



Morley Safer  
Libby Newel

*Jack wanted me to get every single possible connection and give the names of editors, people that I knew. I set up social editors, sports editors; I really set up the lists. He wanted me to think social and think sports, never push it for the sports, but get to know some of the sports writers. I knew Morley Safer and Harry Reasoner from 60 Minutes and we got Peter Jennings (my ex). George Plimpton became a member. We got Nancy Holmes to cover it for Town and Country. And it started to happen by the late seventies.*



Cathy Tankoos

Osborn and Jennings efforts did, indeed, begin to produce results. The establishment of the Croquet Foundation of America, USCA Croquet Ball and Hall of Fame were certainly direct by-products of their efforts as were the articles about the club, which continuously appeared in social columns by Suzy and Eugenia Shepard, among others, as well as television segments on croquet that appeared on *Good Morning America* and *60 Minutes*. Osborn also created the US Croquet Gazette in 1979, initially writing most of the copy himself. It can be surmised that the Gazette's inaugural issue was timed to publicize the first Croquet Ball and the new Hall of Fame, since it was published on the day of the Ball, September 19, 1979, with a picture of Jack, Archie Peck and Cathy Tankoos centered on the front page planning the event. The Gazette featured articles on croquet that had already been published in other newspapers and magazines throughout the US. All of these efforts succeeded in creating enormous momentum for the sport and considerable visibility for the New York Croquet Club

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## The Eighties



Kiley Jones



Jack Osborn  
John Osborn

The early and mid-eighties were a period of exuberance for the New York Croquet Club and for the sport, due in large measure to Osborn's marketing efforts. The game itself was developing. Rules were still being worked on and codified and more and more clubs were being formed throughout the United States that produced top players. The Westhampton, Palm Beach, and Bermuda clubs and the Arizona Club had produced top players like Richard Pearman, the Youngs and Jim Bast and Stanley Patmor from Arizona, but according to Luis Mejia:

*The New York Club had the best players, A flight players [letters, instead of numbers, defined the flights in the early years] like the Osborns [Jack and John], Archie Peck, down from Palm Beach and Teddy Prentis. The level of croquet really started kicking off with Kiley Jones. Usually the first four or five or six spots belonged to the New York Croquet Club in grand prix ratings. It was an Osborn, and [Jim] Erwin, and later Cooper. [Tom and Loretta Cooper joined in 1984.] Of the first 10 or 12 seeds, 80% were always from New York.*

Kiley Jones was a young player who grew into a renowned national champion. At fifteen he won the 1983 National Doubles Championship with fellow New York Croquet Club member Richard Illingsworth beating Archie Peck and Dana Dribben. In 1985 Jones was appointed to the first US National Team invited to visit Britain in the history of the game. Fellow team members invited from the New York Club included Jack and John Osborn and Teddy Prentis. The majority of the seven-member US National Team came from the New York Croquet Club. Between 1980 and 1989, the New York club won six of the ten USCA National Club Team Championships. Doubles partners Jack Osborn and Ted Prentis won the first three tournaments in the years 1980, 1981 and 1982. The Father-Son team of Jack and John Osborn won in 1983 and 1986. Partners John Osborn and Kiley Jones won in 1988.

Osborn continued his efforts to maintain the momentum for the growth of croquet. In the mid-eighties, he initiated a Spring Celebrity Picnic to kick off the New York season and to benefit the Croquet Foundation. Thereafter, the picnic was held annually through the early nineties. Members wore festive dress, even period costumes, and ladies sported fancy hats. Celebrities including soap opera actors and media stars were invited so as to attract publicity for the club. Many didn't play croquet, but came because the event was fun. Again, corporate sponsorship such as Mumms or Veuve Cliquot underwrote the event.



