

Early History of Gearhart Golf Links, Gearhart, Oregon

Established 1892, Course Opened 1892, Second Nine Opened 1915, Expansion/Renovation c.1932
Course Architect: 1892: Robert Livingstone; 1915: George Turnbull, George H. Eddy and R. C. F. Astbury;
c.1932: H. Chandler Egan (Probable)



Gearhart Golf Links, likely 1st tee (located approximately 500 yards south of current 18th tee) – c.1920

Built on the sand dunes of the coastal town of Gearhart, Oregon, Gearhart Golf Links is one of the earliest golf courses in the Pacific Northwest. Some say it is the oldest, but others are less certain. The question of Gearhart Links' true beginnings has remained murky over the years.

Walking up the pathway to the clubhouse, you will see signs with the words, "Gearhart Golf Links Est. 1892." When you look out over the first tee and beyond, you will see a links course reminiscent of those in Scotland and Ireland, and indeed it has the feel of an ancient links land. There are stories of even earlier beginnings, stories of several Scotsmen laying out three or four holes as early as 1886, while some say 1888.

When John Astor sent out expeditions in 1810, one by sea and one by land, to establish a trading post on the Oregon coast, there were two Scotsmen on board the ship the *Tonquin*. Astor's men established a fort in Astoria, only fifteen miles from what was to become the town of Gearhart. True also, there was a family of Scots living in nearby Astoria in later years, one even with the name of Robert McEwan. For students of Scottish golf history, the McEwan name is well known as a family of fine clubmakers. However, this McEwan was born in Nova Scotia, Canada and is not likely to have played golf before emigrating to Astoria in 1846. It is tempting to think that if there were Scots living in the area that they must have played golf. But not all Scots played golf, and there is no evidence to suggest that any had done so in Gearhart prior to 1892.

One must also remember that these early settlers on the Oregon coast led a hard-scrabble existence. They settled in these places not because they were wealthy or prosperous, but because they were poor and were seeking a better life for themselves. It is not likely such people would find the leisure time to play golf.

Additionally, the land around what was to become Gearhart, at the time referred to as the Clatsop Plains, was sparsely populated and difficult to get to, even from the settlement of Astoria. It was not until a railroad extension from Astoria to Seaside was completed in 1890, that the land near Gearhart became readily accessible.

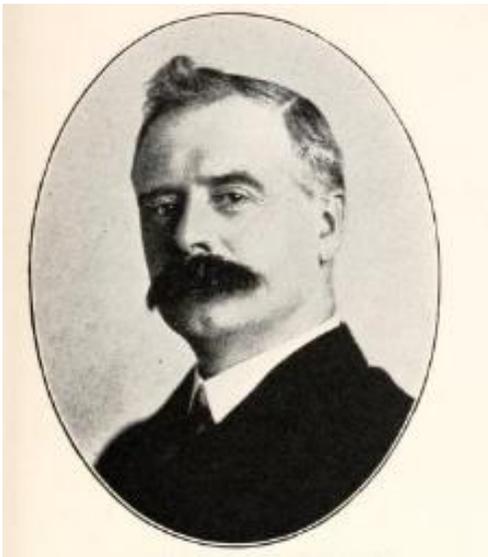
Given that most have accepted that organized golf in American began with the “Apple Tree Gang” in Yonkers, New York in 1888, golf being played at Gearhart in the same year or earlier would be truly remarkable, if true. However, with no documentary evidence to support those stories, they must remain just that, fanciful stories which are neither provable nor disprovable.

What then of the Gearhart Golf Links’ 1892 claim? Many have written on its history, nearly all accepting the claim. However, neither the golf course nor those writers have produced any contemporary, documentary evidence to support this claim. So where did this 1892 date come from?

The first concrete documentary evidence referencing a golf links in Gearhart appeared in Astoria’s newspaper *The Daily Morning Astorian* in 1896. In a brief article, it reported that:

“Mr. R. Livingstone, of Portland, returned home last evening, having spent two or three days at Gearhart putting in a set of golf links.” (*The Daily Morning Astorian* - 7-7-1896)

The phrasing is curious. We assume by “putting in a set of golf links,” the reporter means Livingstone has laid out a series of holes which make up a golf course. The question then becomes, was this the first instance or had he also done so in previous years? All we know from this report is that a golf course was there in 1896. Robert Livingstone, an immigrant from Scotland, had purchased two lots at Gearhart in 1891, therefore it is possible that he may have “put in” a golf links as early as 1892 and but the local newspapers had simply not reported it. The answer to whether the golf course was first laid out in 1892 or in 1896 is not easily answered. Regardless of the answer, it is clear Livingstone played the leading role in establishing golf at Gearhart.



