

Early History of
Overlake Golf and Country Club, Medina, WA
Established 1-30-1925, Course Opened 5-1-1927, Closed 7-1-1934, Re-opened 6-27-1953
Course Architect: 1927 - Francis L. James; 1953 – A. Vernon Macan

Near the eastern shores of Lake Washington on what was to become one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the country, a group of businessmen founded the Overlake Golf Club in 1925. At the time, aside from a few farms and orchards, the area was sparsely populated and heavily forested. It would not be for another 30 years, in 1955, that the Town of Medina would be incorporated.



Medina prior to 1925, with Seattle beyond and the ferry *Leschi* on Lake Washington

The story of Overlake is a tale of two clubs and two courses. The first club and course existed from 1925 until 1934 when it fell victim to the Great Depression. The second is one of rebirth in 1953 to become one of the finest golf courses in Washington State.

The idea for a golf club at Overlake had its beginning on December 30, 1924 when Frank J. Martin, an insurance executive based in Seattle, called for a meeting of prospective members at Seattle's downtown Rainier Club to decide on the feasibility of organizing a golf club in Medina.

After some discussion, Martin's proposal became a reality when Claude C. Ramsay, a real estate magnate, offered to donate 80 acres of property on the condition that the club purchase the remaining 80 acres of his Medina tract. Estimates for the purchase and construction of the course and clubhouse totaled \$77,000 (about \$1.3 million, or the cost of a modest home in Medina, today). Ultimately, the final cost approached \$300,000, still a bargain even for the time.

Martin's approach for financing the club was cautious and measured, befitting that of an insurance man. He announced that only when the membership pledges reached 100, would he form a club. Then only when it reached 200, would he begin construction on the course, and again, only when he was assured of 300 members would he build a clubhouse.

Almost immediately membership pledges exceeded 100, and Overlake Golf Club was formally organized on January 30, 1925. Frank J. Martin was elected president. W. Neal Winter was named vice president, Frank P. Helsell, secretary, and Irving M. Clark, treasurer. Named to the board of trustees were: W. L. Bilger, G. B. Bowden, William Calvert, R. W. Crosby, C. L. Hall, Fred Loomis, D. K. MacDonald, W. B. Nettleton, and Herbert C. Ostrom.



Frank J. Martin (1865 – 1929)

Frank Joseph Martin was born in Indiana in 1865 and arrived in Seattle in 1901. He formed the Northwestern Mutual Fire Insurance Association and was nationally prominent in the insurance field.

In addition to Overlake Golf Club which he founded, Martin was also a member of the Seattle Golf Club and the Earlington Golf Club in Renton.

Less than two years following the full opening of the course in 1927, he died of a heart condition at his home in Hunt's Point on March 18, 1929 at the age of 63.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, there was no guarantee that the club would, or could, reach the membership total of 300 that it needed to make it viable. There was only a small population on the east side of Lake Washington at that time. Nearby Bellevue was a small, unincorporated town of about 2,000 residents in 1925, and would not be incorporated as a city until 28 years later in 1953. Martin would have to draw his members from the Seattle populace, no easy task given that Inglewood Golf Club (est.1919), Rainier Golf Club (est.1919), Broadmoor Golf Club

(est.1924), and Olympic Golf and Country Club (est.1924) in Ballard had established themselves in recent years and were vying for members. In addition, Seattle Golf Club (est.1896) and Earlington Golf Club (est.1912) in Renton had long drawn many of the business elites and the wealthy class of the Puget Sound region.

On the other hand, golf in the 1920s was booming all across the country and there appeared to be no end in sight to its growth. Seattle's municipal golf course Jefferson Park was drawing in excess of 100,000 rounds per year, and Seattle Golf Club had a waiting list of 500 to join.

By July, 1925 membership at the new Overlake Golf Club reached 200. At that time, Hunt's Point, a neighboring community, consisted of 70 households, including that of F. J. Martin. All 70 families became members of Overlake. Many members, however, lived and worked in Seattle. To reach the course they could drive around either ends of Lake Washington on rough roads, no easy commute in 1925, or they could travel by the ferry *Leschi* to reach Medina (the I-90 bridge would not be built until 1940, and the Evergreen Point bridge until 1963).

Despite the initial skepticism of building a golf course that appeared so far away, the trip to Medina by ferry was remarkably fast and efficient. Members could leave from downtown Seattle, by car or tram, arrive at the dock at Leschi Park, board the ferry, and arrive at Medina Landing, half-mile from the golf course in about 35 minutes.



