

Early History of  
Bellingham Golf and Country Club, Bellingham, WA  
Established 1912, First Nine Opened 1913, Second Nine Opened 1925  
Course Architect: 1913: John Ball, 1925: Unknown

One of the pioneering golf clubs in the Pacific Northwest, the Bellingham Golf and Country Club in Bellingham, Washington was established in 1912 and the original nine-hole course opened for play in 1913. But that was not the beginning of golf in the City of Bellingham.



Hole # 1 (now #10) – circa 1913 (photo courtesy of Bellingham Golf and Country Club)

A newspaper account of golf in Bellingham appears in the January, 27, 1900 issue of the Seattle Sunday Times. A group of high society men and women tried to organize a golf club in the City.

There is a movement on foot among the society folk to organize a golf club. A suitable place for the links is found just to the rear of the children's home in Fairhaven. Mr. and Mrs. Roland G. Gamwell, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Fischer and Mr. and Mrs. Chas. A. Darling are the promoters.

Seattle Sunday Times - 1-27-1900

While some form of golf was likely played on these grounds in Fairhaven at the close of the nineteenth century, the effort to organize an actual golf club appears to have fallen short as no further mention is

made in the local newspaper beyond this reference until 1903.

Then in the spring of 1903, a group of men and women, made up mostly of Bellingham's high society, again attempted to organize. This time they succeeded and the Bellingham Bay Golf Club was born. The Club built a three-hole course and a clubhouse, located between Dock and North Elk Streets.

**Last Saturday afternoon the new clubhouse at the links of the Bellingham Bay Golf Club was dedicated with a luncheon attended by nearly all the fifty members.**

Seattle Sunday Times - 7-19-1903

That year, in 1903, only three other cities in Washington State had organized golf clubs: Tacoma, Seattle and Spokane. There existed at the time the Tacoma Golf Club (1894), the Seattle Golf Club (1896) and the Country Club of Seattle (1896), and the Spokane Golf Club (1898). Walla Walla Golf Club and Olympia Golf Club did organize in 1898-99, but the clubs failed after one or two years. When the Bellingham Bay Golf Club formed in 1903, it appeared, by all accounts, to be a strong, viable club. It had officers, committee assignments, a clubhouse, organized tournaments, social events, and a golf course.

#### **GOLF LINKS THRONGED.**

**Sport is Being Given a Renewed Impetus.—Good Scores Made.**

The golf links were well thronged all day yesterday with novices as well as those familiar with the fine points of the game. A number of ladies were present and the club house presented an inviting score. The best cards turned in were: Hay 15, Dickinson 17, Egan 18, Kalloch 20, Smith 22, Leonard 23. Egan and Kalloch did some remarkable driving, but their approach work was not up to their usual standard.

The course is now in good shape and is steadily being bettered. That the work of the various committees is being appreciated is shown by the constantly increasing number of players.

Bellingham Herald - 5-31-1904

The club held numerous tournaments during 1904 and 1905, and its membership was growing. The outlook was indeed positive. The year 1905 especially was a banner year for the Bellingham Bay Golf Club and garnered considerable press coverage.

Then, inexplicably, as suddenly as it appeared, the Bellingham Bay Golf Club disappeared at the close of 1905. An October, 1905 issue of the *Bellingham Ledger* reported that football was being played on the "golf links," suggesting perhaps, that the golf course on Dock Street had been given up. No mention of the club is made in the local newspaper thereafter and it is mystery why an apparently enthusiastic group of golfers would allow the club to die. Yet, die it did.

It was some six years later, in 1911, that talk of a new golf club again surfaced. Credit must be given to Mrs. Alfred L. Black, who served as vice-president of the earlier Bellingham Bay Golf Club, for reviving the idea. She invited a group of men and women to her house in May, 1911 to discuss the matter of organizing a country club.

Enthusiasm was high, but enthusiasm alone does not a club make. The group needed, and got, a dynamic leader in E. B. Deming. It was Deming's driving force, and his financial backing, which made the Bellingham Golf and Country Club a reality.



