

**Early History of
Skagit Golf and Country Club, Burlington, WA**
Club Established 1919, Course Opened 1920 (Back Nine); 1971 (Front Nine)
Course Architect: 1920: Frank Orchard; 1971: Skyco Development Co.



There was no joy in Skagit County in 1916. “Skagit County claims the best fishing in the state, its climate is unexcelled, the crops there grow almost overnight and tourists come in flocks to admire the scenery, yet the joy of residents still is incomplete – they have no golf links.” (*Seattle Times* 6-14-1916)

With those words, Frank Hall, a local businessman dealing in sports equipment, joined with others to organize a golf club in Skagit County in the latter part of 1916. Twenty-five residents met on December 1, 1916 and formed a temporary organization called the Skagit County Country and Golf Club. They elected Wilbra Coleman, a prominent local attorney, as president. They selected a site on Clear Lake Road halfway between Sedro-Woolley and Mount Vernon to build their course.

The initial push to form the golf club actually came in part from W. W. Conner, the state legislator (and later the Speaker of the House) representing Skagit County. Conner’s house still stands on the intersection of Avon Allen Road and SR 20. Although an enthusiastic proponent for establishing a golf club in Skagit County, Conner was a politician first and a golfer second. As one scribe wrote, “... the old man didn’t dare go through with the golf links because – well, because the farmer voters wouldn’t stand for it. The agriculturists couldn’t see anything in converting a perfectly good cow pasture into a place to play an outdoor pool game. And, ‘by heck, a danged fool that would start anything of that kind had better have his head examined.’” (*Seattle Sunday Times* – 4-1-1917)

But the idea nevertheless took root, and an organizing committee, consisting of Wilbra Coleman, Leslie Coffin, F. H. Jackson, Harvey La Plant, and G. B. Grace, set out to sell membership in the club during 1917. Initiation was set at \$100 with \$25 annual dues. Membership would be limited to 200.

The organizing effort was gaining momentum, and construction of the first golf course in Skagit County seemed imminent. That is, until global events took over the daily lives of the residents of Skagit County ... and everyone else in the country. America entered the “war to end all wars” raging in Europe. Attention was now drawn to the war effort and golf was the last thing in the minds of most. Efforts to move ahead on forming the club stalled.

At war's end, however, as residents of Skagit County returned to their normal lives, interest in golf revived. Some from the 1916 organizing committee and some new faces met once again to form a golf club. It was 1919 and the group formally established the Skagit Country Club. This time the organizing committee selected the site at the present location off Avon Allen Road to build an 18-hole course. The 120 acre property was owned by Henry Graham and C. J. Eddy. It was viewed as an ideal location as the land had been logged off and presented a panoramic view of the Skagit Valley and the Cascades beyond. It was also central to the main cities and towns of Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Anacortes, and Burlington, places from which to draw their membership.

It's an interesting point of debate whether the Club can be considered to have started in 1916 or 1919. One could argue that the Club was really established in 1916 with the initial organizing effort; it simply stalled due to the onset of World War I and that effort resumed in 1919. Others may argue, however, that the 1916 effort died with the war, and the real beginning of the Club occurred in 1919.

John C. Wixson (1856 – 1936), owner of a local lumber company, was elected first president of the new club. Attorney Wilbra Coleman and F. H. Jackson from the 1916 organizing committee were also prominent members as was Charles W. Wuest, a local businessman.



J. C. WIXSON,
Day Lumber Co.,
Big Lake, Wash.

John C. Wixson (1856 -1936), first president of Skagit Country Club

John Charles Wixson was born on October 5, 1856 in Michigan. He moved to Washington shortly after the turn of the century and settled near Skagit Valley's Big Lake. In addition to being the principal owner of the Day Lumber Company, he also owned the Hotel Wixson in Sedro-Woolley, and also was the President of First National Bank in the same City. He would later serve as state legislator representing Skagit County.

He was elected the first president of Skagit Country Club in 1919. His election was likely due more to his business acumen rather than his golfing prowess as it would appear he was an occasional golfer. He died at his home in Sedro-Woolley on January 4, 1936.

Perhaps more than Wixson, and perhaps more than any other individual, Charles "Charley" Wuest (1886 – 1972) was at the forefront of those pushing the idea of a country club to Skagit County residents. Wuest, who operated a hardware store in Sedro Woolley, came from Tacoma where he was on the board of Lochburn Golf Club (now defunct). He was familiar with the game and was probably the top player in the very early years of Skagit Country Club. Wuest is noted for scoring a double-eagle in 1922 on the par-5 8th hole (current 17th) measuring 472 yards at the time. This with hickory clubs!

