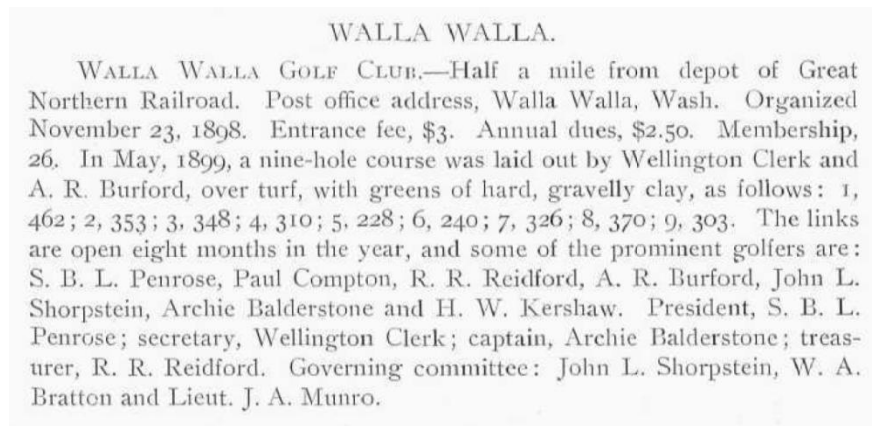


## Early History of Walla Walla Country Club, Walla Walla, Washington

Established 3-15-1915; Current Course Opened 3-31-1923; Second Nine Opened 6-15-1947

Course Architect: 1923 - First Nine: William W. Baker, H. Chandler Egan, Jack Renner  
1947 – Second Nine: Francis L. James

Although Walla Walla Country Club in Walla Walla, Washington indicates their club was established in 1923, the roots of golf in Walla Walla go back a quarter century earlier to 1898. That year, some of Walla Walla's most prominent men, led by Stephen B. L. Penrose, President of Whitman College, organized the Walla Walla Golf Club. A nine-hole course "with greens of hard, gravelly clay" was laid out near the railroad depot in 1899.



Harpers Official Golf Guide - 1900

In 1899, the Pacific Northwest Golf Association, the fifth golf association to organize in the United States, was founded as an association of six golf clubs from Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia. The six founding members of the association were Victoria Golf Club (1893), Tacoma Golf Club (1894), Seattle Golf Club (1896), Waverly Golf Club (1896), Spokane Country Club (1898), and Walla Walla Golf Club (1898).

With this auspicious beginning, these clubs appeared poised to become centers of Northwest golf for years to come. That would indeed prove to be true in Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane, Portland, and Victoria. In Walla Walla, however, organized golf in the early years would prove to be more tenuous than in other cities. Perhaps it was the remoteness of Walla Walla from other cities, or perhaps it was its relatively smaller population, but within two short years, Walla Walla Golf Club ceased to exist.

However, interest in golf among these early organizers did not entirely disappear. In 1908, some of the same organizers, including S. B. L. Penrose, made another push to revive the golf club. Once again their efforts to recruit enough members to form a viable club fell short and golf remained dormant in Walla Walla for another seven years.

