

“The Formative Years of Casper Country Club 1918-1929: What Was Once Lost is Now Found”

By Alena M. Wagner

Bounce Carlson's book written in 1995 was my jumping off point. He did an excellent job of gathering the history of the club through interviews with members past and present and through personal recollections of he and his family's many years here. However, the beginnings of the Casper Country Club have become a little murky over the past 95 years - as people move away and pass on, as records are lost or destroyed. In doing the research for this presentation I have become obsessed with finding out the accurate dates of incorporation and what was happening during the formative years of the club. I will be presenting to you a history of the Casper Country Club from 1918-1929 based on my research at the Natrona County Library in reading the *Casper Daily Tribune* and the *Casper Herald*, and at the Western History Center at Casper College. I want to thank Vince at the College for all of his help, the wonderful reference librarians and especially my boss, Jeff, for letting me leave early some days to go read reels and reels of microfilm.

The Very Beginning

My research began in January of 1918 as I had found in the club records a Photostat copy of a Certificate of Incorporation for the Casper Country Club dated January 16, 1918. It was filed by J.D. Waldron, E.M. Ellithorpe and L.A. Jehnke. According to this document the term of existence of the CCC would be for 25 years. It barely lasted six months.

On Wednesday, June 6, 1918 a Notice of Forfeiture of Corporate Franchise was published in the *Casper Record*. It read: "Whereas, the Casper Country Club...failed to file a Certificate of Appointment of Agent and location of principle office as required...within the time specified. ... Therefore, notice is hereby given, in compliance with the requirements of Sect. 2, chapter 11 that the said Casper Country Club has forfeited all franchise, rights and privileges." It was filed in Cheyenne on May 26th.

A few days later, on June 9th, there was another notice in the *Casper Daily Press* - this one was more positive. The headline read: "Calls Meeting of All Club Enthusiasts". The short notice ran as follows: "Dr. J.H. Jeffery announces a meeting of all who are interested in the golf and country club movement, to be held at his office, Wednesday evening in the OS Building at 8:30." Dr. Jeffery would be a very active supporter of the club from here on out.

For the next several years there was not much going on golf wise in Casper. I have no hard evidence for this, but my guess is that due to the last year of World War I, the influenza epidemic in 1918-19, and economic factors, that an organized golf club was put on the back burner. There are a few indicators in the papers that people were playing golf around and outside the state - as the Cheyenne course had opened in 1916. In the July 25, 1919 paper there was an ad for golf club for sale at a local merchant.

On July 14, 1920 a notice to “Members of Casper Golf Club” stated that there was a “meeting to be held Friday evening, July 16, at 8:00 at the public library. All members and those interested in the Country club to be there.” It was signed Casper Golf Club.

In 1920 another ad or notice was placed in the *Casper Daily Tribune* on August 26th that “a gold watch with engraving on back” had been lost at the golf links. It was to be turned in to the *Tribune* office. So, one must infer that there were some sort of golf links here in Casper in 1920, but there was no building to turn in lost & found items.

By 1921 though, things were getting organized in Casper. There was an organization called the Casper Golf Club with Todd Bowman, President and Ambrose Hemingway, H.J. Peterson and H.B. Sherwood, officers. On Friday, May 6 it was announced that the Casper Golf Club was leasing land for the erection of a clubhouse. The article stated that the golf club leased 2 ½ acres of land from E. Richard Shipp (adjoining the school section recently sold to a group of Casper Capitalists). They had plans for a “comfortable and commodious clubhouse” and two tennis courts which would all be built that summer. The golf course had already been laid out apparently, and an expert was “now putting the finishing touches to it.” At the time the Golf Club has just under 100 members with a large waiting list. The article went on to say that “the interest in golf has reached the point of enthusiasm among the many local devotees of the game and from ten to a dozen carloads of players are on the grounds nearly every afternoon.”

Later that May, on the 26th, there was a meeting held regarding the new club. *The Casper Herald* reported that “New officers and a board of directors will be named at the meeting of the Casper Golf and Country club association. Any person interested in a country club here or in golf, whether or not a member of the present association, has been urged to attend the meeting.” It goes on to report that “the questions of a lease for the site of a proposed country club house will come up for action tonight. The site of the old E. R. Shipp homestead above the city water plant and across the Platte River from the golf links is at present under consideration.”

Interestingly enough it was reported that there was an organized golf club in Casper for the past three to four years, but there was more than enough interest in Casper in golf that the possibility of a golf course was fully anticipated.

This meeting was on May 26th. On May 27th, 1921 the Articles of Incorporation for the Casper Country Club were filed (again) with the Secretary of State at 9:05 am. The first Board of Directors were H.J. Peterson, Todd Bowman, T.F. Algeo (President), A.C. Riker, A.M. Garbutt and B.H. Pelton Jr.

