

T.C. Mar 24, 1990



Victoria Golf Club, 1110 Beach Drive

Barry F. King

LANDMARKS

Golf club's first clubhouse was a piano packing case

While the game of golf in Greater Victoria can be traced to the former nine-hole course constructed by the Royal Engineers at Macaulay Point in 1887, Victoria Golf Club in Oak Bay is reputedly the oldest 18-hole course still on its original site in Canada.

On Nov. 7, 1893, 14 enthusiasts met in the Temple Building (now the Victoria Chamber of Commerce offices) on Fort Street, and formed the Victoria Golf Club. Permission was obtained to use a portion of the fine estate of J.D. Pemberton, who died suddenly earlier in the year while participating in the Hunt Club's paper chase.

It was agreed that the club would not play there in the summer season when the land was needed for cattle grazing. This did create additional hazards for the golfers, however. Initially, the facilities consisted of a nine-hole course and a clubhouse fashioned out of a piano packing case. The annual membership fee was \$5 and monthly dues of 50 cents were levied.

Geoffrey Castle

The following year, the course was expanded to 18 holes, a better clubhouse was built and ladies were granted membership for \$3 a year, but they were not permitted to play on Sundays. In 1902, a professional, L. Jacobs, was hired and given a salary of \$25 per month, but he was required to also undertake greenskeeper duties.

Club members received a rude shock in 1906, when they had to match a developer's offer of \$50,000 to purchase the 97 acres of land on which they had made improvements. Fortunately, James Dunsmuir, who later (1914) helped start the Royal Colwood Golf Club, provided the necessary funds before the deadline arrived. Title to the land was transferred to the Gonzales Point Land Company and a lease back to the club was arranged. Then, in 1926, the club raised a \$50,000 mortgage to gain ownership of the property.

A few months later, fire destroyed the clubhouse and a new one was built. On the eve of the

official opening on Aug. 8, 1927, this structure also burned together with the records. Shortly after this, the present clubhouse was built. It was around this time that the Seniors' Northwest Golf Association annual event commenced. It enabled players over 55 to compete on equal terms and proved to be very popular.

Meantime, the United Services golf club at Macaulay Point had become overcrowded, necessitating the purchase of land on Cadboro Bay Road and formation of Uplands Golf Club in 1922.

In 1957, William Rigway Wilson, the last of the group of 14, died, aged 94. Among the others were Senator Hewitt Bostock, Sir Richard Musgrave, lawyer B. H. Tyrwhitt-Drake and banker George Gillespie.

The special charm and beauty of the grounds of Victoria Golf Club are well known and are often compared to Scotland's ancient St. Andrews golf course.

Geoffrey Castle is a local writer, historian and archivist.