Everett "Ed" B. Deming (1860 - 1942), president of Pacific American Fisheries, a salmon cannery, was a highly successful businessman. He was also a golf enthusiast and benefactor. More than any other, he was responsible for the genesis of the Bellingham Golf and Country Club ... and its survival.



Everett Deming (left) teeing off (photo courtesy of Bellingham Golf and Country Club)

In 1919, Deming purchased the adjoining property for \$40,000 for the purpose of turning the course to the full 18 holes it is now. The second nine (now the front nine) was opened for play in 1925.

As the Club struggled through the Depression years, it was unable to repay even the interest on the loan, much less the loan itself. Deming almost single-handedly kept the Club afloat during this difficult period through his generosity.

On May 16, 1912, the Club officially incorporated and set aside approximately \$5000 to build a new clubhouse and another \$5000 for the construction of the golf course. Deming reported that eighty individuals had expressed interest in joining the club. Initiation fee for membership was set at \$100, with dues at \$5 a month.

Leslie R. Coffin was elected the first president of the Club, and C. G. Burnett its first Captain. Deming was named a Trustee.

CERTIFICATE FOR INCORPORATING  
BELLINGHAM GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, That we L. R. Coffin  
as President and Trustee of Bellingham Golf and Country Club, John Hindes  
as Secretary of said club, and E. B. Deming,  
R. A. Welsh, J. L. Easton, F. S. Piper, G. C. Hyatt, W. J. Griswold,  
C. F. Nolte, H. H. Ellis, G. W. Loggie and C. G. Burnet  
as Trustees of said club, said persons named being all of the trustees  
of said club, do hereby certify as follows:

1. That desiring to incorporate themselves as a social  
club, the said persons on the 16th day of May, 1912, made and executed  
an agreement in writing of which the following, including the names  
of the subscribers thereto, is a true copy:

"AGREEMENT FOR INCORPORATING BELLINGHAM  
GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB.

THIS AGREEMENT made in the City of Bellingham, State of  
Washington, on the 16th day of May, 1912, WITNESSETH:

1. That it is our intention to form a corporation for  
the purpose hereinafter specified, and we, E. B. Deming, R. A.  
Welsh, J. L. Easton, F. S. Piper, G. C. Hyatt, W. J. Griswold,  
C. F. Nolte, H. H. Ellis, G. W. Loggie, L. R. Coffin and C. G. Burn-  
et, all citizens of the United States and of the State of Wash-  
ington, residing in the City of Bellingham in said state, do hereby  
associate ourselves together with the intention of forming a corpo-  
ration, and we do hereby form a corporation, the name of which shall  
be and is Bellingham Golf and Country Club.

Article of Incorporation - 1912 (Source: Washington State Digital Archives)

A tract of land owned by the Bellingham Bay Improvement Company was secured and some 142 acres were leased for the course and clubhouse. Work on building a golf course began almost immediately.

The Club hired John Ball, golf course architect, to lay out and construct the nine-hole course. Few in the Pacific Northwest knew much about designing golf courses and Ball was the only known person in the area advertising his services as builder of golf courses.



John Titus Ball, golf course architect of BG&CC

John Titus Ball (1848 – 1938), born in England, gained his reputation as a golf architect by building the Town and Country Golf Club in St. Paul, Minnesota. He went on to construct the old Seattle Golf Club course at Laurelhurst in 1901 as well as the now defunct Earlington Golf Club in 1908. Contrary to some sources, Ball did not design the Seattle Golf Club at its current location at the Highlands. It was designed by the club professional Robert Johnstone, but the construction work was performed by Ball.

Ball, with his son Ray W. Ball, a golf professional and architect in his own right, would go on to build numerous other courses in the Northwest, including the Grays Harbor Country Club, Meadow Park Golf Course and Allenmore Golf Course in Tacoma.

