

Early History of
Kitsap Golf and Country Club, Bremerton, WA
Established 3-13-1924, First Nine Opened 7-4-1925, Second Nine Opened 1956
Course Architects: 1924 - Francis James; 1956 – A. Vernon Macan



Kitsap Golf and Country Club's first (lower) nine holes (photo courtesy of Kitsap G&CC)

In 1924, the year that Kitsap Golf and Country Club was founded, America hailed the great Walter Hagen who won the second of his four (British) Open Championships. Closer to home, little known Cyril Walker finished ahead of Bobby Jones to win the U.S. Open. The “Roaring Twenties” was the golden age of golf in America as hundreds of thousands of aspiring golfers, who were hard pressed to tell the difference between a niblick and a mashie, took up the “new game.”

Golf's popularity in the 1920s can perhaps be traced to 1913 when a twenty-year old amateur named Francis Ouimet shook the golf world by winning the U.S. Open that year over two British champions, Harry Vardon and Ted Ray. It was David against two Goliaths and David had won. The momentous event captured the imagination of the American public and golf became the talk of the nation. This enthusiasm, however, was short-lived as ominous signs in Europe began to overtake the news wires. World War I had broken out and Americans turned their attention to supporting the war effort.

Following the war, golf's popularity regained momentum and golf courses began appearing all across the nation. Kitsap County was no exception. As early as 1919, a group of businessmen looked to organize a golf club in Bremerton. The first site they selected was on Sinclair Inlet adjacent to the Puget Sound Navy Yard (now the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard). This initial effort, however, appeared to have stalled, and it was not until 1923 a renewed effort was made. That year, the Bremerton Chamber of Commerce asked local business and civic leaders to consider organizing a golf club.

On March 13, 1924, five men, consisting of an attorney, a dentist, a merchant, and two Puget Sound Navy Yard employees, filed for Articles of Incorporation of Kitsap Golf and Country Club. The five were Fred Benedict, John Stewart, Dr. J. B. Bright, C.E.B. Oldham, and Edward E. Crawford. Submitting the filing was attorney Fred W. Moore, who would become Kitsap G&CC's first President.

Following incorporation, members who had pledged support of the newly organized Club met on April 15, 1924 at the office of the Bremerton Chamber of Commerce to elect officers. Fred W. Moore, a local attorney, was elected as Kitsap's first president; Others officers included Ross Black, vice president; H. D. Matthews, second vice president; Sam S. Josephson, secretary, and H. A. Babcock, treasurer.



Fred W. Moore (1869 – 1948). First president of Kitsap G&CC

Frederick West Moore was born on March 5, 1869 in Austin, Texas. Moving to Bremerton in about 1910, he served for a time as the City Prosecuting Attorney.

Moore evidently had a fiery personality. At a City Council meeting in 1912, Moore was involved in a fist fight. He perceived an insinuation made by J. W. Bryan, then City Attorney and soon-to-be U.S. Congressman, and struck Bryan. "Bryan struck back. The two men clinched, were pulled apart, clinched again, were pulled apart, and clinched a third time." The two would go at it again a few weeks later, but no charges were filed in either case.

His temperament notwithstanding, Moore was a civic leader and an important figure in Bremerton's history. While not an accomplished golfer, he led the men and women in early years of Kitsap Golf and Country Club.

He died on April 21, 1948 in Bremerton at the age of 79.

Kitsap G&CC would become the fourth golf club in Kitsap County. Golf in Kitsap County had an early beginning in Washington State when two holes were laid out at the Country Club of Seattle on Restoration Point on Bainbridge Island in 1896. This course, now a nine-hole sand-green layout, can boast as being the oldest in the State at the same location. Next came the Officers Club course at Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton which opened in 1902 and operated for over 30 years before closing prior to World War II. Wing Point Golf and Country Club organized in about 1913, though golf was reportedly being played as early as 1903 in that location.

The Club set the initiation fee at \$100 (about \$1,800 in today's dollars) with the goal of signing up 150 members. The Club purchased 47 acres of farmland and orchards from the Granstrom Farm for \$10,500 to build a nine-hole course. An additional 10 acres was purchased soon thereafter. The Club wasted no time in hiring a well-known golf architect, Francis "Frank" James to lay out the course.



Francis "Frank" L. James (1878 – 1952)

Frank James was a prolific and well-respected golf course designer and builder in the Pacific Northwest.

