

**Early History of  
Seattle Golf Club, Shoreline, WA**  
Established 1896, Course relocated 1901 and 1908  
Course Architects: 1896 - James Gillison; 1901 - William Watson; 1908 - Robert Johnstone



Seattle Golf Club at Laurelhurst – 1902 (Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)

## **Dispelling the Myth**

A lone figure, on a chilly, damp day in 1894, teed up a gutta percha ball on a small mound of sand and launched it for the first time into the gray skies of Seattle. Since that mythical day the origins of how and when golf first came to Seattle has been a source of much speculation. Numerous articles have been written over the years seeking answers. Invariably these articles retell the same basic story: that golf was first played in the Fremont neighborhood of Seattle in 1895 or 1896 on a five-hole course (some say three, some four, and yet others six holes) by about ten or twelve golf enthusiasts.

That story is far from accurate or complete.

The story of how golf began in Seattle is the story of the Seattle Golf Club itself. While it is true that a rough course was played on an open field bordering the Wallingford and Fremont neighborhoods from 1896 to 1899, it is also true that a well-organized golf club comprising of some 60-75 men and women players was active in Seattle during this period. The club was

called the Seattle Golf Club and it has existed since 1896. The club held tournaments, organized parties and held other social activities. Furthermore, they played on a nine-hole course.

Today, the Seattle Golf Club regards 1900 as the year that it was established. But then how to explain the fact that the Pacific Northwest Golf Association was founded a year earlier in 1899 with Seattle Golf Club as one of six founding clubs?

A *Seattle Times* article captured the mystery well: “The actual beginnings of golf in Seattle are shrouded in a sort of obscurity much like that shadowing the origin of the immortal Topsy who ‘just grewed’. The writer goes on to say, “It would be good to get the record straight once and for all ....”

Indeed, that would be a good thing.

## Seattle Golf Club Founded - 1896

The first mention of organized golf in Seattle appeared in a newspaper account dated December 30, 1896 of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. It described the formation of a golf club calling itself the Seattle Golf Club and comprising some 60 members (35 men and 25 women). The club elected a president, a captain, and a board to manage the affairs of the club.



*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* - 12-30-1896

“There is in Seattle a full-fledged golf club numbering over sixty members. This club was organized about a month ago, and is now doing regular practice at links located near Fremont. The club numbers among its members the leading society people in the city....

“The Seattle Golf Club is the name of the new organization. It was started about a month ago by James Gillison, jr., Mr. Ellis, A. J. Fisken, Herman Chapin and W. A. Peters. Grounds were laid out near Fremont large enough for nine holes.”

The article goes on to say: “The club adopted the code of rules used by the Tacoma club, with a few changes, and elected the following officers: President W. A. Peters; captain, James Gillison, jr.; secretary and treasurer, A. J. Fisken; executive committee, Herman Chapin, George Hurd, James Gillison, jr., and A. J. Fisken.”

While James Gillison, a recent immigrant from England, was the driving force behind the founding of the club, and therefore the logical choice for president, members elected William A. Peters for that honor. The decision was likely a pragmatic one as Peters was a highly respected attorney and a prominent member of Seattle's high society. He no doubt lent credibility and importance to a new club which sought to establish itself. He, with James Gillison, A. J. Fisk and Herman Chapin, would play major roles at the Seattle Golf Club in the years ahead.



William A. Peters (1858 – 1929), first President of Seattle Golf Club in 1896

William Allison Peters was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1858, a few years before the start of the Civil War. He attended schools in Europe before graduating from Yale University in 1880. He was a classmate of William Howard Taft who upon becoming President offered him a judgeship which he declined. Peters moved to Seattle in 1887 and practiced law before opening his own law firm some years later.

He was elected the first president of the exclusive Rainier Club, a private social club, in 1888, and was one of the original founders of the Country Club of Seattle (not to be confused with Seattle Golf Club) in 1890. He also served as president of the Washington State Bar Association. He was elected the first president of Seattle Golf Club in 1896 and remained a long-time member of the club.

Peters was an avid sportsman and played golf late into his life. He was a much-admired figure in Seattle. He died in Seattle in 1929 at the age of 71.

The Seattle Golf Club thus became the third oldest golf club in Washington State following Tacoma Golf Club (now called Tacoma Country and Golf Club) which was established in 1894 and the Country Club of Seattle on Bainbridge Island which laid out a course in June, 1896.

## **Golf in the Northwest in 1894-95**

It is generally acknowledged by golf historians that organized golf in America began with the "Apple Tree Gang" in Yonkers, New York in 1888. In the Pacific Northwest, the Victoria Golf Club in British Columbia was founded five years later in 1893. Though Gearhart Golf Links in Gearhart, Oregon claims 1892 as its founding year, there is yet to be found definitive source documentation to support Gearhart's claim.

The Tacoma Golf Club was established in November, 1894 under Alexander Baillie, a Scottish transplant and the manager of the British import/export firm Balfour, Guthrie, & Company

which had a branch in Tacoma. Robert Livingstone, another Scottish transplant and a friend of Baillie, founded Waverly (later spelled Waverley) Golf Club in Portland in 1896.

Some historians have suggested that golf may have been played in Tacoma as early as 1892, but the evidence is anecdotal and no original source records have been found to support this claim. Certainly, golf was played in the prairie lands of Tacoma at least by early 1894 prior to the Tacoma Golf Club's formal organization later that year.

With the founding of its club, golf in Tacoma became a more formal affair with monthly competitions and inter-club tournaments. In what may have been the first international golf match in the world, Tacoma Golf Club travelled to Victoria, British Columbia to challenge that club on March 30, 1895. As recounted in the local newspaper, "the Victorians were victorious" in that first match.

Noteworthy in that Tacoma-Victoria match was that a Seattle golfer, James Gillison, took part as a member of the Tacoma team. Gillison, and other Seattle players, unable to find a suitable site for a golf course closer to home, joined the Tacoma club in order to play in the club's competitions.

"It was thought that Seattle would, ere this, have organized a club, but while there are a number of admirers of the game over there, it seems the city can furnish no suitable grounds for the links, and for this reason the sport is denied the Seattleites."  
(*Tacoma Daily News* - 9-23-1895)

The absence of a golf course in Seattle in 1894-95 does not mean, however, that no golf was played in Seattle during those years. The *Tacoma Daily News* reported that a Seattle player, Alexander Thompson, joined Tacoma players for competition in September, 1894. Another Seattleite, Edward E. Ellis, was also a member of the Tacoma club. It is quite likely, that as early as 1894, Thompson, Gillison, Ellis, and others may have found some small, open fields in and near Seattle to at least practice between their visits to Tacoma. They may even have laid out a few holes, though no concrete evidence has been found. One account by an early player, Henry Carstens, recalled that a field in West Seattle, likely near Alki, was the site of early golf in Seattle. Josiah Collins was another early player who recounted the story that golf was played at a location near the Civic Ice Center near what was later to become Seattle Center. However, until more evidence is found, those possibilities are merely anecdotal.

## **Country Club of Seattle on Bainbridge Island - 1896**

While these events were taking place in Seattle and Tacoma in 1894-96, James Gillison and others began laying out a golf course on Bainbridge Island on what was called the Country Club of Seattle. Some years earlier, in 1890, a number of wealthy businessmen acquired 102 acres of land on Restoration Point on the island and began building stately houses to serve as their summer homes. The Country Club of Seattle was formed in 1890 as a communal club for

activities such as boating, fishing, tennis, etc. In 1896, as talk of golf grew, these homeowners decided to lay out a golf links. It began with two holes, then four more holes followed shortly thereafter.

“J. Gillison was an intimate friend of the members and a frequent visitor at the Club. Returning from a trip to Scotland in 1896 he brought back with him some odd-shaped sticks and gutta percha balls which he presented to the Club. Two tin cans were sunk in the ground ... and thus was the beginning of golf on our shores and the first golf course in the vicinity of Seattle. The first tournament was held June 20, 1896, the course being played twice, and the winner was Harry Meserve with a score of twenty-five for the four holes.” (*The Story of Restoration Point and the Country Club* by T. M. Pelly and G. C. Nickum)

The course on Bainbridge Island was extended to six holes in October, 1896 and extended again into nine-hole course in 1915. At 2082 yards, par 32, this ultra-private course with its sand greens, accessible only to home owners and guests, is still played today. It has the distinction of being the oldest golf course in its original location in Washington State (Tacoma Golf Club, while established in 1894, moved to its current location circa 1907) and also one of the oldest in the entire country.