The Club also hired its first club professional in Frank J. Orchard at a salary of \$75 per month. Twenty-two year old Orchard was born in Boston and moved to Bellingham as a young man. A popular pro, Orchard would stay eight years at BG&CC until 1920 when he went on to design the Skagit Country Club and become its first professional. Orchard eventually settled in California until his death in 1947.



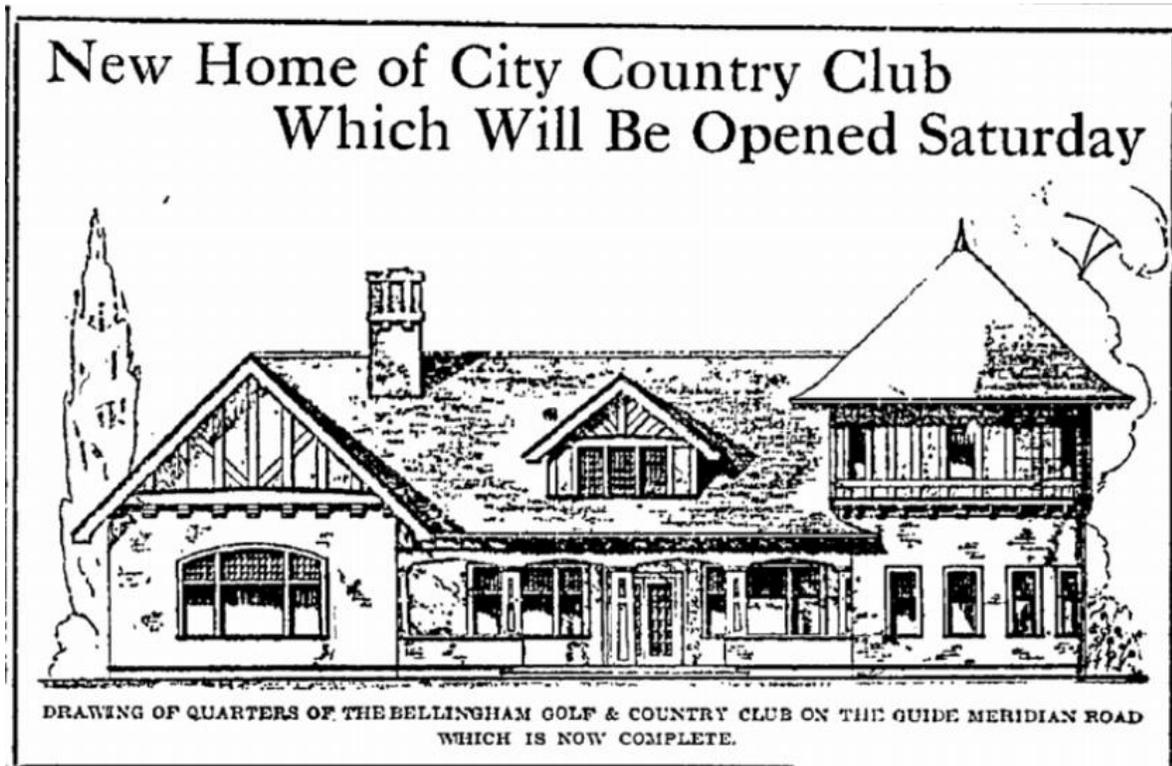
Frank J. Orchard (BG&CC pro 1912-20) Mashie Niblick



Ian F. Dalgliesh (BG&CC pro 1920-22) Spoon

Orchard was followed by a pair of Scotsmen, Ian F. Dalgliesh, from 1920 to 1922, and “Wee” Willie Black from 1923 to 1925. Next came Bert Wilde from 1926 to 1936, then Frank Sadler from 1936 to 1971.

One year and one day following the date of organization, The Bellingham Golf and Country Club officially opened on May 17, 1913.



