

Early History of Spokane Country Club (now Kalispel Golf & Country Club), Spokane, WA

Established June 10, 1898; First Nine Opened 7-8-1911; Second Nine Opened 1914
Course Architects: 1898: members; 1911: James M. Barnes; 1914: David H. Findlay?

Considered the fourth oldest golf club in Washington State, Spokane Golf Club was founded on June 10, 1898. Newspaper accounts, however, tell that golf was being played in Spokane as early as 1894. A July 5, 1894 issue of the Spokane's *Daily Chronicle* published the following: "A new game is about to amuse Spokane. This game is golf, a sport which at first seems ridiculously simple but which in practice has held its victims with a strange fascination in every town where it as appeared."

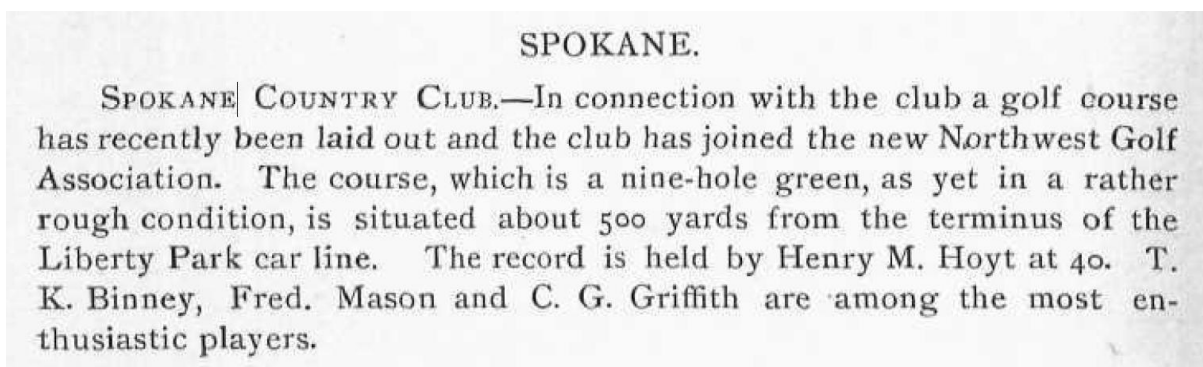


Spokane Country Club. Hole #1 tee – circa 1901 (courtesy of Golf USGA Bulletin)

As told by a Mrs. F. Lewis Clark in an interview given in 1935, golf was first introduced in Spokane by Henry M. Hoyt, a prominent attorney, who, returning from a trip to Pennsylvania, brought back with him three golf clubs and a half dozen golf balls. They then laid out a few holes using tomato cans as cups.

In her interview, Mrs. Clark paints the incongruous picture of men and women, dressed in their finest, including the traditional red jackets, wielding brassies and mashies on the rough farm lands of Spokane. It was a sight at which many in Spokane puzzled and wondered.

Nevertheless, interest grew quickly among Spokane's high society, and the Club was firmly established with the clubhouse construction in 1898.



Official Golf Guide 1899

The nine hole course, described as short but sporting, was laid out. Each hole had a name, mostly prosaic, yet descriptive: 1 - Ananais, 2 - Downer, 3 - Upper, 4 - Ravine, 5 - Middy, 6 - Lone Pine, 7 -

Sand Pit, 8 – The Roses, 9 – Home. The significance of the name of the opening hole “Ananais,” a biblical figure who was struck dead for lying, is curious and mysterious. Perhaps it served as a warning to golfers on the first tee to keep an honest scorecard.

“Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the course is the first tee. It is situated on the pinnacle of a high rock some fifty feet above the course, which is covered by a dense growth of evergreen trees for a distance of 100 yards from the tee, and which must be carried on the drive, since it is utterly impossible to play out of the trees. It is one of the most ticklish and awe-inspiring teeing-grounds the writer has ever encountered.”



Spokane Golf Club. General View – circa 1901 (courtesy of Golf USGA Bulletin)

As one of the pioneering golf clubs in the Northwest, Spokane Country Club, then called Spokane Golf Club, was one of six founding members of the Pacific Northwest Golf Association. The other five founding members of the PNGA are: Victoria Golf Club (1893), Tacoma Golf Club (1894), Waverly Golf Club (1896), Seattle Golf Club (1896), Spokane Golf Club (1898) and Walla Walla Golf Club (1898). The PNGA, established on February 4, 1899, is considered to be the fifth oldest golf association in North America.