Their first action of business was to limit the club membership to 100 people.

As the saying goes, if you build it, they will come. On June 16, 1921 there was an advertisement for a housing development called the Country Club Addition. Two days after the lots were put on the market over half of them were sold. Most of the buyers were “business and professional men” that wanted access to the both downtown Casper and the new golf links. On the map it shows the “New \$15,000 Country Club” - which in 2016 dollars is just under \$200,000. Lots were priced between \$250 and \$400 (\$3325 to \$5321). The bungalows that

were for sale for \$2500 would be on the market for \$33,258 today. On another day it stressed that no tar paper shacks were to be built. As this map shows, and from descriptions in the papers, the Casper Country Club was started in the location of the present day Casper Municipal Course. A snippet in the September 16th *Tribune* gave me further insights into the course: “Ben H. Weeks of Casper was recently returned from Thermopolis where he laid out the course. Mr. Weeks has several successful courses in the state to his credit, including the one now in use by the Casper Golf club.”

The First Tournament

In doing all this research and reading the articles from the newspapers of the 1920's I quite enjoyed the sensationalized and breathless reporting style of the day. The headlines of the papers were all murder and car crashes and divorce scandals and political corruption. The same style was used for sporting news as well as it was the time of Babe Ruth and his home run records, Jack Dempsey and his prizewinning bouts and Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen and Walter Hagen on the golf links.

The Casper reporters stuck to this style as well in their sports reporting for country club events. On Thursday, September 8, 1921, the first official golf tournament for the CCC began. I will have to reprint the whole article from the September 9th *Tribune* as it is just too much fun:

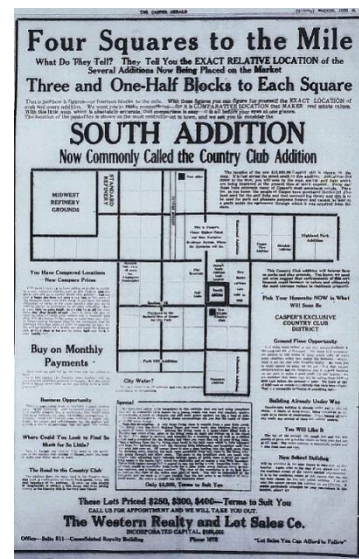
Elimination Matches in Casper Country Club Tourney Started

“Casperites who were wondering yesterday at the dust cloud hanging low over Reservoir hill will welcome the information that it was only the golf bugs practicing out at the links for the first annual handicap golf tournament of which the elimination games are now being played.

The first match, which was played off yesterday, saw two veterans of the game, Tom Dumphy, the famous southpaw, and Frank Firman in combat. It was a battle royal from the first green....

The committee has arranged a match between members who have not yet broken out with Golf Rash. ... As each player is a beginner pure and simple, especially simple, this flight should be most interesting and we might say dangerous to the gallery.

The course has been put in splendid condition for the matches and judging from the interest shown by exponents of the ‘hoof and mouth’ game the first tournament will be a great success.”



The elimination and qualifying rounds took place over the next few weeks. On Friday, September 20th the finalists were given their due in the Casper *Herald*. Four players remained as the winners of each “class” - T. H. Dumphy, M.C. Dutton, J.F. Christiansen and M.C. Price. They would “fight it out Saturday and Sunday, weather permitting, for the loving cup which has been presented by the Casper Country Club to the winner of the tourney.” “Winners in each class, besides having the honor of representing their class in the finals were awarded six new golf balls as prizes for being the victors.”

The tournament finally concluded on Sunday, October 2nd with the victor being J.F. Christiansen, defeating M.C. Dutton. Tournaments rarely last several weeks in the 21st century, but with a week for qualifying, a week for competing, and fall weather delays, this first handicap tournament was one to remember.

In 1921 there was not yet a golf professional for the Casper Country Club. During the same time as this tournament, the members of the club were able to receive golf instruction from a “Golf Expert” from the Rocky Mountain Golf club in Denver. Charles Bell was in town for two weeks starting September 21st to provide just that.

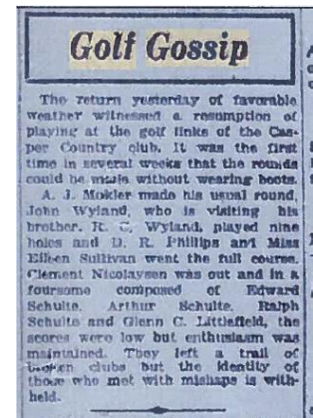
1922

The Casper Country Club was getting their act together in 1922. In April they started to make improvements to the course - leveling and resanding the greens, lengthening three holes, and moving the third hole to the east as the city was building a lake to handle the spring flooding problem. The weather was quite fine in early April as there were reports of the course being quite busy on the weekends.