Mike Gibbons

Some publicity met with unforeseen results. According to Mike Gibbons, a Vice President of the Board and a tireless worker for both the Club and the USCA:

*We tried in every way to get advertising and it was suggested that we get the demographics of who plays croquet. So a survey was done. It asked people to add up all their assets, real estate, bank accounts, etc. and to check where they belonged, whether they were worth \$100,000 or millions of dollars. The results showed that of those who responded, 81% were millionaires. The powers that be decided they would show the statistics to the advertisers, but it also seemed to have been released to the New York Times. The Times ran a story saying that millionaires were playing croquet in Central Park. We got more calls from women wanting to join the club.*



Robert Clayton

Robert Clayton, former President and CEO of Laidlaw, Adams and Peck, became President of the New York Club in the 1982, serving as both President and Treasure for some years. A croquet maven with his own court in Quogue, Clayton had formed and been President of the Quantuck Bay Croquet Club. Clayton took the New York Croquet Club presidency after a tandem-leadership by Cathy Tankoos, who served as President, and Robert Liberman, who served as Chairman, from 1977 through 1980-81. Although Jack Osborn was still overseeing the New York club's activities, much of his focus was on the USCA, the Croquet Foundation, and Jacques International, an American licensee for Jaques equipment. By 1984, the USCA had grown by 4000% from 5 initial clubs to 200. In that year, Osborn moved his primary office to Palm Beach. The club's New York office was relocated to 59<sup>th</sup> and Park, above the

Delmonico hotel.



Cynthia Gibbons  
Pat Supper

"When Bob and I were Presidents, the game was sort of riding a wave or was buoyed by what was happening to the game, particularly in New York. There seemed to be an energy, a real vitality in the game and in the people around it," explains Jim Erwin. Robert Clayton was a President very much in the mold of Joseph Tankoos. "He was instrumental to the game, the feeling for the game and the love of the game," says Erwin. The Mid-Atlantic Regional final games were always held on his lawn in Quogue. He would give cocktail parties for the members, sometimes at The Leash. "All the parties in those days were seemingly more elaborate than they are today. They were more social and there were dinner parties." Clayton set the tone: croquet play was serious, but there was a party atmosphere. Everyone contributed. Clayton brought coffee and doughnuts for the club's frequent tournaments; others would bring sandwiches and beverages. The tournaments were very short. "You'd show up on Saturday morning and the tournaments were over Sunday," according to Mejia. Jack Osborn, Libby Newell, an early patron of croquet in New York and Palm Beach, and Barton Gubelmann, an early founder of the Newport Croquet Club, were frequently on the courts. Cathy Tankoos played often, as did Fred and Pat Supper, founders of the Greenwich Croquet Club, and Bill and Marjorie Campbell, patrons of the Greenwich Club. Don and Connie Degnan, leading patrons of the New York Croquet Club, were also major supporters in those years. "Connie and Don would rent a bus and take all the players downtown to have a good time after the games," says Lila Baitschova, a longtime New York Croquet Club Board Member and Champion player. The Degnans hosted the Mid-Atlantic Regionals at their court on Long Island for years. "They opened their house for everyone during Hurricane Bob [in 1991], when everyone else was being evacuated," Lila adds. There was a strong sense of fraternity during Clayton's tenure: "So many interesting places we used to go and we dressed up beautifully. Really, I used to enjoy [it] tremendously," she continues. "You met the most loving, giving, cultured, traditional people."



Connie and Donald Degnan

Clayton imposed a traditional club structure and oversaw a rigorous interview process for new members. "For early membership, one of the ways to join was to ask someone in the club, and then they would send an invitation to play as a guest, so members could get to know you. That lasted the better part of the season and then you got interviewed by Jack and later by Bob in his office downtown," according to Mejia, who

himself was a later Membership Chairman of the Club in addition



Tom and Loretta Cooper  
(with John Young III  
and Heidi LeSeur)

to being a longtime Treasurer. Lila Baitsova remembers waiting nine months before she was accepted, "Bob Clayton interviewed me in his office downtown by the church somewhere. And he interviewed me and he said 'You will hear from us, from the club.' And by October I heard, by that time I thought to myself, 'Well, nine months waiting.'" Loretta Cooper and husband Tom remember traveling up from Philadelphia after seeing the six-wicket game demonstrated on a segment on television's *Good Morning America*.

