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in Denver. Bill Hughes returned from service and worked with his father in the family cattle-ranching business.

Homes were built first in the Humphreys' portion of the Polo Grounds land. Then in 1947, plans were filed with the Denver Planning Office for what became known as Polo Club Place; and several houses were built in the early 1950s. Another division of Polo Grounds land to be developed into homesites took place in 1959, several months after the death of Lafayette Hughes, at age 78. Thirty acres were sold by the three sons, but the Hughes mansion and the former club house were exempted from the sale. Mrs. McIntosh Buell bought the mansion and resided there until 1976. Now the Polo Club Place Homeowners Association includes sixty-four households.

It was several more years before the final subdivision of acreage into homesites began to take place. The flat land at E. Alameda near South Steele Street which once was the polo field and horse track changed hands several times, beginning in 1955 when Calvin Fulenwider, Jr. and Nick Petry bought it from the Hughes. Planned development at that time did not occur, and Calvary Temple, a church across Alameda on So. University Blvd., bought forty-six acres from them in 1964, which it still owns, but the bulk of the land was bought back by Fulenwider in 1977.

The firm downscaled to the present plans. Seldom has a company had such an opportunity to develop luxury homes in a premier location so close to downtown Denver, says Calvin Fulenwider, III. Fulenwider has primary responsibility for the new Polo Club North, a luxury-home area surrounded by a brick wall, which will contain, when complete, 126 two-unit condominiums and thirty-one custom-built homes. It features a lake and a club house.

While polo has left the Polo Grounds forever, the game has found a resurgence in Colorado since the 1950s, centered to the south of Denver. Lawrence Phipps, Jr., who had participated in polo since he was twenty years old and was an original incorporator of the Denver Polo Club in 1910, continued to offer a polo field on his Highlands Ranch south of Littleton until he died at age eighty-nine in 1976. Polo is being played now at Perry Park, on fields owned by the Sinclair family. This is home of the Plum Creek Polo Club, formed by teams from Colorado Springs since 1959, when they lost their seven fields at the Broadmoor Hotel. William Sinclair believes there are now about 2,000 players in this country.

But the clicks of polo mallets thwacking the ball and the excitement of watching well-trained horses and practiced riders are only faint echoes in Denver's Polo Grounds. Where "society played" almost sixty years ago retains only the name and the memories. ♡

HISTORY OF THE POLO GROUND S

*Once the site
of Denver's
most exclusive
social and sports scene,
now it's no
polo contendre.*

