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Specialists in Rare and Antiquarian Golf Books
Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector

Somerset Hills Country Club

We like to write about club histories of our favorite courses. Thus, we have already written about Pine Valley, Cypress, Sunningdale, Seminole, Maidstone, Shinnecock and Piping Rock. Sand Hills, Yeamans Hall and National Golf Links don't have club histories so we haven't been able to focus on them as yet. This month we focus on the below-the-radar Somerset Hills Country Club. Somerset Hills is an exclusive club located in central New Jersey and was designed by A.W. Tillinghast.

Club histories for Somerset Hills are among the rarest of all golf club histories. The club was formed in 1899 as an "association of gentlemen," who were devoted to the game of golf. Their first course was a nine-hole course located at a different location than the current one. This original course was abandoned and a new one was designed by Tillinghast in 1917, and they gave him brilliant terrain to work with. Half the property is flat and was the site of an apple orchard, several barns, a farmhouse and private race track. The other half of the property is hilly and Tillinghast designed a fabulous routing that has the front nine laid out on the flat ground and the back nine on the hilly terrain.



There have been two club histories published about Somerset Hills. *A Special Place: A History of the Somerset Hills Country Club* was co-authored by Janet Seagle and Percy R. Pyne III in 1990. Seagle was a librarian at the U.S.G.A. which is located very close to Somerset Hills. This book is 64 pages and was published with illustrated wrappers and should contain an errata sheet laid-in (Donovan & Jerris S12760).

A more comprehensive history was published for the club's centenary: *Somerset Hills Country Club 1899-1999* was edited by Adele Nelson and was published in 1998 (Donovan & Jerris N8380). It is 103 pages and was issued without a dust jacket in a oblong format with a gilt stamped leather cover with the crest of Somerset Hills. The

SHCC logo has a crest of the Duke of Somerset in the middle with a phoenix and crown. This history includes details about the origins of the club, vintage black and white pictures and a hole-by-hole color pictorial of each hole on the course with a detailed description of each.

Both books were privately printed in a low volume for members and thus rarely come up for sale or auction.

Among Somerset Hills many charms are its grass tennis courts, a modest and understated clubhouse in the English tradition and one of the best renditions of a Redan hole ever built. Hole number two is the Redan at Somerset Hills and it has a wicked green as I can personally attest to. As one of the few Tillinghast courses that has remained virtually unchanged since its original design, Somerset Hills is an “Unspoiled Jewel” as one chapter of the book is titled.

Given its location in the aristocratic hill country of Somerset County, New Jersey it has had some notable members, but has always remained low key. Notable members of Somerset Hills over the years have included C. Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury for Eisenhower; Cyrus R. Vance, Secretary of State for Jimmy Carter; Nicholas F. Brady, Secretary of the Treasury for George H.W. Bush and two recent New Jersey governors: Thomas Kean and Christine Todd Whitman. The top executives of the U.S.G.A. are also given honorary membership in the club while serving.



Legendary Golf Clubs of
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Legendary Golf Clubs of the American East

If you are unable to obtain a copy of a Somerset Hills club history, the next best book to own is the book we recommend more than any other single book: *Legendary Golf Clubs of the American East* by Anthony Edgeworth and John De St. Jorre. It contains an enticing chapter on Somerset Hills with high quality pictures of the course and is available in a standard trade edition with a dustjacket and a deluxe edition with a slipcover.