*We called Jack, and he invited us out to Bob Clayton's house in Quogue to watch the Mid-Atlantic finals. It could not have been nicer and there was a beautiful croquet court. There was a small crowd for the finals, only 30 people, and Teddy was playing John Osborn. During the year we moved to New York, Bob Clayton interviewed us. He had this incredible office on Wall Street. It was an amazing process, very intimidating.*

Wearing whites for all play became a New York Croquet Club rule during Clayton's tenure. Previously, players wore whites only during tournaments. Clayton introduced the whites rule to create a tone as well as to distinguish the croquet players from the lawn bowlers, who never wore white.

Since the club's inception and continuing through Clayton's tenure, there was an informal board structure, a loosely confederated group of leaders appointed by Osborn who established policy. The group included Bob Clayton, Don Degnan, Mike Gibbons, and younger, newer members like Jim Erwin and Luis Mejia. Devotion to the game of croquet, and a strong sense of volunteerism distinguished some of these early leaders and so helped to define the New York Croquet Club to the rest of the croquet world. Jim Erwin reflects on the club:

*There has always been a nucleus of people good for the game, that played the game, that traveled with the game.*

*People like Mike Gibbons, Bob Clayton, Dick Brackett at the moment, who had a lot of vision for the game and where the game was headed. They sort of guided the Board, so we had a bigger vision than just New York City and made contributions to the USCA and were sort of leaders in the USCA generally. It was sort of incumbent on us to do so.*



Lila Baitschova

Clayton can be credited with having created the Quantuck Bay Croquet Group and having served as President of the New York Croquet Club as well as Treasurer of the USCA for years. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1992. Mike Gibbons served on the Management Committee of the USCA and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1999. Jim Erwin was President of the New York Club at the end of the eighties and the first Regional President in New York State for the USCA. Dick Brackett is the current President of the USCA. According to Gibbons, "*members of the New York Croquet club were out meeting boards of golf clubs and other clubs trying to get them to create croquet lawns. Most of the Management Committee of the USCA at one time was from the New York Croquet Club.*"

In the mid-eighties, Osborn hired a policy consultant to study the New York Croquet Club membership, which was top heavy with high profile names. The consultant suggested that the club recruit younger people because most of the membership was in its fifties. As Loretta Cooper comments,

*When we joined there was a youthful surge. It had been pretty small and an older crowd, more like a country club crowd, a lot of people who summered in the Hamptons. Matt and Jeannie Burris joined later and Jerry Ball, just this whole new crew of people that we all hung out with and had parties with. It was a wonderful social life.*



Dick Brackett

According to Norris Settlemyre, a long time Board Member who joined the club in 1987, a second wave of leaders came from this new group of members. "*The first wave included Herb Swope, Jack, Joe Tankoos, Bob Clayton, Don Degnan, Al Heath and Mike Gibbons. The second wave included Jim Erwin, Brian Formento, Mark Altherr, Luis Mejia, Matt Burris, and Tom Cooper.*" It should be noted that Erwin joined the club for the first time in 1978 or 1979, stopped playing and rejoined a few years later and Mejia joined the club in the very early eighties. So, both Mejia, who is the longest serving Board member, and Erwin really provide a transition to the early

leadership of the New York Croquet Club.



Jim Erwin

As such, Jim Erwin took over the reigns of the Presidency from Bob Clayton in 1986-87. As the Club moved into its next era, Erwin was able to preserve the values that the older leadership respected while providing a fresh outlook that appealed to the new members. He and his Board, notably Mike Gibbons, and later Norris Settlemyre and Tom Cooper, worked tirelessly through the eighties to gain parity with the Lawn Bowlers for equal use of the Central Park facilities. Arduous negotiations went on for months until resolutions were agreed upon by both organizations that would respect each other's rights.