Drawing of Clubhouse - Bellingham Herald - 5-7-1913



Clubhouse - circa 1913 (photo courtesy of Bellingham Golf and Country Club)

Beginning in 1914, members of the Club played a number of inter-club tournaments (popularly known as home and away) with other clubs in the Northwest, including those in British Columbia, in a match play format, which was the predominant form of competition at the time.

First up was Everett Golf and Country Club, established in 1910. With a two year head start on Bellingham in which to develop its players, the outcome had a predictable result in the inaugural match. However, using its home course advantage, Bellingham players turned the tables the following month:

**LOCAL GOLFERS BADLY BEATEN AT EVERETT**

Bellingham enthusiasts can argue with Everett people on the question of school population, and other civic questions, but there is no argument on which city has the best golf players. At least this is the admission made by local golf players who returned from Everett Saturday night, where they were the guests of the Country club of that place. The best players from the Bellingham County club made the journey but they came home without any laurels. Those who autoed from here to Everett were:

R. A. Welsh, James Prentice, J. L. Easton, E. D. Deming and wife, Stewart Deming and wife, Gus Griffith and wife, C. W. Howard and wife, J. W. Kindall and wife, S. J. Craft and wife, H. H. Ellis and wife, Leslie Coffin and wife, Frank and Charles Burnett, Everett Wheeler and F. J. Orchard.

On account of the result of the golf matches in Everett those who returned from the trip have little to say of the playing.

Bellingham Herald - 6-15-1914

**EVERETT GOLFERS MEET DEFEAT ON LOCAL LINKS**

Return defeat was administered on Saturday by Bellingham's golfers to the link enthusiasts of Everett, who journeyed here by road for a day's complete enjoyment at the Golf & Country club. Matches for men and women both went with the honors on the Bellingham side, and an enjoyable luncheon and evening dance rounded out a specially enjoyable day's entertainment for the visitors, who motored home about midnight.

The women's contest was played off in the morning and before many laps had been made the Everett team was left several holes in the rear. The Country club "golfeases" made their long lead longer and by a little past noon the eighteen hole was reached with the locals far ahead of the visitors.

The men's team of the club, which lost in Everett in the first tournament of the season, showed its class yesterday, going into the game with a vengeance, and coming out of it victorious with many holes to spare.

Bellingham Herald - 7-13-1914

A rivalry was born. The following year, Everett players, gracious in defeat, gave this account of their visit:

Seven players of the Everett Golf and Country Club, captained by G. S. Aldrich, journeyed to Bellingham Saturday morning to enter into team play, a return match, with the golfers of the city to the north. Everett was walloped, but the visitors returned well satisfied – aside from the score – with their treatment in Bellingham and the sporty course of the neighboring city, for the nine-hole links in Bellingham, stretching over 3097 yards, was something of a revelation to those who have been playing on the Everett links. (Bellingham Herald 9-28-1915)

Bellingham players proved to be a formidable force at home, winning all their matches for the next several years. A strong visiting contingent from the Seattle Golf Club ended their dominance in 1919.

Intra-club tournaments were also very popular, and some creative matches were invented. There was the Old Guard vs. Recruits matches, where the original charter members matched up against new members. One particular match was called the Fats vs. Leans with some ribbing on the part of members over who belonged to which camp.

The first Men's Club Championship was contested in 1916, won by Leslie R. Coffin, the first President of the Club.

But it was the first Women's Club Championship in 1919, won by Mrs. E. A. Wheeler, which told of an epic battle, as written by club professional Frank Orchard. It is worthy of a re-telling:

## MRS. WHEELER WINS BELLINGHAM GOLF CLASSIC

Most Thrilling Match In History  
of Club—Mrs. Howard Is Cap-  
tain of Captains.

(By FRANK ORCHARD.)

The story of this most exciting match dates back to the signing of the armistice, at which time the local lady golfers were busily engaged in war work and could not be dragged out to the links for even one round of the "grand old game." Then came peace, the ladies were gradually relieved of their hard grind for the boys over there, spring weather set in, and Mrs. C. W. Howard was forced to take the captaincy of the ladies' golf team.

