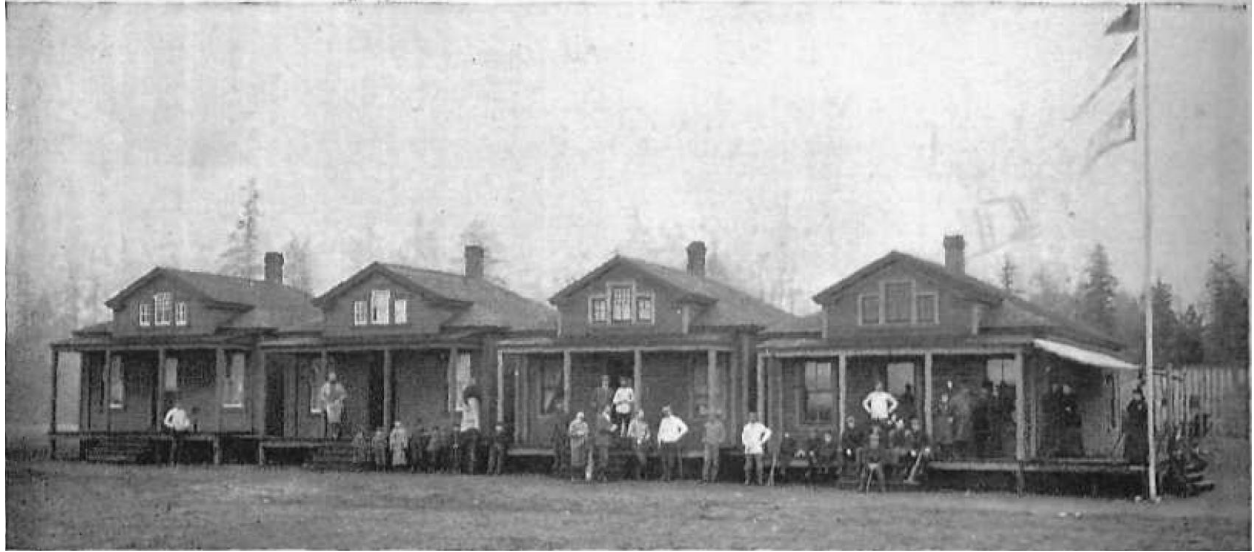


Early History of Tacoma Country and Golf Club, Lakewood, WA

Established 1894, Course relocated 1905

Course Architects: 1894: Alexander Baillie and H. J. Bremner; 1905: Unknown

Tacoma Golf Club was founded in 1894 when a group of a dozen Scotsmen and Englishmen, employed by the English grain firm of Balfour, Guthrie, & Co., which had established a branch in Tacoma, Washington, sought to play the game they left behind in their home lands.



Clubhouse in the prairie field of Edison in South Tacoma - circa 1899

Alexander Baillie, not a particularly accomplished golfer, but who must have commanded some authority, and enthusiasm, on the matter, led the group. In early 1894, while visiting San Francisco, where golf had taken hold with the establishment of the Burlingame Golf Club in 1893, Baillie lamented to his business partners the lack of opportunity to play that Royal and Ancient game in the wilderness of Tacoma. In addition, Baillie was no doubt aware that golf was also being played to the north, at the Victoria Golf Club, founded in 1893, in Victoria, British Columbia. As well, there were reports of golf being played at that destination resort called Gearhart-By-The-Sea in Gearhart, Oregon in 1892.

Determined to introduce golf to Tacoma, Baillie arranged to have shipped from Scotland thirty sets of Forgan golf clubs and twenty-five dozen gutta purcha balls. The story is often told that when the clubs passed through customs, the customs agent, puzzled by their purpose and skeptical of the explanation given, declared them to be farm implements and allowed them pass.

Some of the credit for the founding of Tacoma Golf Club must also go to the "high society" women of Tacoma. As early as May, 1894, golf was on their minds as evidenced by this article appearing in the May 27, 1894 edition of the Seattle Post Intelligencer:

Thinking About Golf Now.

The question of forming a golf club is agitating the female mind at present. The game is a fashionable fad in the East and it is only a question of a short time before it will reach

Tacoma, and society folk say there is certainly room enough on the prairie for a number of golf clubs.

On November 10, 1894 sixteen charter members met and formally organized the Tacoma Golf Club and elected Alexander Baillie as its first president.

GOLF.
TACOMA'S IN THE FASHION.

Tacoma golf players held a meeting on Saturday night and organized a club under the name of the Tacoma Golf Club. The charter members number sixteen. The following officers were elected: President, Alexander Baillie; captain, C. F. Cospers; secretary, G. W. Dishart; treasurer, Ralph Stacy; committeemen, Jesse Merrill, C. S. Milliken and Fred Watson. The club has secured links at Edison and plays there every Saturday. This is the first golf club organized in Washington. The club is now on a substantial basis, having a constitution and by-laws similar to those of the Victoria Golf Club. The game has been introduced in the City of Destiny through the efforts of Messrs. Baillie, Merrill, Gillison and G. W. Dishart.

Victoria Daily Colonist Nov. 14, 1894.