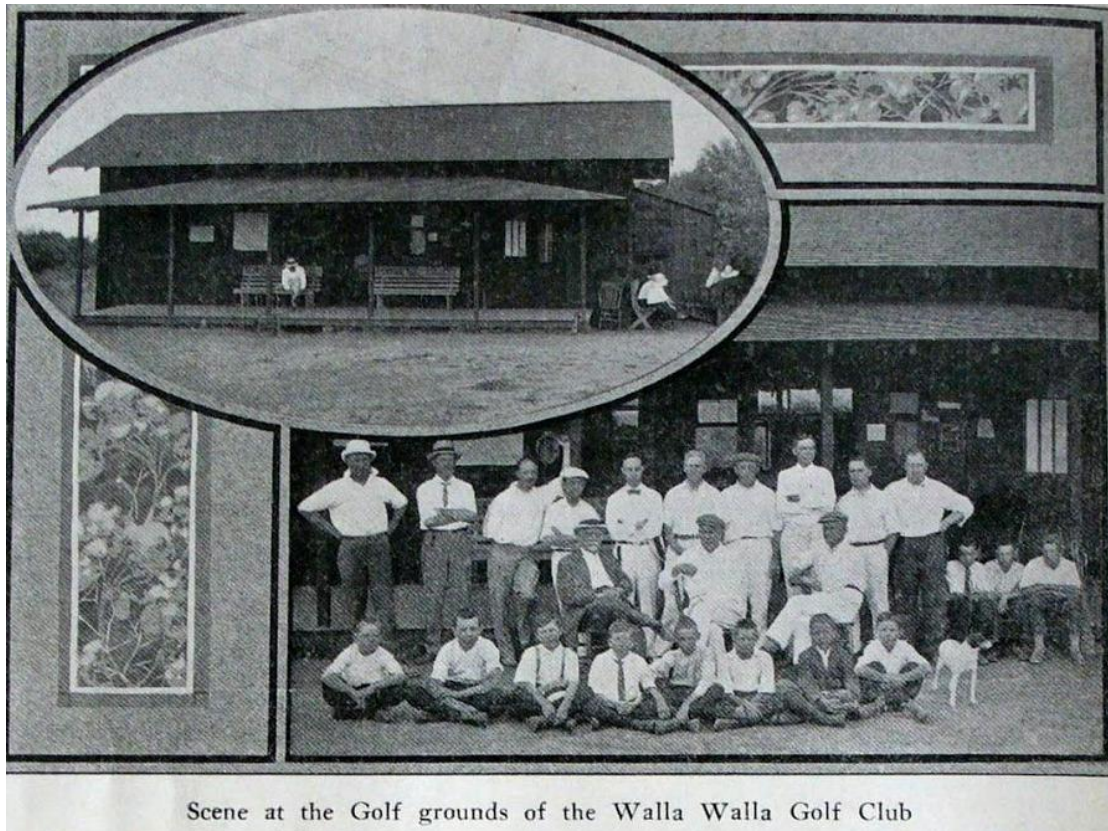
In October, 1913, Francis Ouimet rocked the golf world when he, as a 20 year-old American amateur, won the U. S. Open in Brookline in a playoff against Britain's Harry Vardon and Ted Ray. It was David against two Goliaths. Following Ouimet's victory, golf caught the imagination of Americans all across the country and golf clubs were being organized seemingly everywhere.

In early 1915, John L. Sharpstein (c.1859 – 1934), a Walla Walla attorney and State Senator, along with State Representative Ben F. Hill, took the reins in trying to organize a golf club in Walla Walla yet again. On their trips to Olympia, they had taken notice of the popularity of the game as evidenced by the establishment of Olympia Golf and Country Club in 1914. Sharpstein had been one of the original founders of the club in 1898, and he and Hill were convinced that Walla Walla could support a golf club.

At a meeting held on March 25, 1915, the Walla Walla Golf Club was once again organized. John L. Sharpstein was elected President. Named to the Executive Committee were C. S. Walters, Starr Sherman, Dr. A. A. Campbell, H. G. Thompson, Rev. C. E. Tuke, J. C. Allison and Robert Allen. Also at the meeting were: S. B. L. Penrose, Frank Sharpstein, H. H. Turner, Ben Hill, J. J. Kaufman, L. F. Anderson, George B. Day, E. M. Clingan, P. M. Winans, O. C. Soots, P. H. Weyrauch, Jack Allison, John Pedigo, Everett Smith, and Frank Rees.

Sixty individuals signed the membership roll. The club set a goal of 100 members and the initiation fee was set at \$10. The club wasted no time in setting out to work. A hundred-acre tract of land adjacent to Mill Creek on Bush Street off East Alder was leased from the City, and a nine-hole sand green course was laid out in short order. The club hired George Martin, a transplant from Scotland, as its first golf professional. Later that year, Martin cautiously reported that "golf has taken a toe hold on the Walla Walla people."

The course was no doubt primitive. The grounds were hard and fast especially during the summers as the course baked in the summer heat. Players later would come to call it the "rinky-dink" course.



Scene at the Golf grounds of the Walla Walla Golf Club  
Walla Walla Golf Club Clubhouse, with some members and caddies – 1916 (Up-To-The-Times)

For the next several years, the club held golf matches against other clubs in the area, including those in Pendleton, Baker, Boise, Lewiston, and Yakima. On April 10, 1918 the Walla Walla Golf Club hired its next pro, Jack Renner. He would remain with the club until 1925.



JACK" RENNER.