Born on May 8, 1878 in Birmingham, England, he moved to Philadelphia in 1910 and worked as a greenskeeper at Aronimink Golf Club in Pennsylvania. 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 before forming his own company.

James's Northwest golf courses include Longview CC (1923), Kitsap G&CC (1924), Linden G&CC (1926), Sand Point CC (1927), Peace Portal GC (1928), Jackson Park GC (1930), Vashon Island GC (1932), University of Idaho GC (1937), Walla Walla Country Club (front nine) (1947), Veteran's Memorial GC in Walla Walla (1948), and many others.

Work on the golf course began immediately with the nine-hole course measuring about 3100 yards with holes ranging from 140 to 550 yards. The course, located on what is now the back (lower) nine, was described thus:

Surrounded by virgin forests, and a splendid view of mountains and valleys, it occupies a unique position among the courses of the coast. Its greens are designed for a sporty round, and are well trapped and bunkered. The course will include two water hazards. Gently rolling surfaces blend with the surrounding land, and the course as a whole is worthy of the play of anyone. (Seattle P-I - 11-9-1924)

By November, 1924 the Club numbered 125 members. Anxious to begin play, members laid out six temporary holes on which to practice their skills. The Club hired its first golf professional, "Jolly" Jack Rogers, to provide instruction and to oversee the construction of the new course. Rogers, a transplant from Hoylake, England, who had done work at the Navy Yard course, the University of Washington course, and at Skagit Country Club prior to coming to Kitsap, stayed only for a short time before moving on to Longview Country Club in February, 1925.

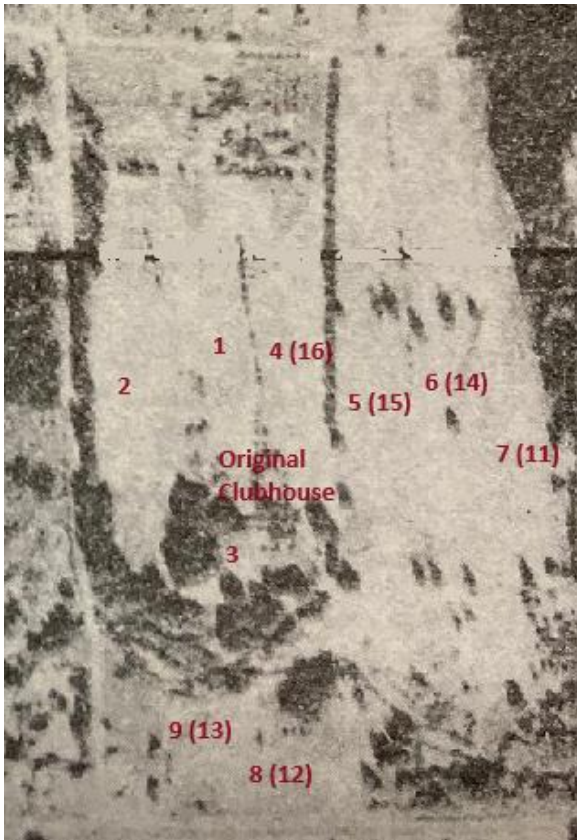
Following Roger's departure as pro, the Club next hired Cleveland "Cleve" Jefferson. Jefferson, one of a family of Jeffersons from Scotland, all golf professionals in the Pacific Northwest, also would have a short tenure, leaving later that same year for Walla Walla Country club.

In addition to the course itself, the club needed a clubhouse. A large farmhouse which sat on the property near what is now the 16th tee, was remodeled into a roomy clubhouse at a cost of \$3,000. "Shower and locker rooms for both ladies and men have been completed, and electric lights, telephone, hardwood dancing floors, a piano and other conveniences have been installed." The farmhouse would undergo numerous changes over the years as membership grew. It would serve the club for forty-five years until the new clubhouse was completed in 1969 at its present location.



Kitsap Golf and Country Club's first clubhouse, a converted farm house - 1931 (photo courtesy of Kitsap &CC)

On July 4, 1925, the full nine holes officially opened for play with a 36-hole tournament in a festive atmosphere. George Rowan was the winner, coming in with a "snappy 171" for low gross honors. The not-quite-yet completed course measured 2500 yards, par 32, though it was expected to stretch to 2800 yards, par 34, when completed.



