

Early History of Rainier Golf and Country Club, Seattle, WA

Established March 11, 1919

First Nine Opened 9-26-1920, Second Nine Opened 5-10-1924

Course Architects: Robert Johnstone and A. Vernon Macan

Following World War I, Seattle had but four golf courses: The Seattle Golf Club (1896), Jefferson Park Municipal Golf Course (1915), and the two now-defunct 9-hole University Golf Club (1914) and the 6-hole West Side Golf Club (1915) in West Seattle. There was also the 9-hole Earlington Golf and Country Club (1912), also defunct, in Renton.

Choices were limited for the Seattle resident seeking to take up this new game that had become suddenly popular. There was a long waiting list for membership at the Seattle Golf Club. Tacoma Golf Club (1894) and Everett Golf and Country Club (1910) were too far, and Jefferson Park, where some 100,000 rounds per year was being played, too congested.



Charles A. Reynolds, founder and first president of Rainier Golf and Country Club

A group consisting of mostly Seattle businessmen first met in 1918 to organize a new golf club in the Seattle area.

Charles A. Reynolds, a prominent Seattle attorney and later judge, led the organizing effort. Reynolds, who served as the president of the Jefferson Park Golf Club, would be named the first president of Rainier Golf and Country Club.

The group spent six months that year scouting for suitable land. They eventually settled on a 107-acre property owned by Mrs. Christine Beals off Des Moines Road on the southern outskirts of the City. They were able to secure a lease with an option to buy, which they did a few months later.

On February 11, 1919, the group met and gave the club its name, Rainier Golf & Country Club, an easy choice given the view of the great mountain from several vantage points on their newly acquired land. The club formally organized on March 11, 1919.

The organizing committee wasted no time in setting out to build a golf course. They had already selected Robert Johnstone, club professional at the Seattle Golf Club, to lay out the course. Johnstone, a transplant Scotsman from North Berwick, was considered the foremost authority in the Northwest on all matters related to golf.

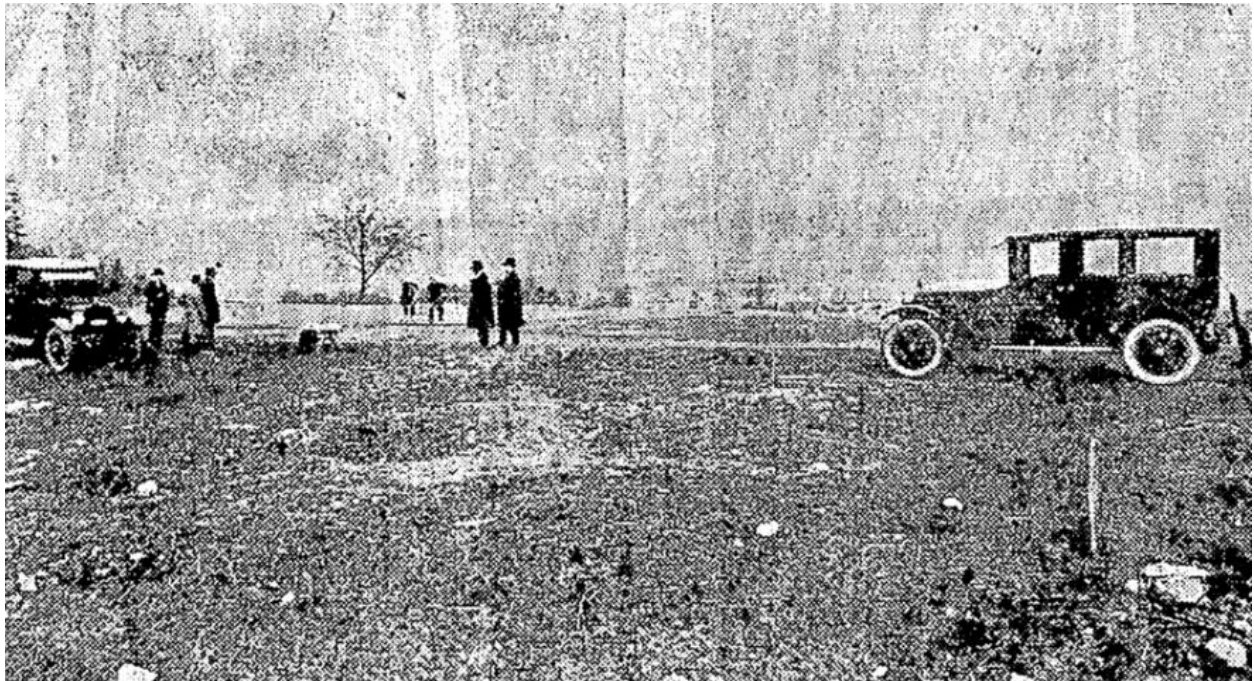
Robert Johnstone, the Seattle Golf Club professional, and certainly the foremost golf course architect in the west, has been in conference with the temporary organization officers, and will be employed undoubtedly to lay out the course. He will act in an advisory capacity throughout the entire construction.