By Ann Emrich

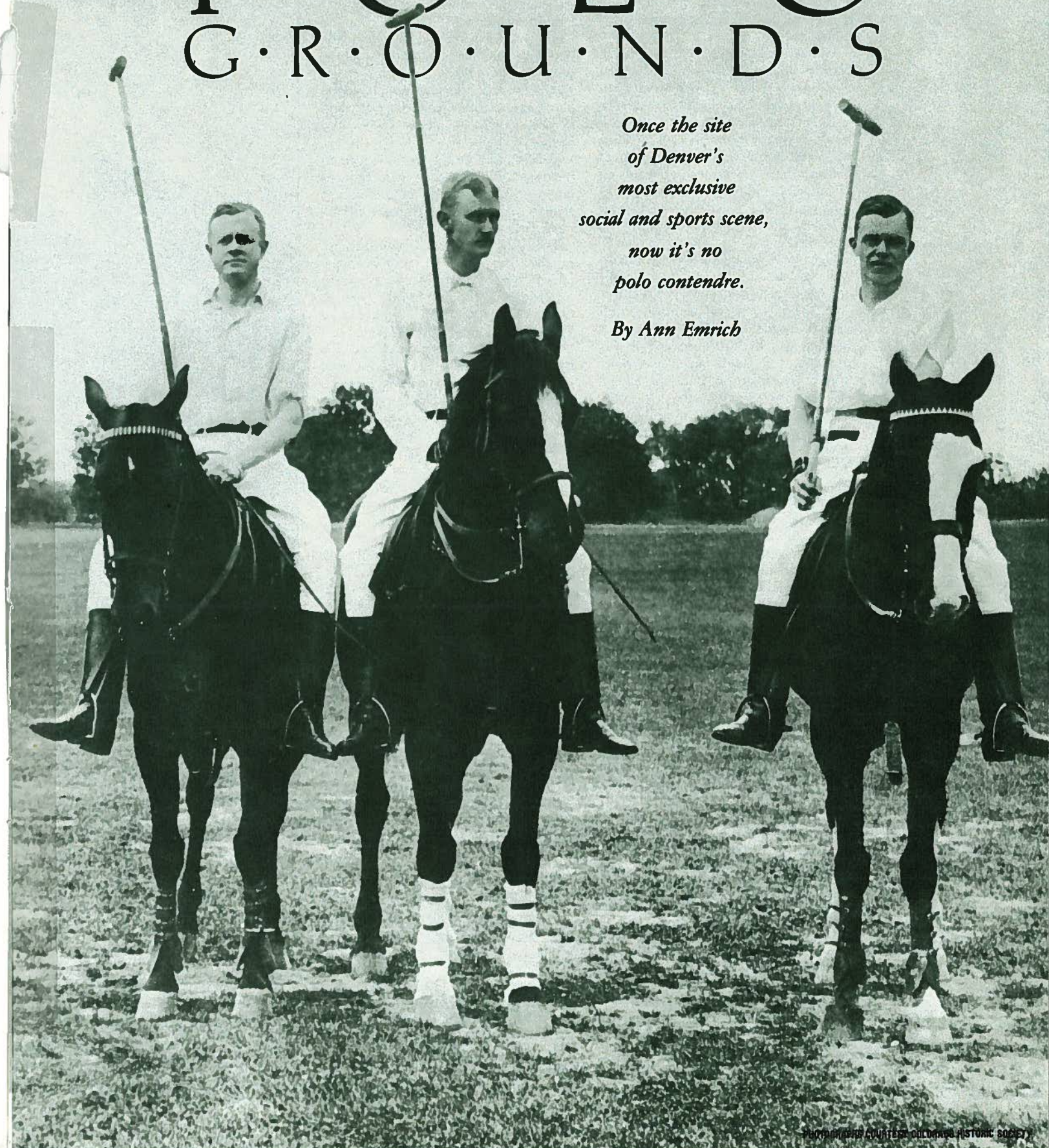


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

“A mat of green velvet to rest the eye — waving tree-tops and jaunty shrubs — a magic oval for the race, and a sheet of blue invites a swim — Parasoled tea tables rest on beach sands and a club house is poised on the hill-top like a bird — that’s the Denver Polo Club, a little Saratoga at which society plays out-of-doors in summer and dances and dines in winter before roaring fire-places.”

That was a description written in 1925 of the prairieland at the southeast edge of Denver near Cherry Creek where Denver’s elite came to play polo, to see and to be seen. Today the Polo Grounds is a collection of luxury homes in a park-like setting, landscaped with literally hundreds of mature trees. It is a quiet, secluded and exclusive, though busy University Boulevard goes right by and downtown Denver is only slightly over three miles away via Speer Boulevard.

This horsey sport most often associated with the bluest of English blood actually originated in Persia, now Iran, perhaps 4,000 years ago. English officers in British India discovered the game and brought it home in 1869. By 1876 it had made its way to the United States. The name comes from a Tibetan word, “pulu,” meaning a ball made from a knot of willow wood. The mallets were made from bamboo shoots, or hickory or maple wood.

Americans learned early that a good “cow pony” made a first-class polo pony, with its ability to start and stop quickly, turn sharply, and to stay cool while having clubs swung near its head. Typically a polo player needed at least four horses for a game, changing steeds every seven and a half minutes to allow the poor horse to be “hot walked” after the ordeal of charging up and down the 200- by 300-yard field.

While polo seemed to do-in many a good horse, for players it was considered a great builder of physical and moral fiber. As one early chronicler of the sport wrote: “As a means of bringing health and horsemanship up to the highest standard of excellence it has no rival, and the essential qualities of pluck, endurance, submission to discipline, good temper, calmness, judgment, quickness of observation and self-control are unconsciously acquired by the enthusiastic player.”

Polo playing did not actually get its start in Denver at the Polo Grounds, though it did achieve glory there. Polo in Denver began in the summer of 1902, according to a *Denver Times* article dated January 17, 1903. Coached by D. B. Turner, who had played the game in Philadelphia, nine inexperienced players, called the “Freebooters,” played on level ground at the race track owned by the Gentlemen’s Riding and Driving Club at City Park. The polo players were George Lillie, Randolph Guggenheimer, C. Mac A. Wilcox, George Wood, John Porter, Granville Moore and brothers Lafayette and Gerald Hughes.

By 1909, the team was playing on the current Denver Country Club grounds, with a thousand spectators every Saturday. Society columnists seemed as interested in watching fashion, as the matches themselves:

“Mrs. Crawford Hill, as usual, looked stunning in her black and white striped chiffon gown, which is the Frenchiest thing in Denver . . .”