Her election was unanimous and "No" would not be accepted, so, much against her own wishes, she started in to work. She gave up her own game almost entirely and devoted a good share of her time to the building up of a real honest-to-goodness ladies' team.

Through her efforts a golfers' luncheon has been served at the local club every Tuesday, and at these little parties, golf was the sole and only topic of conversation, and it was only a few weeks until a deeper, keener interest was taken in the game by the ladies than ever before, so that now Mrs. Howard's work is showing real results in that several very excellent lady players have been developed and all the ladies are playing much better golf than they

have any previous season.

### Club Championship.

Tournaments galore—all sorts of matches and competitions have been played during the summer, but the contest of the season, the classic of them all, was determined on Wednesday and Thursday in a match between Mrs. E. A. Wheeler and Mrs. S. L. Carr for the club championship.

Some weeks ago after playing the qualifying rounds for the club championship and drawing for places, the following players were left: Mrs. C. W. Howard vs. Mrs. B. I. Drake; Miss Hester I. Gunnwell vs. Mrs. S. L. Carr; Mrs. G. E. Dodson vs. Mrs. F. A. Wheaton and Mrs. E. D. Miller vs. Mrs. E. A. Wheeler. The following won the matches thus gaining their places in the semi-finals: The Misses Drake, Carr, Dodson and Wheeler. Mrs. Carr won from Mrs. Drake and Mrs. Wheeler won from Mrs. Dodson, which left Mrs. Carr and Mrs. Wheeler as finalists.

It was decided that the final should be played over thirty-six holes, so on Wednesday afternoon the two contestants appeared on the links to fight out the first eighteen holes of the match. The course was in excellent condition. There was some really remarkable golf played by both players. Puts were conceded on several holes so that the medal scores could not be accurately kept, but there were no more than two strokes difference, neither player was more than two up at any stage of the game, and the first day's play was brought to a close all square, both players having shot less than ninety-five. Every shot brought a thrill to the gallery following.

### Real Test of Golf.

Thursday morning it started to rain which later developed into a steady downpour, making the course several shots slower, and the putting-greens a different from the day before as could possibly be imagined. Both players agreed to play, notwithstanding the heavy rain, so started the last leg of their match in the face of conditions anything but conducive to good golf.

At the end of three holes both players were wet to the skin, as was a very enthusiastic gallery of about twenty, which continued to trail along through the entire match, bearing a flock of bath towels to dry the grips of the clubs before each shot.

Notwithstanding their most uncomfortable condition, both contestants played excellent golf, and like the day before neither one was more than two up during the play, and on the thirty-sixth tee, Mrs. Wheeler stood dormie one. It was generally understood by the players and the gallery that the last hole was halved in five, which would have given Mrs. Wheeler the match, so both players shook hands and kissed each other, as all nice ladies do after finishing a match, but the referee showed where Mrs. Wheeler had taken six strokes for the hole, thus losing it to Mrs. Carr and halving the match. So the thirty-seventh had to be played—in the drenching rain—the players tired out and wet, and the gallery wet and every nerve a-tingle, ready to follow such an exhibition indefinitely. Neither player scored more than six or seven strokes over the previous day's play.

### On the Thirty-Seventh Green.

Each player shot nearly two hundred yards off the thirty-seventh tee and got excellent seconds on this 410 yard hole. Mrs. Wheeler's third was well on the green, and Mrs. Carr's third hit in casual water as did her fourth, so she had to take a six to Mrs. Wheeler's five. This gave Mrs. Wheeler the match, probably the most interesting, hardest fought and exciting contest ever staged on the local links.

To make the ending more perfect, each one of the gripping gallery kissed, each drenched player on the thirty-seventh green, and they all waded back to the clubhouse, tired and wet, in the best of spirits.

Bellingham Ledger - 9-12-1919

For good measure, Mrs. Wheeler became the first BG&CC woman to record a hole-in-one (a dodo in the parlance of the day) on the then fourth hole in 1921.