His last major work in cutting golf links out of virgin acreage was the municipal links at Spokane. He had done a similar service shortly before for the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners when he laid out the municipal links at Jefferson Park. The impress of his work has been felt on almost every course in the Pacific Northwest, and at links in British Columbia and in California. His own magnificent course, the Seattle Golf Club, is a monument to his efforts.

Seattle Daily Times - Feb. 23, 1919



Robert Johnstone (1874 – 1937)



Charles A. Reynolds and Robert Johnstone surveying future site of Rainier clubhouse (Seattle Times 4-4-1920)

By the March 11 meeting, Johnstone had presented to the club the design for the full 18 holes. The first nine would be on the south side of the club house, and second nine of the north side, the reverse of today. Work would begin with holes 10 – 18 (now 1 - 9) first. Johnstone felt the finishing holes, and particularly the 18th, were the most important ones on the course. The 18th green should be located such that it would provide the best view for members and spectators as they sat on the patio of the soon-to-be-built clubhouse. Many matches would be decided, one hoped, on the 18th where the inherent drama would entertain the spectators.

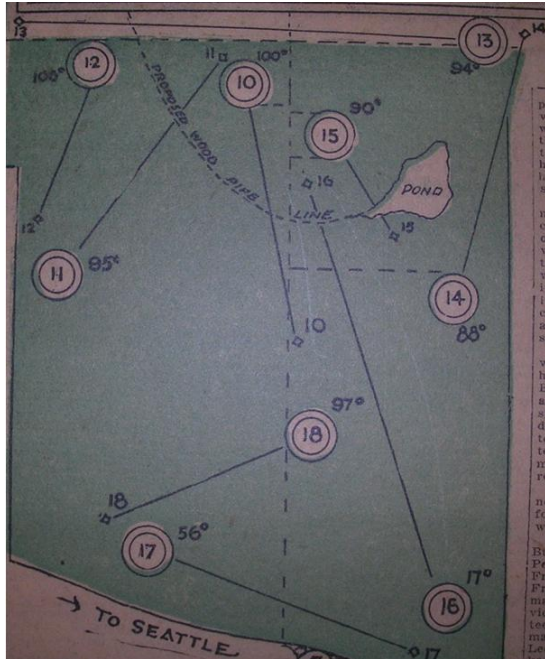


Diagram of Holes 10-18 (now 1 – 9) Seattle P-I - Aug. 29, 1920

The topography of the land for the 18th hole (now the 9th), however, presented a challenge. It was not ideal terrain, and it hand-cuffed Johnstone. He thought long and hard over the design, and after considerable fretting, he came up with a solution:

“The home hole ... is the only one that really is going to be difficult to carve out. It is played diagonally along the slope of the hill. This could not be avoided ... however, with a possible series of terraces the play could be carried along so that the player would not have any bad stance.” (Seattle Times Mar. 16, 1919)

The design and construction of this hole gave Johnstone fits until completed.

Construction of the course soon followed. On May 18, 1919, members of the new Rainier Golf and Country Club held its first organized event, a picnic, to celebrate the start of the course construction as told in this droll story by John Dreher, the golf columnist for the Seattle Times:

Rainier G. and C. Club Will Have Outing Today at Site of New Links.

Somebody put the "rain" in "Rainier" and the Rainier Golf and Country Club took an awful chance when it selected that moniker for its organization. Just how lucky the members are with that handle will appear today when they plan to hold a picnic at the site of their new links along the Des Moines Boulevard. If it rains the Rainierites will postpone their picnic a week. If the weather is at all all right, or nearly all right—all right, the picnic goes.

Early in the week a gang of men went to work at clearing the recently purchased first unit of the links—sixty-five acres—and these stump-blowers, when they threw up their wall tents, gave the first sign of the Rainier Golf and Country Club coming to life. Ever since Tuesday they've been makin' the valley resound with their explosions, while the sky has been painted with the glare of their burning stump piles.

Stump-blowing and a great bonfire, incidentally, are part of today's picnic program. To this outing every member is invited to attend and to bring along the family and also the families of others who might be interested in the Rainier Golf and Country Club.

Arrangements.