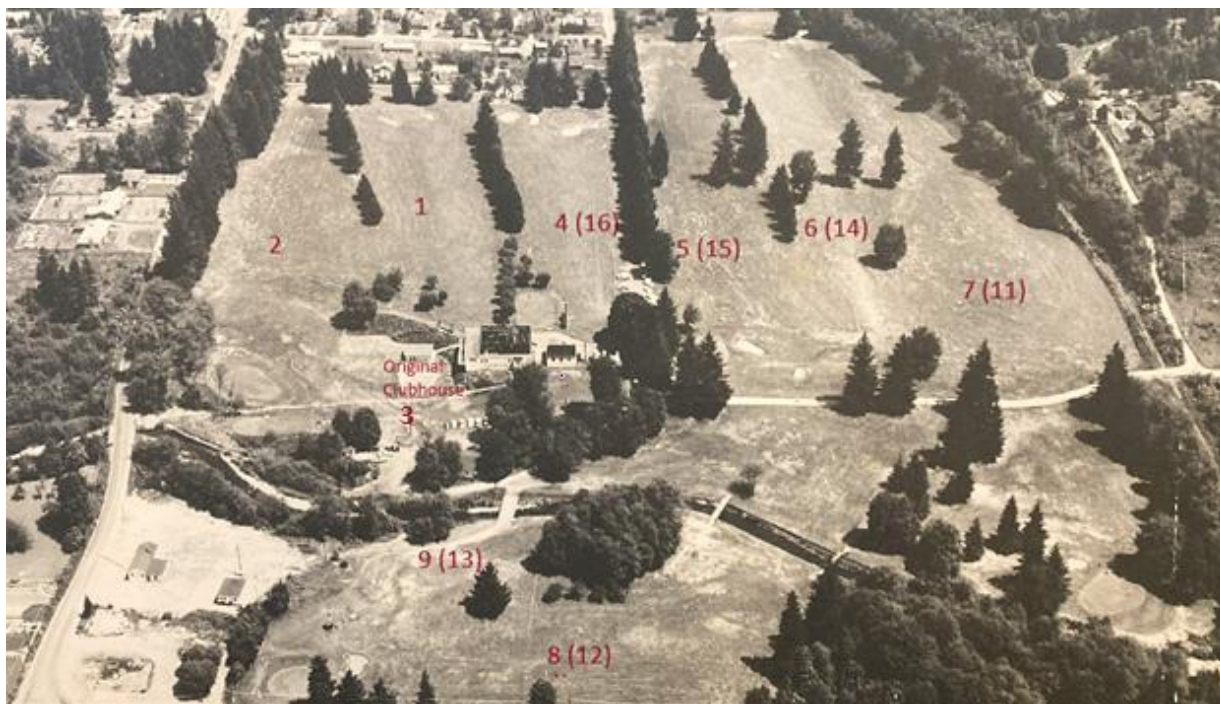
Kitsap G&CC's Original Nine – 1944 (Photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)

This earliest known aerial photograph shows the course 20 years after its founding. Original holes 1,2,3 no longer exist as portions of that property were later sold. Original holes 4 - 9 are shown with today's hole numbers in parenthesis.

Typical of its day, golf architects would cut down nearly all the trees when laying out a new course, reminiscent of the links courses in Scotland. The vertical row of fir trees which is shown in the middle of the photo and which divides today's 15th and 16th fairways, were donated by Dr. J. B. Bright in about 1936.

During World War II, the U.S. Army commandeered the golf course and placed eight anti-aircraft gun emplacements on two fairways (reportedly holes 12 and 13) to defend against possible air attacks by the Japanese on the nearby Navy Shipyard.

Similar WWII defense structures were built at what was to become the nearby Gold Mountain Golf Course where concrete pads for barrage balloons can still be seen on the Olympic course's 18th hole.



Later view of Kitsap G&CC's Original Nine – c.1960. Original holes 1,2,3 no longer exists. Original holes 4 - 9 are shown with today's hole numbers in parenthesis. (Photo courtesy of Kitsap G&CC)

1929 Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Total
Yards	270	320	125	275	415	405	575	160	240	2785

2023 Hole				16	15	14	11	12	13	
Yards				288	397	375	546	291	266	

Current holes 11 – 16 have largely stayed the same with the exception of hole 12 which was played as a par 3 in the early days.