Car Ferry *Leschi* c.1920



Medina Landing c.1920

Work began on the construction of the course in the summer of 1925. The club hired Francis "Frank" L. James (1878 – 1852), a prolific Northwest golf course architect and constructor, to lay out the course. James would become one of the most prolific designers in the Northwest. His 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), University of Idaho GC (1937), Walla

Walla Country Club (front nine in 1947), Veteran's Memorial GC in Walla Walla (1948), and a number of others no longer in existence.

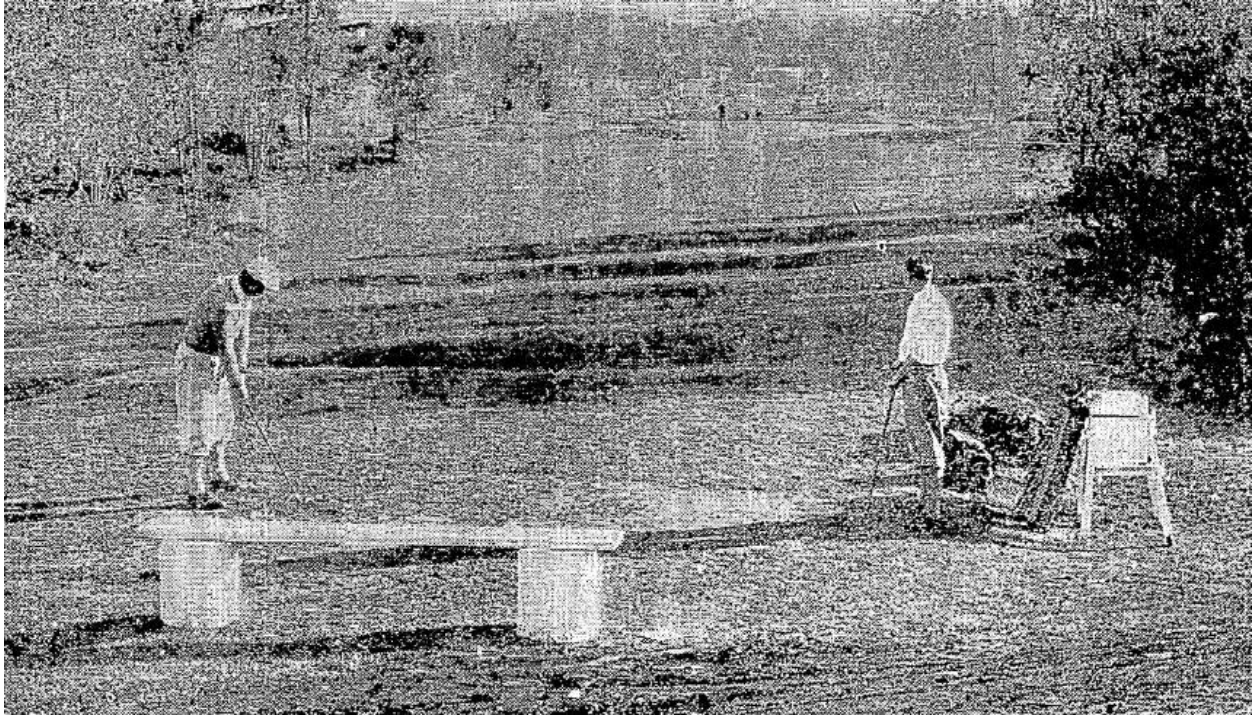
The Overlake course opened the front nine for play on May 1, 1926, with a formal dedication on June 1. The full eighteen would not open until the following year. Membership numbered 235 and the goal of reaching 300 seemed assured.

The initial nine-hole course received high praise among the golfers. The clubhouse sat on the highest point on the property with a view of Lake Washington, Mount Rainier, and the Cascades. The first hole, a 410-yard par 4, began from an elevated tee dropping seventy feet to the fairway below. From there the remaining holes were described as on "gently rolling terrain ... with a feeling of isolation. Dividing the fairways are trees and brush growths of such thickness as to completely shield the average fairways one from the other."

The ninth hole, or more specifically, the ninth green, offered a unique feature. The green was triple terraced and measured 70 yards front to back and rose nearly 70 feet. As described by John Dreher, the golf writer for the Seattle Times, "It has no counterpart, or anything approaching it, on this coast. This hole is going to arouse a lot of controversy – for and against it." (Seattle Times – 10-25-1925)



Overlake Golf Club – left to right: Jim Schuyler, D. K. MacDonald, C. P. Fletcher; clubhouse; a cartoonist's tongue-in-cheek rendition of the approach shot to the triple-terraced ninth green. (Seattle Times 11-7-1926)



Overlake Golf Club 1th hole of original course – (Seattle Times 11-7-1926)



Overlake Golf Club 7th hole of original course – left to right: A. Y. Parker, F. J. Martin, J. H. Constantine (Seattle Times 6-6-1926)

By November, 1926, the membership roll had reached 303 and the limit was raised to 350.