Robert Livingstone (1853 - 1926)

Robert Livingstone was born on November 19, 1853 in Brechin, Scotland. He attended Edinburgh University and practiced law in that city from 1874 to 1885. Living near St. Andrews and Montrose links, no doubt he was acquainted with the game of golf while at Brechin and Edinburgh.

Livingstone emigrated to the United States in 1885, sent by the Scottish American Investment Trust Company to manage their Oregon Mortgage Company in Portland, Oregon. Livingstone would later become one of the founders of Waverley Golf Club, serving as its first president in 1896.

Interestingly, another Scotsman, Alexander Baillie, who founded Tacoma Golf Club in 1894, was also from Brechin. Livingstone and Baillie were well acquainted with one another, each instrumental in establishing their respective golf clubs in Portland and Tacoma.

Livingstone died at the age of 73 on Dec. 31, 1926 in Portland, Oregon.

That Gearhart Golf Links was established in 1892 is supported, though somewhat ambiguously, by a newspaper article which appeared in the April 22, 1923 edition of *The Oregonian*. In a rather confused and puzzling piece, the reporter writes under the headline “Gearhart Course is 32 Years old. Waverley Oldest Green”:

“The oldest course in the state is the Waverley Country club course, which was first laid out in the late ‘80s, and not many years later, in fact 32 years ago, a golf course was established at Gearhart Park, on the Clatsop beach by Robert Livingstone, prominent Portland citizen and Walter J. Honeyman”
(*The Sunday Oregonian* - 4-22-1923)

Doing the calculation, the reporter actually establishes the year 1891 rather than 1892 for Gearhart. In the article, however, the reporter makes a number of factual errors. The first inaccuracy is that Waverley was laid out in the late 1880s. This is clearly false. While golf was reportedly played in the Piedmont district of Portland as early as 1894, it is

well documented that Waverly (now Waverley) Golf Club was founded in 1896, and not in the 1880s. He goes on in the article to describe the changes in the course in the ensuing years, however, he is fuzzy on the details, and inaccurate in other parts.

While the reporter's likely source for his information was Livingstone himself, given the inaccuracies and mistakes in the article, it is difficult to accept the 1891 (or 1892) claim with a high degree of confidence. In addition, an article written 32 years after the purported event is not original source evidence and one should be cautious in accepting the accuracy of its contents. Nevertheless it is an early reference to Gearhart's origins and cannot be entirely discounted.

Perhaps a stronger case supporting the 1892 date appears in a magazine published annually listing all the golf clubs/courses in the United States. Prior to 1926, editions of the *American Annual Golf Guide* list Gearhart Golf Club as having been established in 1912. In the 1926 edition, however, it lists Gearhart as having been established in 1892. The discrepancy may be explained by the fact that around 1912, Gearhart, which had always existed as a resort destination course, formed a club with a membership of its own, and hence the 1912 date. What is not clear is how the 1892 date was arrived at.

GEARHART—GEARHART GOLF CLUB. (Clatsop Co., Oregon)
Estd. 1912. Holes—18. Length—6,800 yds. Par—71. Grass greens. Annual meeting, March. Pres., O. W. Taylor; V. Pres., F. J. Daly; Sec., E. E. Elzea, 212 Railway Exc. Bldg., Portland; Chmn. Greens Com., O. W. Taylor; Professional, John Deggs. Fifteen miles from Astoria, reached by S. P. & S. R. R. Visitors' charges—75c per day. Sunday play permitted and caddies available.

