

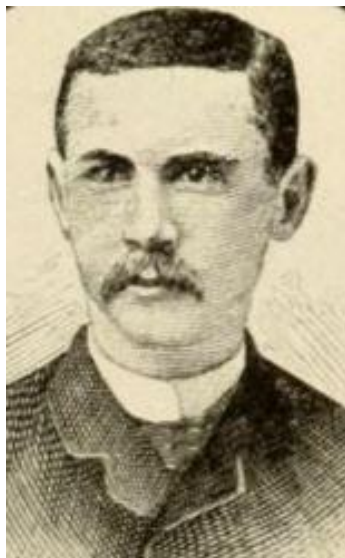
## Early History of Tacoma Country and Golf Club, Lakewood, WA

Established 11-3-1894, Course relocated c.1906  
Course Architects: 1894: Alexander Baillie and H. J. Bremner; c.1906: Unknown



Tacoma Golf Club clubhouse in the prairie field of Edison in South Tacoma - circa 1899

Tacoma Golf Club was founded in 1894 when a group of a dozen Scotsmen and Englishmen, many of them employees of the London based firm of Balfour, Guthrie, & Co., sought to play the game they left behind in their home lands. The group was led by Alexander Baillie, an indomitable Scotsman who would pioneer golf in the Pacific Northwest.



Alexander Baillie (1859 – 1949)

Alexander Baillie was born in Brechin, Scotland in 1859. He attended St. Andrews University. In 1880, fresh out of college, he was sent by Balfour, Guthrie, & Co., an international company in the import/export business, to open a branch office in Portland, Oregon. He would later open a similar office in Tacoma in 1888.

In early 1894, while visiting San Francisco where golf had taken hold with the establishment of the Burlingame Golf Club in 1893, Baillie lamented to his business partners the lack of opportunity to play that Royal and Ancient game in Tacoma. In addition, Baillie was no doubt aware that golf was also being played to the north at the Victoria Golf Club, founded in 1893 in Victoria, British Columbia.

Baillie was not a particularly accomplished golfer, but having grown up near St. Andrews, he most certainly would have been familiar with the game. Baillie died in Tacoma in 1949 at the age of 90.

Determined to introduce golf to Tacoma, Baillie sought to find suitable land in the heavily forested lands of Puget Sound. Eventually Baillie found and obtained a five-year lease on 280 acres of prairie land near

the then village of Edison, located in South Tacoma. Baillie also arranged to have shipped from Scotland thirty sets of Forgan golf clubs and twenty-five dozen gutta purcha balls. The story is often told that when the clubs passed through U. S. customs, the customs agent, puzzled by their purpose and skeptical of the explanation given, declared them to be farm implements and allowed them to pass.

Golf in America was in its infancy in 1894. While there have been reports of golf being played in America in the 1700s, it was not until 1888 when the so-called Apple Tree Gang established its own St. Andrews Golf Club in Yonkers, New York, that golf firmly took hold in America. Popularity in this new game quickly grew and in a few short years, dozens of golf courses were being built. Most were located on the East Coast and the Midwest, but by 1894 several had begun to appear in the West. There is on-going debate as to which club/course is the oldest west of the Mississippi, with a dozen or so clubs making that claim. Fairfield Golf Club (1892) in Iowa appears to have a strong case, and on the West Coast, Burlingame Golf Club (1893) in San Francisco, and Vancouver (Jericho) Golf Club (1892) and Victoria Golf Club (1893) in British Columbia are among the early clubs. While Gearhart Golf Links in Gearhart, Oregon claims 1892, original documentary evidence has yet to be found to support this claim.

At a time when news about golf was just as likely to be found in the Society page as to be found in the sports section of newspapers, some of the credit for Tacoma Golf Club founding must go to the "high society" women of Tacoma as well as to Baillie. As early as May, 1894, golf was on the minds of these women as evidenced by the following article:

#### **Thinking About Golf Now.**

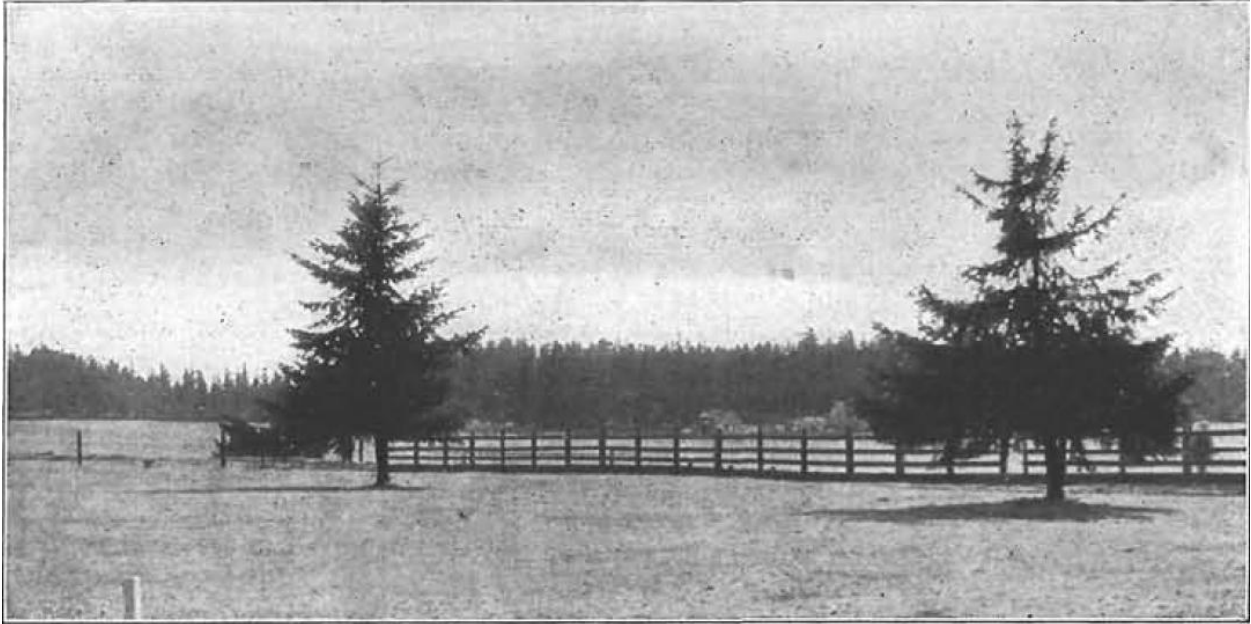
The question of forming a golf club is agitating the female mind at present. The game is a fashionable fad in the East and it is only a question of a short time before it will reach Tacoma, and society folk say there is certainly room enough on the prairie for a number of golf clubs. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* - 5-27-1894)

On November 3, 1894 sixteen charter members met and formally organized the Tacoma Golf Club and elected Alexander Baillie as its first president.

**GOLF.**  
**TACOMA'S IN THE FASHION.**  
Tacoma golf players held a meeting on Saturday night and organized a club under the name of the Tacoma Golf Club. The charter members number sixteen. The following officers were elected: President, Alexander Baillie; captain, C. F. Cosper; secretary, G. W. Dishart; treasurer, Ralph Stacy; committeemen, Jesse Merrill, C. S. Milliken and Fred Watson. The club has secured links at Edison and plays there every Saturday. This is the first golf club organized in Washington. The club is now on a substantial basis, having a constitution and by-laws similar to those of the Victoria Golf Club. The game has been introduced in the City of Destiny through the efforts of Messrs. Baillie, Merrill, Gillison and G. W. Dishart.

*Victoria Daily Colonist* - 11-14-1894.

The club immediately set out to lay out the new course. It is not clear if they set out to build 27 holes from the outset, but by 1896 there was an eighteen-hole "Men's Course" measuring 5549 yards and a nine-hole "Ladies' Course".



Hole #2 in Edison, Tacoma's original course from 1894 to circa 1906 prior to relocating to the current location.



Club House and 1<sup>st</sup> Tee circa 1900

A clubhouse, consisting of four adjoining red-shingled houses, was secured. One was used as the caretaker's home, another as the club room, another as the Men's locker room, and the last became the Ladies' locker room.

The courses were primitive by today's standards, little more than pasture land, where cows were allowed to roam at will. One member recalled in later years that he could still hear the hollow sounds of balls thudding into cows.

On November 29, 1894, members of the Tacoma Golf Club held their first formal tournament, as reported by the *Tacoma Daily Ledger*:

Nearly all members of the Tacoma Golf Club met on the links at Edison yesterday and a spirited contest for the prize of a 'driver' (golf stick) took place, resulting in it being carried off by J. B. Maclean, whose excellent play came as surprise to many, a fact which will

probably scratch him in future competition. The prize was presented to the winner with a neat speech by the president of the club, Alexander Baillie. By a coincidence a consignment of golf clubs arrived from Scotland yesterday amongst which were several ladies sets, so that in the future the flutter of the petticoat will invariably be seen on the links. (*Tacoma Daily Ledger* - 11-30-1894)

In what may have been the first international golf match outside of matches between Scotland and England, Victoria Golf Club and Tacoma Golf Club met on the links of Victoria Golf Club on March 30, 1895. This match predates by three years a match between Royal Montreal Golf Club and The Country Club at Brookline which took place in 1898.