To find suitable land in the heavily forested lands of Puget Sound was no small task. Eventually Baillie entered into a lease agreement for prairie land in Edison in what is now South Tacoma. They immediately set out to lay out the new course. It is not clear if they set out to build 27 holes from the outset, but by 1896 there was an eighteen-hole "Men's Course" measuring 5549 yards and a nine-hole "Ladies' Course".

The courses were primitive by today's standards, little more than pasture land, where cows were allowed to roam at will. One member recalled in later years that he could still hear the hollow sounds of balls thudding into cows.



Hole #2 in Edison circa 1899 before being relocated to its current location in 1905.

A clubhouse, consisting of four adjoining red-shingled houses, was secured. One was used as the caretaker's home, another as the club room, another as the Men's locker room, and the last became the Ladies' locker room.



Club House and 1st Tee circa 1900

On November 29, 1894, members of the Tacoma Golf Club held their first formal tournament, as reported a day later by the Tacoma Daily Ledger:

Nearly all members of the Tacoma Golf Club met on the links at Edison yesterday and a spirited contest for the prize of a 'driver' (golf stick) took place, resulting in it being carried off by J. B. Maclean, whose excellent play came as surprise to many, a fact which will probably scratch him in future competition. The prize was presented to the winner with a neat speech by the president of the club, Alexander Baillie. By a coincidence a consignment of golf clubs arrived from Scotland yesterday amongst which were several ladies sets, so that in the future the flutter of the petticoat will invariably be seen on the links.

While there is some debate as to when and where the first international golf match in the world took place, Victoria Golf Club and Tacoma Golf Club have a strong case to make that claim. On March 30, 1895, such a match took place at the Victoria Golf Club as described in articles from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer:

The Tacoma delegation of golf players [Messrs. Alexander Baillie, Thomas Kerr, O. F. Casper, A.E. Buell, H. S. Griggs and J. Gillison] who went to Victoria to represent the Tacoma Golf Club in a match game between Victoria and Tacoma ..., failed to win. The Victorians were victorious. The highest [best] score made was by W. E. Oliver, who played 18 holes in 87 strokes. The ladies' open competition was won by Mrs. W. A. Ward

Later, the Seattle Golf Club and the Waverly Golf Club in Portland, Oregon joined the fray and inter-club matches among these four clubs were common place.

By late 1898, there was enough interest among these clubs to form a golf association, and on February 4, 1899, at a meeting in Tacoma, the Pacific Northwest Golf Association was born. The six founding members of the PNGA are: Victoria Golf Club (1893), Tacoma Golf Club (1894), Waverly Golf Club (1896), Seattle Golf Club (1896), Spokane Golf Club (1898) and Walla Walla Golf Club (1898). The PNGA is considered to be the fifth oldest golf association in North America.

By 1900 the Club had grown to 180 members and it became apparent that a new location and a larger clubhouse were needed to accommodate the growing membership. On October 18, 1904, the Tacoma Golf Club acquired the seven acre Lehman estate plus 160 acres of surrounding property on the eastern shore of American Lake, its current location. At the time, this location was a popular destination, operating as the Tacoma Country Club, for sun-bathers, swimmers and other non-golf activities. On January 21, 1905, the two clubs merged into the Tacoma Country and Golf Club. Play continued at the old location in Edison through 1906 while the new course continued to be improved.



9th & 18th square greens ca. 1920 (courtesy of Joel Kachmarek)



Same view ca. 2010 (courtesy of Joel Kachmarek)

It is not clear who originally laid out the course at its current location. By then, members had been playing golf in Tacoma for ten years, enough to know something about golf course design, which at that time remained fairly rudimentary. Perhaps the responsibility for laying out the course fell to the greens committee.

The first club professional at Tacoma Golf Club is believed to be Charles Lock, born in England, who lived on site and served as instructor and club maker from about 1909 to 1910. In 1911, Tacoma Golf Club hired James M. "Long Jim" Barnes, then a young and ambitious English transplant who most recently was employed at the Spokane Country Club. Barnes would leave Tacoma in 1914 and go on to win four major titles: the PGA Championship in 1916 and 1919, the U.S. Open in 1921, and the British Open in 1925.



Jim Barnes Swing with hickory club – circa 1919



Lock and Barnes Hickory Clubs – circa 1906-13

In 1913, following Francis Ouimet's win at the U. S. Open in Brookline, Harry Vardon and Ted Ray travelled west to play in a series of matches against the best golfers that local golf courses had to offer. They stopped at the Tacoma Country and Golf Club on November 4, where they were matched in a fourball match against Barnes and Robert Johnstone, the club professional at the Seattle Golf Club. In a closely contested match over 36 holes, Vardon and Ray prevailed 2 and 1.

The following video, courtesy of Joel Kachmarek, the greens superintendent at TC&G, depicts scenes of men and women at play with hickory clubs at the course in 1926:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwCIS_IBKc

Over the years, the course has undergone a number of changes, notably the addition of its many bunkers. In 2013, the club began the process of restoring many of its bunkers to the look and feel of the bygone era, with their furry edges and deeper faces. Today Tacoma Country and Golf Club is considered by many to be the best conditioned and one of the most challenging golf courses in the Northwest.

Written by Martin Pool
April, 2015
fas1863@hotmail.com
www.nwhickoryplayers.org