American Annual Golf Guide - 1925

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American Annual Golf Guide - 1926

On the flip side, arguments can also be made that the links were not laid out until 1896. One such argument is a newspaper article which appeared in *The Daily Morning Astorian* in 1894:

“Other towns may play tennis and quoite and high five, but while Astoria is up on those old-time favorites, she is also abreast of more modern ideas, and there is some talk of taking up golf, the pet amusement of eastern society circles. Golf is not as funny as shinny, but it is more scientific.” (*The Daily Morning Astorian - 4-20-1894*)

If golf was being played in 1894 at nearby Gearhart, only 15 miles away, would the reporter not have mentioned it? Is it possible that the reporter was unaware that there was a golf course, however rudimentary, at Gearhart?

Golf in Gearhart is again noticeably absent in an article which appeared the following year, this one in Portland's *The Oregonian* from 1895:

“Golf promises to become one of the standard sports in the Multnomah Club during the coming outdoor season. Portland athletes have been led to take an interest in it through their neighbors in British Columbia, where Scotch and English residents have enjoyed the amusement and exercise it affords for many years Tacoma people first caught the infection on this side of the line, and ... has

a club of 70 active members, with excellent 'links' ... [and] Seattle also has a club." (*The Morning Oregonian* - 4-1-1895)

The reporter was aware that golf was being played in Victoria, Tacoma, and Seattle at the time of his writing in 1895. He gives Tacoma Golf Club (established in 1894) credit for being the first golf club/course "this side of the line" meaning south of the U.S. – Canadian border. If golf had been played at Gearhart since 1892, would he not have been aware of it, and would he not have mentioned it in his article?

Finally, in an article appearing in 1914, *The Oregon Daily Journal* reported that ten golf courses, including Gearhart, existed in Oregon. It reported that "The course of the Waverley Country Club [est. 1896] is the oldest in the state" (*The Oregon Daily Journal* - 11-22-1914)

The question of whether Gearhart Golf Links was established in 1892 or 1896 may never be settled. But we can ask the question which date is more likely to be true.

Gearhart prior to 1890 was largely undeveloped land, with a few cabins scattered about. That all changed when a wealthy businessman Marshall Kinney bought up vast tracts on and around what was to become the town of Gearhart (incorporated 1918). By 1890, Kinney had platted the property, begun the construction of Hotel Gearhart, and extended the railway line from Astoria to Seaside with a stop at Gearhart. Kinney had a vision that Gearhart would become a popular resort destination and he would be proven right. Portlanders could now take the eight hour stern wheeler trip down the Willamette and Columbia Rivers from Portland to Astoria, hop on the train and be at Gearhart the same day.

Once the railway had been extended, and Gearhart became more accessible, Robert Livingstone was one of a number of wealthy Portlanders who began buying up Kinney's lots in Gearhart starting in 1891. The first lots Livingstone purchased were south of what is now Pacific Way, about a half mile south of where the golf course now sits. The purchase documents were signed in October, 1891.

What was Livingstone's motivation in purchasing the properties at Gearhart, where he would spend nearly every summer for the rest of his life? Clearly he was enchanted with the place. Was it because it reminded him of his homeland in Scotland? Was it because he saw that the land was perfectly suited to the game of golf? Perhaps. Would Livingstone have immediately started laying out a golf course upon purchasing his lots in late 1891? Given that there was no infrastructure, no place to call home, on land which he did not own, and in unfavorable weather, the thought that he may have built a course at that time seems a long stretch.

On the other hand, it is not implausible to think that by the summer of 1892, he may have laid out a few holes near the hotel with Kinney's permission, for himself and a small circle of expatriates.

At the time, Livingstone was also active in the affairs of the St. Andrews Society of Oregon, a social club founded in 1875 in Portland, in which members would celebrate Scottish holidays and traditions. Alexander Baillie, founder of Tacoma Golf Club in 1894, was also a member and no doubt Livingstone and Baillie saw each other often. These two men, along with other members of the Society, doubtlessly ventured out to Gearhart to play the game that they loved.

In 1893 and 1894, Livingstone bought additional lots at Gearhart, this time on Cottage Avenue and closer to where the golf course would be located. On one of his lots, he built his summer house, which was completed about 1896. In the meantime, interest in golf had been growing in Portland, and on April 20, 1896, Waverley Golf Club was founded. The founders elected Livingstone as its first president.