The vitality for croquet evident in the early and mid-eighties was carried forward into the late eighties in a different way by a new group of very active members. A change was coming. Loretta Cooper reports, "*When we joined, [the media] had kind of an upper crust take on the sport and I think it became so much less so that way. Now, the entré is whether you can play, it wasn't always that way.*" More and more people started playing by the late eighties. "*The lawn started to go bare because of the amount of people playing,*" according to Mejia. And Erwin reflects:

*There became more of a focus on the game. It seems to me that suddenly the best players didn't live on Park Avenue anymore, whereas they always had. They didn't live in Westhampton or Palm Beach. The exuberance of the late seventies and early eighties created energy in the middle-eighties that changed the game from Jack's original vision. It was publicized differently out west. Jack believed in bringing in people to show the flash and sizzle and believed that these people would draw others to play. But underlying it all, the people have to love the game. And those are the ones who stick around. Those who stick around, the people who get there, get through the mechanics, get through the frustration of not being able to play the game, then get the strategy and all that's revealed.*

People were sticking around. John Osborn and Kiley Jones started giving clinics in the evenings that were heavily attended. New players were learning the game by watching the New York Croquet Club champions play. Golf croquet tournaments were played which helped beginners learn the basics. Croquet-a-thons were introduced to the New York Club in the early eighties by

Xandra Kayden, who founded the Collegiate Division of the USCA. Different from golf croquet, the croquet-a-thons were small tournaments that were scheduled before the sanctioned tournaments. They allowed beginning players to use the strategy of break play without the stress of playing a full game. A Challenge Ladder was introduced in 1987 and, importantly, Mini tournaments began to be played in 1988.



Bill Mead

Initiated by Bill Mead, and helped along by Teddy Donohue, Jerry Ball, Bernadette Tracy, and Matt and Jeannie Burris, the Minis were a series of small tournaments played during the summer on weekend mornings. They were for newer players, B and C level, who wanted to learn the game and have fun. According to Bill Mead:

*They were played from 7:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Saturday mornings, so as not to interfere with club play. We played three matches for fifty minutes apiece and we brought our own alarm clocks, because the flags and clocks were only for tournament use. Lila [Baitschova] came by and thought they were a great idea and played in all of them. We did one a month, so three a summer. There were goofy prizes like headbands and coffee cups and goofy plaques. Doug Moore, [a current Board member], played and Terry Colbert [currently President of the New York club], came up through the Tournaments. We drew people from Tuxedo Park, New Jersey, Greenwich, Philadelphia and Delaware.*



Jeanne and Matt Burris

The Club instituted the Mini-Tournaments, putting them on the season schedule in 1991, and made Mead the Mini-Tournament Director. In 1993, the club initiated an official Mead Cup Tournament, naming it for Bill Mead to honor his contribution. It is played as a non-sanctioned, small tournament in the early part of the New York Croquet Club season. As of 2002, the Mead Cup was renamed to honor the club member who is most recently deceased. The last person to be honored was Theo Holcomb in 2002. Since the Mini-tournaments began, the New York Croquet Club has had a series of small tournaments played throughout the summer. They include the Dog Days Tournament played in August and the Polar Bear Tournament played at the end of the season.



Bernadette Tracy

An extremely important change to the club was its official incorporation in 1986 and the creation of its bylaws. Prior to this change it



had operated as an association. There were those who regarded the incorporation as a controversial turn for the club. The second wave of leaders, Mark Altherr, Brian Formento, Tom Cooper and Luis Mejia, believed that the Club needed an official governing structure. Many long-term members felt that the old way was better. Although he joined in the late eighties, Norris Settlemyre comments on how the Club used to work, *"The Board used to consist of pretty much the guys who started the thing. It wasn't formal, you'd just call each other and say what do you want to do and just do it. Things pretty much got done between Bob Clayton and Jack and Mike Gibbons. Mike and Bob did an awful lot and ran it to have fun."*



Mike Gibbons  
John Young  
Jim Erwin  
Tom Cooper

*For Lila Baitsova, "You don't need bylaws; you are the bylaws. If you have five or six quite established gentlemen, you are the bylaws. You know exactly what you want to do and how you want to do it and everybody is happy."* According to Mark Altherr, *"The early Board was nominal. There were a lot of people you never saw. It evolved very quickly after the bylaws were in place because*