SEATTLE—OVERLAKE GOLF CLUB.
Estd. 1925. Holes—18. Length—6,415 yds. Par—72. Grass greens. Annual meeting, February. Pres., F. J. Martin; V. Pres., W. N. Winter; Sec., Frank P. Helsell; Treas., Irving M. Clark; Chmn. Greens Com., N. M. Winter. Mail address, 1119—4th Ave. Three miles from city, reached by ferry or automobile. Visitors' charges—\$1.00 week days; Sundays and holidays, \$2.00. Sunday play permitted and caddies available.

American Annual Golf Guide – 1926

The club hired Jack Hueston as its first golf professional in 1926. Hueston had been a caddie at Seattle Golf Club and had learned to play under Robert Johnstone, the club professional at that club. Hueston's stay at Overlake was short, as he was succeeded by the popular Danny Walker in 1927.

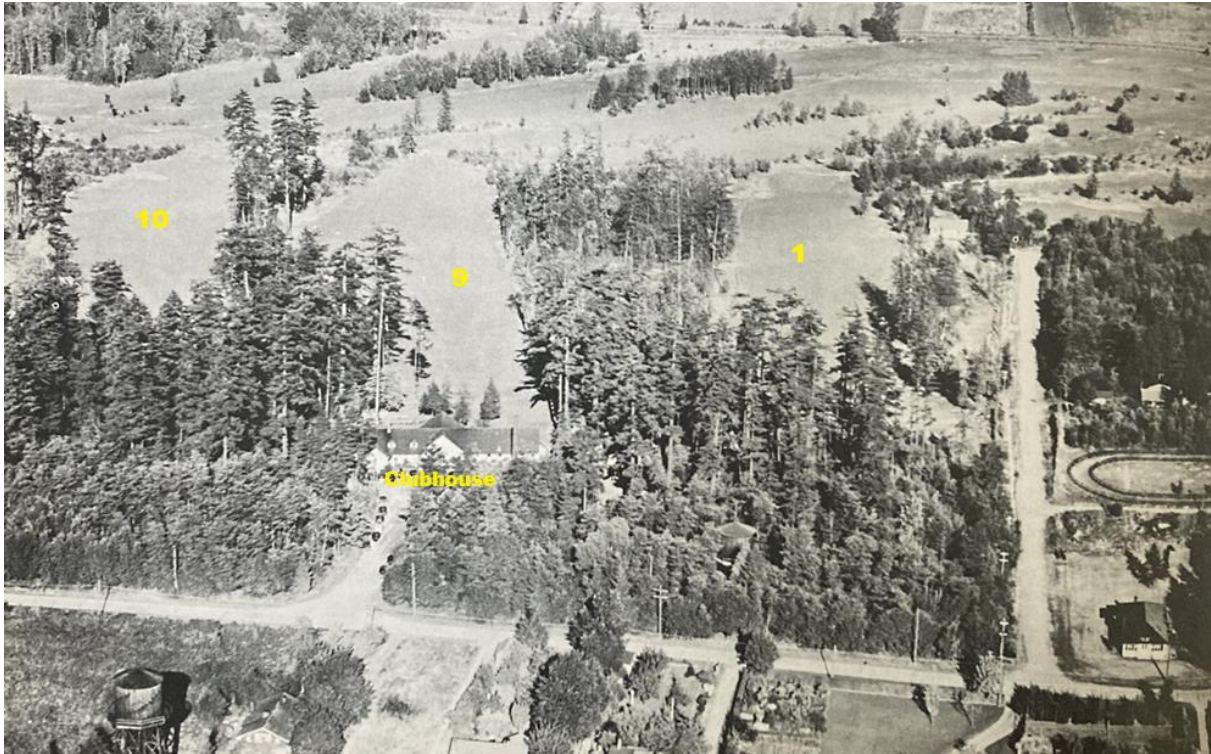


Danny Walker stamped hickory clubs

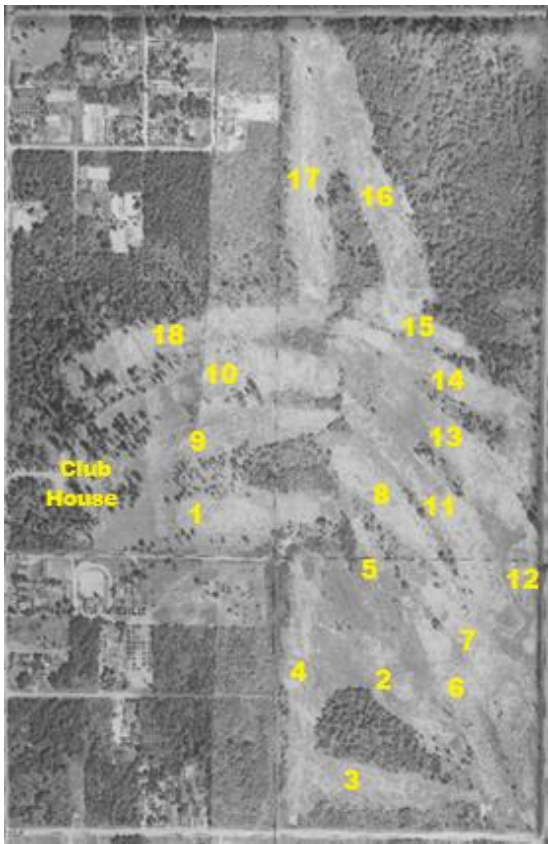
Daniel M. "Danny" Walker was born in England in 1890. At age 10, he began caddying at Lytham and St. Anne's course in Lancashire. He caddied for the likes of Harry Vardon, Ted Ray, and Harold Hilton and learned his trade under Tom Simpson, the pro at Carnoustie. He arrived in America in 1910.

Walker proved to be a popular pro at Overlake. In appreciation of his service, the club awarded him with an honorary membership in 1933. He stayed at Overlake until 1934 when the club closed. He died in Los Angeles in 1963. He was 73.

With considerable anticipation, Overlake Golf Club opened its full eighteen holes for play on May 7, 1927. The second nine was equally well received as the first by area golfers.



Overlake GC Aerial – clubhouse in foreground - c.1930 (Courtesy of Overlake G&CC)



Overlake GC Aerial - 1936



Overlake G&CC Aerial - 2013

The course measured 6490 yards, par 72. By comparison, the par 71 course today measures 6699 yards from the championship tees. Comparison of the two aerials show that very little remains of the original 1927 layout. James's routing of the holes in 1927 was mostly east to west orientation, whereas the new layout, designed by A. Vernon Macan and opened in 1953, was distinctly north-south. Perhaps the only hole which can be said to have remained the same is today's ninth hole which in 1927 was the fourth.

