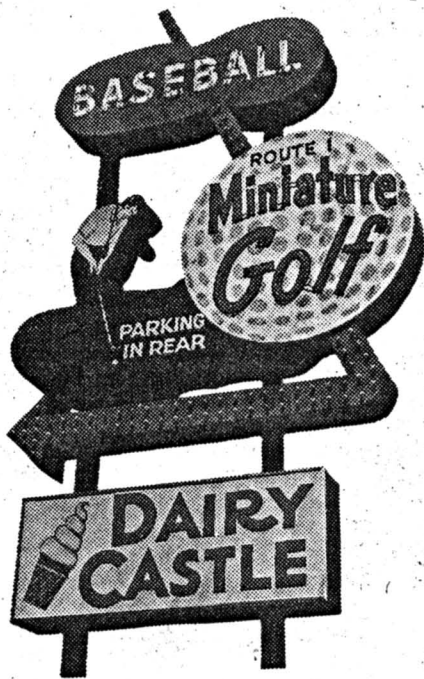


Book Review

January 10, 1988

Section 7 © The New York Times



A miniature-golf sign competes with other attractions in Saugus, Mass., in the 1950's.

A Short Course in American Leisure

In retrospect, the miniature golf craze of the 1920's made as much sense as anything else at the time. If college students were swallowing goldfish while their elders sat on the tops of flagpoles, why not try to push a golf ball through a smallish copy of a Dutch windmill? The people who put together **MINIATURE GOLF** (Abbeville, \$19.95) have done some very intelligent things. John Margolies produced photographs that are models of clarity, lavishing the same care on a howitzer-shaped hazard as he would on the Morgan Library. Somebody had the wit to cover the book with actual artificial grass. Then two art historians, Nina Garfinkel and Maria Reidelbach, have fashioned a text full of insight. I would not have realized that miniature golf gave people deprived of their customary bar stools during Prohibition something to do in their afternoons if the writers had not pointed it out. The text starts in 1916, when James Barber developed a "postage stamp" golf course on the grounds of his North Carolina estate. Then it moves on to the boom times during the 1920's, when the sport threatened the movies as a form of popular entertainment. During the Depression, miniature golf was seriously considered by some economic analysts capable of lifting America out of the slough of economic despond. Along the way, the authors point out some delicious overindulgences, from the gentlemen who played in evening clothes to the woman in California who tried to have a course placed in a local graveyard, using the tombstones as hazards. Like an illustrated history of quoits, "Miniature Golf" may be limited in its appeal but enchanting to those of us who love the endeavor.

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