*the board became a group of people who were very active."* Says Tom Cooper, *"The New York Croquet Club was gaining a stronger core group and those of us who had to administer to that group realized we had no control. We needed control in order to administer to that group."* The younger group felt that one of the most important reasons for incorporation was to create an official structure that would absolve the Board from liability. They also wanted to achieve more growth for the Club and, importantly, wanted to separate the Club from the national organizations like the USCA and Croquet Foundation to which, until this point, the club had been tightly linked, through the efforts of Jack Osborn and the early Board. Mike Gibbons expressed concern that *"if you publish rules or bylaws, you'll have people who only read the bylaws and never play the game and try to make that their vision of croquet."* Eventually, both Gibbons and Erwin agreed, *"The common sense thing to do was to incorporate to protect the board members."*

Once the younger group decided to incorporate, Mark Altherr took on the responsibility of finding a suitable set of bylaws and

filling out the incorporation papers.

*Because we were not a charity we had to be a 501(c)7 which was by definition a result of incorporating in New York State. We didn't have to do something with the IRS, it was the state that determined our tax status--if you are by definition a not for profit corporation you're one or the other and you have to prove something to be a 501(c)3, so we were a 501(c)7. For the bylaws I took forms from all sorts of clubs [including] the Metropolitan Club, Sleepy Hollow Country Club and then just put something together that I thought was appropriate.*

Many including Jack Osborn, Luis Mejia and Jean Arrington, who worked in Jack's office and was Treasurer of the USCA, reviewed the new bylaws. After the bylaws were approved, Altherr went on to formalize the reporting done at the Board Meetings and served as the club Treasurer after Bob Clayton, responsibilities he later turned over to Luis Mejia. As the eighties moved forward, Osborn began spending more and more time in Palm Beach attending to the USCA and Croquet Foundation. He was still very actively involved in the New York Club: serving on the Board and overseeing the Nationals until they were moved to Palm Beach and the Spring Kickoff Picnic. In 1988, the New York Croquet Club Championships were renamed the Osborn Cup by the club's Directors in appreciation of all that Jack Osborn had done, not only for the New York Croquet Club, but for croquet everywhere. The new name went into effect in 1989 the same year that Jack stepped down as President of the USCA.



Jean Arrington

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## The Nineties



Tom Cooper

In 1990 Jim Erwin became President of the New York State region for the USCA and Tom Cooper became President of the New York Croquet Club. Both Erwin and Gibbons remained actively involved on the Board in the early nineties. During Cooper's term, which lasted from 1990-91 through 1993, there was a surge in membership to more than 100 members and interest in the game continued to grow. Teddy Prentis and Michael Charrier were giving clinics. Cooper instituted a spring kickoff mini-tournament to be run by the current President of the Club. Terry Colbert later renamed it the President's Cup during his presidency. It was designated as a one-day hi-lo tournament and Loretta Cooper remembers always being Walter Kaufman's partner. Walter is the longest surviving member of the New York Croquet Club, a devoted and somewhat ubiquitous croquet player. As Luis Mejia relates,

*I was walking down the street in Martha's Vineyard one time visiting some friends and there's Walter. 'Hi Luis,' he called me. 'Where are you going?' 'I'm going to get a beer, Walter.' And he says, 'Come and play croquet.' 'What?' 'Yeah.' And a block away there's a lawn the size of this table and there was Nelga and John Young and the Campbells. They were having a tournament. I see him at places I just never expected to run into Walter.*



Luis Mejia

Bill Mead's Mini-tournaments were formalized in 1991 during Cooper's presidency. At that time he instituted the Polar Bear Tournament and established an ongoing intra-club summer tournament in which members could challenge each other to play at their convenience. It was quite similar to a challenge ladder and, according to Loretta Cooper, a fair amount of people played. Loretta Cooper also relates that an important legacy of Tom's tenure was the development of a sister relationship with the Delaware Croquet Club. "A lot of people from Delaware would come to our tournaments and we would go to theirs. Rufus Bayard, Tom Hughes and his brother, Jim and Jim's son Jay came for the New York

*States and for the Osborn, also the Mid-Atlantic Regionals when they were played on Long Island."* This relationship continues to the present. There seems to be a strong tie among the old guard champions of the New York Club who make the Delaware Invitational a high priority.