Less than three weeks after opening, Kitsap Club pro Cleve Jefferson scored Kitsap's first ace:

"He stepped up to face the eighth hole [today's #12 played as a par 3] and with a mighty clout of his mashie drove the pill 155 yards and into the cup. Adding to the hole-in-one honors, Jefferson manipulated the course in thirty strokes which is two below par, and probably a mark that will go for some time." (Bremerton Daily News Searchlight 7-23-1925)

In September, 1925, Kitsap G&CC held its first Men's Club Championship on the new nine-hole course. Twenty-nine year-old George Rowan shot a score of 232 over 54 holes to become Kitsap's first club champion on the newly completed layout. Rowan would go on to win the next three club championships as well. Molly Greenwood became the first women's club champion in 1925.



George Rowan (1896 – 1971)

George Rowan was a lifetime member at Kitsap G&CC and last of the charter members when in 1969, forty-four years after his first club championship, he gave an interview to the *Bremerton Sun* newspaper.

He recounted, “We had some tough years. There were 100 of us putting in \$100 each to get the thing started, but before we could do very much we ran out of money and had to have two assessments of \$50 and \$15.”

Rowan began playing with hickory clubs in the early years and saw the transition to steel-shafted clubs in the 1930s. He carried a three handicap most of his life.

Rowan worked as a machinist at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. He died in 1971 at the age of 74.

On September 14, Kitsap G&CC hosted its first interclub match, popularly known as “home and away” matches against the Officers Club of the nearby Navy Yard. As expected from a new club facing an established club, Kitsap men lost 32-2.

In a return match later that month, the Club, led by team Captain Ed Crawford, fared only slightly better losing 33-4. Kitsap’s pro Cleve Jefferson was the only player to win his match on the Kitsap side defeating his counterpart and cousin Charlie Jefferson to gain two points for the home team.

Some years before Kitsap G&CC was founded, bragging rights for the strongest golf club in Kitsap County began with inter-club matches between the Country Club of Seattle on Bainbridge Island and the Officer’s Club of the Navy Yard in the early 1900s. It became a three-way competition when Wing Point Golf Club joined after it organized in about 1913. Kitsap G&CC then made it a four-way rivalry when it appeared on the scene. The competition consisted of each club sending their eight best players to play at each of the four courses and totaling their aggregate scores

Kitsap, still a fledgling club in 1928, had finished at the bottom of standings each year until a glimmer of hope appeared that year. At the half-way point in the competition “There was quite a jubilation in the ‘Kitties’ clubhouse Sunday evening when it was discovered, that after being tailenders for four straight years, they had crawled out of the coal bin, yielding the job to the gold braid chaps [Navy men].” Sadly, when the final score was tallied, the “Kitties” were back in the coal bin. Final aggregate scores: Country Club – 2549; Wing Point – 2554; Officer’s Club – 2591; Kitsap G&CC – 2599.

From the beginning, the Club struggled with its finances. Large assessments were levied in order to keep the Club solvent. Then the Great Depression hit in 1929 and things got worse. To

boost its revenue, the Club experimented going semi-private by opening up the golf course to the public on a limited basis. However, after a few years the experiment was abandoned as members' complaints grew. Later, the Club installed slot machines in the clubhouse, an illegal but not an uncommon practice among golf clubs during this period, until the authorities began cracking down in the 1950s.

In 1930, a golf star emerged from the ranks of the ladies at the Club. Twenty-one year-old Mrs. Don (Leila) Scott took the club championship title that year. Under the tutelage of Club pro Verne Torfin, a top-notch golfer in his own right who shot a course record 62 in 1935, Scott's golf game improved dramatically. She was featured in the local newspaper in 1934:



Leila Scott (Bremerton Searchlight 6-24-1934)

"Maybe some woman golfer in the Pacific Northwest has beaten men's par over eighteen holes sometime, somewhere, but we had never heard of such a thing happening hereabouts until the other day. Then our faithful correspondent, Curly Coulter, wrote us from Bremerton that Mrs. Don Scott had just shot a competitive round of 71 for the Kitsap course, where par for men is 72 and where the previous record for women was 75, set recently by Mrs. Scott herself.

Being unfamiliar with the Kitsap layout, we might be forgiven for figuring that possibly the course is short, the bunkers few and the pars easy. But you can't laugh off a 71 scored by a woman golfer, no matter whether the par 4's of the course average 350 or 400 yards.