Interestingly, the same article stated there were 76 members in the club in 1921 and that membership may double in 1922. The membership prices were \$25 for a first year member (\$354) and \$15 for a second year member (\$212).

On April 18 the club hired their first golf professional. Alex McCafferty was from Scotland, and spent many years with the Casper Country Club and the Casper Community Club, until his departure in 1928. At the same board meeting, they decided to build a small clubhouse on the course costing \$500 (\$7087). It was not going to be anything elaborate in the fact that the club did not own the links and had no surety of being able to lease them for any length of time. This “clubhouse” would have a soft drink stand for soda, sandwiches and near beer (it is prohibition), a shop to be run by McCafferty that would sell golf balls, an area to maintain and repair golf clubs, and he would be able to rent out clubs to those in need. Members would also register and report their scores at the house. Mr. McCafferty would also be providing lessons to the membership and organizing club tournaments.

A fun feature in the *Tribune* during 1922 was “Golf Gossip”. It appeared sporadically throughout the year, reporting on random club happenings. This one on the screen is from April 21. Lines of interest (to me) include “A.J. Mokler made his usual round” (more on him later). And “It was the first time in several weeks that the rounds could be made without wearing boots” showing that golfers were just as eager to play then as they are now. And my favorite, on the Schulte, Schulte, Schulte, Littlefield foursome that had low scores but they maintained their enthusiasm: “they left a trail of broken clubs but the identity of those who met with mishaps is withheld.” Noting that in 1922 the shafts of clubs were made of hickory and thus much easier to break. During the 1920’s there were many articles regarding the shift from hickory to steel shafts, and it caused great controversy.



The unknown sports writer for the *Tribune* was a great wordsmith - and probably a cohort of several of the regular golfers to get the stories he reported. Bear with me, as this article from April 22 merits a full reprinting.

DECKS CLEARED FOR BIG GOLF BATTLE HERE SUNDAY

‘A bitter contest will be waged tomorrow and the only trophy which will reward the winner of the battle will be a pair of white linen golf pants. The battle is scheduled to bring together the warring factions composed of A.C. Riker and George Campbell, banker and clothier respectively on one side, and Roy C. Wyland and J.H. Jeffrey, banker and chiropractor on the other side.

The fierceness of the coming battle is indicated by the fact that Dr. Jeffrey recently bought the white linen pants so that he could slip a surprise on the golfers at the country club course.

It is reported that someone tipped him off and that he was accosted by George Campbell and told that a person who couldn’t play any better golf than he could should not wear conspicuous white pants. This aroused Doc’s Scotch ire and the war was on.

It appears that there is considerable chicanery hidden behind the scheduled match. All during the winter months George Campbell is said to have been a constant visitor at the country club grounds here. He often substituted snow balls for the gutta percha pellet but nevertheless he has become proficient. In fact so much so that it is rumored he is about to challenge the world.

Knowing that sometime he would be called on to defend his laurels Roy C. Wyland slipped off to Hot Springs, Ark., where in balmy climates

he has played an average of 18 holes a day for the past month. This is a confidential report.

It is indicated that Mr. Wyland was forced willingly into the match in view of his winter practice. It was learned later today, however, that George Campbell hearing of Mr. Wyland's efficiency hedged his bet.

The match is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock. It will be heralded into being with a blast and pellet chasers are warned off the course while this foursome is holding away."

The winners? Roy Wyland and Dr. J.H. Jeffrey. According to the Golf Gossip on the 24th, George Campbell had quite the story to tell about his defeat. Alas, that story has been lost to history.

Several mentions are made of the women of Casper starting to play golf too. "If they continue to show interest in the game it would be necessary to hold a tournament for them." They did construct a ladies' tee on the 2nd hole - a great concession I'm sure.

In early May there were heavy rain storms in Casper and they caused great damage to the course. Tees and greens were washed out in some places and repairs would take a couple of weeks to complete. In early June it was reported that a steam roller was being used to smooth out the roughness of the fairways thus expecting to materially improve the course.



Prizes for the smaller golf tournaments - or sweepstakes - were not the traditional trophies. Glenn Littlefield won the Sweepstakes tourney on Memorial Day and received 15 golf balls. The three players that tied in 2nd place each received 5 golf balls. In June, George Jarvis won the Sunday Handicap tournament and received a pair of golf knickers. For a tournament in August the prizes were a golf vest, sweater, golf shoes, McGregor driver, driver & brassie, approach iron, golf bag, and golf balls. You will notice that a pair of white linen pants are not listed among the prizes.

On June 7th an announcement appeared in the newspapers that the first Wyoming State Open Golf Tournament would be held in Cheyenne over Labor Day weekend, with the finals to be held on Monday, September 4th. A letter was sent to Casper Country club asking for participants.