The committee hired Frank Orchard, a Bostonian and the then golf professional at Bellingham Golf and Country Club (estab. 1912), to lay out the course. Orchard submitted his plans for an eighteen-hole

course in August, 1919 and commenced work on clearing the land and building a golf course. By February, 1920 much progress had been made:

The trustees of the Country club held a meeting in Mount Vernon recently and report that everything is progressing in a satisfactory manner, and that from indications the Skagit Country club has the finest golf course in the Northwest. The nine-hole course is situated centrally so that Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley, Burlington and Anacortes members will find it equally available.

Thirty-five persons who have applied for membership in the new club have found that the list is filled and they will have to wait their turn in getting into the fold, unless there is a revision of the articles of incorporation in the meantime. The limit was originally set at 200 members, and this was reached a short time ago. (*Bellingham Herald 2-18-1920*)

It is unclear why the original plan for an 18-hole course was abandoned, and the decision made to just build a 9-hole course. Regardless, by the fall of 1920, members were out playing on the 3,150 yard course on what is now the back nine.

The new course was described thus: "It will be a fast course and a difficult one for the scratch player, but the ordinary duffer will be able to make his 45 or 50 here as well as on another course. The putting-greens are all sloping and rolling. There is one water hole – 235 yards [a par 3!] – and it is laid out so that the player who takes a crack at the green from the tee will have to carry 150 yards." (*Northwest Golf and Motor Life – Feb. 1921*)

A few years later, William Steedman, golf columnist for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, wrote:

The golfer who wants to play on a course where nature is architect and man's interference has been held down to a minimum, will revel in a round at the Skagit County Club. The course is laid out on decidedly rolling ground, with delightful avenues of trees all the way around. Artificial trouble is conspicuous by its absence at the Skagit club. Throughout the course there is not a sandtrap.

One 'hazard' the player will encounter at Skagit lends an individual and picturesque charm to the course – sheep [300 of them]. Instead of running a mower over the fairways, the club keeps the grass down by letting sheep graze on it. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer – 10-30-1925*)

Most golf courses in the span of 100 years will undergo many changes: bunkers are added or removed, holes are re-routed, or in some cases removed entirely and new ones built. Yet at Skagit, the routing of the holes has remained remarkably consistent over the 100 plus years of its history.

An aerial photo of the golf course, taken by the U.S. Army in 1937, shows the routing of holes that are essentially the same as today.



1937 U.S. Army Aerial Map (courtesy of Skagit Co.)



2021 Aerial Map (courtesy of Skagit Co., GIS)

Additionally, with the exception of holes 4, 8, and 9 (now 13, 17, and 18), the yardages shown in 1921 approximate those of today as shown below:

1921		
hole	par	yards
1	4	395
2	4	310
3	4	410
4	3	235
5	3	135
6	4	430
7	4	390
8	5	485
9	4	360
	35	3150

2021		
hole	par	yards
10	4	377
11	4	324
12	4	386
13	3	160
14	3	132
15	4	398
16	4	396
17	4	345
18	5	483
	35	3001

By the 1940s, the only significant change was shortening of hole #8 (now #17), to a par 4 with a length of 371 yards which is closer to today's yardage.

YARDS		399	330	408	214	140	420	412	371	370	3064	399	330	408	214	140	420	402	371	370	3064	6128			
PAR		4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	34	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	34	68		
HOLES		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	OUT	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	IN	TOTAL	MDCP	BET	
Fagan		6	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	6		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6			
Bill		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6		6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6			
2D																									
WOMEN'S PAR		5	4	5	4	3	5	5	4	4	39	5	4	5	4	3	5	5	4	4	39	78			
SCORED BY		BY										ATTENT										DATE			

Skagit Country Club Scorecard – c.1940s

During the early part of 1920, as the construction of the golf course was proceeding, members set out to build a clubhouse. They hired a building architect and authorized \$11,500 to build a new clubhouse in the Dutch Colonial style.

By November, 1920 the elegant building was largely completed. The clubhouse was given national publicity when a film crew from Pathe Animated Weekly arrived to film the clubhouse to be shown in newsreels at movie theaters. Sadly, the clubhouse would burn down in 1948.



Skagit Country Club Clubhouse c.1930 (photo by Asahel Curtis - courtesy of Washington State Digital Archives)

On November 5, 1920 the clubhouse opened its doors as reported in the newspapers:



Seattle Sunday Times 11-14-1920

The new club also needed a golf professional to give instructions to members, many of whom had little or no experience with playing the game. Frank Orchard, who had been hired as Skagit's golf architect, left his position at the Bellingham G&CC to become Skagit's first golf professional. His tenure was short as he left the job a year later to become the pro at Rainier Golf and Country Club in Seattle. Orchard was followed at Skagit Country Club by Scotsman David Craig (from 1922 to 1925), then by Jack J. Martin (from 1926 to 1928).