The Tacoma delegation of golf players [Messrs. Alexander Baillie, Thomas Kerr, O. F. Casper, A.E. Buell, H. S. Griggs and J. Gillison] who went to Victoria to represent the Tacoma Golf Club in a match game between Victoria and Tacoma ... failed to win. The Victorians were victorious. The highest [best] score made was by W. E. Oliver, who played 18 holes in 87 strokes. The ladies' open competition was won by Mrs. W. A. Ward. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* - 4-3-1895)

In a return match the following week, Tacoma, fielding an entirely new team of six, turned the tables on their rival. The scores reflected the high winds and rain the players faced that day:

Victoria Golf Club		Tacoma Golf Club	
H. Combe	97	C. S. Milliken	127
W. H. Langley	124	S. Medilcott	131
C. B. Stahlschmidt	121	H. J. Bremner	116
G. Henderson	149	J. Dishart	118
R. Prior	132	Rev. W. Carnett	129
A. P. Luxton	130	T. B. Maclean	119
Total	753	Total	740

Meanwhile, the society men and women of Seattle and Portland took notice of the "newest fad" in Tacoma, and by 1895 golf was being played in those two cities. It took another year for the players in those two cities to formally organize. Waverly (now Waverley) Golf Club was established on April 20, 1896 and Seattle Golf Club followed suit in November, 1896. Interestingly, Waverly's founder and first president was Robert Livingstone, who, like Baillie, was born in Brechin, Scotland and attended St. Andrews University before being sent by his employer to set up a branch office in the Pacific Northwest.

These four clubs, Victoria, Tacoma, Waverly, and Seattle would become the centers of golf in the Pacific Northwest for decades following. Rivalries developed as inter-club matches among these clubs were common place during the early years.

By late 1898, there was enough interest among these and other clubs to form a golf association, and on February 4, 1899, at a meeting in Tacoma, the Pacific Northwest Golf Association was born. The six founding members of the PNGA were: 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). C. B. Stahlschmidt of Victoria was elected PNGA's first president, perhaps in recognition of Victoria's senior status. The PNGA is considered to be the fifth oldest golf association in North America.

That same year, in 1899, the PPGA held its inaugural championship at Tacoma Golf Club. The Men's Amateur Championship was won by eighteen year-old Charles H. Malott, who learned to play while caddying at Tacoma. The Women's Amateur Champion was Amelia (Mrs. Melbourne) Bailey, also a member at Tacoma.



Ladies Play at Tacoma – c.1899 likely from the PPGA Championship (photos courtesy of Tacoma C&GC)

By 1900 Tacoma Golf Club had grown to 180 members and it became apparent that a new location and a larger clubhouse were needed to accommodate the growing membership. On October 18, 1904, the club acquired the seven-acre Lehman estate plus 160 acres of surrounding property on the eastern shore of American Lake, its current location.

At the time, this location was a popular destination, operating as the Tacoma Country Club, for sun-bathers, swimmers and other non-golf activities. On January 21, 1905, the two clubs merged to become the Tacoma Country and Golf Club. The new clubhouse opened on June 25, 1905. Sadly, the clubhouse burned down in 1909. A new clubhouse "The Grand Old Lady" was built in 1910, but in 1961 it too would suffer the same fate as its predecessor.





Tacoma C&GC Clubhouse "The Grand Old Lady" 1910-1961 (photo courtesy of Tacoma C&GC)

At its annual meeting held on October 4, 1905, the club once again elected Alexander Baillie as its president. The club scheduled the season's first tournament on October 14, presumably on the old course. In the early years, the golf season in the Puget Sound region typically began in October and ended in April. This was due primarily to the difficulty of keeping the grass down during the growing season as horse-drawn mowers could not keep pace. During the 1905-06 season, the old course at Edison continued to be used while the new course was being constructed. It is likely that the first nine holes of the new course opened sometime in 1906-07.

It is not clear who originally laid out the course at its current location. During this period in the Northwest, the responsibility for laying out a golf course often fell to the club professional. Tacoma does not appear to have had one in 1905-06, but as members had been playing golf in Tacoma for ten years, enough to know something about golf course design, it is possible that the responsibility for laying out the course fell to the greens committee.