The Country Club of Seattle on Bainbridge Island with sand greens (Photo courtesy of Northwest Hickory Players)

An October 18, 1896 article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported that a “golfing party was being given by Mrs. F. H. Osgood at the Country Club [of Seattle].” Among the attendees were James Gillison, W. A. Peters, E. A. Strout, Josiah Collins, and many others. The occasion for the party was likely to celebrate the expansion of the Country Club course to six holes.

A tournament was held on that same occasion and Gillison and Strout tied for low honors with a score of 98 for 18 holes (three times around the course). Given that nearly all the original founders were present at the party, this may have been the moment that the Seattle Golf Club was formed.

## **James Gillison Jr. and Links at Fremont - 1896**

Against this backdrop, by late 1896, the formation of a golf club in Seattle was inevitable. James Gillison Jr. who had immigrated from England a few years earlier, led the effort.



James Gillison Jr. (1872 – 1941)

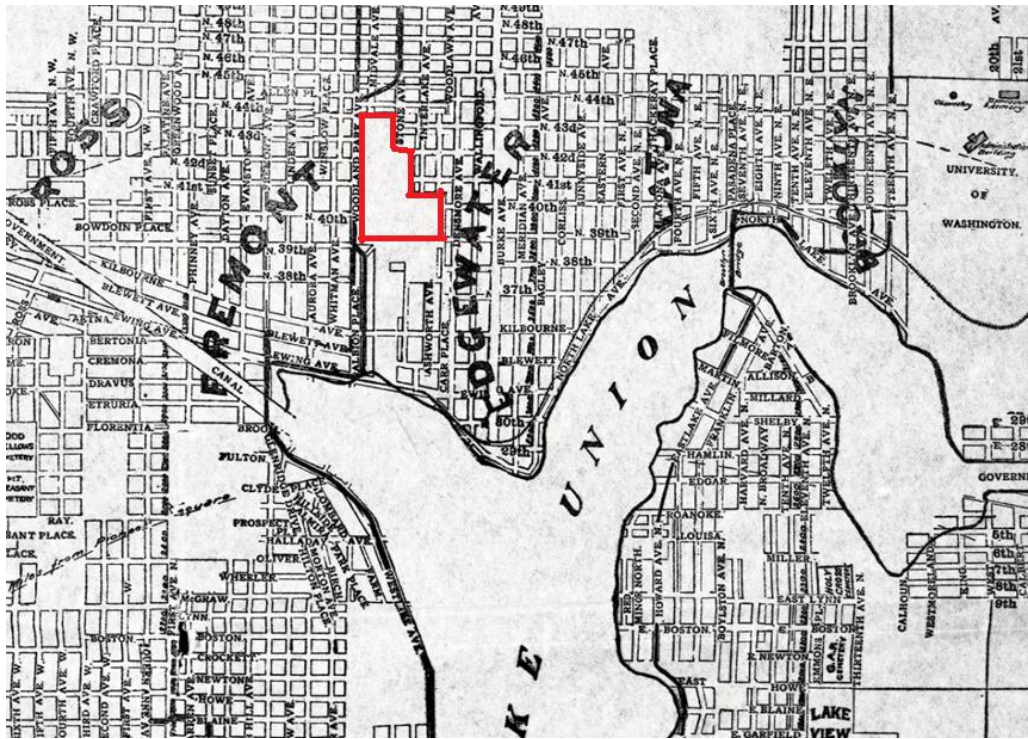
James Gillison Jr., was born in Liverpool, England in 1872, son of Scottish parents. It is likely that he learned to play golf at an early age given his high skill level shown in the early days of Seattle golf. In early 1893, at the age of 20, he emigrated to America as an employee of Balfour, Guthrie, & Company, the same company with which Alexander Baillie, the founder of Tacoma Golf Club, was employed. Gillison managed the branch office in Seattle.

Gillison was a member of the Tacoma Golf Club from its beginning in 1894 as well a founder of the Seattle Golf Club in 1896. In later years he moved to Portland where he became a member of Waverley Golf Club. He was a top player at the Seattle Golf Club. He finished runner-up in three PPGA Men’s Amateur Championships (1906, 1907, 1909). He died in Portland in 1941 at the age of 69.

Upon arriving in Seattle, young Gillison’s first act doubtlessly would have been to pay a visit to Alexander Baillie to seek advice and counsel. Working for the same employer, the two men built a close working relationship. They also shared a passion for golf. In their minds Seattle had gone too long without a golf club, and it was time to organize one.

Finding a suitable site to lay out a golf course in Seattle was difficult. Most of the outlying, unpopulated areas were heavily wooded, and open areas were used as farm land. Furthermore, given that this was before the advent of the automobile, the course needed to be within walking distance of a rail line. Eventually Gillison and others located a tract of open field bordering the Fremont and Wallingford neighborhoods. Accounts differ on the exact location

of the course, but it was generally described as bordering on Stone Avenue and three to four blocks north of Lake Union. An 1894 map depicts an open area fitting that description and the likely location highlighted in red.



1894 Map of Fremont and adjacent neighborhoods. Likely location of golf course in red.

The property was not ideal. It was a considerable distance from downtown Seattle and required an hour ride by tram to reach the course. The other option was to travel by boat, dock at the base of Stone Avenue, and hike uphill four or five blocks to reach the course. The course, referred to as “Fremont Links” or sometimes “The Meadows,” tended to become very muddy during the winter months when golf was typically played. Without mowers, golf could not be played during the summer months as the grass grew too high to make play feasible. The golf season lasted from October to April, the wettest times of the year in Seattle. In short, the course was hilly, muddy, and very rough, and the weather generally nasty. Nevertheless, enthusiasm was high, a course was laid out, most likely by Gillison with Baillie’s help, and Seattleites ventured out to play. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* later described the course:

“The Seattle or Fremont links are spoken of by golfers as a short but sporty nine-hole course. There is hardly a shot that cannot be reached by a drive and iron shot. The course is narrow and therefore requires good direction in making all kinds of shots. The best record for the nine holes is 36, held by E. A. Strout. He also holds the 18-hole record of 76. Miss Minor holds the club record [for women]. It is said that Miss Minor has made the nine holes in 46 strokes.

“There are a number of hazards, which prove trying to the players. Hole No. 7 is on a hill. It is the longest drive and hard to reach. Hole No. 4 is the shortest, but probably the most difficult of all, as the player cannot see the flag until very close. No. 4 is also on a hill. A ditch runs through the entire course and many balls are lost in it.” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* – 4-8-1900)

Having laid out a rudimentary course, Gillison with others, most notably Edwin A. Strout and Josiah Collins, sought to recruit members from a populace which knew virtually nothing about this new game called golf.



Streetcar on the interurban c.1902 (Photo courtesy of Wash. State Historical Society.) Players rode on a streetcar to reach the course. A Fremont station similar to one shown above was a few blocks from the golf course.

## **First Seattle Golf Club Tournament - 1897**

The news of the founding of the Seattle Golf Club in 1896 quickly spread and members were invited to participate in the New Year’s Day, 1897, tournament to be held in Tacoma. Other invitees were the Victoria Golf Club and the Waverley Golf Club. Unfortunately, given the recency of its organization, the Seattle Golf Club sent its regrets.

On January 30, 1897, the Seattle Golf Club held its first tournament on the Fremont course. Despite the “inclement weather and the poor condition of the course,” James Gillison came away the winner with a score of 120 over the 18 holes, winning by a margin of 34 strokes (gross) over the next competitor.

Owing to the condition of the links the scores made Saturday were not fully up to what was expected. There was one exception to this, however, in the play of J. Gillison, jr. He made the circuit of the nine holes, twice in 120 strokes, thus establishing a record. Mr. Gillison is undoubtedly the most expert player in Seattle and he understands the game in all its phases.