An important development occurred in the history of the Club in 1919, when the Club acquired additional land giving it the opportunity that it had long desired to turn the course into a full eighteen layout. E. B. Deming extended a \$40,000 loan to the Club to purchase the existing property as well as

the additional land. The offer was accepted and the Club immediately began the work of constructing the second nine. The club professional, Frank Orchard, was tasked with laying out the new nine. One newspaper account stated, Orchard "... started work last week clearing for the new holes. Largely of a meadowland character, the \$10,000 allotted to putting in the greens and fairways of the second nine will prove entirely adequate to give the Bellingham golfers a very satisfactory course." (Seattle Daily Times 7-27-1919).

It is unclear why this work stalled for it was some six years later, in 1925, that the second nine (today's front nine) was opened for play. It is also unclear whether Orchard's original layout was used or whether there was a redesign by another architect.

Another noteworthy event took place in 1919 with the first landing of an airplane from Seattle to Bellingham. As part of the post-war tour and recruitment effort, the U. S. Army delivered a message by airplane from the Mayor of Seattle to the Mayor of Bellingham. Lacking an airfield, the plane landed on the grounds of Bellingham Golf and Country Club: "Lieutenant J. M. Fetters and his mechanic Sergeant Owen Kessel, arrived this morning at 10:45 o'clock in the first airplane to visit this city from Seattle. The plane first circled the city for a time and then gradually coming lower, finally landed on the local golf and country club course. After hitting the ground the plane ran about three hundred yards before coming to a standstill." (Bellingham Ledger 6-19-1919)

In 1921, noted golfers "Long" Jim Barnes, fresh off his U. S. Open win, and Jock Hutchinson, off his British Open win, toured the Northwest in a series of matches against the best of the local players. On a cold, blustery day in December in Bellingham, Barnes and Hutchinson paired up against Ian Dalgliesh, the Club's pro and Don Randell, club champion, in a four-ball match. The local heroes gave a good accounting of themselves being just one down after nine holes, but eventually gave way to finish four down to the national champions.



Jim Barnes in the hickory era



Jock Hutchison in the hickory era

The first major championship came to Bellingham Golf and Country Club in 1930 when it was awarded the dates for Washington Open as well as the Washington State Amateur Championship. Fresh off his

win at the Northwest Open held at Shaughnessy Heights CC in British Columbia, Bellingham's own pro Bert Wilde took away the Washington Open trophy on his home course with a score of 283.



Bert Wilde (right) in 1924 as pro in Hawaii

Albert Ernest "Bert" Wilde (1898 - 1970) learned his golf caddying at the Seattle Golf Club under the tutelage of Robert Johnstone, the club professional.

His first job as a professional was as an assistant to Jim Barnes while he was club pro at Tacoma Golf and Country Club.

Wilde became one of top players in the Northwest winning the Oregon Open as well as the Northwest and Washington Opens and a number of other tournaments. A wanderlust, Wilde held pro jobs in California, Hawaii, Illinois, and Texas, as well as Washington.

Coincidentally, Wilde was the grandson of John Ball, BG&CC's original course architect.

Bert Wilde served at BG&CC from 1926 to 1936 and was followed by Frank Sadler. Sadler, a long time pro, first as assistant to Wilde, became head pro in 1936 and retired in 1971 after 41 years with the club.



Washington State Normal School (now Western Washington State University) Student Golfers at Lakeway Golf Course, Bellingham in 1932. Instructor Frank Sadler right (photo courtesy of Bellingham Golf and Country Club)

Over the years, the golf course has undergone many improvements and redesigns, yet many of the holes retain their original routing and characteristics. Known for its fast greens and well conditioned fairways, the Bellingham Golf and Country Club offers a stern test for today's golfers.



A view of the clubhouse – circa 1913 (photo courtesy of Bellingham Golf and Country Club)

Written by Martin Pool  
January, 2016  
[fas1863@hotmail.com](mailto:fas1863@hotmail.com)