During the early years the Club sought to find more suitable land and in 1904 relocated the course from its location in Liberty Park to Hart Field. When the newly constructed clubhouse burned down on May 31, 1908, members sought to relocate once again. On April 19, 1910 the club purchased a 140 acre farm land, located on the banks of the Little Spokane River some eight miles north of city center. A number of members objected to the new location as being too far from the City. The roads were rough, automobiles were a new innovation, and few had the means to get to the course. A jitney was provided by the club to transport golfers to and fro, but this too remained unsatisfactory to many. Some of the disgruntled members chose to remain at the old location and eventually formed their own club which was later to become Manito Golf Club, established in 1917.

The new course opened for play on July 8, 1911 as a nine-hole course. It is not entirely clear who designed the latest layout. While the club has attributed Jim Barnes as its golf architect, original documentary evidence is scarce. No less a personage than the famous golf architect Tom Bendelow was purported to have visited the club in 1909, and then later by H. H. Barker, a noted golf professional and architect. Barker drew up a plan for the course, and some have credited the design to him. However, it turns out the plan was for a location that the Club was considering at the time but later abandoned.

Given that Barnes was still at the Club when the property on the banks of the Little Spokane River was purchased, and given that the ranks of golf professionals, much less golf architects, in the Northwest were few, it is very likely that Barnes was the actual designer of the original nine holes.

One of the earliest professional golf matches in the Pacific Northwest took place in April, 1903 when Alex Smith, then the golf professional at Spokane Country Club defeated John Moffat, the Waverley Golf Club professional by a margin of 6 and 5. Both men were transplanted golf professionals from Scotland. Their match was contested over 36 holes with a purse of \$100.

A similar match took place in September, 1906 when Robert Johnstone, the Seattle Golf Club professional defeated Spokane Country Club professional Martin (first name unknown) by the same margin over a 72 hole contest and took home the \$100 prize.



Alex Smith - Spokane CC pro 1903

Mrs. Clark recalls that the first golf professional hired was named Wilson, whose first name is lost in the records. He was followed by Alex Smith in 1903, L. S. Jacobs (from Victoria, B. C.) in 1904-1905, Mr. Martin (whose first name is also lost) in 1906, and later the great "Long Jim" Barnes in 1908-1910.

James Martin Barnes arrived at Spokane in the spring of 1908. Barnes was then a young and ambitious English transplant who most recently was employed as an assistant professional at the Claremont Golf Club in Oakland, California. In Barnes's own words, the offer from Spokane "wasn't very flattering," yet, the Spokane job would afford him, at the age of 22, his first opportunity to become a head professional. Barnes would leave for Tacoma Country and Golf Club in late 1910 or early 1911. He would eventually resign from Tacoma in 1914 and then go on to win four major titles: the PGA Championship in 1916 and 1919, the U.S. Open in 1921, and the British Open in 1925.



L. Jacobs lofter and Jim Barnes putter



"Long" Jim Barnes – circa 1916

Spokane Country Club hosted its first major tournament as the site of the 1907 Pacific Northwest Golf Association Championship. Players arrived from Seattle, Tacoma, Port Townsend, Portland, Victoria, B.C. and Butte, Montana. T. S. Lippy from Seattle won the Men's Amateur Championship, Mrs. I. W. Anderson the Women's Championship.

The 1907 Championship consisted of 24 events, including putting, driving, and approach contests, as well as mixed foursomes. Finding enough caddies for such a large event was a problem. Boys, typically ages 10 -16, would skip out of school to make a little money. They didn't always get away with it as told in this story:

An amusing incident occurred at the Country Club links Wednesday morning, when B. G. Peters, city truant officer, suddenly appeared and began gathering in the caddies. He corralled two or three, and was engaged in a merry chase after the others when the officers of the club put in a protest.

Peters was obdurate, and insisted that he would return all of the boys to school, when Frank P. Hogan, one of the trustees of the club, ordered him to leave the grounds. He left but went to the nearest telephone and called up County School Superintendent M. B. Watkins, who is the county truant officer and appealed to him for help.

Watkins hurried to the scene where he explained the matter to F. W. Guilbert, one of the club managers, and the trouble was adjusted, about a dozen of the boys being taken from the course and sent back to school. Their places were filled by older boys and some men.

Seattle Times - May 25, 1907



Women's Presidents Cup Trophy Spokane CC – 1913

The Club completed the second nine in 1914. By then the Club had hired David H. Findlay as its golf professional. While records are also scant on who designed the second nine, it is also likely that Findlay would have some involvement its design. Findlay would later lay out the Downriver Golf Course in Spokane in 1915 and the Yakima Country Club in 1916.