Other highlights of 1922 include a hold-in-one hit by A.C. Riker, secretary of the club, on June 14th. It was a 112 yard shot and merited a mention in Golf Gossip: "Casper golf enthusiasts are scratching their heads this morning and wondering how he did it."

The next day, S. Davidson Herron visited Casper and played a round of golf with Dr. J.H. Jeffrey against A.C. Riker and Vance Rowe. Herron had won the 1919 US Amateur Golf Tournament at Oakmont Country Club - defeating Bobby Jones. He was a bit of a celebrity and a "big gallery of fans followed" the match. Herron & Jeffrey won by 4 strokes.

On July 8 the club hosted a Caddies Tournament and the entrance fee was 5 hours of work on the course - what a great way to get free labor!

At the end of August a contingent of 12 men went to Cheyenne to try their luck against the rest of the Wyoming golfers. The first Casperites to play in the State tourney were club pro A. McCafferty, J. H. Jeffrey, A.C. Riker, D H. Phillips, A.A. Schulte, Ed Schulte, Leo Dunn, Roy Wyland, George Campbell, Glenn Littlefield, I.N. Frost, Frank Firmin, J.C Kamp, T.F. Algeo, Frank Knittle and Ralph Schulte. Dr. J.H. Jeffrey came in 2nd overall, losing to a player from Laramie, and Art Schulte won the medal in the Tenderfoot flight.

And the final big tournament of 1922 was the Club Championship played on September 24. And the winner is... J.H. Jeffrey, defeating Art Schulte. Dr. Jeffrey won a silver loving cup and the *Herald* reported that it was believed to be the largest cup in Casper standing approximately three feet tall.

I'll end the year with a day at the movies. On the weekend of October 25 & 26 one could go to the Wyoming Theatre - besides seeing the feature of "The Gunfighter" starring William S. Hart, and "In the Days of Buffalo Bill", the residents of Casper could see themselves on the big screen. You could see the Labor Day parade, a local moonshine raid, and Casper's golf links! If only we could find those movie reels!

1923

By this time plans were already in motion for the Casper Country Club to move from the links on city ground to our present location here along Elkhorn Creek. At a city council meeting in early June, 1923 the council expressed their desire to turn the land into a municipal course when the Casper Country club moved off.

The only activity in the early summer happened in mid-June when eleven Casper golfers went to Cheyenne for the first of a series of team matches. The Cheyenne team would come up to Casper in August to play here. However, they totally ditched us! The August 20th *Tribune* reported that "Capital City Golfers Fail to Keep Date." Fortunately, T. Blake Kennedy, a federal judge and Charles Gwenthouse, a federal court clerk - both from Cheyenne - were in Casper and agreed to play a round with the guys. During the match, A.C. Riker made another hole-in-one on the 4th hole, apparently the third hole-in-one he had made in the 1923 season to date.

The 1923 State Golf Tournament, once again in Cheyenne, did not go well for the guys from the Casper Country Club. Ed Schulte did win the Pioneer flight and George Campbell won the Tenderfoot flight, but no State Championship for the men.

Mrs. W.F. Ott however is another story. Mrs. Ott was a member of the Casper Country Club, along with her husband, and she participated in the Women's State Championship. She won, beating Mrs. C. Draper of Cheyenne, and "Mrs. Ott was in a class by herself in the ladies' play." Remember her name, I will be mentioning her a lot.

The 1923 Club Championship was to be decided in mid-September with qualifying rounds starting on the 15th. On the 17th, "because of the bad weather yesterday...the tournament was not entirely played off." Snow was reported on Casper Mountain. The Club Champion was

not decided until Monday, October 1st, “being handicapped by inclement weather but despite the mud and rain the affair has been one of the most successful since the club was organized.” The winner was F.F. Hamilton, a recent addition to Casper from Oklahoma.

A new tournament was started in October of that year (why are they playing golf in October? It’s Casper! It snows in October. It also snows in April.) It was a city tournament that was sponsored by the *Casper Daily Tribune* - the winner receiving the *Tribune* Cup. This first tournament was open to all golfers, being a member of the country club or not. The only caveat was that all entrants must be qualified voters of the City of Casper, or be a prospective voter if a minor.

The *Tribune* Trophy Tournament was very exciting - F.F. Hamilton, the club champion, was defeated by J. S. Brown (recently from Denver) in the first round. The finals were on Sunday, October 14 and the winner was declared - Glenn Littlefield, defeating J.S. Brown. Littlefield won the *Tribune* Trophy, but Duke Wheeler, the consolation flight winner, received a “handsome suede leather golf suit.”



