

# Forefathers, Foresight, and Forethought for Foursomes

## “I Remember Linden”

Written on the Occasion of Linden Golf and Country Club’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

By Aaron Aiken

One day in July 1926 I knew that there was a new links in the making for my dad came home and remarked that “Frank had a new job”. Frank was Francis James, a popular golf course architect from Great Britain. He had designed several links in the Puget Sound area and the latest one, prior to Linden, was the new 18 hole Earlington Golf Course. My dad said the new job was in a place called Puyallup, which, of course, was new to me. Only if he had said Sumner, I would have known about that for I had caddied for some golfers, W. B. Mitchell, Clyde Farquhar, and Marion Fox, who said they were from the town of Sumner. I did not know that Puyallup was so close. So the next morning, my dad hocked up several teams of horses along with graders, Johnson bars and slips. Those pieces of equipment being the ones used to shape the mounds, greens and tees at Linden, all horse drawn. The announcement of building a new golf course at Puyallup, of course, did not mean anything to me because I, at that time, never dreamed that my family would move eventually to Puyallup. However, my first look at Linden was shortly after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1927. So far as I know, the work was progressing well under the supervision of Francis James, the first club pro, Jack Heuston, and a man with whom I eventually became very well acquainted, Mr. W. B. Stevens.

In June, 1927, I was one of a crew of kids that was hired to weed greens and one day I looked up and saw three well-dressed men approaching the fourth green where we were working, and I knew that something was wrong for a little short Scotsman, dressed in knickers was among the men. His name was Davey Craig, who was hired that day to replace Jack Heuston. The reason for the change, I never learned. Davey Craig was at one time the Scottish pro at the old Earlington course. I can’t say how long exactly Davey Craig remained the pro at Linden, probably until 1932 at which time Ray Hall was hired. Davey Craig was from St Andrews, Scotland and was a very fine teacher of several facets pertaining to becoming a golf professional.

I don't recall the exact day that the course was opened for play, but when it was opened the first "club house" was one of Russell's berry shacks just off the present 4<sup>th</sup> green, and the terrible "monster" hole, #5 was the point of beginning. There were some of the members, including Bob LaBrash Sr. that pushed hard for the building of a club house where the 5<sup>th</sup> tee was and is now located. The thinking was that there would be a restaurant open to the public and since considerable room for parking would be required, it would shorten up this terrible hole, which in the beginning had a very narrow fairway perhaps not more than 30 yards wide. The hole was designed as a very sharp dogleg right with a well-placed tee shot approximately 215 to 225 yards to what is now deep left of the present fairway. On the right side of the fairway was a swamp similar to what is now on the left side. This swamp with willow brush extended down the right side of the fairway for a distance of about 225 yards. Across the fairway at a point about 150 yards off the tee was an open drainage ditch. So, the majority of the players played the hole with a double lay-up, hitting anywhere from a 6 to a 4 iron off the tee, laying up short of the ditch, then swinging the same club the second time to lay up short of the "pond" which little gem, was named "Elephant Wallow" first by Ernie Johnson of the Pacific Northwest Golf Association. I won't tell you what a lot of people called it (to me, it is one of the finest golf holes in this part of the country). Anyway, it was a very tough starting hole and things didn't get much better as one finished the nine. The sixth hole, played than as #2, had a very narrow fairway, deep bunkers to an hourglass green with the front part of the hourglass extending right to the edge of the bunkers on each side of the green.

The par fives were maybe not quite so long as many, but were very demanding with accurate shots, for the river sand between the present 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> fairways extended almost from tee to green and in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> green on each side of the fairway, there were three large bunkers. At one time, one of the prominent Tacoma golfers, having hit two solid wood shots escaped the sand between the fairways, but his second shot landed in the first bunker on the right side, short of the green. When he got through flailing from one bunker to the next and onto the green and into the cup, the total count was 14. The eighth hole was designed as a dogleg right and was well bunkered. Again the river sand on the right side was a problem, but the steep embankment surrounding the right side of the green was covered with rough that was cut only once a year by hand scythe. Nine

was a fairly short par 4 designed as a dogleg right. The grass bunkers that you now see were once sand traps. Actually, these don't come into play except for the real short hitters, likely some of them were for errant shots on #1. Originally, the green was an hourglass shape which opened up for the approach shot for a properly played tee shot to the left side of the fairway.

The current first hole, a very fine par four, was designed to play as a slight dogleg from right to left. The traps that you see now were at one time much larger and in back of the green, a snake pit or a deep barranca, covered with 3" rough that was hand cut once a year. The second hole was a short par 3, pretty much as you see it now excepting there were no trees but a couple more bunkers, one more on the left and one more on the right. Number 3 was a short par 4, deep rough on the left and right. At q point on the left side of the "hill", was a very large alder tree, so that hooked tee shots or pulled tee shots were in trouble being stymied by the tree and a bunker on the left so deep one could hardly see the top of the pin as you were in the bottom of the pit. Number 4 which was played as the 9<sup>th</sup> hole in the beginning, was truly a 386-yard hole but played somewhat longer for there was a longer narrow alleyway which is now hardly even fairway. The proper placement of a tee shot was slightly to the right of the fruit orchard that is now in the left rough. Guarding the green to the right on the mound that is approximately 20 yards short of the green was a massive fir tree probably 130' tall. But before you got to that point on the left side of the fairway were several large firs. What is now played as fairway on the right side, was rough in the beginning, about 2 feet high, so a slice or pushed or weak shots to the right side wound up as a lost ball. Lost balls, there were many for very, very few golfers played nine holes without losing a ball.