Following are scores of Saturday's play:

	Gross Score.	Handicap.	Net Score.
J. Gillison, jr.....	120	..	120
J. D. Lowman.....	159	28	131
A. J. Fiskken .....	154	20	134
H. Taylor .....	163	28	135
L. Pelly .....	172	36	136
W. A. Peters .....	166	28	138
A. W. Engle .....	196	54	142
E. A. Strout .....	167	29	147
E. Ling .....	178	28	150
G. A. Hurd .....	179	20	159
F. H. Osgood .....	207	45	162
H. Carstens .....	211	45	166

Seattle Post-Intelligencer - 2-1-1897

Scores ranged from 120 to 211 for the 18 holes, but one must not judge these players too harshly. Nearly all were new to the game. In addition, this was the era of gutta percha balls, which flew a very limited distance compared to today's balls. A drive of 150 yards was considered a very good drive.

Also, the course was no doubt very muddy and very rough. Compounded by apparent foul weather, the conditions were extremely difficult on this day.

The list of handicaps shows that Gillison at scratch was the best player by far in the club, hence his captaincy.

Following their inaugural tournament, members sought to improve the conditions of their course. A tent was added to serve as a clubhouse, and as winter turned to spring, "the ladies and gentlemen of the Golf Club have spent many pleasant hours on the Fremont Links, and have 'teed,' 'lofted' and 'putted' the ball to their hearts' content. All agree that nothing can be as nice as golf, for the golf is new in the West to almost everybody." (*Seattle Daily Times* – 5-29-1897)

A new golf season started in October, 1897 and the first Ladies Challenge Cup, essentially the club championship, was held the following month. In a field of six players, Mrs. E. A. (Cora) Strout defeated Miss Rena May Riley, a top tennis player, in a close match. On the men's side, club captain James Gillison defeated club president W. A. Peters to capture the cup.

During this time, the cup was contested every six months, once in the fall and once in the spring. Once the cup was won, the winner was automatically in the finals for the next tournament. It fell on the remaining players to compete through a series of match play competitions to earn the right to challenge the defending champion.

### **Golf Club Tournament.**

The Seattle Golf Club's semi-annual tournament came to a close yesterday afternoon, with two excellent matches.

Miss Riley won the ladies' championship by defeating Mrs. E. A. Strout, holder, by two up and one to play. E. A. Strout defeated J. Gillison, holder, two up, thus winning the gentlemen's championship.

Both matches were evenly contested throughout and developed many plays that were interesting to those who followed the links.

Gentlemen's competition—H. Carstens beat W. McDonald, 3 up and 2 to play; E. A. Strout beat L. Spear, 8 up and 7 to play; E. A. Strout beat H. Carstens, 8 up and 7 to play.

Finals—E. A. Strout beat J. Gillison, holder, 2 up.

Ladies' competition—Miss Arquit beat Mrs. J. D. Lowman, 3 up and 1 to play; Miss Riley beat Miss Struve, 3 up and 1 to play.

Finals—Miss Riley beat Mrs. E. A. Strout, holder, 2 up and 1 to play.

The following spring, on April 2, 1898, in a pair of close matches, E. A. Strout, who had finished 47 shots behind James Gillison a year earlier, dethroned Gillison by a score of 2 up in the men's championship.

In the women's championship, Miss Riley turned the tables on Mrs. E. A. Strout by a 2 and 1 margin.

Both E. A. Strout and Miss Riley would go on to win their next three cup challenges in their respective divisions.

Other names appearing in the competition, viz., Struve, Lowman, and Carstens, would play important roles in Seattle Golf Club's history.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer - 4-3-1898

The results of this tournament at the Fremont links clearly shows that it was a serious affair, played by both men and women.

"Golf has become so popular that it has more than rivaled any other winter pastime, even cards. It seems rather curious that people should brave the rigors of winter weather trudging over the links, but enthusiasts do it. The links of the Seattle club, which are located at Fremont, are probably the poorest in the Northwest, yet notwithstanding the club is in a prosperous condition and the membership is growing rapidly." (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* - 12-18-1898)

Major changes were in store for the club in 1899. As has happened to so many early golf courses in urban areas, construction of private homes and commercial buildings began taking up the land in and around the golf course. Seattle was no exception. The Seattle Golf Club lost its lease at the Fremont site and was compelled to abandon the course. As it turned out, this development may have been a blessing in disguise.

## **Move to Green Lake - 1899**

Forced into action, the club saw an opportunity to secure a lease on part of the 179-acre Woodland Park property which had recently been purchased by the City of Seattle from the

widow of Guy Phinney. At the time, Woodland Park encompassed the land where the zoo now sits as well as the property south of Lake Union.

The Seattle Golf Club was granted the lease and built a course at the south end of Green Lake in 1899.

“The golf season is in full swing. Almost every afternoon a number of the enthusiasts are seen at the links at Green Lake. The golfers here will have a club tournament a little later in the season.” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* – 12-3-1899)

The details of the new course at Green Lake are not known. Nor do we know the exact location other than it was probably close to where the pitch and putt course and the ball fields now sit.

“The links are situated between Green Lake and Edgewater. It is said that the links at Green Lake are among the most difficult in the country, and the Seattle players thus become better accustomed to rough ground. A little clubhouse has been erected on the links, and there every Friday and Saturday afternoon the ladies who belong to the club serve tea.” (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* – 12-10-1899)

Evidently Seattle Golf Club had an interest in purchasing the property from the City to permanently locate its course at Green Lake, however to this end it was not successful.

By the close of 1899 the Seattle Golf Club had 75 members. The officers of the club were: E. A. Strout, president; A. J. Fisker, secretary and treasurer; Josiah Collins, captain; with J. D. Lowman, Harry Taylor, Josiah Collins, and Herman Chapin serving as directors.

The year 1899 was a pivotal year for the Seattle Golf Club for another reason. On February 4, 1899, in a meeting held in Tacoma, the Pacific Northwest Golf Association (PNGA) was organized becoming the fifth oldest golf association in the United States. Seattle Golf Club was one of its six founding members, along with Victoria GC, Tacoma GC, Waverly GC, Spokane GC, and Walla Walla GC. Captain Harry Taylor, commander of the Army Corps of Engineers in Seattle, represented Seattle Golf Club at the meeting. The following year E. A. Strout was named Seattle Golf Club's representative and would later serve as PNGA's second president from 1901 to 1906.

## **Move to Laurelhurst - 1900**

As the world turned to the new century, the club, after failing to purchase the Green Lake property, continued to look for a permanent home for their course. After a lengthy search they found a 55-acre property on the hilltops of the Laurelhurst neighborhood. The location was spectacular with a sweeping view overlooking Lake Washington and the snow-capped Cascades and Mount Rainier. In the summer of 1900, the club secured a 10-year lease with the

option to buy for \$30,000 (about \$1.1 million today) the “Ferguson Place,” a property owned by David Ferguson.



Postcard scene of Seattle Golf Club course and clubhouse at Laurelhurst – c.1903

Josiah Collins tells the story that when the owner, a Scotsman, of the property was first approached about the rental of the property he wanted \$150 a month rent. “But, this is not for any private individual or corporation gain. My purpose in getting a rental price fixed on it is so that I can inform the golf club that is going to use it.” “Golf?” ejaculated the Scot. It’s for golf you want my acres? Well, that’s different; you can have it for \$125 a month.”

On August 8, 1900, the club incorporated as the Seattle Golf and Country Club. Judge Thomas Burke, a non-golfer, was elected president. Named to the Board of Trustees were Josiah Collins, Bernard Pelly, C. R. Collins, E. A. Strout, George Ladd Munn and E. W. Andrews. The name of the club would later revert back to Seattle Golf Club in 1912 to avoid confusion with the Country Club of Seattle on Bainbridge Island.

Clearly a few of these men saw the newly formed club as a new beginning and wanted to break free, for reasons not easily discerned, from the Seattle Golf Club to which many of them had been a part. Certainly, they had been frustrated, and perhaps a little embarrassed, by their inability to build a golf course on par with the likes of Victoria, Tacoma, and Waverley. For several years the clubs in these cities had taken turns hosting inter-club tournaments. But Seattle’s club, to the consternation of its members, could not do the same given the poor condition of the Fremont course.