Professional golfer, Walla Walla Country Club. "Jack" is an artist in his line and one of the best golf players in the Pacific

Jack Renner (1884 – 1965) (Up-To-The-Times)

John "Jack" William Renner was born in Newbiggin, England in 1884 and emigrated to the United States after the turn of the century. He worked as the golf professional at Lochburn Golf Club in Tacoma in 1916-17 and at the Boise Country Club in 1917 before coming to Walla Walla. He was also pro at La Grande Golf Club in Oregon, and Lewiston Country Club in Idaho.

He returned to Walla Walla Country Club in his later years and died in Walla Walla in 1965.



Jack Renner, Walla Walla hickory mashie club

Following World War I, as America returned to a state of normalcy, golf's popularity grew at an even greater pace all across the country and Walla Walla was no exception. In addition, Walla Walla itself was growing, doubling its size from the previous decade. It must have been obvious to the members of Walla Walla Golf Club that interest in golf would only grow, and they made the decision to purchase part of the land that they were leasing from the City. On October 30, 1919 they incorporated the Walla Walla Golf Association to "buy, sell, mortgage, own, hold, lease and operate golf links, country clubs and club houses ..."

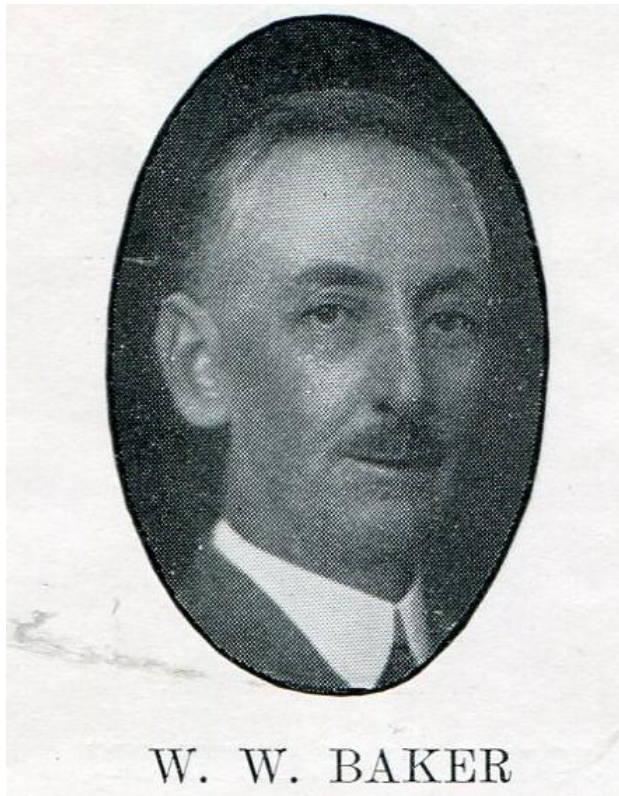
In April 1920, the Association purchased 44 acres from the City at a price of \$4,157. The decision may have been premature. The sand green course along Mill Creek had never been ideal. It was described as rocky, and during late summers, the course became dry and dusty. Then in June, 1921, the club learned that an extension of the street railway would cut into their course, and the club decided to search for another site.

By November, 1921, members of the Walla Walla Golf Club had selected a new location, 70 acres of land off Ninth Avenue owned by John W. Langdon and Hugh McCool. At a meeting held on December 5, 1921, members of the Walla Walla Golf Club decided to issue \$40,000 in bonds to buy the property, build a clubhouse, and construct a golf course. They also decided to re-incorporate under a new name, the Walla Walla Country Club. John W. Langdon would serve as the first President of the club under its new name.



Having three overlapping golf entities, the Walla Walla Golf Club, the Walla Walla Golf Association, and the Walla Walla Country Club, operating during the years from 1915 to 1923, was, to say the least, unusual and confusing. Essentially they were one and the same organization, as many of the same men served on the governing boards of each. The Association, operating as a corporation, oversaw the transition of Walla Walla Golf Club to Walla Walla Country Club. Prominent on each board were John L. Sharpstein, John W. Langdon (1874 – 1930), and William W. Baker. These were the men who, as officers of the Walla Walla Golf Club and Walla Walla Golf Association, purchased the new property, directed the construction of the course, and reorganized the club as the Walla Walla Country Club.

Work on constructing a new nine-hole course began in early 1922. The design of the initial nine-hole course was primarily the work of club member and local banker William W. Baker, who chaired the greens committee. H. Chandler Egan, noted golf architect, consulted on the layout of the greens and Jack Renner, the club's professional, also contributed to the design. Baker was subsequently tasked with directing the construction.