Marshall Kinney, who platted the land in and around Gearhart in 1889/90, initially envisioned that the property on which the golf course now sits would remain undeveloped as an open park for visitors. Livingstone would have had to convince Kinney, who knew little about golf, to allow him to lay out a course on Kinney's park land. Kinney, however, was first and foremost a businessman and the idea of adding a golf course next to his Hotel Gearhart must have intrigued him. Golf was becoming more and more popular, and by the mid-1890s, many more people were becoming aware of "America's newest past time." He likely saw the appeal of golf to draw more visitors and buyers to Gearhart.

By 1896, Livingstone had founded Waverly Golf Club, completed his summer home in Gearhart, and likely began the work of expanding the course at Gearhart to nine holes. A number of Waverly members purchased lots and homes at Gearhart, and interest in golf grew. It is possible that the 1896 report that Livingstone was “putting in a set of golf links” referred to the renovation and expansion of the golf course. The following year, in 1897, Hotel Gearhart would for the first time, promote the golf course in its advertisement:

“The beautiful resort at Gearhart Park will open for the season on July 15th.... The hotel has been renovated and a bowling alley put in. Golf links are added as an attraction to resorters.” (*The Daily Morning Astorian* - 7-11-1897)

Golf at Gearhart in the late 1890s and early 1900s was strictly a summertime affair. The season typically opened in mid-July and concluded in late September. The course catered mainly to the guests of the hotel and to Portlanders who had built summer homes there. Using goats and sheep to keep the grass down during the off season, the course no doubt was rough. It is not known what the layout and yardages of Livingstone’s initial layout were, but it would have been entirely different than what it is now. In 1902, Jack Moffat, Waverley’s golf professional, shot a course record 66-69 four times around the nine-hole course, which gives us some idea of its par, probably around 65, given that an excellent score by a golf professional at the time would have been a few strokes over par.



Gearhart Golf Links – c.1910 (Postcard from Martin Pool Collection)

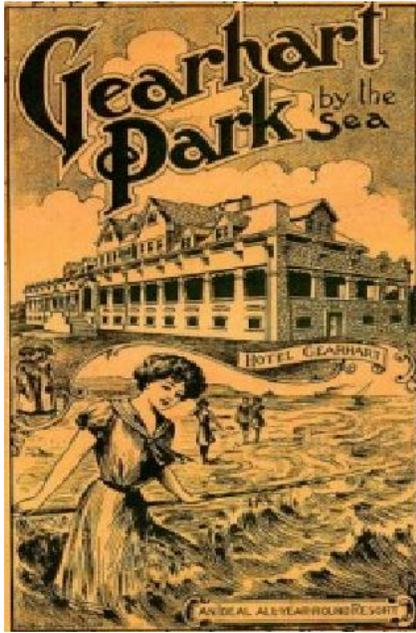


Golfers on 8th green at Gearhart Golf Links – c.1910 (Photo courtesy of Gearhart Golf Links)

The concept of a hotel with a golf course was a novel one in the 1890s, but then everything about golf was novel at the time. Over the next decade, golf resorts would appear up and down the Pacific coast, perhaps none more famous than Hotel del Monte in Monterey, California. Marshall Kinney visited Del Monte in 1900/01 and liked what he saw. By this time, he himself had picked up the game and soon became an avid golfer joining the membership at Waverley. When he returned home he resolved to improve the Gearhart course and give it “a proper name.” He also saw that Del Monte was the stage for biggest golf tournaments in California, and envisioned a similar stage for Gearhart. In 1905, Kinney sold his hotel and golf links to Theodore Kruse, a Portland restaurateur. Kruse had an even grander vision for the resort that Gearhart could become than did Kinney. Near what is now Pacific Way, some half mile south of where the current clubhouse sits, he built a grand hotel, the Hotel Gearhart by the Sea, which opened in June, 1910.



Hotel Gearhart by the Sea – c.1912



Travel brochures and promotional ads for the new hotel appeared in newspapers all across the Northwest as tourists flocked to the resort.

The ads proclaimed it was “The Finest Appointed Hotel in Western America, right on the shore overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and the finest bathing Beach on Oregon Coast.” It also offered tennis, croquet, livery stable, and horses and autos for hire. An adjoining building served as a natatorium (indoor pool).

The ads also proclaimed it had the “Best Golf Course in the United States.”

