

Early History of Olympia Country and Golf Club, Olympia, WA

Established May 21, 1914; Course Relocated 1926; Second Nine Completed 1958
Course Architects: 1914: Willie Leith and R. W. Ball; 1926: Walter Fovargue; 1958: Unknown

While the signs at the Olympia Country and Golf Club in Olympia, Washington indicate the Club was established in 1926, the roots of golf in Olympia go back more than a quarter century earlier.



Olympia Country and Golf Club – circa 1926 (Courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)

There were six golf clubs in Washington State by the end of the 19th century. Tacoma Golf Club (1894), Country Club of Seattle (1896), Seattle Golf Club (1896), Spokane Country Club (1898), Walla Walla Golf Club (1898), and Olympia Golf Club (1899) were the pioneering clubs.

The 1899 course was located in Maple Park near what is now the State Capitol Campus. The April 23, 1899 issue of the *Morning Olympian* described the organization thus: “Olympia has a Golf Club ... the first of its kind ever organized in Olympia. The links are in Maple Park, and the members have had them put in first class condition. Much enthusiasm is shown among its members. “

WASHINGTON OLYMPIA

OLYMPIA GOLF CLUB.—Half a mile from N. P. Railroad station, and accessible by street car. Organized, March 15, 1898. Entrance fee, \$25. Annual dues, \$10. Membership, 25. A nine-hole course. President, B. W. Allen; Vice-President, F. G. Deckebach; Secretary, C. G. Heifner, Olympia; Chairman of House Committee, C. S. Eaton, Olympia; Captain, G. W. Ingham; Treasurer, Dayton Williams. Governing Committee, C. G. Heifner, B. W. Allen, and C. S. Eaton. Greenkeeper, Hermon Struck.

Harper's Official Golf Guide 1901

Membership totaled 25. Accounts of their activities are scarce, and while they may have been an enthusiastic group, it was too few to sustain itself for long. Forced to abandon its course due to construction of new buildings on its site, the Club appears to have lasted only a couple of years. Some in this group made another attempt in 1904 when they tried to develop a six-hole course near the original site, but this effort too failed. Golf seems to have remained dormant in Olympia for the next ten years.

Then in 1914, following the U. S. Open win by Francis Ouimet at Brookline the previous fall, a resurgence in golf took place all across the country, including Olympia. A group of men and women met several times in early 1914 to organize the new Olympia Golf and Country Club. On May 21, 1914 the club organized itself with a charter membership of 93 which read like the Who's Who of State government: included were Governor Ernest Lister, Secretary of State Ithamar Howell, Assistant Attorney General Roy Campbell and eight Supreme Court Justices. George W. Draham, a prominent businessman, was named the temporary President of the Club.

The Club secured a 160 acre tract of farm land on Chambers Prairie bordering Chambers Lake near Lacey. They hired Willie Leith, Scottish golf professional at Tacoma Country and Golf Club and his brother Sandy Leith as part-time instructors.

A month later, the club hired its first full-time golf professional in Ray W. Ball. Ball grew up in Seattle and served as caddie under Robert Johnstone, the club professional at the Seattle Golf Club. Prior to coming to Olympia, Ball had helped his father John Ball in the construction of the Grays Harbor Country Club, where the younger Ball served as its first golf professional in 1913. He would later return to Olympia to help his father construct the Olympia Country and Golf Club course at its current location.

In short order Willie Leith and R. W. Ball laid out a rudimentary nine-hole course, and on June 28, 1914, mere five weeks after the founding of the Club, the course was formally opened. "The golf fever has hit a number of members hard and they are taking advantage of every opportunity to take a spin out to the links and go a round." Nearly all were novice players.

This was truly pasture golf. As seen in this tongue in cheek account, sheep, goats, and cows helped maintain the course, and the players encountered rules questions not normally encountered today:

Sheep, Goats and Cow Play Parts in Golf

In order to keep the grass down on the links of the Olympia Golf & Country club, it is announced that arrangements are being made with A. H. Chambers to have a band of sheep turned in on the course. These animals it is claimed will keep the foliage clipped close to the ground and will do no damage to the greens, while it is asserted that their presence will in no way bother the players.

Some one has suggested that the sheep may get the "goat" of an individual player or two while it is claimed that if all the political goats were turned loose out there that the flock could keep a much larger course in good condition.

George Draham and Bob Blankenship are having a dispute now over the proper way to score a hole in which a cow played a prominent part. It is asserted that a wayward bovine in front of whom a golf ball stopped picked it up as part of her cud. The irate owner of the ball proceeded to hit the cow six times and she dropped the ball in the hole. Blankenship says the hole was made in seven, as each belt given the cow, said blows being delivered with a mashie, should be counted. Draham insists that the hole was made in one, the raps given bossy not to count as strokes. It may be necessary to appeal to Varden for a ruling unless Judge George E. Morris, Roy Campbell and R. E. Ball can decide the point.