Seattle Golf Club's move to a new location was not unique in the early days of golf in America. Many courses which began in urban areas were compelled to relocate. It is unusual, however, for clubs to abandon their history and start over as new clubs.

The parallels between the histories of Seattle Golf Club and Tacoma Golf Club are striking. Both were started by men who were branch managers of the British firm Balfour, Guthrie, & Company. Tacoma Golf Club was founded in 1894 and built a course in the Edison district of Tacoma. The club relocated to its current location on American Lake in 1907. Like Seattle, it re-named itself, from Tacoma Golf Club to Tacoma Country and Golf Club, at the time of its move. Unlike Seattle, however, it has retained its original founding date.

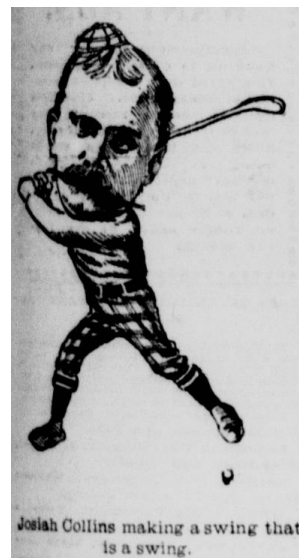
For that matter, both Waverley Golf Club and Spokane Country Club also relocated from their original sites. These clubs too have retained their original founding dates. While it is true that Seattle Golf and Country Club incorporated in 1900, it must be noted that formal incorporations of clubs are often filed months or years after the organizations' founding and typically are not determinants of when clubs are established.

## Strout and Collins – 1900

By 1900 a new sheriff, or more accurately, two sheriffs were in town. Two men, E. A. Strout and Josiah Collins, would lead the Seattle Golf and Country Club into the new century.



E. A. Strout Caricature



Josiah Collins Caricature

Fifty-three names appear on the Founder's roll following incorporation. Curiously, James Gillison, who had been at the forefront of golf's beginnings in Seattle, and hence of the Seattle Golf Club, was conspicuously absent from the roll. His absence has led some to speculate that the incorporation may have been a take-over by the more senior and prominent members of

the club in 1900. Gillison would, however, later re-appear as a member of the club and serve as secretary for several years. While Judge Thomas Burke had the title of president, it was Strout and Collins who took charge of the club's affairs.



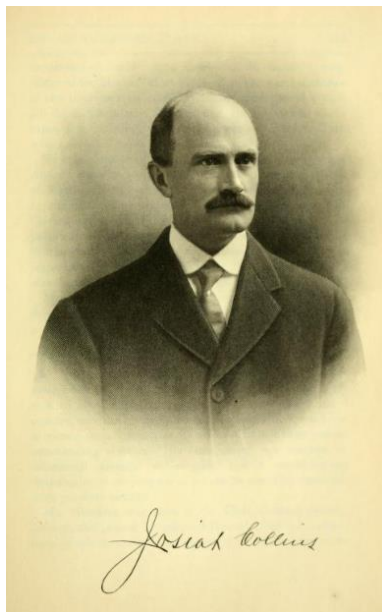
EDWIN A. STROUT  
Fire and Liability Insurance; Secretary Brick Exchange. Born New Hampshire, 1862. Arrived in Washington 1884. Address, Seattle, Wash.

Edwin A. Strout (1862 – 1928)

Edwin “Win” Augustus Strout was born in 1862 in Conway, New Hampshire. He struck out at the age of eighteen and eventually arrived in Seattle in 1884 and worked as secretary and treasurer for the Puget Sound Ice Company. He later entered the insurance business and founded his own highly successful insurance company.

It is not known how he was introduced to golf. It seems likely that he learned to play golf in 1896 when the club was founded. It is clear that he made rapid progress. After finishing 47 strokes behind James Gillison in the club's first tournament in 1897, he came back the following year to defeat him. He became a top player at the Seattle Golf Club in the early years.

He would serve for a number of years on the Board of the Pacific Northwest Golf Association from its inception in 1899. He died in Seattle in 1928 at the age of 65.



Josiah Collins (1864 – 1949)

Josiah Collins was born 1864 in Hillsboro, North Carolina into what was once a wealthy family. When the Civil War wiped out the family fortunes, he was left to his own devices. At the age of nineteen he moved to Seattle and eventually obtained his law license. He became a prominent attorney in Seattle and also served as a State Senator. He was also the Fire Chief at the time of the Great Seattle Fire in 1889.

One of his favorite stories as told in a letter to A. S. Kerry in 1937, was how golf started in Seattle in the wild environs of Lake Union. “It was a pretty rough neighborhood near these golf links north of Lake Union. There was a saloon not very far from the end of the tracks and coming in with two girls from these ‘aboriginal’ links one day a big drunken logger got on the train. He did not like my looks nor the girls I was with. I had a fight with him and he got me down on the floor and would have killed me if the girls had not pulled him off. Ever since that time I have been a strong advocate of lady golfers.” He died in 1949 in Seattle at the age of 85.

The immediate task for the new board was to make ready the clubhouse and construct a golf course. Work began immediately and the Ferguson home was transformed into a clubhouse after an extensive remodel. The construction of the golf course would take some time and require professional help.

On April 27, 1901 the clubhouse opened to much fanfare: “The club house looks very attractive on approaching, situated on the crest of a green hill sloping to the lake and an orchard in full blossom at one side. An orchestra of stringed instruments was heard on reaching the club house. During the afternoon putting and driving contests were held and prizes awarded.” (*Seattle P-I* - 4-28-1901)



Seattle Golf Club (clubhouse in the distance) at Laurelhurst – 1902 (Courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)



Seattle Golf Club at Laurelhurst – Hole 4 - 1902 (Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Wash St Historical Society)



Seattle Golf Club at Laurelhurst – Hole 1 - 1902 (Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Washington State Historical Society)



Seattle Golf Club at Laurelhurst – Ladies Match on Hole 4 - 1902 (Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Wash St Historical Society)

## William Watson and John Ball – 1901

Work on the course continued as well. While an Englishman named John Ball has historically been credited as the designer, recently discovered evidence points to the legendary golf professional and architect William Watson as the designer of the course at Laurelhurst. John Ball was the constructor of the golf course, and not its designer.

“William Watson, a professional golf player and teacher, is in Spokane. He is on his way to give a series of lessons at Tacoma, and will then lay out the golf links at Seattle. From there he will go to Pasadena, where he will give instructions on the private links of the Hotel Green.” (*The Spokesman-Review* 11-16-1900)

A month later, on December 27, 1900, E. A. Strout, a frequent visitor to California, met Watson at the Hotel Green course and played a round with him. Strout played excellent golf that day, even making the local newspaper.

“E. A. Strout, president of the Seattle Golf club, is spending a few weeks at Pasadena. Playing with the professional, William Watson, at the Hotel Green Links last Thursday he beat the amateur record for the course, making eighteen holes in 79.” (*Los Angeles Herald* – 12-31-1900)

Watson would make several trips to the Northwest in the next two years. He appears to have visited Seattle in April, 1901 and again in October, 1901, which approximately coincides with the construction of the Laurelhurst course. There is also a high likelihood that it was Watson who gave Strout the name of John Ball, a landscaper and builder who had constructed Watson’s courses in Minnesota.



William Watson (1860 – 1941)

William Watson was born in 1860 near St. Andrews, Scotland. He learned to play golf at a young age and was a member of the St. Andrews Golf Society. In 1898 he emigrated to America and settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was hired as golf professional at the newly-formed Minikahda Golf Club and laid out its course. The following year he moved to Southern California which would serve as his home base. He led a peripatetic life designing or remodeling over a hundred golf courses all across the country. He is credited with designing or remodeling Olympia Fields GC, Olympic Club courses, Interlachen GC, Harding Park GC, Belvedere GC, and many others. William Watson died in 1941 in Los Angeles at the age of 81.

William Watson's younger brother John Martin Watson was a well-known professional in the Pacific Northwest having served as golf professional at Spokane CC and Waverley GC. William Watson and John Martin Watson served for a brief time as golf professionals at Tacoma Golf Club in 1902. J. Martin Watson's son Forest Watson was a top amateur player in the Northwest during the 1920s and 1930s and served as the president of the PPGA in his later years.

