



# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



# Shady Rest Golf & Country Club

(Est. 1921)

“First African-American Country Club in the U.S.”



**The Shady Rest Golf & Country Club** was established in 1921, in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. In the late 1890s, the 31-acre property, a previous farm, was leased to the Westfield Golf Club. The members of the golf club worked to turn the farmland into a 9-hole golf course, keeping the farmhouse as the clubhouse.

In 1921, the Progressive Realty Corporation was formed by prominent African American residents and investors. They leased the property and opened the Shady Rest Golf and Country Club on July 28, 1921, with nearly 2,000 people attending.

During a time of racial segregation, Shady Rest provided a safe recreational and social setting for its members. Black golfers and their families came from the surrounding New Jersey area to the club to enjoy entertainment, fine dining, the outdoor life, golf, croquet, skeet shooting, horses, tennis and other social events.

The golf course was home to the first National Colored Golf Championship (held in 1925) and sponsored by the United States Colored Golfers Association which had been founded earlier that year and led by its president, B.C. Gordon, the president of Shady Rest.

In 1931, John Shippen, American golf professional and the first African American to compete in the U.S. Open, became the club golf pro and groundskeeper. He lived there for over thirty years, until 1964, in an apartment on the third floor of the clubhouse.

In 1938, the township of Scotch Plains added concrete roadways to cover the large ruts, from the lack of roadway maintenance. The club was not able to pay for the cost of the added roadways, so Shady Rest changed ownership to the township of Scotch Plains through a tax lien foreclosure. In 1964, after a legal battle, the township of Scotch Plains gained ownership of the Club and made the grounds public and racially integrated. It also changed the name to the Scotch Hills Golf and Country Club. The Club House still survives. When under a threat of demolition in 2013, local residents formed The Preserve Shady Rest Committee and raised money to have the clubhouse renovated and restored. It now includes a small museum dedicated to John Shippen and his contribution to golf history.

“A Place For Us” was the motto of the club as many prominent black activists such as W.E.B. DuBois lectured there. As a result of its location, just thirty miles west of New York City and its inclusion in The Negro Motorist Green Book, the clubhouse became a haven for many prominent black entertainers such as Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Calloway, and Sarah Vaughan. Tennis great Althea Gibson, who won a singles title at the French Open, followed by two at Wimbledon and in the U.S. Open, also won the Shady Rest doubles championship. It was at Shady Rest that pioneer Gibson also developed a golf game that eventually placed her on the Ladies Professional Golf

Association tour. Ora Washington, tennis great and basketball player, also frequented Shady Rest. The former heavyweight champion boxer Joe Louis, teed off there.

On May 18, 2022, Shady Rest Golf & Country Club was added to the New Jersey Register of Historic Places.

On July 7, 2022, the National Park Service granted the Shady Rest Golf and Country Club, the first African American country club in the United States, a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

