

# MANSFIELD MEMORIES: The mini golf craze of 1931

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MANSFIELD - If you've ever tried to knock a ball through a windmill or a clown's mouth, you have probably played miniature golf. This fun pastime has been enjoyed for generations. A mini golf craze hit the United States in the late 1920s and Mansfield soon caught on.

For many years Mrs. Mabel Barnes had been growing cucumbers in her greenhouses near what is now 515 South Main St. In November 1930, the Board of Selectmen granted Mrs. Barnes a license to operate a mini golf course in one of her greenhouses. The course was laid out by Chief of Police Newell B. Vickery who for many years had overseen Mrs. Barnes's cucumber growing operation.

The "Greenhouse Indoor Golf" course had several unique features. It was described as an 18-hole course with "a dozen innovations to trap even the best putters." But its most important innovation was that it was indoors.

"Golf Under Glass" allowed players to press on "with the thermometer always hovering close to 70 degrees, regardless of the wintry blasts outside." And the fun didn't have to stop at night as the course was equipped with 100 lights. The Barnes course also featured a bridge table, where players often stopped between nines or at the end of the round to play a few hands.

The Barnes greenhouse was the place to be in the winter of 1931. It quickly became sufficiently popular for the selectmen to grant a permit for mini golf on the Sabbath. Greenhouse Indoor Golf soon hosted tournaments and fundraisers put on by the local American Legion, the Mansfield Grange, and the Congregational Women's Union. The latter found mini golf a "unique form of amusement."

<p><b>One Golf Game Free</b></p> <p>To introduce the course to the public any resident of Mansfield who has never played a game on the 205 So. Main st. Outside Course may play <b>ONE GAME FREE</b> on Saturday, July 18 from 1 to 6 p. m.</p>	<p><b>Play Golf</b>      Saturday                                  Sunday                                  Labor Day</p> <p>at 205 South Main St. MANSFIELD</p> <p>It is now an easy, enjoyable walk from the center of Mansfield to the Golf Course on the nearly complete <b>NEW SIDEWALKS.</b>      1t27</p>
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George F.F. Roberts was also granted a permit to operate a mini golf course. He originally planned to open a more traditional outdoor course on his property on North Main Street. But he soon found it more feasible to open at 205 South Main St., about half a mile from downtown Mansfield (and just three quarters of a mile from Greenhouse Indoor Golf!). Roberts opened for the 1931 season on April 18, and also seemed to enjoy success.

Players were charged 25 cents per round. The course would “be open daily and evenings in good weather.” Roberts billed his course as an “easy, enjoyable walk from the center of Mansfield” on brand new sidewalks along South Main Street. The Mansfield Visiting Nurses Association soon stopped in for a tournament, as did five carloads of “Rainbow Girls” who motored all the way from Natick.

By 1932, the nation was heading into the worst years of the Great Depression. The mini golf craze began to fade as disposable income vanished. In March 1933 George Roberts proposed that the town meeting purchase his property at 205 South Main St. for use as a playground.

Former Selectman Ernest L. White motioned to postpone Roberts’ article. Mr. Roberts stated “it would cost each of us less than a quarter of a dollar” to purchase the property.

“But I am afraid we have not all got the quarter,” Mr. White replied.

Mr. White’s motion was approved. Town meeting rejected the same playground proposal the following year.

Both mini golf courses faded into history as quickly as they began. Mini golf enjoyed resurgence during the peace and prosperity of the 1950’s, but neither the Greenhouse Indoor Golf nor the Roberts course would return.