While the clubhouse opened to much fanfare and publicity, there was, inexplicably, very little press coverage of the opening of the course itself. It likely opened in October, 1901. When completed, the nine-hole course measured 2130 yards. It was short, even by the standards of the time, and hilly. A deep ravine crossed the fairway requiring a trestle bridge to reach the clubhouse. The original house, now a private residence, still stands today. The ravine later became 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE.

To reach the course, most members took a street car running along Madison Street from downtown, to what is now Madison Park, where a boat, the "Sunny Jim," awaited them. It was an eight-minute boat ride to the Laurelhurst dock from where a walk up a very steep hill was then required to reach the clubhouse.



Seattle Golf Club at Laurelhurst – Boat Dock - 1902 (Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Wash St Historical Society)



William Howard Taft

Secretary of War William Howard Taft played the Laurelhurst links in 1907 while visiting Seattle. Reportedly, the Laurelhurst course left little impression on him as he would later say that the only thing he remembered of the course were the fruit trees on the property.

It could not have been easy for the Falstaffian future President, tipping the scale at 330 pounds, to climb the very steep incline before starting his round. He remarked after the round that “given a few days’ work of that sort, he would soon reduce his waist line by several inches.”

Taft would return two years later to play the club’s new course at The Highlands neighborhood, north of Seattle.

By all accounts, John Ball did excellent work in constructing the course as members expressed satisfaction with the results. The club later brought him back in 1907 to construct the club’s new course in the Highlands in the Richmond Beach neighborhood.



John Ball (1848 – 1938)

John Titus Ball was born in England in 1848 and emigrated to America in 1886, settling in Minnesota. His background was as a florist, gardener, and landscaper. As far as is known he had no background in golf course design prior to coming to America, or that he even played the game until late in his life. As late as 1910, he is listed in Seattle directory, not as a golf professional or architect, but as a “Gardener in Landscape Business.”

In Minnesota, Ball constructed several golf courses, including the Town and Country Golf Club and the Minikahda Golf Club courses, both designed by William Watson. From this experience, he was hired to construct the Laurelhurst course in 1901 and again the Richmond Highlands course in 1907. Ball would later parlay his experience with the two Seattle courses to gain a reputation as both a designer and a builder. He would go on to design and construct numerous golf courses in Washington, including Grays Harbor Country Club (1912) and Bellingham Golf & Country Club (1912). He died in Tacoma in 1938 at the age of 90.

William Watson returned to Seattle in October, 1901, presumably to oversee the completion of the course and while there gave lessons to members. It is likely the first time many of the members had received professional instruction.

“On next Sunday a golf tournament will be played on the links of Seattle Golf and Country club, between the Seattle and Tacoma clubs. The links are in good condition and some of the Seattle players have acquired remarkable proficiency

under the direction of Prof. Watson, a well-known golfer of Los Angeles, Cal., who has lately had the Seattle players in charge. The Seattle men are confident of winning.” (Seattle Star – 10-11-1901)

The result of the match between the two clubs was not reported in the local newspapers, but it marked the first time Seattle club members felt confident enough of their course to host an inter-club tournament.

## A Golf Star Emerges

In 1902, a young golf star rose from the ranks of Seattle Golf Club. In the PPGA Men’s Amateur Championship held in Tacoma that year, F. C. Newton emerged as the champion and would be the first of many club members to bring the prestigious trophy to Seattle.



Frank C. Newton (1874 – 1946)

Francis “Frank” C. Newton was born in Washington D. C. in 1874. He moved to Seattle in 1898 and later joined the Seattle Golf Club. Within a very short time he became an accomplished golfer.

He won the bronze medal in the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis when golf was an Olympic event. He lost in the semi-finals to the eventual gold medalist, Canadian George Lyon 1 down in a 36-hole match. It would be another 92 years before golf returned as an Olympic sport in 2016.

Newton, a chemist by profession, later moved to Massachusetts where he joined the historic Country Club at Brookline. He competed at the highest levels of amateur golf against the likes of Francis Ouimet, Chick Evans, and Chandler Egan. In 1923, at the age of 49, he won the prestigious North-South Championship held at Pinehurst, North Carolina. He died in Connecticut in 1946 at the age of 72.

The club began playing in a series of “home and away” tournaments against Victoria, Tacoma, Waverley, and Spokane clubs. By 1905, Seattle Golf Club had become the dominant force, competitively speaking, among the five major golf clubs in the Northwest. In early 1905, in a series of matches against each of the other clubs, the Seattle team, led by Newton, defeated their rivals.



Oregonian - 3-12-1905. Shown in the photo are from top left: Sherwood Gillespie, James Wood (Portland), J. Gillison, F. C. Newton, F. S. Ruhn, E. A. Strout. From bottom left: J. D. Lowman, James D. Hogue, G. W. Fischer, Josiah Collins, J. C. Murray, J. W. Eddy, C. A. McKenzie

In 1905, as part of the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, Waverley Golf Club in Portland, Oregon staged the biggest golf tournament in the Pacific Northwest to that point. Several golf organizations have also laid claim to the tournament, as it is also regarded as the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Pacific Northwest Golf Association Amateur Championship, the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Oregon State Amateur Championship, and the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Northwest Open.

While Seattle's F. C. Newton was regarded the favorite to win the amateur title that year, it was Waverley's top player Roderick MacLeay who captured the crown. Five professionals competed in the Open Championship, with George Smith from Oakland defeating the Waverley pro John Moffat in the finals. Robert Johnstone, pro from San Francisco Golf Club at Presidio came in third.

In January, 1902, Seattle Golf Club hired its first golf professional, William Brown, from Chicago.



“Wm Brown Seattle” rut iron

William Brown was born in Scotland in 1870 and learned his trade at St. Andrews. He joined the great influx of Scottish golf professionals who came to America at the turn of the century, arriving in Chicago in 1898.

As was customary of the era, a golf professional’s duties were many and widely varied. In addition to giving lessons and organizing tournaments at the Laurelhurst course, he also acted as the greenskeeper, club maker, and club house manager.

Brown’s stay at Laurelhurst was brief as he returned to Chicago the following year.

Following Watson’s departure, the club was without a professional for a year or more. This changed in 1905 with the arrival of Robert Johnstone, a Scottish golf professional.

## Robert Johnstone – A Professional and a Gentleman

Robert Johnstone, who had immigrated from Scotland five years earlier in 1900, was persuaded to come to Seattle with an offer of a position at the Seattle Golf Club. Thus began a relationship between the man and the club that would last for the next 32 years. This pivotal hire would not only define the future of golf at the Seattle Golf Club, but in some sense, that of the entire Pacific Northwest.

Robert “Bob” Johnstone was born in North Berwick, Scotland in 1874. He was assistant to famed clubmaker and professional Ben Sayers at North Berwick Golf Club. In 1899, John Lawson, the branch manager of the Balfour, Guthrie and Company in San Francisco, while visiting Scotland, convinced Johnstone that a job awaited him at the Presidio Golf links. Johnstone, with fellow golf professional William Bell, made their way to San Francisco in 1900. He was at Presidio from 1900 to 1905. While there he redesigned the Presidio course and the Ingleside Golf Club course.

He returned to Scotland in 1902 to marry Sarah Gilbert. They had two daughters, Ethel and Florence. He was with the Seattle Golf Club for thirty-two years from 1905 to 1937. Robert Johnstone died of a heart attack in Seattle on October 29, 1937 at the age of 62. Remarkably, his wife Sarah lived another 40 years, passing away in 1977 at the age of 101.



Robert Johnstone (1874 – 1937)



ROBERT JOHNSTONE.

Johnstone in California - 1902

Johnstone was an exceptional player and competed in many tournaments. He won the inaugural Pacific Coast Golf Association Open Championship in 1901 held at the Hotel del Monte links in Monterey. He took home \$100 (\$3,600 today) for his win. This tournament is regarded by some as the first California State Open. After finishing in fourth in 1902, Johnstone won again in 1903.