William W. Baker (1861 – 1948) (Up-To-The-Times)

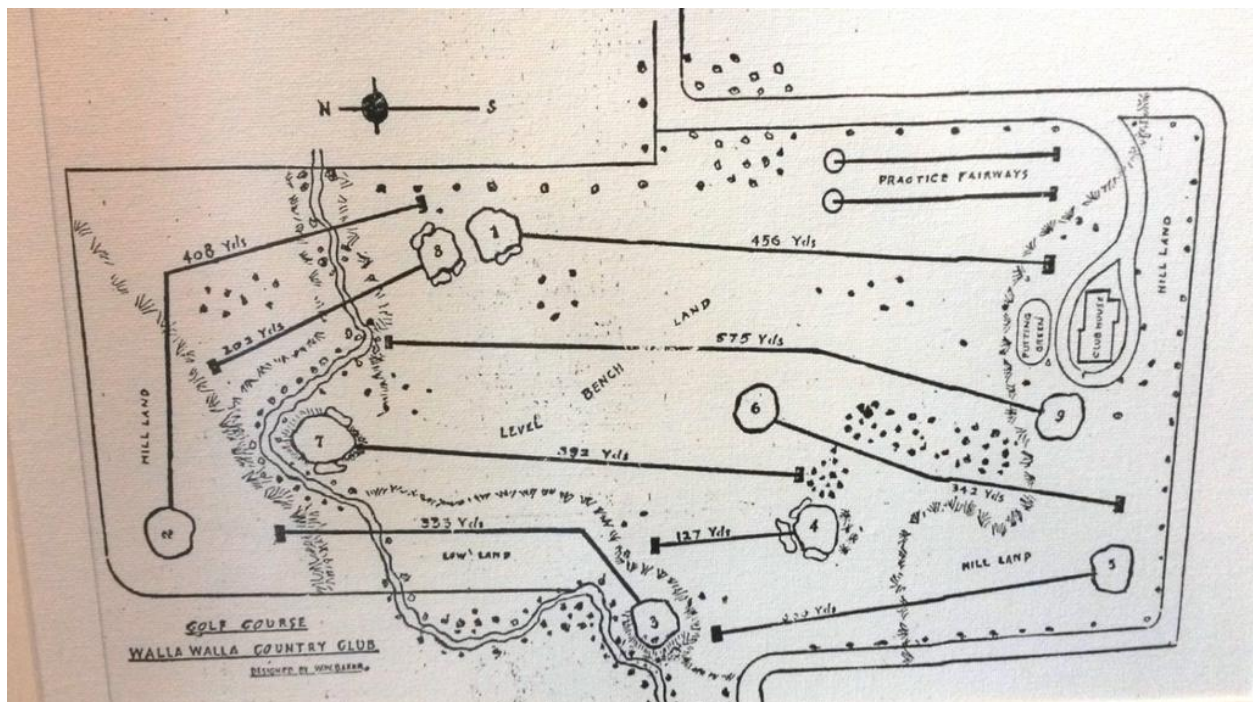
From a prominent, pioneering family in Walla Walla, William W. Baker, was a banker by profession. In his later years he became the president of Baker-Boyer Bank. Known by some as “Walla Walla Willie,” he was evidently much taken with the game of golf as he became an accomplished player at a fairly advanced age.

In 1925, at the age of 64, Baker, as the oldest member of the country club, faced the youngest player Elmer Watson, age 16, in the finals of the Club Championship. The final result is lost to history.

Baker also became interested in golf course design. In addition to his work on Walla Walla Country Club, he went on to design the first nine of the Wenatchee Golf and Country Club in 1923, and the La Grande Golf Club in 1928.

The 3,165 yard, par 36, course opened for play on March 31, 1923. The original nine holes are the back nine holes we see today. The following compares the yardages then and now.