Tragically, the hotel would only survive five years after it opened. In December, 1915, the grand structure burned completely to the ground. Two years earlier, the original Hotel Gearhart, which was being used for lodging by the hotel staff when the new one was completed, had also been destroyed by fire. There was suspicion that the fire was deliberately set in both cases, but nothing was proven.



Artist Rendering of Gearhart c.1912

In 1910, the same year that Hotel Gearhart was opened, owner Theodore Kruse organized Gearhart’s first major golf tournament. Following Kinney’s vision, Kruse put up the Gearhart Hotel Cup, hoping to attract players from all over the Northwest. Kruse enlisted the help of George Turnbull, Waverley’s new golf professional, to run the tournament.

W. B. Mixer, formerly of Rock Island Golf Club in Illinois, now a member at Waverley Golf Club, won the inaugural event. The match went to the final of the 36-hole match with Mixer winning one up over G. R. Andrews of Seattle. In the women’s division, Mrs. Richard Koehler won by a score of 2 and 1 over Mrs. N. E. Ayer in a nine hole match. Some fifty players from Portland, Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, and British Columbia participated in the tournament. The tournament grew steadily over the next several years as the word spread and its popularity grew.

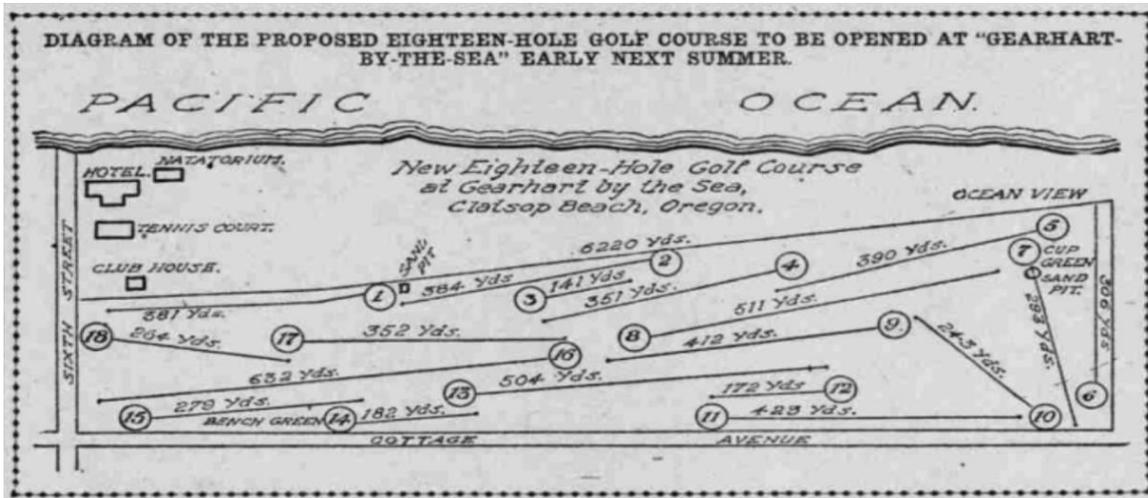
This tournament has been held every year since its inception except 1918, when it was cancelled due to World War I, and again during World War II. The event was temporarily held at Astoria Golf and Country Club from 1937 – 1941, then permanently starting in 1951. It has become a fixture at the Astoria club ever since as the Oregon Coast Invitational.

With the new resort and golf course attracting more visitors each year, golf became a year round activity at Gearhart starting in 1911. Kruse hired George Junor, from a family of golf professionals who had immigrated from Scotland, as