Both the men's division and women's division were very active in the early years at Overlake. Tournaments were arranged with other clubs in match play team competition, a popular format in the 1920s. Inter-club matches were held against Sand Point Country Club, Inglewood Golf Club, Broadmoor Golf and Country Club, and Earlington Golf Club.



Overlake members ready to tee off - c.1930 (photo courtesy of Overlake Golf & Country Club)

The women's division was particularly strong against their opponents and they took their matches seriously. How seriously was demonstrated in a story which appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer in 1928:

Women Hurt In Car Wreck

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Still They Keep Golf Date

WHAT is a mere automobile crash to a quartet of women golfers tournament-bound? What matter a few cuts and bruises when one is due to tee off at the other end of Lake Washington in another hour?

Just nothing at all!

Four women members of the Overlake Golf Club got up bright and early yesterday morning, loaded themselves into an automobile and started for the Medina ferry, en route to Earlington

for the monthly city sweepstakes tournament.

Another car sped around a corner on a left turn and crashed head on into them. All were shaken up and received some nasty cuts and bumps. Their car was put clean out of commission.

Whereupon the girls flagged a passing car, repaired to the home of one of their number, got into her bus and continued their trip. They arrived in time to play, and one of them got into the prize list.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer 3-20-1928

In the first eight years at Overlake, the club championship title in the men's division was shared by multiple winners. In the women's division, however, the cup was dominated by one woman: Mrs. H. O. (Zella) Young. Prior to joining Overlake in 1929, Mrs. Young had earned the Northwest's highest honor by winning the Pacific Northwest Golf Association Women's Amateur Championship in 1924. She would win five consecutive club championship title at Overlake from 1929-33.