In October 1923 a man named Thomas Bendelow arrived from Chicago. He was a golf course architect and was nicknamed “The Johnny Appleseed of Golf”. He is credited with designing some 600 courses over his 35 year career. Notable and regional courses included Cheyenne Country Club, Billings Golf & Country Club, Boulder Country Club, Algonquin Golf Club in St. Louis, MO, and Medina Course #3 which has hosted several major championships. His approach to course design was a “naturalistic approach” in that he utilized the natural features of a site to maximum advantage. His personal goal was to build good, solid, enjoyable golf courses. It has been believed that “more people have learned to play golf on a Tom Bendelow designed course than that of any other golf course architect.”

1924

In reading through the papers, scanning every page for mentions of the Casper Country Club, I could not help but to read the headlines of the day. 1924 was a very busy year for the world, the United States and Wyoming. The summer Olympics were held in Paris, Harold Carter was still working on King Tut’s tomb (having opened it in 1922), Fatty Arbuckle was found guilty of indecency and theaters were pulling his films (Casper included). Calvin Coolidge was running a second term as President and the republican and democratic conventions were lively and contentious. The Leopold & Loeb trial was making headlines from Chicago. In Wyoming there was a little dispute over a Teapot Dome or something? Ha Ha. Governor Ross died after

complications from an appendectomy. The Hotel Townsend opened in downtown Casper, and, east of the city, a new golf course was opened.

The old course was taken over by Alex McCafferty as he secured a permit from the Community Corporation to maintain a community course for non club members. He would charge a smaller annual fee than the Country Club, and also have daily green fees. The two clubs would compete against each other in the City Tournament over the rest of the decade. I found myself being very protective of “my club” and hated to read about a member of the Community Club beating us in a tournament.

On March 16th it was announced that Colby & Rognstad Contractors were awarded the building contract for the new clubhouse. The plans & specifications for a stone and frame structure were drawn up by Rayburn S. Webb. His plans called for a main floor with lounge, dining room, ballroom, kitchen, pantry and a ladies locker room with showers. A wide veranda looking south and east could be opened to form part of the main room. There were two fireplaces (one of which remains behind me here) on the main floor, with one extending down to the basement. The ground floor would have the men’s locker room and lounge, club storage, the club pro’s workroom, living rooms for attendants and the furnace & coal room. Contrary to club lore, the men’s locker room was never stables for the horses that were here in later decades when a small horse track was on the property.



Ruth Scott Hocker Collection, Casper College Western History Center

Casper Country Club.

The *Tribune* praised the efforts of the club in that “Casper has long needed a country club and the directors are to be congratulated on the thoroughness which has marked their efforts in the place for the new building and the development of the membership.” It went on to report that “because of the fact that the directors have not given any publicity to the new clubhouse since last fall some propaganda

has been spread that the building idea had ‘blown up’. This is, of course, ridiculous and the new clubhouse will be started almost immediately.”

Excavation was started on Monday, March 19th, 1924. The rock that graces the lower walls was gathered from the surrounding area when the course was being laid out and the clubhouse excavated. There were seven men and two teams of horses to work on the excavating.

The Casper Country Club had a new clubhouse in the works and had a new course plan - all they needed was a new golf professional. On Saturday, March 29th Jimmie Mason arrived in Casper to take up those duties. Mr. Mason hailed from Scotland and in 1914 won the amateur

championship there. He had also won the Wisconsin Open, the Hot Springs, Ark Open Championship and numerous other small tournaments.

His first duties upon arrival were to get “a gang of men” started on the course construction. He had detailed blueprints from Tom Bendelow showing every tap, bunker and hazard - drawn to scale. The course was outlined for 9 holes at 3087 yards with a par of 37. There was only one par 3 hole (#7) and numbers 1 & 5 were par 5’s. The course was designed with the plan of making it a full 18 holes - the back nine to be added in 1925. Due to funds and other circumstances, that did not happen until the 1950’s.

I’m going to take a moment here to describe the 1920’s Casper golf course as it would not be familiar to 21st century golfers. When we look out the window here we see green fairways with groomed grass on the tee boxes and greens. This would not be the view 95 years ago. The fairways were green with grass that was rolled to maintain a level playing surface. The greens however, were not green. They were oiled and sanded. Each green here was supplied with 10 barrels of oil which took a few days to soak into the soil. A thick, heavy oil was used (the heavier the better) like used motor oil or other petroleum based products. After the oil was absorbed a layer of sand was spread over the green. The oil and sand could be mixed beforehand and then spread over the green too. When a ball landed on the green, a player would roll or smooth the surface to the hole so his ball could travel cleanly to the pin. No mention has been made of what the “greens” smelled like, but I wonder if in the summer, with temperatures in the 90’s, if there was an oil like aroma on the course.