Those who have automobiles and also have a bit of room to spare are asked to take along a brother member or a friend. The hour of the opening is set for 3 o'clock this afternoon. Everybody is expected to bring along food, cooked or uncooked—the latter can be prepared on the grounds, if one brings along his own camping irons. Coffee, cream and sugar will be furnished by the club.

The committee on arrangements has arranged for adequate table and bench accommodations. They will also carefully look after all the automobiles parked on the grounds and will have special accommodations for the women and the children. An orchestra will be there the major portion of the day and nobody is expected to leave before 11 at night. The bonfire will keep everybody warm and the orchestra will keep them awake.

During the afternoon there will be competitions of midiron and mashie character. It may be possible that a driving contest will be staged. This will depend upon how many stumps the workmen have removed and the amount of space they have cleared.

There will be races for the fat and the lean, for the grown-ups and the not-grown-ups. Somebody may remember some good kissing games.

There will be sticks of dynamite for the children to play with—the contractors have several tons of them ready to pass out.

By the summer of 1920, construction had progressed to the point where holes 10-18 (now the front nine) were nearly ready for play. And on September 26, 1920, the as yet nine-hole course formally opened with an inaugural tournament. The course conditions were still rough and the best scored turned in that day was an 85 for two loops around the course.

On opening day, there were 225 members paying the \$5 monthly dues. The temporary clubhouse was yet a small structure which would later be used as a caddie shack and maintenance building. Work on the second nine began immediately.

Almost simultaneously, beyond the north end of Seattle, the Inglewood Golf Club (est. 1919) also formed. Inglewood too hired Robert Johnstone and A. Vernon Macan, as their golf architects. These two clubs, virtual twins in their development, would become fierce rivals in many inter-club matches in the years to come.

In November, 1919 Rainier hired its first golf professional, Robert “Bobby” Pringle Collins (1883 – 1941). Collins was born in Scotland and came from a family of golf professionals. Collins would take charge of the actual construction of the course, as well as make golf clubs and give instruction.



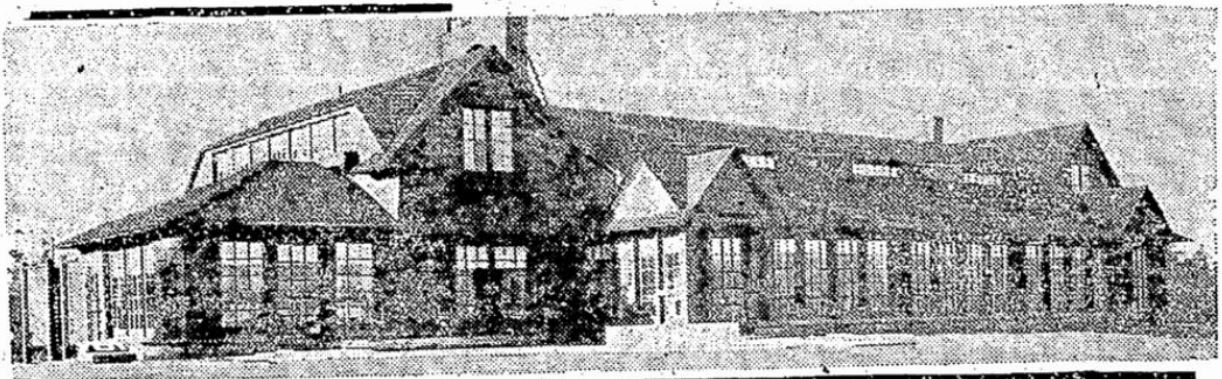
Robert P. Collins (First Rainier Club Pro) Brassie



Frank Noble (Third Rainier Club Pro) Mashie Niblick

Rainier hired its second golf professional, Frank Orchard, in June, 1921. Orchard had been the golf professional at Bellingham Golf and Country Club for the previous six years and had recently designed Skagit Golf and Country Club near Mount Vernon. Orchard’s stint at Rainier was short, lasting only a few months. Frank Noble was hired as the next golf professional and he would remain at Rainier until 1927. Other notable professionals at Rainier were Walter Pursey, formerly of Inglewood, who was there from 1940 to 1953 and Ray Bennett from 1960 to 1982.

On New Year’s Day, 1923, the clubhouse, complete with furnishings, at a cost of \$20,000, was opened.



Rainier Golf and Country Club House.

These are interior and exterior views of the home into which the Rainier Golf and Country Club will move tomorrow, holding an open house from 2 to 5 in the afternoon and closing with a dance from 8 to 11 o'clock. The interior view shows the big living room, beautifully and comfortably furnished, and ready for tomorrow's occupancy. From the windows of the clubhouse, as shown fronting in this photograph, a magnificent view of Mount Rainier may be had through a rift in the hills. It was this view of the mountain, from this clubhouse site that gave the club its name, "Rainier."