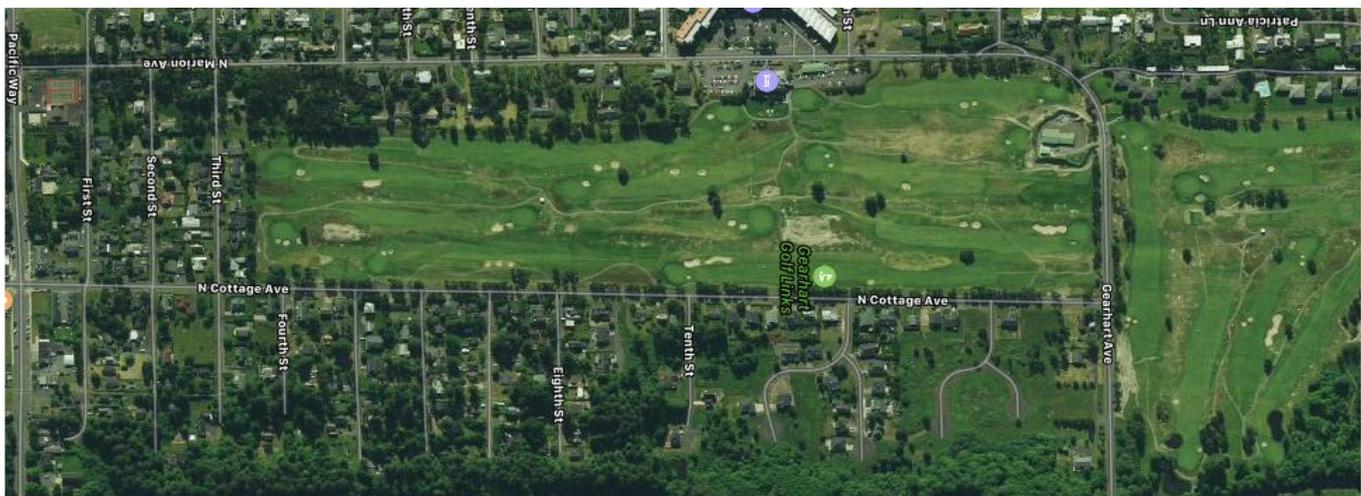
Gearhart's first golf professional in 1912. Junor would only stay for a short time and George H. Eddy, golf professional from England, succeeded him in 1914.

The year 1913 was a landmark year for golf in America as twenty year old Francis Ouimet shook the golfing world by defeating the two golfing giants, Harry Vardon and Ted Ray, in the U. S. Open at Brookline, Massachusetts. Vardon and Ray's subsequent tour of the U. S. (including stops at Waverley, Tacoma, and Seattle clubs) received wide press coverage and spurred on even greater interest in golf.

That same year, Gearhart Golf Links, now operating under the management of Gearhart Park Company, announced plans to expand the golf course to 18 holes. They secured the services of George Turnbull, Waverley's golf professional, to design the layout. Turnbull's proposed design for the new 6220 yard course, as it appeared in the 12-27-1914 edition of *The Sunday Oregonian*, is shown below.



Gearhart Golf Links proposed 18 hole layout – 1914 (The first tee is located near Sixth Street - now Pacific Way)