When the course and clubhouse were finished the members would be able to arrive here with ease. The road from the city limits to the clubhouse would be graveled in April and it was expected that the city would gravel the street from McKinley to the city limits.

There was not only golf to be played at the new country club. Two tennis courts were being constructed a few feet from the west end of the clubhouse (where the pro shop is today). A grader was needed to level the ground, but they would be located just under a rolling hill to protect the players from the wind and provide a bit of shade. Later, a fence would be installed around the courts to keep the golfers from tramping across them in their golf shoes. A trapshooting area was installed as well for the members’ enjoyment. There was not much written about this part of the club but I am assuming that it faced away from the golfers.

A water line from Evansville was installed. Post holes were dug for electric and telephone poles coming from the city. “It was found necessary to bury or burn dead stock found in the pastures, clear away logs and rocks, remove fences, and go over the grounds with disk, harrow and rollers.”

Work continued at speed during May, but the opening was delayed by a spring rain storm. The official opening date was set for Sunday, June 8, 1924. It is hard to believe that in 10 weeks a 9-hole golf course was constructed from scratch during a Wyoming spring. This same wonderment was expressed by the *Tribune* in February of 1925 in a special industrial insert of the Sunday paper. “The Casper Country Club members accomplished the almost impossible in

1924 by constructing a \$30,000 clubhouse, a complete 9-hole golf course, tennis courts and trapshooting equipment in the same year.”

Sunday, June 8 was a standard day for any big golf tournament at the Casper Country Club - windy and chilly. The opening drive would be taken by club President George Campbell at 9:30 o'clock am. (The paper's wording, not mine.) The opening foursome included A.C. Riker (club secretary and treasurer), Jimmie Mason (club professional) and Raymond Webb (director). The next group of golfers were Dr. J.H. Jeffrey, Glenn Littlefield, Farris Hamilton, Dave Silverman and Alex McCafferty. The Sunday morning *Tribune* declared: “Whether you are a member of not, if you take pride in Casper and the accomplishments of its virile, hustling, public spirited citizens, drive out to the club property today and feast your eyes on this splendid asset to the community. You will renew your faith in Casper and your pride in its citizens and you will see a country club and golf course of scenic beauty and natural advantages that golf experts claim to be without parallel in the Rocky Mountain district.”



The clubhouse was still under construction and was reported to cost \$32,000 (\$445,627). By contrast, in 1923 the B.B. Brooks Mansion was built for \$55,000 (\$765,921). On opening day the workers were putting shingles on the roof and the interior remained unfinished. It was reported that it would open in mid-July, but did not actually open until mid-August in time for the Wyoming State Tournament.



Opening day was a success! George Campbell was presented with an inscribed golf cane as a token of appreciation from members for all of his hard work in opening the new club. His first ball played would be preserved and attached to the cane by a gold chain and hung over the great stone fireplace as the first club trophy. Where this cane is now is anyone's guess. George was very humble in accepting the accolades for his efforts. In his remarks to the crowd he said: “A great deal of credit has been given to me which I appreciate but this course could never have been built in the time it has or for the money we had to

spend only for the excellent support we have had from the members and especially from the members of big companies - Ohio Oil, Standard of Indiana, Illinois Pipe who built our phone and light line for us; Texas - a Mr. Keiser who very



gratefully loaned us a five ton truck and it certainly ought to be appreciated by every member of this club for we did not have the money to buy rollers and hire tractors to run them.” Things have not changed much to this day as we still use the connections of members to help us save money on projects.

After the two opening groups teed off, the course was opened to the membership for play at their new home.

Alfred J. Mokler

Publisher of the Casper Daily *Tribune*, automobile enthusiast, obsessive golfer and very OCD when it came to his journals, Alfred Mokler was an excellent witness of 1924 Casper. And I am thankful to him for this because without his journals I would be bereft of his unique insight and observations of the first year of the Casper Country club.

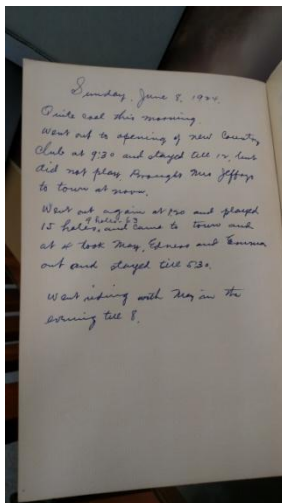
In this photo, Mr. Mokler is the gentlemen in the middle, along with who we think are M.P. Wheeler and Dr. Morgan, getting ready to head out for a day on the links. Mr. Mokler's 1924 journal was a daily recounting of his activities and well being.