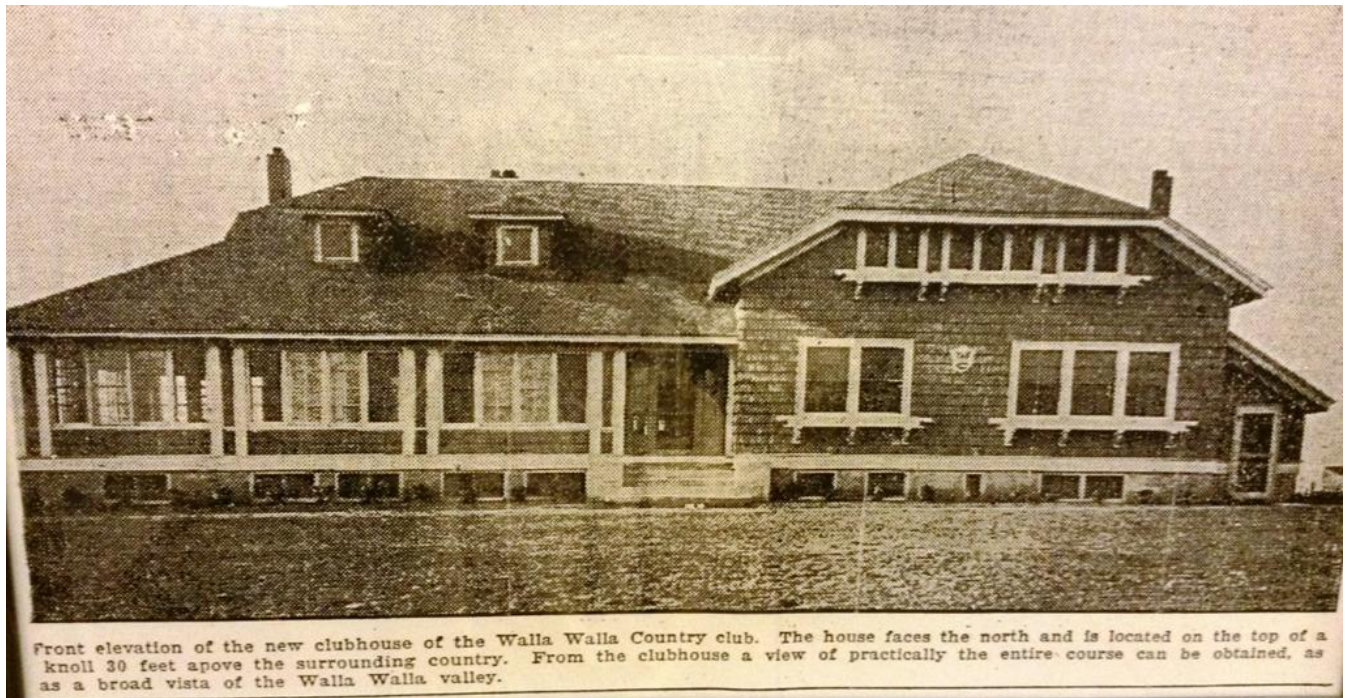
Hole	1923 Yards	Par	2021 Yards (back nine)
1	456	5	452
2	408	4	411
3	333	4	364
4	127	3	145
5	330	4	354
6	342	4	353
7	392	4	395
8	202	3	197
9	575	5	528
Total	3165	36	3199



Walla Walla Country Club First Nine (now back nine) -1923 (Photo courtesy of Walla Walla CC)

It is unusual for golf courses to retain the original routing of holes after nearly a hundred years, yet at Walla Walla Country Club, both the yardages and the routing are remarkably similar.





Walla Walla Country Club Clubhouse- 1923 (Photo courtesy of Walla Walla CC)

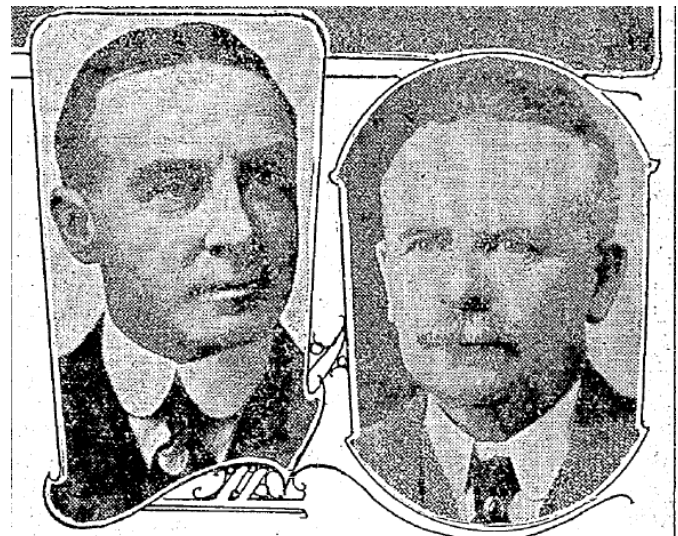
The Seattle Times featured the new course in an article from June 10, 1923:

The Walla Walla Country Club was organized and play was started in 1915. John L. Shrapstein was the club's first president and has always been an inspiration for the cause at home and throughout the Pacific Northwest. The members of the original organization turned in and personally helped clear the site for the nine-hole course. They didn't get all the rocks off, at that, but they did very, very well, indeed. They have left a very good course for the municipal players.