Another possibility is that Tacoma may have turned to a club professional from another club in the Northwest, a practice not uncommon at the time. Robert Johnstone was at Seattle Golf Club, Alex Duthie at Waverly GC in Portland, Jack Moffat at Victoria GC in British Columbia, and L. Jacobs at Spokane. The nearest professional, Johnstone, originally from North Berwick, Scotland had recently been hired by Seattle Golf Club in June, 1905. Prior to coming to Seattle, Johnstone had laid out the Presidio and Ingleside courses in San Francisco. He would go on to design or co-design many golf courses in the Northwest, including Seattle Golf Club in 1907-08. Records show that Tacoma C&GC did consult with Johnstone in subsequent years on course construction projects. However, until hard evidence can be found, we can only speculate as to the original designer of Tacoma Country & Golf Club.

Evidently the land that Baillie and others selected adjacent to American Lake was a difficult one on which to build a golf course. It was gravelly in nature and by the end of 1907, only nine holes were

opened for play. The PPGA Championship scheduled to be held Tacoma in 1908 had to be relocated and Victoria Golf Club was selected in its place. Tacoma was finally able to showcase its new eighteen hole course in 1910 when it hosted the PPGA Championship that year. However, as late as 1921, the club was still struggling with the rocks and gravel issues.



9<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> square greens ca. 1920 (courtesy of Joel Kachmarek)



Same view ca. 2010 (courtesy of Joel Kachmarek)



The first club professional at Tacoma C&GC is believed to be Charles Lock, born in England, who lived on site and served as instructor and club maker from about 1909 to 1910. In 1911, the club hired James M. “Long Jim” Barnes, then a young and ambitious English transplant who most recently was employed at the Spokane Country Club. After three years, Barnes would leave Tacoma in 1914 and go on to become one of the top professional golfers in America. He would win four major titles: the PGA Championship in 1916 and 1919, the U.S. Open in 1921, and the British Open in 1925.



Jim Barnes (1886 – 1966) – circa 1913



Lock and Barnes Hickory Clubs – circa 1906-13

In 1911, Barnes played a series of individual matches against members.

During the last two months the members of the Tacoma Country and Golf Club have been playing a series of matches with the professional, J. M. Barnes, each match being based on the player's handicap, charging Barnes as plus 4. On the last two days of the tournament he made two rounds in 67 and one round in 65. Details of his round in 65 follows: Out—3 3 2 3 3 4 4 4 6—32 In —4 2 4 3 3 4 5 4 4—33—65. Distances: Out-350 240 200 205 375 450 350 425 580-3175 In -215 140 300 170 370 345 520 395 410-2865 Total yards, 6040. He is a very powerful driver and his iron play and putting are in keeping with his long game. (*American Golfer* – October, 1911)

In 1913, Barnes traveled to Brookline, Massachusetts to compete in the U. S. Open. Francis Ouimet, a twenty year-old amateur, rocked the golf world by defeating the great Harry Vardon and Ted Ray in a playoff. Barnes tied for fourth behind those three players. Following this historic Open, Vardon and Ray toured the U. S. playing in a series of exhibition matches against the best golfers that local golf courses had to offer. They stopped in Tacoma on November 4, 1913 where they were matched in a four-ball match against Barnes and Robert Johnstone, the club professional at the Seattle Golf Club. In a closely contested match over 36 holes, Vardon and Ray prevailed 2 and 1.



The course has undergone numerous renovations over the years. The nines have been reversed, hole numbers have changed, the acreage has increased in size and new holes added. Joel Kachmarek, the greens superintendent at TC&GC and club historian, in a wonderful piece of research and analysis, has prepared following aerial map showing the original routing (as shown in red, numbered lines) overlaid onto today's routing. Holes 13, 14, and 15 on the south end of the course were added in 1989 by golf architect John Steidel, but otherwise a number of holes from the original layout follow the same contours of today's course.



Prepared by Joel Kachmarek (numbered, red lines show the pre-1911 routing of holes overlaid over today's course)

Also courtesy of Joel Kachmarek, the following video clip depicts rare scenes of men and women at play with hickory clubs at the course in 1926: [Tacoma G&CC in 1926 Video Clip](#).

In 2013, the club began the process of restoring many of its bunkers to the look and feel of the bygone era, with their furry edges and deeper faces. Today Tacoma Country and Golf Club is considered by many to be one of the best conditioned and most challenging golf courses in the Northwest.

Written by Martin Pool  
April, 2015; Revised February, 2020  
fas1863@hotmail.com  
[www.nwhickoryplayers.org](http://www.nwhickoryplayers.org)