R. J. Johnstone	.....71, 71, 75, 79—296
F. J. Reilly	.....74, 74, 77, 74—299
George Smith	.....75, 75, 83, 77—310
J. Melville	.....82, 80, 74, 78—314
A. G. Harvey	.....81, 84, 74, 80—319
W. Frederickson	.....77, 82, 83, 78—320
Alexander Bell	.....77, 82, 86, 78—323
W. Welsh	.....75, 79, 86, 82—332
J. S. Oyster	.....89, 92, 81, 89—351
W. M. Carpenter	.....88, 95, 83, 89—355
J. J. Crooks	.....95, 84, 93, 86—358
J. W. Byrne	.....90, 90, 94, 87—361
C. E. Orr	.....87, * * —

#### 1903 Pacific Coast Golf Association Open Results

While some have credited Johnstone with winning the Northwest Open in 1906-08, and 1910, no evidence has been shown to prove this. Given that there were only three or four golf professionals in the Northwest at any given time during these years, it is unlikely that an Open tournament would even have been conducted.

The Pacific Coast Golf Association (PCGA), founded in San Francisco in 1901, was an ambitious, but doomed-to-fail, attempt to create an association of associations by combining the Northern California Golf Association, the Southern California Golf Association, and the Pacific Northwest Golf Association, and by extension, their member clubs. The PCGA would conduct annual Men's and Women's, amateur and professional, championships to determine the best golfers on the Pacific coast.

From the beginning, the viability of PCGA was in doubt. The main obstacle was the great distances players had to travel during those early years when travel was difficult. In addition, there existed a constant tension between the Northern and Southern California golf associations regarding its governance, particularly when it came to deciding tournament venues. The PCGA struggled along for about a dozen years, but given the difficulties, it gradually faded out of existence by the 1920s.

Then in 1967, the association miraculously was re-incarnated at the Seattle Golf Club when the club hosted the Pacific Coast Amateur which has been contested every year since then. Today the PCGA numbers fifteen member associations that include ten western states and two

Canadian provinces. The annual Pacific Coast Amateur tournament draws the very best golfers from its member associations.



Robert Johnstone 1914 Spalding's Golf Guide

In 1906, Johnstone played a challenge match against Ernest Martin, the pro at Spokane Country Club. The challenge match was reminiscent of the great matches in Scotland during the 1800s between pros such as Old Tom Morris and Willie Park.

Over 72 holes, the first 36 at Spokane and the final 36 at Laurelhurst, Johnstone, down one hole at the halfway point, came back to win the match 6 and 5 and pocketed \$100.

Johnstone followed that win with another match a year later against Victoria Golf Club's pro Jack Moffat winning by a score of 7 and 6. Victoria's newspaper, *The British Colonist*, reported that "considerable interest was taken in the match and several large bets were placed on the results."

At Laurelhurst, Johnstone resumed his professional duties and established himself as an excellent teacher and player. His dedication to his work and to his club is evident in a later interview: "When Robert Johnstone arrived at the Laurelhurst course in 1905, he charged members one dollar for an hour lesson. 'But,' smilingly reminisces Bob, 'I'd spend the whole afternoon with one pupil for that dollar; I was willing to give up everything and anything to turn out one finished player whose skill might fire the imagination of the others; might bring some esteem to our club.'" (*Seattle Times* - 4-27-1930)

It is difficult to overstate Johnstone's contribution to golf in Seattle and to the Pacific Northwest. He was the consummate "pro's pro". He taught a generation of golf professionals and top amateur players who learned the game as caddies at the Seattle Golf Club. Among the professionals were Frank Rodia (1929 Washington Open Champion), Bert Wilde (1930 Northwest Open Champion), Jack Hueston (1925 Northwest Open Champion), Mel Hueston, Harry Pratt, Ray Ball (son of John Ball), and many others. Top amateurs taught by Johnstone included Bon Stein, Lee Steil, Claire Griswold and Harry Givan.

Johnstone was instrumental in founding the Pacific Northwest Professional Golfers Association (PNWPGA) in 1922 and served as its president for the first ten years of its existence. The organization established a code of conduct for the professionals to follow. It also established a fund to assist fellow professionals in time of need.

Among his architectural accomplishments, Johnstone designed the Seattle Golf Club course (1908), Everett Golf Club course (1910), Jefferson Park Golf Course (1915), and Downriver Golf Course (1916) in Spokane. He designed the first nine of the Rainier Golf and Country Club (1919) course and partnered with A. Vernon Macan to design the Inglewood Golf Club (1919) course. He was also involved in the remodel of many other courses in the Northwest.

On the occasion of Johnstone's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1930, the Seattle Golf Club presented him with an honorary membership at the club, an act unheard of at a time when golf professionals were considered as hired help. "You have done a wonderful thing," he said to the members on that occasion. "You have made a professional a gentleman."

John Dreher, the Seattle Times golf writer paid him this tribute:

"Bob Johnstone is not only a Seattle institution, but a landmark in Pacific Coast golf. Laying early the foundation of a reputation for honesty and character and workmanship, he has ripened in the esteem of the Seattle Golf Club. Rewarded has been his toil; realized has been the ambition to build a great institution from the ground up. Rarely has a golf course been selected, or a major move made by a golf club in this city or district that the opinion, advice, and counsel of Bob Johnstone has not been obtained first." (Seattle Times – 4-27-1930)

For all that he has accomplished, perhaps his most endearing quality was his sense of humor and his story-telling, told in his heavy Scottish burr. Some of Johnstone's stories can be found at the end of this article.

## **A New Era Dawns and the Move to the Highlands – 1908**

In 1906, Seattle Golf Club hosted its first major tournament at the Laurelhurst course with the playing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Pacific Northwest Golf Association Championships. In the Men's Championship flight, 38 players contested for the title, while 12 women competed in the Ladies Championship. In the Men's finals, C. K. McGill from Victoria Golf Club defeated James Gillison by a score of 5 and 4. In the Ladies' finals, Seattle Golf Club's Edith Garrett upset the defending champion Violet Pooley of the Victoria Golf Club 2 and 1.

Although most of the members did not know it at the time, big changes were coming for the club in 1907. In January, 1907, five men, C. D. Stimson, H. W. Treat, Harvey Lindley, F. K. Struve, and George B. Kittinger purchased 303 acres of property in the Richmond Beach area north of Seattle. While the precise circumstances of the purchase are not known, the events that played out were unusual.

First, Stimson and company filed for incorporation as a new entity called the Seattle Country Club. This in itself was peculiar because there already existed the Seattle Golf and Country Club

as well as the Country Club of Seattle. The group's plan was to use the property to build summer homes and to consolidate various outdoor activities including golf, tennis and yachting.

Secondly, this was not the normal course of business in relocating a golf course, if that was indeed the intent. Perhaps it was a splinter group of the Seattle Golf and Country Club, or perhaps a backroom deal was made, which led to the decision to create the new club. Regardless, those on the board of the Seattle Golf and Country Club saw an opportunity to sell the Laurelhurst property, consolidate with the Seattle Country Club, and relocate to Richmond Beach. In March 1907, the membership voted, in a controversial vote, to do just that. "Ties of sentiment and the popularity of the old course caused serious dissension in the club, and many of the foremost members objected strenuously to the abandonment of the Lake Washington grounds." (Seattle P-I – 5-20-1913)

In the end, the move only made sense. Like the Fremont course before it, suburban development had begun encroaching on the Laurelhurst property making the land much too valuable simply for golf. In addition, the short, hilly nine-hole course, while spectacularly located, was hardly championship quality.

The club exercised its option to buy the 55-acre Laurelhurst property from David Ferguson for \$30,000, an amount agreed upon earlier. Within a few weeks, the club sold the Laurelhurst property to the Seaboard Security Company, a development company, for \$100,000 for a tidy \$70,000 profit (equivalent to \$2.5 million in today's dollars), albeit the club had expended significant dollars to upgrade the clubhouse and the grounds over the six-year period. The stage was now set to build a new, 18-hole golf course.

Club professional Robert Johnstone was tasked to design the course and John Ball was once again hired to construct it. The new property was very heavily forested. Ball later he recalled that the woods were so thick that "one could not see the sun in the search for locations for the greens. The slashers were provided with pocket compasses to run their lines and to ensure their safe return to camp for dinner." Undaunted, Ball set to work on May 15, 1907. He later gave an interview on how the forest was transformed into a golf course:

"An open spot, about the center of the links site, was selected on the county road from which to attack the job. There, tools and materials could be delivered and carried into the woods for the opening of the eleventh and sixteenth holes, two holes which their constructor declares have no superiors anywhere in America. Trees were felled and stumps were blown with powder. This was followed by two-horse stump-pullers which took out every large root. Men with grubbing axes followed and removed small roots.

