

Early History of Longview Country Club, Longview, WA

Established 1923, Course Opened First Nine: 4-30-1927; Second Nine: 1958
Course Architect: 1927 - Francis L. James; 1958 - unknown

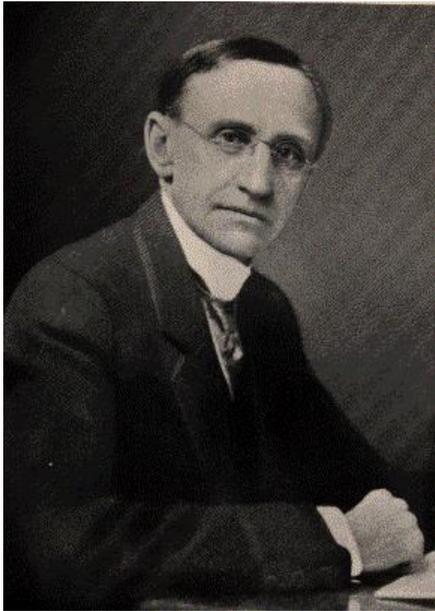
A year before the City of Longview was incorporated, a group of businessmen met in the summer of 1923 to organize Cowlitz County's first golf club: the Longview Golf and Country Club. The club initially planned its first golf course at the base of Mount Solo, just west of Longview. Given the primitive roads at the time, the distance proved to be too much, and those plans were dropped. They then decided on another course closer to the soon to be City, and a nine hole course was built on the farm lands just off Ocean Beach Highway and Pacific Way. Two years later, the club would rename itself the Longview Country Club, and relocate its golf course farther up the hill to its present site. The new course would open for play on April 30, 1927.

The City of Longview has a unique history as a planned city in the early 1920s. At the time, the land was largely rural farmland and virgin forest. The nearest town of Kelso had a population of 2,000. In 1921, Robert Alexander Long (1850 – 1937), a lumber baron, a philanthropist, and president of Long-Bell Lumber Company in Kansas City, bought up vast tracts of land in and around the yet to be named Longview to build a lumber mill.

Recognizing that he needed an infrastructure to support the anticipated 10,000 employees, Long planned out a city, and began building. By the end of 1923, Long's company had constructed 357 buildings, including the Hotel Monticello. Remarkably, the rural farmland had been transformed into a modern city in two short years.



Aerial view of Hotel Monticello in the new planned City of Longview. The original golf course is in the upper left part of this photo – 4-30-1924. (Photo courtesy of Longview Public Library)



Robert Alexander Long (1850 – 1934)

Robert Alexander Long was born in Shelbyville, Kentucky in 1850. In 1877, Long partnered with Victor B. Bell to form a lumber company in Columbus, Kansas. Highly successful, the two expanded their operation first in Kansas, then in Louisiana and Washington.

During the 1920s, as golf clubs sprang up across the country, Long recognized that a golf club would attract more people to the new City.

While not a golfer himself, Long's many business associates were and they would form the core of the group which would found Longview Country Club. Long would later donate the clubhouse to the Club and would be its primary benefactor as the Club struggled through the difficult early years.

A number of Long's associates had belonged to golf clubs in Kansas City and felt the need to introduce the game to the new city. Some became members of Waverly Golf Club in Portland, Oregon but found little time to travel such a distance on a regular basis. The group elected David Boice, manager of the new Monticello Hotel, as temporary chairman. They selected a site at the base of Mount Solo, and laid out an eighteen hole course at that location. Given the rough roads to travel there, and the lackluster participation, they soon abandoned their plans. The group then decided to relocate the course closer to the City, and settled on the property on Ocean Beach Highway and Pacific Way.

In the fall of 1923, the Longview Golf and Country Club was officially organized and H. H. Rock, a banker and a Long associate, was elected the club's first president.



H. H. Rock (1882–1941), Longview Country Club's first President

Harold Hughes Rock was born in Vinton, Iowa in 1882. He moved to Louisiana, where Long-Bell Lumber Company operated a lumber mill, and worked as a cashier at a local bank. When he learned of R. A. Long's plan to build a city in Longview, he moved west to start up Longview's first bank, the Lumbermen's Bank and Trust Company. He was elected to Longview's first City Council in 1924.

It is not known when and where Rock was introduced to golf. Normally a club elects as its first president the one most responsible for the formation of the club. One must assume he was familiar with the game.

On April 14, 1924, Longview Golf and Country Club's golf course opened for play. Built on farm land at the base of Cascade Hills, the nine-hole course was short, simple, and rough. The club used the old Huntington residence as a temporary clubhouse. Ralph Sackway, mentioned as the "former golf champion of Missouri," shot 34 for the nine holes.