On top of the news from Bremerton came word from Tacoma that a day or so later Mrs. Scott scored a 77 over the Tacoma Country and Golf Club course, clipping a stroke from women's par and also from the course record established by Vera Hutchings"

In 1934, Leila Scott finished runner-up the Pacific Northwest Golf Association Woman's Amateur Championship. Competing at the highest level in the Pacific Northwest, she would go on to win the Washington State Women's Amateur Championship in 1935 and 1936. Inexplicably, in 1937, rather than defend her Washington State title, she announced she was retiring from competitive golf. Leila Scott died in Riverside, California in 1983 at the age of 74.

At the conclusion of World War II, the Club sought to expand the course to 18 holes. They acquired about 100 acres of land up the hill and south of the original course. In 1947, the Club hired A. Vernon Macan, a renowned Northwest golf architect from British Columbia to layout the course. In what may have been a first in golf course architecture in the Pacific Northwest, Macan reportedly "... drew up his plans while coursing back and forth over the terrain in an airplane." (Seattle P-I, 4-13-1952).



Golf Architect A. V. Macan (1882-1964)

Arthur Vernon Macan, born in Ireland in 1882, emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in 1912.

He was an accomplished golfer winning the Pacific Northwest Amateur Championship in 1913. He volunteered for service in World War I with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was wounded in France resulting in the amputation of his left leg. He returned to British Columbia to begin his career in golf architecture.

His designs included Royal Colwood (1913), Shaughnessy Heights (1927) in British Columbia; Rainier (1919), Inglewood (1919), Fircrest (1923), Broadmoor (1924), Overlake (1953) in Washington; Columbia Edgewater (1924), Astoria (1924) in Oregon; and California Golf Club (1925) and many others in those states and province.

He died in 1964 while still designing golf courses at the age of 82.

Macan's plan was to eliminate the original holes 1 – 3, and build twelve new holes leading up to the upper half of the newly acquired property. However, the topography presented an awkward challenge: given the location of the original clubhouse, there was no way to return to the clubhouse after nine holes. While not ideal, members of the Greens Committee pointed out that a number of courses in Scotland, including the Old Course at St. Andrews, did not return to the clubhouse until 18 holes had been played.

Construction of the new holes proceeded slowly. Financing was always an issue, as was the topography of the property.

KITSAP GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB
celebrating the opening of their
new 18 hole golf course
Eddie Swanson, Pro.
BREMERTON, WASH.

1956 Ad (Seattle P-I - 4-28-1956)

While an ad from 1956 announced the opening of the 18 holes, construction continued in a piece-meal fashion over the next several years as financing became available. It was not until 1962, fifteen years after Macan first surveyed the property, that holes #4 and #5 were finally completed and Macan's design was fully realized.

When finished in 1962, the layout of the "upper course" looked substantially the same as it does today. Some exceptions exist, namely: In about 1969, holes #1 and #10 were added, and hole #2 lengthened from a par 3 to a par 4 as the new clubhouse was being completed. At long last, members could return to the clubhouse after completing nine holes of play.



Kitsap's "upper nine" - 1961 (photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)



Kitsap's "upper nine" - 2023

In what may be the most controversial hole on the course, currently the 18th, Macan's design created much consternation among the members as some doubted that it could made a viable golf hole due to the narrowness of the fairway and the potential for of rain water runoff down the hill. Macan eventually won out, and the 18th remains one of the most distinctive holes on the course today.



Current 18th hole, played as the 10th hole when it first opened – c.1960 (photo courtesy of Kitsap G&CC)

On January 8, 1956, a tragi-comedic moment took place on what was then the 9th (current 13th) hole. As told in the newspaper,

“Andy Johnson hit a 261-yard hole-in-one yesterday in club-sweepstakes play at the Kitsap Golf and Country Club, and the unusual shot [an albatross!] didn’t count. Johnson’s ball plopped into the wrong cup on the No. 9 hole. Winter play is on temporary greens; his ball rolled into the regular hole, 15 yards away.” (Seattle Daily Times 1-9-1956)

In 1957, a year after the opening of the 18 holes, Kitsap G&CC hosted its first major tournament, the Washington State Men’s Amateur. Two years later it hosted the Washington State Women’s Amateur Championship which was won by Kitsap member and club historian Pat Brewitt, to whose historical research this article is indebted. In 1962, Kitsap G&CC hosted the Washington State Open, which was won for the fifth time by the great Chuck Congdon of Tacoma Country and Golf Club.

Today, beginning with the difficult and unusual par 3 starting hole, the course offers a variety of interesting holes which challenge all levels of golfers.

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