"An average of seventy-five men, including watchmen to guard against fires, and seventeen teams were used on clearing the one hundred acres which constitute the cleared land for the links. The work was all done in 127 days. Nor did the work mentioned include the many large rocks that were drilled and blasted out of the course. Firs and cedars from two to six feet in diameter had to be removed, trunk, branch and root." (Seattle Times – 8-24-1919)

When the course opened in 1908, the heavily wooded forest was replaced by a wide expanse of fairways and greens.



Seattle Golf Club at Highlands – c.1910 (Photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)



Seattle Golf Club at Highlands – c.1910 (Photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)



Seattle Golf Club at Highlands – c.1910 (Photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)



Seattle Golf Club at Highlands – c.1910 (Photo courtesy of UW Special Collections)

The club hired well-known Northwest building architect Kirtland K. Cutter (1869 – 1939) to design the clubhouse. Cutter had a fondness for the Swiss chalet style, which he used to design the clubhouse, and later the Spokane Country Club clubhouse.



Seattle Golf Club Clubhouse - c.1920 (courtesy of UW Libraries Special Collections)



Seattle GC 11<sup>th</sup> Hole – A footbridge was used to reach the green - c.1920 (courtesy of MOHAI)

Members began playing the course by the fall of 1908. In June 1909, Seattle Golf Club showed off its new course to the world by hosting the Pacific Coast Golf Association Championship. As was the case at the Lewis and Clark Exposition Tournament at Waverley in 1905, this tournament coincided with the Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition, and served as PPGA's annual championship as well as the Northwest Open for the professionals. In the Men's Amateur, Californian Douglas Grant defeated local favorite James Gillison in the finals. The Women's Amateur title was won by Violet Pooley who defeated Mrs. Walter Langley, both from Victoria. In the professional division, James "Long Jim" M. Barnes, recently hired by Spokane Country Club, came in first while Johnstone finished second in a field of four professionals.

On October 1, 1909, William Howard Taft, now President, returned to Seattle and played a nine-hole match against H. C. Henry, the club's president. With Josiah Collins serving as his caddy, Taft won the match 2 up shooting a 45 for the nine holes.



President Taft Putting at Seattle Golf Club on 10-1-1909 (courtesy of UW Special Collections)

## **Northwest's Greatest Match – 1913**

In 1913, Seattle Golf Club was the site of the largest gathering of spectators for a golf event in the Northwest. The occasion was the touring exhibition by the great Harry Vardon and Ted

Ray, part of the tour of America following their shocking defeat at the hands of amateur Francis Ouimet at the U.S. Open at Brookline, Massachusetts. An estimated 1,200 spectators lined the fairways to watch local favorites Robert Johnstone and Tacoma Golf Club's pro James "Long Jim" Barnes play a 36-hole four-ball match against the English greats.

Johnstone and Barnes were intent on beating the visitors as they prepared for several days leading up to the match. Barnes, twelve years junior to Johnstone, was the stronger of the two. While the legendary play of Ouimet, Vardon and Ray at the 1913 U.S. Open is immortalized in the book and film *The Greatest Game Ever Played*, less well known is the fact that Barnes finished tied for fourth in that championship, only three strokes out, and could very well have won that tournament but for a couple of errant shots.

The match in Seattle began on October 30<sup>th</sup> on a cool, clear day. The first half began auspiciously when Barnes sank a tricky 8-foot putt to put the Johnstone/Barnes tandem 1 up after the first eighteen. A key moment came on the 15<sup>th</sup> when Barnes, with his opponents both inside him, made a clutch 9-footer for what appeared to be for a tie. However, Ray missed his 8-footer, then Vardon missed his 3-footer. Vardon, the greatest player in his day, suffered from the putting yips in the late stages of his career and it was evident during his match.



Harry Vardon (with cigar) driving – 1913. Ted Ray watching. (courtesy of Seattle Golf Club)



Ted Ray (with pipe) putting – 1913. Johnstone in white hat watching (courtesy of Seattle Golf Club)



Jim Barnes putting. Johnstone (in white hat) and Vardon in foreground. (courtesy of Seattle Golf Club)

The second half began poorly for Johnstone and Barnes when the English pair won four unanswered holes to go 3 up through the 10<sup>th</sup>. The match appeared all but over at that point. But the local team got one back on the par 3 eleventh when Barnes made a sensational birdie. When Johnstone birdied the 13<sup>th</sup>, all of sudden, the local team was only one down with five to go. The two sides tied the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> holes. Johnstone hit a perfect approach on the 16<sup>th</sup> for a birdie, and suddenly the match was all square with two to go. On the 17<sup>th</sup> hole Vardon made a twelve-footer to go 1 up with one to play.

On the final hole, Barnes had a chance to tie, and go into extra holes, with an eight-footer, but struck too hard, it jumped the hole. Vardon and Ray had won 1 up in a thrilling 36-hole match. It was described in the local papers as “the greatest golf fight staged in the Northwest.”

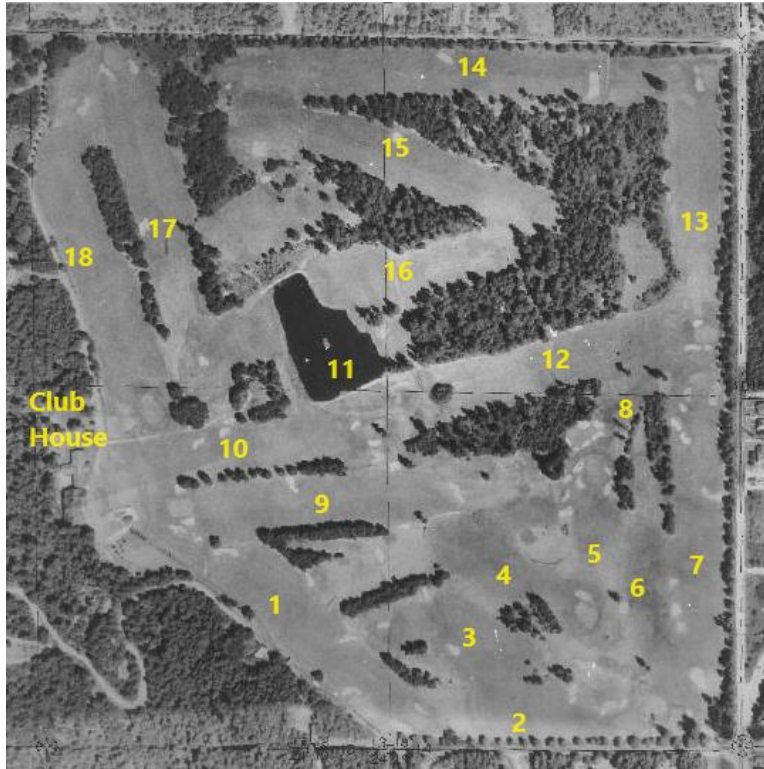
If on that day in October, Seattle saw a fading star in forty-three year-old Harry Vardon nearing the end of his illustrious career, it also saw the rise of a new star in another Englishman, twenty-seven year old Jim Barnes. Standing six foot four, the lanky Englishman was known for his prodigious length off the tee. Barnes left his position at Tacoma in 1914 and went 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.

Barnes and Johnstone forged a strong friendship during their time in the Northwest. They collaborated on designing several golf courses in the Northwest including Spokane Country Club, Everett Golf Club, and Jefferson Park Golf Course.

## **The Course: Then and Now**

Over the course of nearly 120 years, the course, as expected, has undergone major changes in its layout. Vardon noted the paucity of bunkers in 1913 and the club responded with the addition of bunkers on nearly every hole. Vardon’s philosophy was that a club could not produce a champion golfer without a championship level course.

Major renovations took place in 1968 by golf architect Ted Robinson when the practice area was put in, and again in 1996 by Arnold Palmer when a number of holes were lengthened. Throughout these changes, the routing of the holes has remained substantially the same with the exception of the closing holes 15 – 18 when the driving range was put in where holes 17 and 18 were once located.