David Craig (1881 – 1962) was one of a large number of Scottish and English golf professionals who came to America to ply their trade. Jobs were scarce at home, and hundreds, if not thousands of these golf professionals saw opportunities in America as the golf boom took hold. It was a rare club which did not employ a Scottish or English golf professional in the early days of the twentieth century.



Dave Craig gives lesson on hitting a cut shot with a mashie-niblick (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer 3-25-1925*)

David Craig born in St. Andrews, Scotland on July 25, 1881, emigrated to the United States in 1906. He began his golf career as an apprentice in the shop of Robert Forgan, famous clubmaker of Scotland, and worked for a time under Old Tom Morris himself.

He was the golf professional at various golf clubs/courses around the Northwest, including Vancouver Golf Club in British Columbia, Linden Golf Club in Puyallup, as well as Earlington Golf Club in Renton and Washington's own St. Andrews Golf Club in Orillia, both now defunct.

A diminutive man, "Wee Dave" was considered a top notch clubmaker and instructor. He returned to his Scottish homeland in the later years of his life where he died on November 18, 1962.

By 1923, the club was well established and the following entry appeared in the national publication American Annual Golf Guide:

MOUNT VERNON—SKAGIT COUNTRY CLUB. (Skagit Co.)
Estd. 1919. Holes—9. Length—3,100 yds. Par—37. Grass greens.
Annual meeting, January. Pres., N. B. Hannay; V. Pres., Paul Rhodius
and H. L. Dodge; Sec., W. J. S. Gordan; Treas., Frank H. Jenne;
Chmn. Greens Com., Wilbra Coleman; Professional, David Craig.
Five miles from city, reached by automobile. Visitors' charges—\$1.00
per day. Sunday play permitted and caddies available. (Pac. N. W.
G. A.)

American Annual Golf Guide - 1923

Match play was the predominant form of competition during this time. Many inter-club matches, more commonly known as "home and away," were held with Bellingham G&CC and Everett G&CC. Both men and women members travelled as far away as Yakima, Olympia, and Aberdeen to play their matches.

Skagit Country Club's first interclub match was held on October 22, 1922 against a much stronger team from Bellingham Country Club. Led by their pro Ian Dalgliesh, another Scot, the Bellingham men defeated the Skagit men captained by pro Dave Craig by a score of 54 – 18. In a return match the following week, the Skagit men, playing on their own course, made a much better showing but again came out on the short end of a 33-25 score.

It took less than a year before Skagit men became more competitive in their inter-club matches. Skagit Country Club and Everett Country Club (estab. 1910) matched up for the first time in July, 1923. Regarded as distinct underdogs to the more established club, Skagit men managed to halve the match 30-30. In a return match, Skagit men lost a close one 31-30.



Skagit Country Club Stamped— Ladies Hickory Mid Iron

Skagit women were also very active in the club. They too held numerous inter-club matches, travelling long distances in some cases.

Their first recorded match was in 1924 when they battled a powerhouse team from Rainier Golf Club, to whom they lost 30-3. As more Skagit women played and as their skills developed, they became very competitive in later years.

Top woman golfer at Skagit in the early years appears to have been Mrs. Raymond (Blanche) Dickinson who was club champion in 1925.

By 1925 youth had taken over the tournament scene at Skagit.

The photo on the right shows Denton Rossell (1909 – 2004) in front of the clubhouse. The caption reads: "This Mount Vernon youth, a junior in high school, Denton Rossell, holds the course record [36 for nine holes] of the Skagit Country Club; won the president's cup, a handicap affair, at the final expense of his father, and topped it all off by winning the annual club championship the other day. Both his final matches, in the cup and in the title event, were at thirty-six holes." (*Seattle Times* – 9-6-1925)

Rossell and Ed Knipe, another high schooler, would combine to win the club championship at Skagit Country Club for five consecutive years from 1925-29. Both would go on to become star players and teammates on the University of Washington golf team.

Rossell would pursue a career in music becoming the director of Seattle Civic Opera while Knipe returned to Mount Vernon to become an attorney. Neither appears to have continued competitive golf after his university years.

It would be fifty years after the founding of the Club, in 1969-70, that a group of real estate brokers, led by James McNett, would buy and develop the property and build what is now the front nine to make it an 18-hole course. The second nine holes, under the auspices of Skyco Development Company, would be completed in 1971.

Over the years, The McNett family continued to be involved in the affairs of the Club, and today James McNett's grandson, Craig Welty, serves as the Director of Golf and head professional.

CHAMP AT 15



DENTON ROSSELL.



Skagit Golf and Country Club showing 10th and 18th holes – circa 1970 (photo courtesy of Skagit G&CC)

Today the course offers a challenging test for golfers with its narrow, tree-lined fairways on the front nine, and the more open but longer back nine. The course is always in superb condition and the greens are fast and rarely offer a level putt.

Written by Martin Pool
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fas1863@hotmail.com
www.nwhickoryplayers.org