Bill Sloboda

The newer members were actively participating in club activities. A club newsletter called *The Croquet Times* was created by Bill Sloboda during Cooper's tenure and had its first issue in 1992. Parents brought their children to the courts. Babies were put in a playpen in the clubhouse so parents could play croquet, as Patricia Cooper and Lily Cooper probably well know. Patricia Cooper, the Coopers' young daughter, was USCA Spectator of the Year in 1991. An active social life revolved around the game and included Matt and Jeannie Burris, the Coopers, Bill Mead, Lucille Moresca, John and Nelga Young's granddaughter Heidi La Suer, and John Osborn. Eventually this enthusiasm for the New York club was reflected in the size of the Board of Directors, which ballooned to fifteen members by the early nineties. The Board had grown through an effort made by Cooper to have a broader representation of the membership. However, the Board had become so big that it was difficult to get business done. Mike Gibbons' earlier comments on establishing bylaws proved prophetic. In retrospect, many who were there feel that too much time was being spent discussing bylaws and policy and not enough time was spent on croquet. New bylaws were adopted concerning the nomination process and board meeting attendance.



Matt Burris

Matt Burris was President of the New York Croquet Club from 1993 through 1994 and was followed by Michael Charrier who served from 1994 through 1997. Members continued to be very active during Burris' tenure. There could be as many as sixteen players on the courts on any given Saturday morning. Tom Cooper and Kiley Jones were Board members who helped with the Spring Tournament and the Osborn Cup. In 1994, The New York State Championship Tournament, which served as the club's major spring competition, was renamed The Robert and Marie Clayton Cup in honor of the contributions to the club made by Robert Clayton and his wife. The idea for the new Cup was Teddy Donohue's, who found the trophy and had it engraved. The large silver cup was unveiled by Teddy Donohue and Mark Altherr in 1995 at a party given for the Clayton's at The Leash Club. While he was President, Burris designed a five-page survey to poll the

members on every element of the club, in an effort to align stewardship with membership. Based on the results of the survey, the Spring Celebrity Picnic was dropped after 1994. Monies that it had raised for contribution to the Croquet Foundation and Central Park Conservancy were now to be raised from Mini-tournaments.



Michael Charrier

During his term as President from 1994 to 1997, Michael Charrier worked hard to generate new membership for the New York Croquet Club. He introduced people to the club through the croquet clinics that he conducted every Tuesday evening as well as through the annual all-Ivy wicket shoots that he conducted at the Harvard or Yale Club. Charrier was the head of the USCA Collegiate division for a number of years and coached at several colleges, which accounts for his acknowledged teaching skills. During his tenure the Clayton Cup/New York State Championships were renamed for the first time the Clayton Cup/New York Invitational. According to Norris Settlemyre,

*The New York Championship was a time for people to come to New York from Delaware, Virginia, New England, Pennsylvania and they played for the New York State Championship. New Yorkers would reciprocate and go down to them and play, but a bylaw was made in the USCA rules preventing travel out of a player's region to play in a championship in another region. So, Mike Charrier changed the name to the New York Invitational and we continued to invite people and anybody who wins, wins the title. When you hold an event you want the best field possible and you want people from all over the country.*



Norris Settlemyre

The Invitational reverted back to a state championship in 1995-96, but became an invitational again in 1997. In 1998, during Terry Colbert's term as President, the Osborn Cup, which had been the club's exclusive croquet championship, was opened up as an invitational as well. Due in large measure to Colbert's efforts, both tournaments have become enormously successful. Both Invitationals draw top champions from across the country and are so popular that they are usually filled within weeks of the invitations being mailed. Rich Curtis, a National Champion, former New York State District President, and New York club member who has come to every Osborn and Clayton Cup Championships since 1988 with the exception of one, comments:

*In 1995 or 6 you had a tough time in those years getting 40 people to play, unlike the late eighties, for the New York State Championships. Then the club opened up the tournament to people around the country and it became a great success. You guys have the greatest location of any club that I've ever been to. Where else can you be playing croquet in the middle of this park, looking south at the greatest skyline in the world. It's absolutely spectacular.*



