

## Hiawatha Golf Course Clubhouse Minneapolis, Hennepin County



On days Solomon Hughes Sr. played Hiawatha Golf Course near his Powderhorn home, his wife packed a bag lunch for him. Even though Hughes had won the National Negro Open in 1935 and was one of Minnesota's best golfers since moving his family here from his native Alabama in 1943, he was not welcome in the Hiawatha clubhouse. No Blacks were.

The Hiawatha Golf Course clubhouse (shown here in 1935) cost \$14,864 when it was built in 1932 to resemble what parks superintendent Theodore Wirth described as a "very cozy cottage." The nine-hole course run by the Minneapolis Park Board opened the summer of 1934, charging 35¢ a round, and expanded to 18 holes the following year.

Technically, all Minneapolis park facilities, including the clubhouse, were open to everyone, but de facto segregation still permeated Twin Cities movie theaters, swimming pools, and neighborhoods—and the clubhouses of the area's municipal

golf courses. While Black golfers were allowed to play the area's municipal courses, the clubhouses—with their dining rooms, locker facilities, toilets, and drinking fountains—were reserved for whites only.

The Hiawatha course's southeast Minneapolis location made it a favorite of the Black community, including Hughes, easy to spot in his snazzy two-tone golf shoes and with his white golf bag with his name in script down the side. But it didn't sit right with him that he couldn't enter the clubhouse.

So Hughes—who had met a range of civil rights activists, from Muhammad Ali to Malcolm X—and his brother prevailed upon one of the white members of the Hiawatha Golf Club to change the rules. In 1952—the same year Hughes gained entry into the St. Paul Open played at Keller Golf Course after twice being denied because of the Professional Golfers' Association's "Caucasians only" policy—the Hiawatha club-

house finally allowed Hughes and other Blacks inside. While Hiawatha became the first to integrate, other municipal courses would not open their clubhouse doors to Blacks until the sixties. (The PGA eliminated its Caucasians-only clauses in 1961.)

Two years ago, the Minneapolis Park Board honored Hughes for his role in promoting racial justice by naming the Hiawatha clubhouse after him, with new signage and a dedication ceremony. "He was a quiet trailblazer who helped to end restrictions of racial discrimination in golf," his daughter, Shirley Hughes, remarked.

—John Rosengren

Sources: Thomas B. Jones, "Caucasians Only: Solomon Hughes, the PGA, and the 1948 St. Paul Open Golf Tournament," *Minnesota History* 58, no. 8 (Winter 2003): 382–93; David C. Smith, "City of Parks: The Story of Minneapolis Parks," Foundation for Minneapolis Parks, 2008; author interviews with Darwin Dean, Shirley Hughes, David C. Smith, and Thomas B. Jones.

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