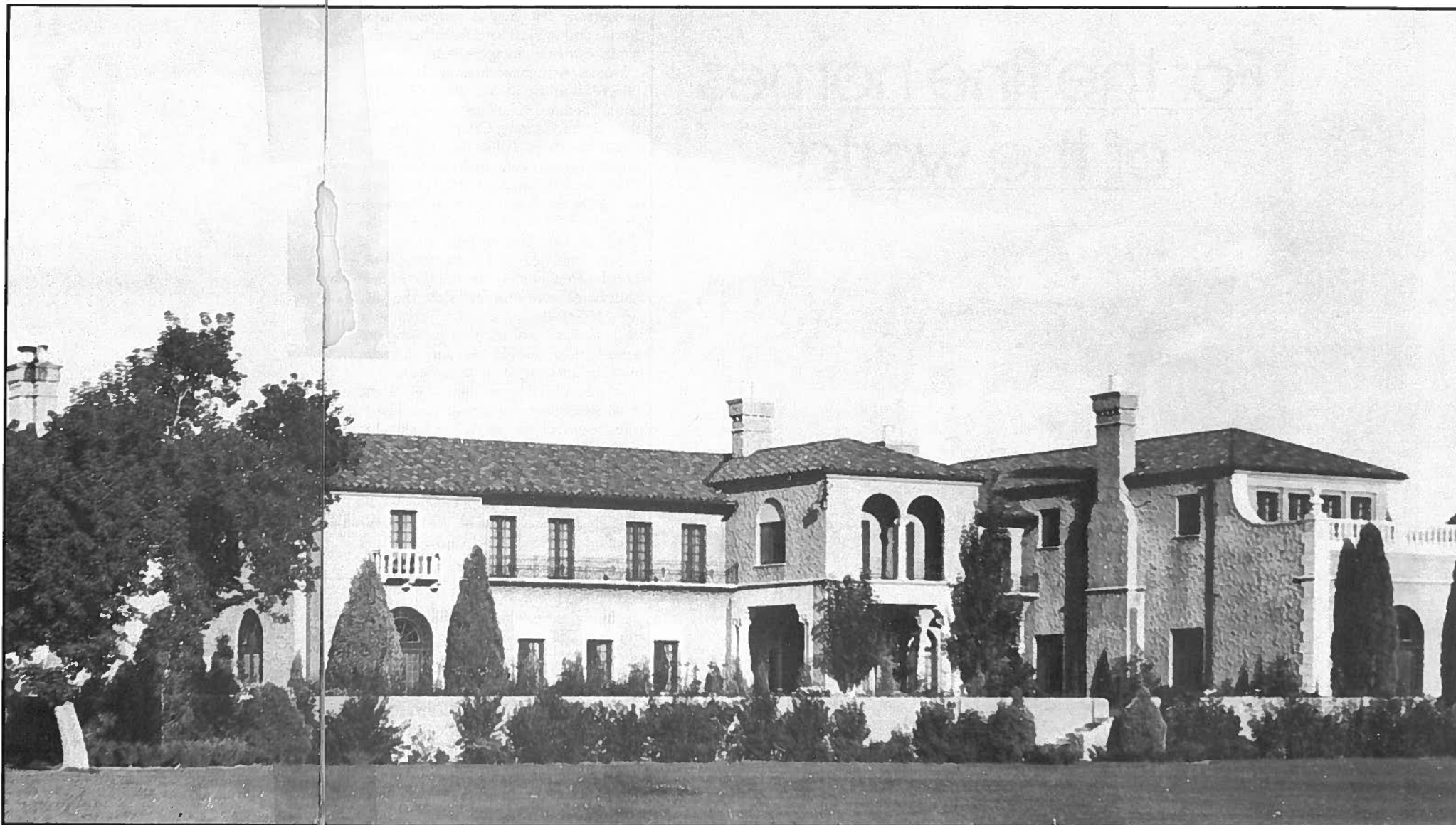
Then and down through the years, the opposing team quite often came from the U.S. Army. In 1909, the Army champions from Fort Riley, Kansas, played the Denver team composed of Lafayette and Berrien Hughes, J. Foster Symes and Lawrence Phipps, Jr.

Denver’s was not the first polo team in Colorado. Glenwood Springs brought polo to the state in 1890, and Colorado Springs had polo teams at the Broadmoor grounds soon after.