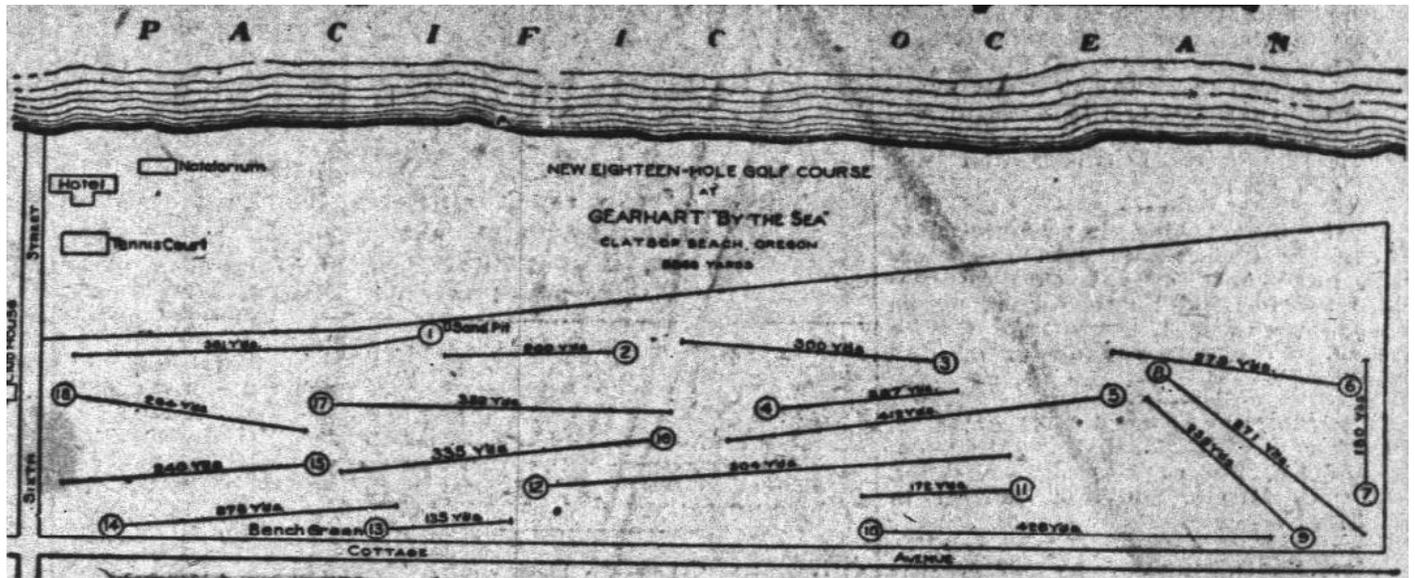


Gearhart Golf Links aerial – 2020 (original layout included the three block section between Pacific Way and Third St, but did not include area north of Gearhart Lane (Ave))

The new 18-hole course opened for play in July, 1915. At the time, Hotel Gearhart was located about a half mile south of where the clubhouse now sits. The course extended some three blocks south of what is now the 18th tee, hence the 1st tee was located near what is now Pacific Way. This three block area between Pacific Way and Third Street was later platted and sold. The area north of what is now Gearhart Lane (Avenue) where holes 2 - 8 now sit, was added around 1932.

When completed, the layout showed considerable changes in the routing of the holes and yardages from the proposed plan. Gone was the 632 yard 16th hole, and the course overall was shortened considerably to 5,413 yards. The changes

were reportedly a collaborative effort by Turnbull, George Eddy, Gearhart's golf professional, and R. C. F. Astbury, Waverley member and a civil engineer by profession.



Gearhart Golf Links 18 hole layout on opening day – 1915

One writer gave this impression of the new layout:

“One of the big surprises that the new 18-hole course offers is the first hole. This hole is called the sand pit and has the angle of a dog’s leg. Golfers who are familiar with the Gearhart links can negotiate the sand pit, a distance of 381 yards in five, but there will be more take six or seven than will make it in five. The Gearhart links have always been considered a very sporty one ... and none of the sportiness of the links has been sacrificed.” (*The Oregon Sunday Journal* - 8-22-1915)

The following month, the course hosted the sixth annual Gearhart tournament. The renowned H. Chandler Egan arrived to play an exhibition match against Rudolph Wilhelm. Egan immediately set a high bar by establishing the course record of 68 on the par 72 course.

On December 21, 1915, five months after the opening of the 18-hole links, and five years after the grand hotel itself had opened, Hotel Gearhart By The Sea burned to the ground. The future of the resort and the golf course was left in limbo.

As late as June, 1916, the question of whether the annual tournament would be held was up in the air. “We are undecided because of the burning of our hotel,” said E. N. Wheeler yesterday. ‘However, a great many golfers have cottages at the beach and others have friends with whom they could stay. We hope to hold another tournament this fall.’” (*The Sunday Oregonian* – 6-4-1916). The popular tournament indeed went forward and the golf course continued to operate without the hotel for the next seven years.

In 1923, the Gearhart Park Company opened the third Hotel Gearhart, a half mile north of the previous location, and near where the current clubhouse now sits. In order to situate the first tee near the entrance to the new hotel, the existing holes were renumbered.



The third Gearhart Hotel - c.1925 (located near the current clubhouse site, opened in 1923 and razed in 1970)



Possibly 16th Green – c.1925 (photo courtesy of Gearhart Golf Links)

The golf course has gone through numerous changes in ownership over the years. As a consequence, numerous renovations of the course were undertaken by new owners. In 1917, A. Vernon Macan, noted Northwest golf course architect, praised Gearhart's location as "the most promising course I have seen in this country." A Seattle Times article from 1922 stated that "The Pacific Coast has never had a finer student of golf links construction than Macan. The Colwood, Inglewood and Gearhart links are of his brainwork and handiwork." (Seattle Times 7-22-1922). The suggestion is that Macan had done renovation work at Gearhart although it unclear as to when and to what extent.

In 1926, Gearhart Land Company sold the golf course to Gearhart Golf Links, Inc. In addition to the original sixty acres, the new company acquired an additional fifty acres north of the existing property. The plan was to expand the golf course to utilize the full 110 acres and to extend it out to the beach to create two ocean holes.