The fourth and fifth holes were so demanding and so tough they were excluded, bypassed, and never played by a lot of players. So, Linden, with its deep rough and swamps and 45 bunkers, resulted in players scoring from 90 to 100 as against playing Meadow Park in 80 or 90. So, the depression notwithstanding, Puyallup, Sumner and Tacoma area players felt that Linden was too tough and therefore play diminished at our club. Something had to be done. I don't know what came first, whether the modest little white frame house was built so that play would commence at the planned #1 hole or we started to cover up bunkers. Whichever doesn't really matter, but the bunkers were covered, many of them. The swamp

on the right side of the 5<sup>th</sup> fairway was cleaned out. The rough on the right side of #4 was hand cut and the terrain shaped so tht it could at least be partially machine mowed. All of these changes were not done overnight. Eventually, the player could elect to cut the dogleg and take his chance to get through the trees and the remaining rough. The deep river sand between #7 and #8 was smoothed out. Grass seed was planted and the course in general was made easier to play by several strokes. However, for several local golfers, it was much too tough and members were hard to get, even at \$3.30 a month which was the prevailing rate through the 1930's. Tough as the course was, it wasn't all bad, for there were always jobs for caddies, and after the rough was cut, balls were lost and the caddies had ready customers for good conditioned, used balls at 25 cents each.

The "Forefathers" intended to have a real golf course where they and their followers could play at the least possible cost, and they did it and kept it that way, sometimes at considerable personal expense. There were several from both Puyallup and Sumner, and since I may leave out one or two, I believe it best not to try to list them by name except for only one, Mr. W. B. Stevens, who in several instances carried most of the load.

Several odd instances happened. One time after a team match, and we used to have several. In this particular instance involved an extra match played on the basis of medal play plus match play between Bob LaBrash, Sr. and Mr. VanDorn of the Mountain View Golf Course in Olympia. When VanDorn overshot the 9<sup>th</sup> green and wound up in our greens keeper's potato patch which are is now our large putting green, VanDorn elected to play the ball instead of taking an unplayable lie and he tried his level best with a "Jimmy", a concave club similar to a sand wedge, to pop the ball out and Mr. LaBrash standing over the frustrated VanDorn, counting by raising his hand every time the club head went to the ball...and, what had been a deficit round up to that point for Mr. LaBrash, turned out to be quite profitable.

Even after the fourth fairway was leveled and the rough cut, the embankment between four and five was covered with deep rough that snared balls that were slightly pushed off the tee. One of our area's top amateurs at the time, a 7yound fellow from Enumclaw, having started out with birdies on two of the first three holes, drove into the deep rough on the 4<sup>th</sup> hole and wound up with a triple

bogey, seven. On the fifth hole, after having hit a solid tee shot, stroked a 3 iron that should have carried the pond, but didn't quite make it. So it was that he wound up with a double bogey, five over par on those two holes! That shouldn't happen to anyone, so he thought. So, he said to his caddy, "We're going to play four and five until I play it right". Whereupon, he played four and five all day long until twilight and there was more than one instance when he didn't clear the pond. On the last endeavor, decided it wasn't worth it all and threw bag and clubs into the pond and started out to walk to Enumclaw because his playmates were long gone. But, caddies are funny people and his caddy fished the clubs and bag out of the pond and trudged along with him, hitchhiking to Enumclaw. This fellow developed into a very fine golfer and has been a professional for many years and currently owns a golf course a few miles south of Puyallup.

One time after a team match with Olympia, the usual igarotti (bean), (marble), or (skin) game took place and the #1 man from Olympia, who later won the Western Amateur, the United States Amateur, and a multitude of tournaments as an amateur, turned Pro and won many more tournaments, was having a tough go that day, having lost three points to his opponent in the team match, was having further difficulty in the bean game and as he approached the third tee for the fourth time around, hooked his tee shot into the large alder tree located on the left of the hill. The ball was never found, so it was assumed it went into the pond. The gentleman couldn't take it any longer, so he and his caddy trudged back to the clubhouse.

Things you may not know – Those that belonged to Linden, liked it, played it and respected it, for twice around measured a measly 6,200 yards roughly, and even on the simplest hole one may take a bogey, buzzard or worse. They played in rain, sun, frozen or in snow – and sometimes daylight to dark, 63 holes or even 72 on a summer's day. But the record belongs to a couple of the most rabid – Joe Pohlman and Emmett Burks – 90 holes one day – and without a cart of any kind.

I don't remember the year – I guess '42 or '43 – we had a little problem. Our tractor was broken down and we couldn't get it fixed, but that didn't matter for the new greens keeper couldn't drive it anyway. So, Uno Ostrom, bought an old Chevy truck so our man would get out of his rocking chair and work cutting the fairways.

The first club champion was Fred Tebb in 1929. In 1930 it was Stanley W. Brown of Auburn. He was probably the fastest walker of all time. In 1931 Tebb won again and in 1932 Frank Erspamer, a coach from Lincoln High School. In 1933 and 1934 Bob Gray was champion. Bob was a son of a Linden charter member and played on the University of Washington golf team. In 1935 Aaron Aiken won from Bob Gray and started string that wasn't broken until 1961 when his friend, Bill Milligan gave him a lesson in the semi-finals. The title in 1961 was won by Byron Haines, a fine golfer and probably best remembered as being one of the best halfbacks ever at the University of Washington.

After that Aiken won the championship in 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1966. Subsequently Bobbe LaBrash, Bobby Olson, and Gary Wegener with Aiken interspersed three or four more times.

There are many more things that I remember, especially knowing and having the privilege to play this fine golf course which certainly is improving under the very fine management that it has now.