The Denver Polo Club was incorporated on April 19, 1910, but it was some fifteen years before teams began to play on what is now the Polo Club grounds. A *Denver Post* article in 1923 stated that Ira B. Humphreys and Lafayette Hughes had purchased eighty acres of land “near the intersection of York street and Alameda avenue” for \$62,000, to become part of a development. The Polo Grounds was eventually bounded by University Boulevard, on the west, East Exposition Avenue on the south, South Steele Street on the east, and East Alameda Avenue on the north. On the lower part of the grounds, near Alameda and Steele, sat barns and the polo field with a horse track around it. The latter was used mostly for exercising the horses, although occasionally races were held.

Denver businessman Harold “Bud” Tamblin remembers two polo fields on the grounds. The one inside the race track was the “best in the world,” equipped with underground drains. Tamblin is one of two or three men still living in the Denver area who played polo there. He remembers watching polo games on the Denver Country Club grounds across Downing Street from the Norman apartments, where he lived with his family, as a kid and soon became a “lead boy,” working with the horses. He started playing polo while still in high school, about 1931, and played until 1936.

The Ira Humphreys family owned the Polo Grounds strip of land along the east side of University Boulevard. Stables they built were much later turned into a beautiful home owned first by the Gates family. Four homes at the southeast corner of the grounds, along East Exposition Avenue, were not part of the Polo Club but built separately, beginning in 1927 and 1928. The remainder of the grounds was owned by Lafayette Hughes and his wife, Annie Clifton Hughes, whose grandfather, William Hughes (no relation) was a Texas cattleman and banker.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY COLORADO HISTORIC SOCIETY

The Hughes Mansion

In 1927, the Hughes family built a three-story, thirty-six-room mansion on the upper part of the property, overlooking the polo fields below. Designed in Mediterranean style by Denver architects Fisher and Fisher and built by the O. E. Brueggeman firm, it features a curving stairway leading up from a large entrance hall, a living room wing with a large fireplace and a raised area sometimes used to stage musicals. Originally a dirt path wound around from the road to the house and huge iron gates stopped unwanted visitors. These and a line of poplar trees are gone. The house is still occupied and has changed little, but none of the Hughes immediate family lives on the grounds now.

Lafayette and Annie had three sons, William and twins Charles J. and Lafayette, Jr. A little young for polo yet, the boys joined the youngsters of other Denver families about 1925 in a league of

football players who utilized a field built near the south end of the property. Gerald Phipps remembers being involved in those games.

In the polo season of 1926, games were played every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, as well as tournament games. The team included Lafayette Hughes, Lawrence Phipps, Jr., Berrien Hughes, Carlos Brewer, Barrie Houston, Verner Z. Reed, Christopher F. Cusack, Robert Johnson, and Ira B. Humphreys.

About twenty polo players made the move from the Denver Country Club grounds to the new fields across University Boulevard, forming an organization that shared expenses and built a pink stucco, red tile roofed club house in 1926. The club house was decorated with murals by well-known artist John Edward Thompson, who also painted murals in the Hughes home, and sculpture by Robert Garrison. In the

summer, members used the swimming pool and tennis courts, breakfasts and luncheons were daily events the year ‘round. Vice President Charles Gates Dawes, who served with Calvin Coolidge, was a luncheon guest early in his term.

The Depression and World War II brought an end to the color and excitement. The U.S. Army teams, principal opponents of the Denver Polo Club, were no longer available to compete, and polo was discontinued about 1936. Lafayette Hughes’ brother Berrien, a Denver lawyer and top player, died in 1939 as a result of skiing injuries suffered on Loveland Pass. The three Hughes sons went off to war. Their mother, Annie Clifton Hughes, died tragically in 1940. On July 17, 1941, the newspapers announced the Denver Polo Club would be closed and its property sold. John W. Morey, club president, said, “We feel the

club has served its purpose and the members and stockholders desire to dispose of the property.”

When Charles Hughes returned from Air Force duty, he and his wife, Dory, bought the old club house, renovated it and lived there for fourteen years, rearing five children. Years later, in January, 1978, the home was severely damaged by a high-explosive bomb placed against the outside west wall. There was no fire, and occupants were not injured in the midnight blast, but structural damage made it necessary to completely demolish the house and build a new one on the site. It never was determined who planted the bomb.

Lafayette Hughes, Jr., who served during the war as an aerial photographer, returned home and resumed his business he founded in 1940. He converted the old stables into a production studio — one of the first sound motion picture companies