The finished course would receive high praise: “For variety of terrain, scenery and playing conditions, probably no golf club in the United States surpasses the links of the Spokane Country Club. There are mountainous backgrounds, plains, plateau, gulches, precipitous bluffs, forested hillsides, rocky crevasses, arroyos, a lake and a spring that forms a pool in the seventeenth fairway.” (Lewiston Evening Journal - 4-26-1926)



Spokane Country Club – Hole #10 green and clubhouse - circa 1920 (courtesy of Spokane Country Club)

Spokane Country Club organized the first Inland Empire Golf Championship in 1917. As told by one wit: "it was designed to get all the yokels in from all over the wheat-corn-spud-lead-copper-apple-zinc belt who had ever seen a golf stick." Invitations were sent to Yakima, Walla Walla, Lewiston, Butte, Hayden Lake, Helena, Missoula, the Bitter Root and the Palouse. "Not, of course, before you have the crops in and your money in OUR banks; or, money borrowed from OUR banks to handle the crops," read the invitation." (Seattle Sunday Times 10-7-1917). The winner was Ed Hughes from Spokane. The Championship would grow in prestige and became a fixture in the Inland Empire for many years.

Joe Novak followed David H. Findlay as club professional from 1918 to 1922, followed by J. Martin Watson from 1923 to 1929. Watson, whose son Forest Watson would go on to become a top amateur golfer in the Northwest and to head the Pacific Northwest Golf Association, evidently had the heart of a poet as he penned this lyrical piece in 1926 called:

"A Spokane Reverie"

Looking down towards the first hole at the Spokane Country club, one is struck with the ever changing beauties of the season. Shorn of their summer clothes, rows of tall, pale poplars, like old ivory keyboards, play a broken spinet chord as the snow blows disorder through their branches and sprinkles the course with a mantle of winter loveliness. If one who loves nature will look a little closer, Pan himself may be found in the reeds improvising a melody full of spring promises, for soon the days will lengthen—and the golf bug bite.

Nineteen twenty-six will be a gala occasion here when the pick of the northwest's best will vie for the laurel wreath of golfing supremacy.

To those who have never been guests here, the course and surroundings will come as a complete and rare surprise. The course is being made standard length, with feature holes, splendid greens and fairways. The whole will be a joy long remembered. The surroundings have quite a different charm and appeal, especially to the outdoor man who respects his rod and gun.

I do not know a course anywhere that has a greater variety of wild life than this beauty spot on the Little Spokane river, for here are rainbow and speckled beauties, just as elusive as the little white ball is. To the marshes come the ducks to nest and stay with us till the snow flies. The China pheasant, the fleet-winged Hun, quail and grouse, all find welcome and undisturbed cover, while in the spring a buck or two is always in evidence. Beaver on the river bank are busy destroying their favorite birch—so life is plentiful and to the city man it gives a sense of the broad freedom of awakening, and instinctively we stop to bare our heads before it all.

The daytime is not alone with its allurements, for when the clubs are put away and the inner man replenished, the magic of the night draws one to the long veranda to watch—

The moon comes like a lover from the hill,
Leaning across the twilight and the trees,
And finds them grave and beautiful and still,
And wearing always on such nights as these
A glimmer less than any ghostly light,
As women wear their beauty in the night.

It is at least consoling to think of these things now. The golfer is an optimist. In the land where the snow falls he is making preparations for spring. He knows it lurks round the corner. He plans and schemes, changes here and changes there, and resolves all and more than our friend Briggs gives us to laugh at over the breakfast table. Be it resolved that we think of the word "concentration." What is it? Suspended attention. An act of will on which the mind is clamped down on a given subject like a tight shut fist. One of the catholic principles of the game—usually violated—is that of keeping the head still. Old stuff—yes, as old as the hills, but the hills still stand, as does the advice to keep your cranium quiet. See to it that you concentrate on this and the taking of the club back with a reasonably stretched left arm so that the radius of the swing may be maintained and you are at least on the highway with a good start for better golf. The making of a golfer is no easy task. The sand of life is white and fine. If one fumbles with the clay it may become an earthen pot instead of a crystal vase. There is no magic working formula; no royal road to the summit of success, but work and years of it.

What is the golf swing anyway?

One might answer, Something felt, but never discovered.

But this is a digression. Spokane will be ready in 1926. She welcomes you and her hospitality is second to none.



Spokane Country Club – circa 1928 (courtesy of Spokane Country Club)

Spokane Country Club would go on to host many important golf championships and holds the distinction of hosting the inaugural U.S. Women's Open Championship in 1946, won by Patty Berg. It was the only time that the Women's Open was played as a match play.

Following a legal judgment against the club, and its subsequent bankruptcy, the Kalispel Tribe of Spokane acquired the country club in December, 2015. The club has been renamed to Kalispel Golf and Country Club.

Written by Martin Pool
October, 2015; revised May, 2017
fas1863@hotmail.com
www.nwhickoryplayers.org