Every day he worked in the morning or ran errands. He had lunch at home or at the Masonic Temple. Then, every day, and I mean every day, he was at the Casper Country Club between 1 and 1:30 to play golf all afternoon. He would play few holes by himself, or a round or two with friends, or a pickup game with whomever was around. He recorded everyone's score, and significant details of the day. He was not the best golfer based on his scores, but he was certainly enthusiastic.



Mokler Collection, Casper College Western History Center
Unidentified male, Alfred J. Mokler, Unidentified male. Golf. Sports.

On opening day he recorded this: “Quite cool this morning. Went out to opening of new Country Club at 9:30 and stayed till 12, but did not play. Brought Mrs. Jeffrey's to town at noon.” (Her husband was playing the 2nd group if you will recall.) “Went out again at 1:20 and played 15 holes (9 holes=63), and came to town and at 4 took May, Edness, and Emma out stayed till 5:30. Went riding with May in the evening till 8.”



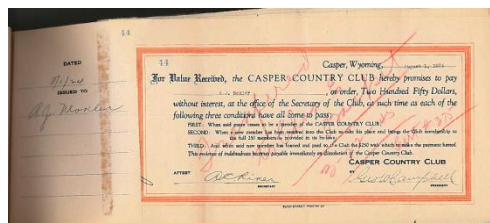
Almost every night he would go out riding, which I assume means out driving based on other entries and where he went, and then came home. Most days he also gave accounts of how he slept or how he was feeling. I think he was a bit of a hypochondriac too.

“Monday, June 9, 1924 - worked in library all morning. Went to temple club rooms at 1 pm and at 1:30 went to Country Club with Frank Knittle and stayed till 5. Played 15 holes - 9 holes 61. Stayed home all evening. Quite Tired, Slept good last night and but little abdominal distress.”

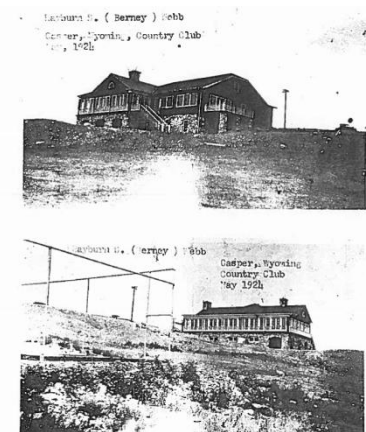
"Tuesday, June 10, 1924 - Worked in Library all morning. Day is nice and fairly warm. Went out to Country Club with Chris Rhinemuth and played 15 holes, 9 holes - 58, home by 6pm. Flagman at 2nd street R.R. crossing criticized me for driving close to track, but he did not signal to stop. Home all evening. Very tired, did not sleep good last night."

And this continued for the rest of the year! Here are some highlights from his entries: "June 23rd...went to club at 1:00 pm with Victor. AM shot 60, Victor 47. Killed a rattlesnake at 7th green. Lost 3 balls and found 4." On another day he saw a bull snake, but did not kill him. In late July he somehow got poison ivy on his hands and had a bad rash. His still played golf every day. He went to the hospital at one point to have the bandages replaced and then came to the club for his usual rounds. August 4: "not a very pleasant afternoon on account of jangle between Knittle and Warren who were playing for small amount. Gambling and golf do not go well together. Hope I will not play with them anymore." On August 10 he did not play golf but went through the clubhouse so I am assuming that it was near completion and he was able to take a tour. September 30: "Went to Country club at 1 pm with Holmes and Shaffer and played 18 holes. On second rounds criticized Frank England for discourtesy on golf ground. Talked very plain to him and he was quite peeved. Curt was glad I talked to him and exercised my rights." He played daily up until November 4th. Then for a about 10 days off and on until mid-December. On December 13 he records that it was "very windy and just a little cold for playing golf." But he still played.

The new and improved Casper Country Club was organized much differently from when they were at the community links. Membership was now \$250 which bought you stock in the club. Mokler was able to pay his in installments and recorded these payments on April 18th "Paid \$50 at 1 pm to Riker - have paid \$150 to date." Then made a final payment \$100 payment on July 1st. That \$250 in 1924 is \$3481 in today's money.



During the season a golfer had the option of using caddies. That first year the service was provided by Casper Boy Scouts and they would be by the arches of the clubhouse waiting for players to engage their services. Beverage carts were not available either - a golfer had to bring his own. On June 13th it was announced that Sunday players "need not plan on taking their own refreshments, for at the farm house near the links, sandwiches, coffee and pop will be served."



The State Tournament at the Casper Country Club

The Clubhouse was completed in time for the Wyoming State Tournament. These photos were sent to the club in the 1960's by the architect and were dated May 1924 - but that date is incorrect as the clubhouse was still undergoing construction in May. You can see the corner of the tennis courts in one of the

photos however. The Tournament was to begin August 28th and by this time the clubhouse was ready to accept players from all over the state and provide all of their refreshment needs.