Perhaps due to the costs associated with building a new clubhouse, the construction of the second nine at Rainier progressed slowly.



Arthur Vernon Macan (1882 – 1964)

In June, 1923 Rainier hired Arthur Vernon Macan, noted golf architect from British Columbia, to complete the construction of the greens of the second nine. In addition to Rainier, Macan's design includes Inglewood, Broadmoor, Fircrest, Columbia Edgewater, and many others in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California.

Golf holes in the early days of course design tended toward straight lines. The concept of doglegs as a design strategy, rather than a geographical necessity, was a relatively new idea at the time.

One who would use doglegs to great effect in his course design was Macan. No doubt impressed by Macan's ideas, Rainier would go beyond the original scope Macan's work, and ask him to re-design the second nine. Macan would make substantial changes to seven of the nine holes.

When he had finished, Macan, speaking of his work at Rainier, said:

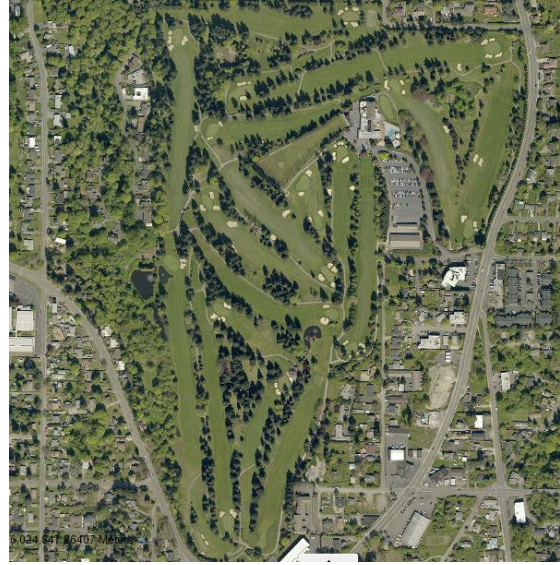
"I've never done anything in my life that I am so satisfied with, and I believe that three of those holes, Nos. 1, 3 and 8 [now 10, 12, and 17], will rank with any anywhere. I am only saying what I deeply feel. I am willing to let my work in golf course designing go before the world with those three holes as a sample."

Macan was not the only one pleased with his work. Rainier members must have also been happy with the results as they asked him to review the original nine holes for other possible modifications. Clearly unsatisfied with the original nine, Rainier continued to make changes to the greens and the routing of this nine in subsequent years.

With the expenses of the new clubhouse and the course construction, combined with a slower growth in membership than they had hoped, Rainier was going through a difficult period. On March 9, 1924 Rainier invited its members to a "rock picking" contest. As the fairways on the new nine were being readied for its opening, members who picked the most rocks were offered prizes. This is telling, as clubs would typically hire out labor for such tasks. "Rock picnics" were common usually among financially strapped clubs. On May 10, 1924, three and a half years in the making, the second nine at Rainier was finally and formally opened. By May, 1925, the goal of 400 members was reached.



Rainier Golf & Country Club Aerial view - 1936



Rainier Golf & Country Club Aerial view - 2015

On September 24, 1922, the first of many “home and away” matches were held with Rainier’s rival club Inglewood Golf Club. Forty-three golfers from each club, the most that the City had seen in its history, participated in a match play competition, won by Inglewood at their home course by a score of 82 to 39.

On May 26, 1923 the first Pacific Northwest Professional Amateur Golf Championship tournament was held at Rainier with 22 teams taking part. An innovative idea at the time when match play was the predominant form of competition, this tournament paired the club professional with the top amateur of the club in a best-ball medal play format. This tournament proved to be highly popular in the ensuing years. One of the outstanding performances in the tournament came in 1925, when Mortie Dutra, club pro from Grays Harbor, shot a 64 on his own ball, including an eagle on the 9th (now 18th) hole when he drove the 307 yard hole and made the four-footer. This at a time when players were still using the wood-shafted hickory clubs!

Rainier G & CC hosted its first major tournaments in 1929 when it became the site of the Washington State Open Championship as well as the Washington State Amateur Championship. Frank Rodia, club professional from Broadmoor Golf Club, won the Open title with a score of 283. In the Amateur contest, two Rainierites, Alex Duncan and Johnny Shields met in a 36 match play final where Duncan prevailed 2 and 1.

Over the years Rainier Golf and Country Club has hosted many important championship events and has produced some of the best men and women players in the State.

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