- - -



*Rich Curtis*



## The New Millennium



Terry Colbert

Terry Colbert became President in 1998 and remains so in 2005. Colbert's presidency was welcomed as a bridge between the many differing points of view that had arisen through the years. His emergence as President seemed to satisfy everyone, even the lawn bowlers. Colbert met with Tony Reynall, who coincidentally became President of the Lawn Bowlers at the same time Colbert moved into his role, and the Presidents discussed the long history between the two clubs. They dedicated themselves to continuing to improve the relationship by attending each other's meetings and maintaining open communication between the clubs. According to Luis Mejia, "*Terry has been one of the best Presidents. He has done a yeoman's job of taking a position and refining it to where it really just hums.*" Colbert created a database for the first time for all members. He solicited friends of the club and set up mailing lists for the two Invitationals. Drawing on his design background, he has created stationery, business forms, membership materials, marketing flyers, signs and banners. In effect, through his attention to detail, Colbert has revived the New York Croquet Club's image of itself and, so, strengthened its structure.

An increasing number of people are out on the courts playing croquet. Members are cheerful and the club is running smoothly. Colbert brings to the club his passion for all the people who play, "*Membership fluctuates but stays solid. We love new energy. We like getting new players in, people who care, who are smart, and volunteer.*" Under his leadership, the New York Croquet Club has entered a new mature phase. Moving forward without the need to fulfill a grand vision, it achieves the important goal of keeping its individual members happy. As the longest serving President, his leadership is testimony to that.

*Maybe years from now there will be lots of croquet pros and television coverage, who knows. But you know what? I don't think we [the Board] discuss it in those kind of global terms. I think we simply go with what's needed at the moment and with what's working for the membership. We do not have major discussions like our character of today versus yesterday.*

*I've sought to encourage the spirit of croquet, to bring on the smiles. All my efforts are designed to say 'we're taking care of you and we're so glad you are a part of the game'*

And, for now, it's working.

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## Appendix

### New York Croquet Club Founding and Charter Members 1967-68

Charles E. Andrews	Jack R. Osborn
Richard Barkle	John S. (Bud) Palmer
H. Hubert Boscowitz	Sandy Pitofsky
Robert Bragarnick	E. A. Prentis III
Edgar Bronfman	Donald J. Quinn
Gates Davison	Joseph Rhodie
Peter Duchin	Jay Rossbach, Jr.
Andrew P. Fuller	Robert W. Sarnoff
C. Gerald Goldsmith	David H. Seininger
Joseph Goodson	Herbert B. Swope, Jr.
John David Griffin	Frank B. Sawdon
Robert L. Haag	Lawrence V. Stapleton
William O. Harbach	S. Joseph Tankoos, Jr.
W. Averell Harriman	DuPratt White Taylor
Alfred R. Heath	Nicholas Vanoff
Dwight A. Hemion	David Wayne
Ray Herrman, Jr.	Henry S. White
Chester Herzog	Robert Widener
Salvatore Iannucci	H. Raymond Winship, Jr.
Robert Kerdasha	
Homer A. Langdon	
Laurence C. Leeds, Jr.	
Philip Lukin	
Peter Maas	
Michael Maas	
William J. Marlow	
Spencer Martin	
John Mosler	
Robert G. Miller	

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*Karen Kaplan*

Heath, Elizabeth Newell, Catherine Tankoos Barrett, Robert Liberman, Michael Gibbons, Archie Peck, Jean Arrington, Teddy Prentis, Jim Erwin, Luis Mejia, Walter Kaufman, John Osborn, Diana Millay Jones, Valerie Jennings, Robert Kroeger, Bill Mead, Pat Supper, Tom Cooper, Loretta Cooper, Brian Formento, Mark Altherr, Lila Baitschova, Xandra Kayden, Rich Curtis, Dick Brackett, Terry Colbert, Norris Settlemyre, Boris Koytchou, Michael Maas, Matt Burris, Michael Charrier, Chuck Loving, Steve Carter, Judy Just, and Sara Low.

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