

Early History of
Skagit Golf and Country Club, Burlington, WA
Established 1919, Course Opened 1920 (Back Nine); Circa 1970 (Front Nine)
Course Architect: 1920: Frank Orchard; Circa 1970: Unknown

There was no joy in Skagit County in 1916. "Skagit County claims the best fishing in the state, its climate is unexcelled, the crops there grow almost overnight and tourists come in flocks to admire the scenery, yet the joy of residents still is incomplete – they have no golf links." (Seattle Times 6-14-1916)

With those words, Frank Hall, a local businessman dealing in sports equipment, joined with others to organize a golf club in Skagit County in latter part of 1916. Twenty-five residents met on December 1, 1916 and formed a temporary organization called the Skagit County Country and Golf Club. They elected Wilbra Coleman, a prominent local attorney, as president. They selected a site on Clear Lake Road halfway between Sedro-Woolley and Mount Vernon to build their course.

**Mt. Vernon and Neighborhood
Residents Get Together to
Form Golf and Country Club
Forthwith.**

MOUNT VERNON, Saturday, Dec. 2.
—Twenty-five of the most prominent residents of Skagit County met here yesterday and formed a temporary organization of the Skagit County Country and Golf Club. Attorney Wilbra Coleman was chairman of the meeting and had Leslie R. Coffin, a well-known golfer of Bellingham and Seattle, outline the proposition.

Coffin gave an idea of the workings of such organizations in other parts of Puget Sound and spoke enthusiastically of the beauties and natural possibilities for a golf links of one of the proposed sites, situated on the Clear Lake road, between Sedro-Woolley and Mount Vernon.

The following were appointed a committee to plan organization, obtain members, consider sites and recommend the site appearing to them the most desirable: F. H. Jackson of Clear Lake, Harvey A. La Plant of Lyman and G. B. Grace of Mount Vernon.

It is the intention of those attending last evening to endeavor to secure 200 members from Skagit County, each of whom should take \$100 worth of stock in the property, which would be same as an initiation fee, with annual dues of not less than \$25 per year. A country home would be erected and a keeper and instructor engaged.

The initial push to form the golf club actually came in part from W. W. Conner, the state legislator (and later the Speaker of the House) representing Skagit County. Conner's house still stands on the intersection of Avon Allen Road and SR 20. Although an enthusiastic proponent of a golf club in Skagit County, Conner was a politician first and a golfer second. As one scribe wrote, "... the old man didn't dare go through with the golf links because – well, because the farmer voters wouldn't stand for it. The agriculturists couldn't see anything in converting a perfectly good cow pasture into a place to play an outdoor pool game. And, 'by heck, a danged fool that would start anything of that kind had better have his head examined.'" (Seattle Sunday Times – 4-1-1917)

The organizing committee, consisting of Wilbra Coleman, Leslie Coffin, F. H. Jackson, Harvey La Plant, and G. B. Grace, set out to sell membership in the club during 1917. Initiation was set at \$100 with \$25 annual dues. Membership would be limited to 200.

The organizing effort was gaining momentum ... that is, until global events took over the daily lives of the residents of Skagit County ... and everyone else in the country. America entered the war in Europe. Efforts to move ahead on forming the club stalled. Attention was now drawn to the war effort and golf was the last thing in the minds of most.

At war's end, however, as residents of Skagit County returned to their normal lives, interest in golf revived. Some from the 1916 organizing committee and some new faces met once again to form a golf club. It was 1919 and the group established the Skagit Country Club. This time the organizing committee selected the site at the present location to build an 18-hole course. It was viewed as an ideal location as the land had been logged off and presented a view of the Skagit Valley and the Cascades beyond. It was also central to the main cities and towns of Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Anacortes, and Burlington, places from which to draw their membership.

J. C. Wixson was elected first president of the new club. Wilbra Coleman and F. H. Jackson from the 1916 organizing committee were also prominent members as was Charles W. Wuest, a local businessman.

It's an interesting point of debate whether the Club can be considered to have started in 1916 or 1919. One could argue that the Club was really established in 1916 with the initial organizing effort; it simply stalled due to the onset of World War I and that effort resumed in 1919. Others may argue, however, that the 1916 effort died with the war, and the real beginning of the Club occurred in 1919.

The committee hired Frank Orchard, a Bostonian and the golf professional at Bellingham Golf and Country Club, to lay out the course. Orchard submitted his plans in August, 1919 and commenced work on clearing the land and building a golf course. By February, 1920 much progress had been made:

SKAGIT COUNTRY CLUB MAKING GOOD HEADWAY

(Special to The Herald.)

MOUNT VERNON, Feb. 18.—The trustees of the Country club held a meeting in Mount Vernon recently and report that everything is progressing in a satisfactory manner, and that from indications the Skagit Country club has the finest golf course in the Northwest. They have secured Frank Orchard, of the Bellingham golf course, as an instructor.

The nine-hole course, situated centrally so that Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington and Anacortes members will find it equally available, will be opened for play about June 1. Temporary greens will be used until about September 1.