Longview's first golf course. Hotel Monticello is in the background – 3-17-1925. (Photo courtesy of Longview Public Library)

By the summer of 1924, the club was in full swing. Membership totaled nearly 100. The club hired Allen Longstaff (1897 – 1977) as its pro. Longstaff had most recently been at Rose City Golf Club in Portland and previously at Eugene and Pasadena. President Rock announced that a new clubhouse would soon open. He also reported that women were now taking up the game.

The club held its first outside match against Centralia Golf and Country Club (now defunct) with the Centralia team winning 17-10. A year later, as their numbers grew and their skills improved, Longview golfers returned the favor by defeating Centralia 31-12.

On October 19, 1924, Longview Golf and Country Club held its first annual meeting and elected new officers: President - Kenneth F. Park, 1st Vice President – F. H. Crites, 2nd Vice President – T. M. Foster, Secretary – Ray June, Treasurer – S. B. Gresham. The board voted to give Fred H. Crites lifetime membership for preparing the links.



Longview's first golf course. W. A. "Bert" Taylor farm house and Huntington Rock 3-17-1925. (Photo courtesy of Longview Public Library)



Longview's first golf course. Women were active in the club. - 3-17-1925. (Photo courtesy of Longview Public Library)

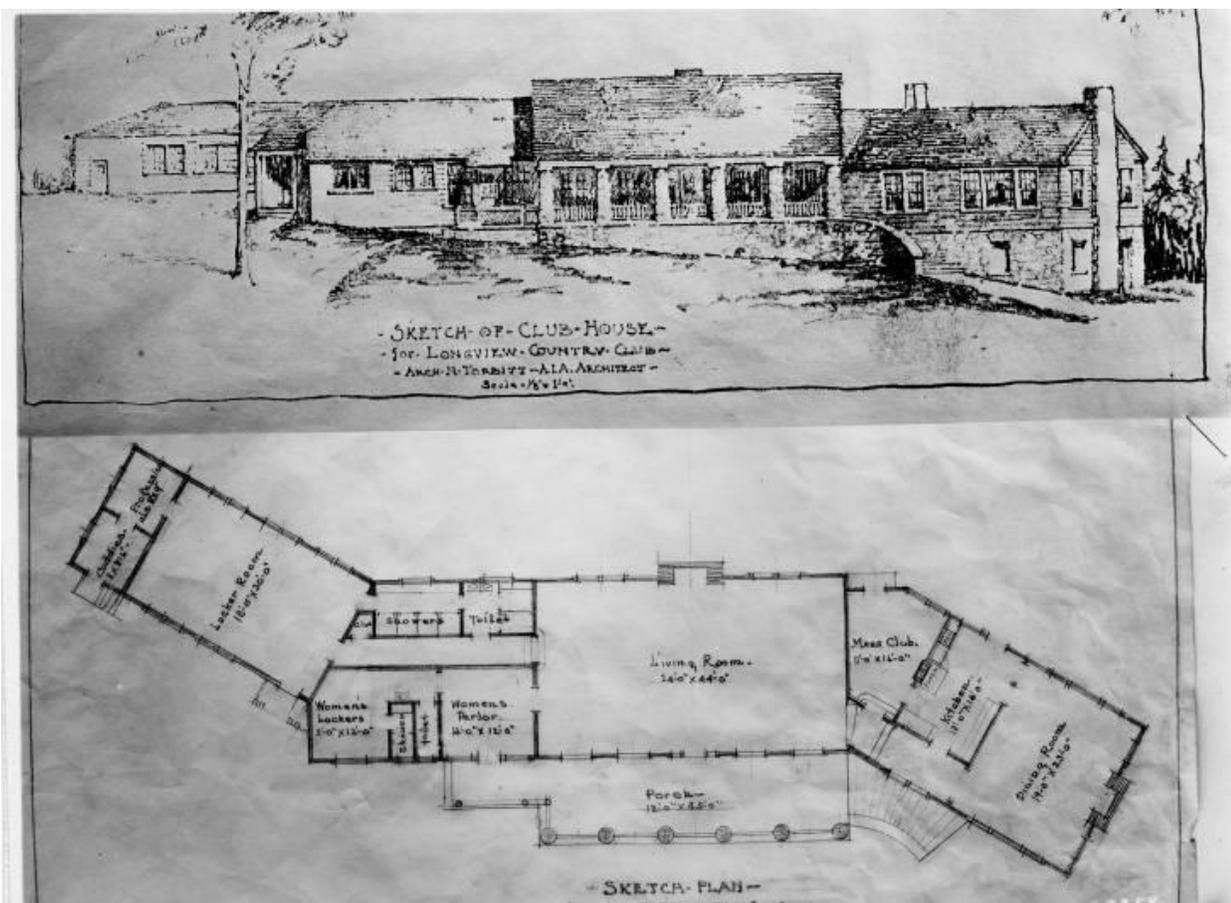
In early 1925, the new president Kenneth Park announced plans to build a new course. What precipitated the move is not clear. Likely, it was related to Long-Bell Lumber Company's intention to build a company railway through the golf course property, which it did in 1926. Even as trains crossed the course, golf continued to be played. Members later recalled that if one cleared the railroad tracks from off the first tee, it was considered a good drive.