Seattle Golf Club – 1936 Aerial (courtesy of King County GIS)

Seattle Golf Club - 1914					
hole	yards	par	hole	yards	par
1	410	4	10	305	4
2	283	4	11	155	3
3	190	3	12	339	4
4	330	4	13	300	4
5	365	4	14	530	5
6	345	4	15	426	5
7	430	5	16	410	5
8	125	3	17	341	4
9	475	5	18	175	5
	2978	36		3281	38
			<b>Total</b>	<b>6259</b>	<b>74</b>

The routing and yardages have largely remained the same from 1914 to 1936 when this aerial was shot.

Seattle Golf Club - 2024					
hole	yards	par	hole	yards	par
1	440	4	10	424	4
2	366	4	11	194	3
3	393	4	12	391	4
4	363	4	13	398	4
5	204	3	14	533	5
6	409	4	15	393	4
7	523	5	16	211	3
8	177	3	17	404	4
9	550	5	18	528	5
	3425	36		3476	36
			<b>Total</b>	<b>6901</b>	<b>72</b>



Seattle Golf Club – 2019 Aerial (courtesy of King County GIS)

In the years following Vardon and Ray's appearance, Seattle Golf Club emerged as the pre-eminent golf club in the Northwest. It hosted numerous major tournaments including the Western Amateur Championship in 1927 (won by Seattle's own Bon Stein), the U.S. Amateur in 1952 (won by Everett's Jack Westland), the Walker Cup in 1961 (won by the U.S. Team 11-1 and led by Jack Nicklaus).

The club also produced a number of champions who won major tournaments in the early years. F. C. Newton won the PPGA's Men's Amateur in 1904, T. S. Lippy in 1907, George Ladd Munn in 1908, Harry A. "Dixie" Fleager in 1917, and Harry Givan five times over a twenty-five-year span from 1936 to 1961. Among the women, Edith Garrett won the PPGA Women's Amateur in 1906, and Phebe Nell Tidmarsh won in 1921.

The history of the Seattle Golf Club is a long and storied one. It began humbly in the muddy fields in Fremont in 1896, but it has since become one of the finest in the country.

## Postscript: Robert Johnstone Stories

***On Democracy of Golf.*** "I like that phrase, 'the democracy of golf.' It reminds me of an incident that happened at St. Andrews some years ago. A big amateur tournament was in progress when, during the luncheon hour, a famous titled person who had won his morning match, said to the servant who was attending to his table wants: 'Would you mind finding out whom I play this afternoon?' Pausing for the moment in the act of removing the dishes, the waiter replied: 'You play me, my lord, this afternoon.'" (*Seattle Times* - 4-2-1922)

***Too Many Foreigners.*** When Robert Johnstone first arrived in San Francisco in 1900 with his fellow golf professional William Bell, he asked his friend, "Willie, what do you think of this place?" To which, Bell replied, "All right, Bob, except there are too many foreigners here."



Robert Johnstone Stamped Set



R. Johnstone Scared-neck Brassie

**On Wearing Knickers.** “Aye, way back in 1900 I wore them. It was our Scottish custom, and I defied anybody to make me take ‘em off. In those days I was professional at the Presidio Club of San Francisco. We then had lots of trouble with the caddies. One time we had a strike, and the caddies made life a misery to us all. One day a bunch of them stood at a safe distance and shouted vile things at us until I could stand it no longer, so, armed with a golf club, I chased them away. The next day a cartoonist drew a picture of me in half kilts and half knicks, with bristling hair on my knobby knees, chasing the caddies with a war club. The next day I put on long trousers, and never went back to knickerbockers.” (*The American Golfer* – 1918)

**Pasture Pool.** “The man – or woman – who will tell how he, or she, witnessed two golf balls meeting in midair is always listened to with - respectful attention. But, the writer last week witnessed two of the freakiest tricks ever performed by the dimpled darlings. A ‘hole-in-one’ is an everyday trick in comparison. What is more remarkable, both freaks happened within two holes of one another in the same match, a threesome played by A. S. Kerry, O. W. Potter and Bob Johnstone at the Seattle Golf Club links. Johnstone’s mashie approach was bunkered at the thirteenth hole. It was wedged in between two pieces of recently laid sod, with about a third of the ball showing and at a hanging lie. Smashing into it with his niblick, the professional abruptly clutched at the air and his arms were flying like windmills as he evidently attempted to protect himself against flying sand and turf. Suddenly, his hand pressed against his right side as though he had experienced an acute pain. Instead of agony, surprise and wonderment were written on his features. The ball had dropped into his lower right pocket of his gray-green jersey. ‘I played it for the side pocket, at that,’ he had the effrontery to say.



R. Johnstone stamped Putter

“Discussion of the freak ‘bad out’ in the side pocket, had not died away when the second astounding thing happened. Potter had sliced his drive for No. 15 into the woods and Kerry had followed with a perfect down-the-center drive for 200 yards. The three players, the writer and one caddy will affirm what followed. Johnstone’s drive, with not so much daylight under it, traveled the same direction of the Kerry drive and when it landed it was on top of the Kerry ball. ‘Crack’ went the colliding balls. The Kerry ball was kicked back six feet and the Johnstone ball traveled forward twenty feet. Both balls had leaped three feet in the air at the impact. ‘I played it for the carom,’ Johnstone had the nerve to say.” (*Seattle Times* - 5-11-1913)

**Sukey the Cow.** “There are some bugs who have gotten into the habit of calling golf the ‘great national game.’ But it isn’t; never will be. Nor, is baseball. Poker is right! Some day when Bob Johnstone gets too old to teach golf, he might take up instruction in the great national game of draw poker. They say the scotch have adapted themselves to poker more quickly and with greater success than any other people born outside of the U.S.A. Much of their success, of course, lies in the fact that they do play them quite close up to their vests. Bob Johnstone plays ‘em verra, verra well. That dollar-and-a-half-the-hour he gets for instruction on the green turf seems ridiculous alongside what he might make on the green table. But why shouldn’t he be good at the baize; for he has been studying his fellow man for years on the turf, watching his hands, his feet, his eyes and so forth.

“Anyhow, to get down to the game again, this particular game was a bit of aftermath of a long, hard day of golf. It started with a cup of tea, was followed with dinner, and supper came on in time. Eventually, there was breakfast served, also. Nature was painting the heavens pink when Bob made his first attempt to break away. He started with a yawn. They stifled that. Then he doubled and tripled the yawn and refused to come in unless he had something better than two pair. They got on to this, and glared at him. He only yawned and took turns around the table, while his pile of reds, whites, blues and yellows tottered as he stamped about. All he got was ugly looks from those who had helped erect those barber poles in front of his place of business. Finally, with breakfast over, and the pink now turned to gray and gold in the heavens, Bob arose with an air of finality – desperation in his demeanor. ‘Gentlemen, you’ll have to excuse me. I guess I’ll cash in and get out to the barn; for the family Jersey always is milked at this hour; in fact, it makes her ill when she doesn’t get milked on time.’

“There was a silence you could cut with a knife. They all felt that they were at the end of their tether and that they had to let the big winner get out. But that silence was cut, and not with a knife – with two jawfuls of teeth that clipped the words off like a pair of barber’s shears. ‘What’s the cow worth?’ asked ‘Okey’ Farnsworth. ‘Oh, it would cost me about \$100 to replace her,’ slowly replied the owner of ‘Sukey,’ after a careful weighing of the matter. ‘All right, here’s your hundred,’ said Farnsworth, big loser, as he tossed a half dozen chips to the owner of the cow, adding, incisively: ‘I now own the cow, and I-don’t-want-her-milked-this-morning.’

“The story should end there, at that climax; but, unfortunately, at the risk of marring it, the fact must be included that ‘Bill,’ the greens keeper, had milked ‘Sukey’ – that is ‘Okey’ – before the pink turned to gold and gray in the heavens. And, furthermore, when Bob Johnstone finally did get up from the table and made his getaway he owned ‘Sukey’ again and he had enough kale laid away to feed her, and to buy and feed several more like her, for the twelve months to come.” (*Seattle Times* - 6-6-1920)

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