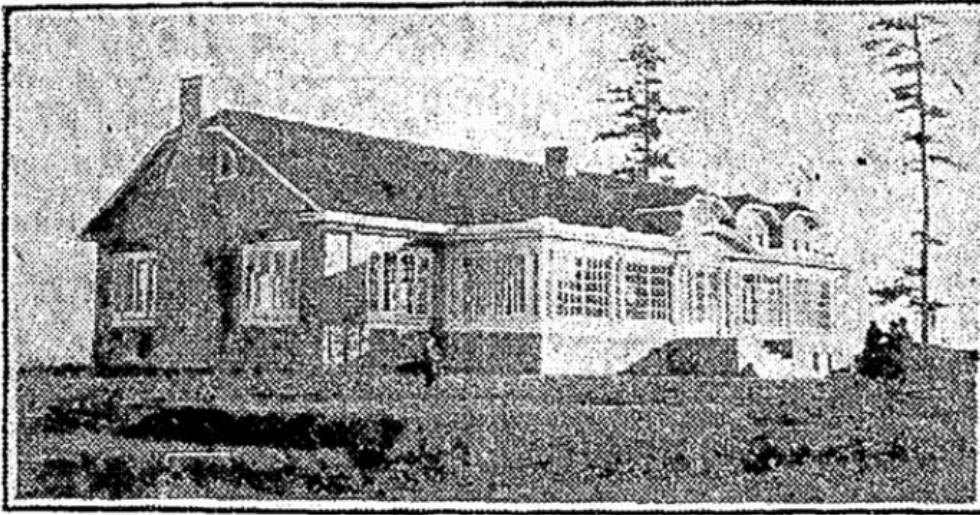
Thirty-five persons who have applied for membership in the new club have found that the list is filled and they will have to wait their turn in getting into the fold, unless there is a revision of the articles of incorporation in the meantime. The limit was originally fixed at 200 members, and this was reached a short time ago.

Bellingham Herald 2-18-1920

It is unclear why the original plan for an 18-hole course was abandoned, and the decision made to just build a 9-hole course. Regardless, by the fall of 1920, members were out playing on the 3100 yard course on what is now the back nine.

The committee also set aside \$11,500 to build a new clubhouse in the Dutch Colonial style, and by November, 1920, it was largely completed. Sadly, the clubhouse would burn down in 1948.

NEW SKAGIT COUNTY GOLF CLUB



Open Beautiful Home.

The Skagit Country Club, whose membership includes many of the prominent residents of Skagit County, opened its new clubhouse on a hill a few miles northwest of Mt. Vernon Friday evening, November 5, with a dancing party. The clubhouse commands a magnificent view of Skagit Valley and the Cascade Mountains and has a splendid sun room across the west side which faces the golf grounds. The grounds now are being gone over by landscape gardeners and when completed, experts believe the course will rank as among the best in the West.

Seattle Sunday Times 11-14-1920

Frank Orchard left his position at the Bellingham G&CC to become Skagit's first professional on March 1, 1920. His tenure was short as he left the job to become the pro at Rainier Golf and Country Club in 1921. Orchard was followed at Skagit Country Club by Dave Craig (1922 – 1925), then by Jack J. Martin (1926 – 1928).

By 1923, the club was well established and the following entry appeared in the national publication American Annual Golf Guide:

MOUNT VERNON—SKAGIT COUNTRY CLUB. (Skagit Co.)
Estd. 1919. Holes—9. Length—3,100 yds. Par—37. Grass greens.
Annual meeting, January. Pres., N. B. Hannay; V. Pres., Paul Rhodius
and H. L. Dodge; Sec., W. J. S. Gordan; Treas., Frank H. Jenne;
Chmn. Greens Com., Wilbra Coleman; Professional, David Craig.
Five miles from city, reached by automobile. Visitors' charges—\$1.00
per day. Sunday play permitted and caddies available. (Pac. N. W.
G. A.)

American Annual Golf Guide - 1923

Match play was the predominant form of competition during this time. Many inter-club matches, more commonly known as "home and away," were held with Bellingham G&CC and Everett G&CC. Members travelled as far away as Yakima, Olympia, and Aberdeen to play their matches.

Top players in the early days of Skagit G&CC were Denton Rossell and Ed Knipe. Rossell won the club championship at Skagit in 1925 at the age of fifteen, and Knipe, also at a young age, took the title in 1928. Both would go on to become star players and team mates on the University of Washington golf team.

It would be fifty years after the founding of the Club, in 1969-70, that a group of real estate brokers, led by James McNett, would buy and develop the property and build what is now the front nine to make it an 18-hole course. Over the years, The McNett family continued to be involved in the affairs of the Club, and today James McNett's grandson, Craig Welty, serves as the head professional.

The course offers a challenging test for golfers with its narrow, tree-lined fairways on the front nine, and the more open but longer back nine. The course is always in superb condition and the greens are fast and rarely offer a level putt.

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