On July 20, 1914 the golf professional R. W. Ball played the first official match of the Olympia Golf and Country Club against amateur Assistant Attorney General Roy Campbell, a member who had relocated from the Midwest and knew something about the game. Attended by a large throng of spectators, Campbell defeated Ball, described as "3 up". Campbell shot 84 to Ball's 87 for two loops around the nine hole course.

As was common at the time, inter-club ("home and away") matches were quite popular. In the early days of the Club, matches were played against the Lochburn Golf Club and Lakeside Golf Club, both in Tacoma and both now defunct as well as the Meadow Park Golf Club. Later, matches were arranged with clubs from Chehalis, Centralia, and Aberdeen.

Intra-club matches were also popular, and fierce, if not good-humored, rivalries developed. Here the Washington State Office of the Auditor issued a challenge to the Office of the Attorney General in a manner which could only have been written by accountants and lawyers:

C. W. CLAUSEN DEFIES W. V. TANNER

* * * * *

Officials at Outs--Challenge Is Issued

To the Honorable W. V. Tanner:

Fore—The attention of the undersigned has been called to certain and sundry remarks purporting to emanate from the Temple of Justice, and particularly from that portion of the Temple of Justice wherein are situate the offices of the Attorney General, said remarks tending to lead uninformed persons to believe that the aforementioned Temple of Justice is the abiding place of a bunch of sharks in the Ancient and Honorable game of Golf.

Be it also known, that these certain and sundry remarks further purport to make light of and to hold up to scorn and derision the abilities of certain other wielders of the brassie and mashie, and in particular a certain bunch appertaining to and being a part of the force in the office of the

State Auditor, said office being situate in the Capitol Building.

In order that the falsity of these slanderous remarks, purporting to emanate from the Temple of Justice, be established and that the good name of the Capitol Building remain free of blemish, the undersigned, on behalf of himself and four others from his office, hereby offers and agrees to administer to the Honorable W. V. Tanner, and four others from the office of the Attorney General, a sound trimming at the Ancient and Honorable game of Golf, said trimming to take place on the Greens and Fairways of the Olympia Golf and Country club on the afternoon of July 14, 1917.

Having laid you a stymie on the 19th, with my trusty putter I hereby subscribe myself,

C. W. CLAUSEN.

The challenge was promptly accepted:

Tanner Et Al Vs. Clausen Etc.

* * * * *

Case to Be Fought Out Loco Citato

No. 1.

ANSWER AND ACCEPTANCE.

On the Golf Links of the Olympia Golf Club in and for the City of Olympia, Thurston County, Washington.

Slicer Clausen, Hooker Hartnett, Topper Jamieson, Mattor Shelley, Dubber Leghorn, Challengers, vs,

Par Tanner, Birdie Fairbrook, Dogle Murphine, Dormie Christensen, Sty-mie Waterman, Challenged.

Come now the challenged above named and making their initial drive herein and for answer and acceptance deny, allege and approach as follows:

1. Teeing up, the challenged deny that the challengers maintain an office in the capitol building and allege on information and behalf that the only place of business of said challengers is on the above entitled golf links.

2. Taking a stance, and answering the Fore part of the challenge herein, challenged deny specifically that any slanderous remarks have emanated from that portion of the temple of justice wherein are situate the offices of the attorney general concerning the bunch of Dubs infesting the office of the state auditor and they allege that it would be impossible to slander the aforesaid Dubs as to their golfing ability.

3. Following through, the challenged state that they have no information sufficient to form a belief concerning

whether the capitol building of those abiding therein have a good name or are free from blemish and therefore deny same and brand it as a good lie.

4. And Sinking the Putt, the challenged emphatically deny that the challengers herein can trim the challenged, or any one else or anything at all, save and except the daily trimming they give the fairway on dubbed shots.

Wherefore, having fully answered, the challenged herein accept the challenge of said challengers and agree to a match to be played on the afternoon of Saturday the 14th day of July, A. D. 1917.

W. V. TANNER,
For the Challenged.

The first round of this mighty golf tournament went to the players wearing the Clausen colors. They played rings around their opponents and forced Captain Tanner, of the legal team, to admit between sobs that "they licked us and licked us good." Mr. Tanner admitted that his team could win from the auditor's gang and another game has been arranged. Shelley will play with Clausen and Waterman will take sides with Tanner. The score yesterday:

Tanner, 2; Murphine, 1; Fairbrook, 0; Christensen, 0—Total 3.