Overlake Club Champions		
	Men	Women
1926	Jack Bertholf	
1927	Neil C. Jamison	
1928	Jimmy Clapp	Mrs. Guy Farrar (Neva)
1929	Dick Pascoe	Mrs. Harry O. Young (Zella)
1930	Harry Hjert	Mrs. Harry O. Young (Zella)
1931	Harry Hjert	Mrs. Harry O. Young (Zella)
1932	Eddie Adams	Mrs. Harry O. Young (Zella)
1933	Erv Parent	Mrs. Harry O. Young (Zella)



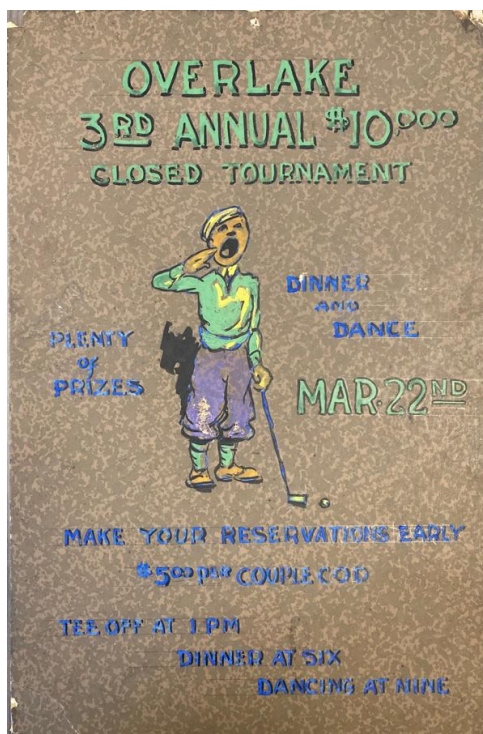
Mrs. H. O. (Zella) Young (1891-1937)



Overlake Women's Club Championship Runner-Up Trophy - 1928



Overlake ladies awaiting end of match - c.1930 (photo courtesy of Overlake Golf & Country Club)



\$10,000 "Closed" Tournament Poster - 1930

One of the more popular club tournament of the year was the so-called \$10,000 "Closed" Tournament for members.

This tongue-in-cheek event, organized by club captain Grover Burke, ran each year from 1928 to 1932. It promised no money, but guaranteed \$10,000 worth of fun with "dinner at six" and "dancing at nine" following tournament play for \$5.00 per couple.

The Overlake Golf Club's big spring event, Grover Burke's famous "\$10,000 closed tournament, is scheduled for Saturday, and the biggest turnout of the spring season is expected at the Medina course.

On October 6, 1929, the club reported the membership now numbered 415, and the future appeared bright. Plans were set in place to build a new men's locker room and make other improvements to the course and the clubhouse. Unbeknownst to the members, however, dark times were ahead. Three weeks after reaching this high water mark at Overlake, the stock market crashed on October 24, 1929.

While the effects of the market crash were not immediate, by the following year, as more and more members became delinquent on their dues, the financial picture for the club became dire. Lower dues structures were introduced with little effect. By the end of 1931, the club had lost nearly three-fourths of its membership and was down to 117 members. While golf clubs everywhere were in similarly difficult positions, Overlake seems to have been especially hard hit by the Great Depression. The club pared its expenses and limped along for two more years, but by the end of 1933 and start of 1934, the fate of the club was clear. The club defaulted on its loan. The bank foreclosed on the property and Overlake closed its doors on July 1, 1934.

The course sat fallow for several years. In 1938, as signs of recovery appeared across the country, former member James N. Clapp (and 1928 club champion) purchased the property. Envisioning an English-style manor estate, Clapp and wife, who already owned a home across the street, built a large barn and a training track to raise Arabian and Palomino horses, as well as Hereford cattle. They named it "Fairway Farms."

Five years later, in 1943, the Clapps sold the entire estate to Neil C. Jamison, another former Overlake member (and 1927 club champion). Jamison, a cattleman, would use the property to raise cattle. In 1950, Jamison sold the 170-acre “J Bar J Ranch” property to Medina Land Company for \$200,000 (\$2.7 million today) who shortly thereafter sold it to Norton Clapp, president of Weyerhaeuser Corporation and half-brother to James N. Clapp.

In 1952, Stanley E. Stretton, a district manager for Standard Oil Company, obtained a 35-year lease from Norton Clapp with the intent to develop the property once again into a golf course. In June, 1952, Overlake Golf and Country Club was incorporated. The reborn club hired A. Vernon Macan, a renowned Canadian golf architect to design the new course. Macan’s design fee was \$3,000.



A. Vernon 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 an amputation of his left leg.

He returned to British Columbia to begin his career in golf architecture. His designs included Rainier, Inglewood, Broadmoor, Fircrest, Glen Acres, Columbia Edgewater, and many others in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California.

He died in 1964 at the age of 82 while working on the Sunland Golf Course in Sequim.

The new course opened on June 27, 1953 with 300 members. Today, the Overlake course is considered one of the premier championship courses in the Northwest and the site of many major tournaments.

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