The new course, one and one-quarter miles from Walla Walla, was designed by Jack Renner, the club professional, assisted by H. Chandler Egan. The Medford, Ore., man also designed all the greens, and the greens have been built to the Egan models. They are sloping in the main and, generally, undulating.

The course is situated on a knoll, and occupies sixty-five acres. A wonderful view of the Walla Walla Valley and of the Blue Mountains is obtained from almost any point on the course.

Seattle Daily Times - 6-10-1923



Walla Walla Country Clubhouse and Club Backers.

The town of Walla Walla ranged alongside the big towns of the state—Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane—when it established a municipal golf links the other day. This was done by the Walla Walla Country Club constructing a new nine-hole course and clubhouse, after using the old course for eight years, and then turning the old course over to public use. This photograph of the new clubhouse is supplemented with photographs of John L. Sharpstein (right), first president of the Country Club, and J. W. Langdon (left), present head of the club, two men who have labored hard for the advancement of golf in the old home town.

Following the opening of the new course, the Walla Walla Golf Association sold the old course back to the City, and it operated as the Municipal Golf Club, popularly known as the "rinky dink." The club and the course continued to operate until the 1930s when it suffered the same fate as many other courses during the depression years, and closed its doors.

Following World War II, the City of Walla Walla would build a new municipal golf course to replace the "rinky dink". It hired Francis "Frank" L. James, a noted architect who had just completed the second nine at Walla Walla Country Club to lay out the course. The Veterans Memorial Golf Course opened the course for play in 1948.

It is of interest to note that on April 5, 1936 the renowned golf architect A. W. Tillinghast stopped at Walla Walla Country Club to evaluate the course and make recommendations for modifications. Consulting for the PGA of America, Tillinghast was in the midst of a two year tour visiting some 500 golf courses throughout the United States. He stopped at eight courses in Washington in 1936, sometimes visiting two courses in one day. Following a drive from Pullman, he spent the day in Walla Walla, and filed this report:

President of the P. G. A.

Dear Sir:

This afternoon I finished the long drive from Washington, through Oregon and Idaho to Utah. After sending my report to you last Saturday evening, I went carefully through my new schedule and determined that I could not afford to spend Sunday at Pullman, Washington, resting up as I had anticipated. So I got an early start and drove to Walla Walla, Washington, to call on P.G.A. member Sid Harman at the Country Club there. He has recently taken up his duties at the Walla Walla Country Club as professional and superintendent of the nine holes.

I found the turf on the greens rather run-down and made recommendations to Harman as he requested. I also suggested the eventual removal of a huge mound in the centre of the ninth green. When this is graded out there will be more room for cup-cutting and at the same time make a fairer green to hold shots.

Harman was very much distressed because one of the officials was insisting on the use of a very heavy roller on the greens, which already are very tight. Of course I condemned this practice severely, and emphasized it when I talked with the club president, Ralph Glafke. However I have sent Harman a letter (at his urgent request) on a P.G.A. letter-head, covering this point in detail. Harman asserted that this would help him a lot in keeping the big roller off. Let us hope so.

Courtesy of The Tillinghast Association





Walla Walla Country Club - circa 1950 (photo courtesy of Walla Walla Country Club)

Walla Walla Country Club's second nine (currently the front nine), designed by Francis L. James, opened for play on June 15, 1947.

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 emigrated to America in 1910. 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), Longview CC (1927), Peace Portal GC (1928), Jackson Park GC (1930), University of Idaho GC (1937), Veteran's Memorial GC (1948), and many others.

Two years later, in 1949, the club hosted its first major tournament, the Northwest Open, won by Inglewood GC pro Ed "Porky" Oliver, an outstanding player who represented the U.S. in three Ryder Cups.

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