Clausen, 1; Hartnett, 2; Jaminson, 3; Leghorn, 3—Total, 9.

Morning Olympian July 15, 1917

By 1915, the lease on the Chambers property in Lacey was scheduled to expire. In addition, the Club struggled to maintain its membership. While they had a Golf Club, they were still missing the Country in Olympia Golf and Country Club and realized they needed to offer more than just golf to attract new

members. They made an effort to find new land, but in the end, renegotiated the lease with an option to buy. In May, 1917, they did just that, but first they needed to establish themselves as a legal entity. Thus on March 30, 1917, the Olympia Golf and Country Club was formally incorporated.

From 1915 to 1919, the Club rebuilt its nine-hole course and improved its clubhouse operations. The club also undertook several membership drives. Men would pay a \$10 initiation fee with \$1 monthly dues, and unmarried women would pay \$5 initiation and 50 cent dues. But America was at war in Europe, and attention was drawn to war efforts at home rather than country club activities.

All that changed in 1920. First, the war was over and men and women found more leisure time. Secondly, the Club elected Clarence J. Lord as its President. Lord, a wealthy banker and a dynamic leader, led a resurgence in the Club. In what was to presage the Club's move to its new location in 1926, Lord offered to donate the land on Tykles Cove in April, 1920. However, the Club declined his offer as they saw it as too great a financial burden to relocate the club at that time.

Nevertheless, Lord spent considerable amount of his own money to renovate the clubhouse and in other ways improve the operations of the Club. He also had a vision to relocate the course to a new location as he is quoted in the December 31, 1920 issue of the *Morning Olympian*:

Someday we are going to have a club down the bay on a large tract of nearly 200 acres which I have promised to donate when the time is ripe. It is the ideal location for the club which ours will someday grow to be, on the shores where yachting and motor boating can join with pleasures on the green. This will make our Olympia club one to draw people from all quarters to visit From these beginnings the accomplishments I see ahead will develop, possibly in five years time, but if not by then, certainly not long after.

That vision began to be realized when the club purchased a 396 acre property for \$37,075 at Butler's Cove in March, 1924. Two years later, a nine-hole course would be opened for play, just as Lord foresaw.

The club sold off the property at the old course in Lacey in 1925. The old site was turned into a municipal course and became the Mountain View Golf Course. This course operated until 1963 when it was sold to developers to later become the Panorama City retirement community.

Olympia Country and Golf Club then hired Walter G. Fovargue (1882 – 1963) as its golf architect to lay out the new course. Fovargue grew up in Ohio and became a golf professional at the age of 17, one of the first American born golf professionals when virtually all the golf professionals in America in 1900 were Scots or Englishmen. Fovargue was one of original founders of the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) in 1916. He played in eleven U. S. Opens with his best finishes in 1906 and 1916 when he finished 13th.



Forvague later gave up his professional status and eventually ended up in Aberdeen, Washington where he accepted a job offered by W. J. Patterson, an influential businessman and president of the Pacific Northwest Golf Association, managing a fuel company. He joined the Grays Harbor Country Club, and as an amateur, Fovargue competed in many tournaments, winning the Northwest Open in 1917. He was also involved in golf architecture and his Northwest designs include Olympia Country and Golf Club, Willapa Harbor Golf Course, Oaksridge Golf Course in Elma, as well as the redesign of the Grays Harbor Country Club.

“Carved out of a forest,” as pronounced by the Seattle Times, Olympia Golf and Country Club’s new nine-hole course and clubhouse at Butler’s Cove formally opened on May 15, 1926. George Draham, the first president of the Club at its founding in 1914, was again elected President of the Club at its new location. Clarence J. Lord, whose vision five years earlier had now been realized, was a Trustee. Membership stood at 163.



Olympia Golf and Country Club – circa 1926 (Courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)



Olympia Country and Golf Club Clubhouse – circa 1926 (Courtesy of Washington State historical Society)

OLYMPIA—OLYMPIA GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB.

Estd. 1914. Holes—9. Length—3,205 yds. Par—37. Grass greens. Annual meeting, January. Pres., G. W. Draham; V. Pres., V. Baker; Sec. and Treas., Earle M. McCroskey, The Olympia National Bank; Chmn. Greens Com., O. C. Hanson; Professional, Walter Mitchell; Greenskeeper, Fred J. Payne. Mail address, P. O. Box 396. Three and one-half miles from city, reached by automobile. Visitors' charges—\$1.00 week days; Sundays and holidays, \$2.00. Sunday play permitted and caddies available.

The American Annual golf Guide 1926

In 1958, a second nine was added to make it a full 18 holes course. Over the years the Club has hosted many significant tournaments and was visited by many golfing greats, including Byron Nelson, who shot a course record 59 on one of his visits.

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