The “two ocean holes” never materialized, and it appears it took several years and yet another change of ownership to realize the anticipated expansion of the golf links. The major renovation to lay out what is now holes 2 – 8, across Gearhart Lane (Avenue), appears to have taken place in 1931/32. The addition of these holes in the north end of the property also meant the redesign and re-routing of existing holes. Who was the designer of this major renovation? Records are scarce in trying to answer this question but there are strong suggestions that the architect was H. Chandler Egan. As early as 1921, Egan in an interview with a reporter expressed the desire to “build a championship course at Gearhart.” (*New York Herald* - 11-27-1921)

More direct evidence comes from a September 27, 1931 issue of the Medford Mail Tribune which reported that H. Chandler Egan had been hired to renovate Gearhart.

Further evidence came from a Seattle Times report the following year:

Two men who had faith in Gearhart as a resort and as a golf tournament center are Gov. Julius Meier and Aaron Frank, Portland merchant and capitalist. They bought the Gearhart hotel, and golf course, or anyhow the controlling interest in it. The present lay-out is after the composite design of A. Vernon Macan of Victoria, Chandler Egan of Medford, Or., and George Turnbull, the big Scot who was professional at both Waverley Country Club and at Gearhart. (*Seattle Times* – 9-4-1932)

H. Chandler Egan (1884 – 1936) and A. Vernon Macan (1882 – 1964) were the two great golf architects of Pacific Northwest golf courses during the golden age of golf in the 1920s. Each designed or renovated numerous golf courses in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, and in Macan’s case, in British Columbia.



Aerial of Gearhart Golf Links – 1937. Two greens can be seen across Gearhart Lane (Avenue). (photo courtesy of City of Gearhart)



Aerial of Gearhart Golf Links – c.1940. Course can be seen across Gearhart Lane (Avenue). (photo courtesy of Gearhart Golf Links)

GEARHART GOLF CLUB



GEARHART-BY-THE-SEA
"Oregon's Finest and Oldest
Resort Course"
BARNEY LUCAS, Proprietor

KINDLY
REPLACE
DIVOTS

Hole	Yards	Par	HDCP. + - 0	Hole	Yards	Par	HDCP. + - 0
1	340	4	8	10	355	4	13
2	350	4	6	11	200	3	11
3	294	4	4	12	352	4	5
4	175	3	4	13	551	5	1
5	387	4	5	14	356	4	7
6	327	4	6	15	150	3	17
7	351	4	6	16	341	4	15
8	506	5	5	17	383	4	9
9	376	4	6	18	485	5	3
Out	3106	36	50	In	3173	36	
				Out	3106	36	
				Tot'l	6279	72	
				Women's Par Same as Men's	Hdep.	NET	

Date _____

Scored by _____

Attest _____

Gearhart Scorecard - c1940

Pars and yardages then and now are shown in the following chart:

c.1932		
hole	par	yards
1	4	340
2	4	350
3	4	294
4	3	175
5	4	387
6	4	327
7	4	351
8	5	506
9	4	376
Out	36	3106

2021		
hole	par	Yards (black)
1	4	324
2	4	349
3	4	263
4	3	176
5	4	360
6	4	338
7	4	334
8	5	456
9	4	346
Out	36	2946

hole	par	yards
10	4	355
11	3	200
12	4	352
13	5	551
14	4	356
15	3	150
16	4	341
17	4	383
18	5	485
In	36	3173

hole	par	Yards (black)
10	4	343
11	3	221
12	4	386
13	5	528
14	4	363
15	3	116
16	4	344
17	4	341
18	5	588
In	36	3230



Likely the finishing hole of Gearhart's Annual Tournament which would later become known as the Oregon Coast invitational – c.1940

In 1946, the three-block section at the south end of the course which had been part of the original layout was platted and sold in individual lots for the construction of private homes.

The most recent renovations took place in 2010 by golf architect Bill Robinson, and again in 2016 when a great number of trees were removed to return the course closer to its original design. Gearhart Golf Links remains a popular resort destination to this day. In 2021, golf history buffs, clad in their period clothes, will roam the course with their niblicks and mashies as the course plays host to the U.S. Hickory Open.

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