The club wasted no time in selecting a new site. Financing assured, it acquired 160 acres of heavily forested land, a short distance up the hill from the original course. The club hired Francis L. James to design the new nine-hole layout. Work began in June, 1925 to clear the tract.

Francis L. "Frank" James (1878 – 1952) was a prolific and well respected golf course designer and builder in the Pacific Northwest. Born in England in 1878, he moved to Philadelphia in 1910 and worked as a greenskeeper at Aronimink Golf Course in Pennsylvania. He learned golf course design under William H. Tucker, a noted golf architect in New York, and became Tucker's field representative in the Northwest. James's Northwest golf courses include Kitsap CC (1924), Linden G&CC (1926), Sand Point CC (1927), Peace Portal GC (1928), Jackson Park GC (1930), University of Idaho GC (1937), Veteran's Memorial GC in Walla Walla (1948), and many others.

In August, 1925, the club incorporated under the new name Longview Country Club. The existing board members of the Longview Golf and Country Club were listed as the incorporators. At its annual meeting later that year, Luke Goodrich, president of the First National Bank, was elected club president.

The cost of constructing the nine-hole course was \$40,000. To finance the project, a goal of 100 members was set and \$250 to join. After the initial membership drive, 72 had signed up. Short of their goal, the club nevertheless decided to proceed with the construction by borrowing \$25,000 from Long-Bell. In addition, R. A. Long personally agreed to donate \$7,000 and a loan for an additional \$10,000 toward a new clubhouse. Long would later forgive the loan.



Longview CC clubhouse sketch - 6-4-1926 (courtesy of Longview Public Library)

The club next hired John "Jolly Jack" Rogers, an English golf professional, who had immigrated to America in 1918. Hired at \$125 a month, Rogers would oversee the construction of the new course while instructing members on the finer points of the game. Rogers would stay with the club until 1929 when he was succeeded by Rube Arneson.



Longview CC Members. L to R: unknown caddie, Jack Rogers, club pro, George Hays, unknown, Homer Stone, George Downey. 5-17-1927 (courtesy of Longview Public Library)

Construction of the new course began in earnest in early 1926, and while the new course was being constructed, members continued to play on the lower course. In 1926, George Sainsbury, West Kelso merchant, proved to be Longview's best golfer, defeating Ralph Sackway for the club championship.



Longview CC's new course under construction. Horse team in center- 5-25-1926 (courtesy of Longview Public Library).

The new 3200 yard, par 36 course officially opened for play on April 30, 1927. In October of that year, William A. "Bert" Taylor (1884 – 1960) beat George Sainsbury for the club championship. Taylor, a local insurance businessman, was considered the strongest player at the time, shooting a course record 64 in 1930.



Longview Country Club's new course par 4 - 5th hole – 3-2-1927 (courtesy of Longview Public Library).



Longview Country Club par 3 - 7th hole – 3-2-1927 (courtesy of Longview Public Library).



Longview Country Club par 4 - 8th hole – 3-2-1927 (courtesy of Longview Public Library).



Longview Country Club par 4 - 9th hole – 3-2-1927 (courtesy of Longview Public Library).

While membership had grown to 130 by 1928, the club's treasurer reported that only half were making regular payments and the club's bank account was overdrawn by \$1,300. Interest payments, primarily to Long-Bell, were not being made. In 1928, another membership drive was undertaken, this time at a greatly reduced initiation fee of \$50. When the drive only brought in eleven new members, club president Goodrich, a banker himself, wrote to R. A. Long in despair:

Personally I have worked just as hard for the country club as I have for the bank in the past year and, while I have never in my life welshed on a personal obligation, it now appears that I am to be put in the position of facing the possibility of the country club, of which I am the president, being compelled to default on its obligation. (R. A. Long's Planned City, The Story of Longview, by John M. McClelland, 1998)

Then things got worse. In October, 1929 the stock market crashed, and the country was in the throes of the Great Depression. Yet, somehow, the club survived. Golf continued to be played through the depression years, though on a very limited basis. At one point, it had only two employees: a caretaker and his wife.

The club began to recover post World War II and by 1958, it was financially stable enough to add a second nine to its course. Today, with its fast sloping greens and tree-lined fairways, Longview Country Club provides a stern test for even the best golfers.

Written by Martin Pool

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