I won't bore you with the play-by-play details of the tournaments. But the winners are: For the Women - Mrs. W. F. Ott defeated Miss Hattie Wyatt to win her 2nd state championship. For the men, it was Glenn Littlefield, member of the Casper Country Club and in June had won the Nebraska Golf Association Championship. He defeated Ferris Hamilton, also of Casper. "Both played suburb golf, brilliant at times" and they had a large gallery following them during their championship round. Littlefield also won the approaching and putting contests held during the tournament.

The course and clubhouse were well received and paid many compliments by the out of town players. The *Tribune* on September 2nd: "Greater progress in golf has been made during the last year, both in Casper and Wyoming, than during any previous year. The year has seen the completion of several courses in leading towns and competition in the state tourney reflected playing improvement to a marked degree. The Casper Country club course ranks as the sportiest and most difficult in the state and as such called for a superior brand of golf."



A small tournament was held on Sunday, September 21 - a husbands and wives tournament. The winning couple would receive a trophy. However, I mention this tournament because of a different sort of prize all together. This quote is taken directly from the *Tribune*: "Ferris Hamilton, runner up in the recent State Tournament, on hearing of the Campbell trophy being put up has offered a second prize in the form of a box of candy to any of the wives that come in at the end of the nine holes on friendly terms with their husbands. Friendliness with someone else's husband will not be considered in the qualifications for the candy." Mr. & Mrs. Ott won the tournament and the Campbell trophy. No mention was made of who won the box of candy, if anyone.

And finally, in 1924, the club champion at the new home of the Casper Country Club, was A.C. Riker by defeating J.H. Jeffrey.

1925-1929

The next five years of the Casper Country club continued in the same vein with tournaments, dinners, dances, and other social events. I won't go into too much detail year by year (and there was much rejoicing) but will highlight some of the interesting and unique happenings that took place.

What did the golfing gentleman wear to the country club? A newspaper fashion report cleared this up. "In the spring a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of - his golf score. And so does that fancy of the no so young man." "One advantage of the golf suit is that the purchaser is



provided with both regulation trousers and golf knickers. "Tweeds and cheviots are the thing and light greys and browns are the colors. Of course, here and there one will find a light green." "Pockets are huge affairs again, for the secretion of such commodities as are essential to a perfect golfing day." "Golf stockings both murmur and shriek. If the golf knickers are to be tucked into the stocking, then the stockings have the fold at the top." Once again, no mention of white linen pants.

On May 3, 1925 the *Tribune* updated the readers on the condition of the Country club course. Cottonseed hulls were placed on all the greens and they were in splendid shape, making it easy for accurate putting. Not two weeks later the green at #6 caught fire.

COUNTRY CLUB GREEN RUINED BY DESTRUCTION OF HUSKS BY FIRE

"Use of cottonseed husks, tightly rolled and packed, as a surface for golf greens, met with its first reverse at the Casper Country club this week when a lighted cigarette or match carelessly thrown down by a player resulted in the destruction of half the matting on No. 6 green. The destruction was discovered in the morning and evidently resulted from a fire which smoldered during the night, fanned by the wind. The club has no husks on hand to repair the damage and a temporary surface will replace the burned material for the time being. The greens are soaked thoroughly from time to time in aid in packing the material.

The recent fire has proved an object lesson to all players and it is likely that every care will be exercised in the future to avoid danger of further damage.

Surfacing of all the greens with husks was only recently completed, following an experiment on green No. 9 at the suggestion of the golf greens bureau of the department of agriculture. The husks proved ideal for the purpose, providing a putting surface which resembles in many ways the best grass greens."

The women of the club were organizing themselves in 1925 as well. They started to hold handicap tournaments for club members and were holding regular events by the end of the decade.

Tournament results for 1925: The Club Champion was Glenn Littlefield as he defeated A.C. Riker. And Mrs. Ott once again won the women's state championship.

1926 saw an unusual tournament. It was described as “a novel match in which the merits of a bow and arrow will be tried against a set of golf clubs.” The competitors were Al Seanor, city champion and golf pro Jimmie Mason against archers Ed McGuinn and Leon Goodrich. It was played over 18 holes on Sunday, June 20th. So that the cups were not injured by the arrows a 4 ½ inch target was placed three feet to the left of the green for the archers to shoot at. The golfers won the match, as a strong wind handicapped both teams but the archers suffered more from the wind. McGuinn broke his target arrow and had to use a lighter arrow which was not as efficient in the wind. There was interest in having a rematch, but I never saw it mentioned in the paper.



Unidentified men, Alton J. Mason, unidentified men, sports, history and golf.

In the Annual City Golf Tournament, sponsored by the *Tribune*, two Country club members were in the finals. The City Champion ended up being Glenn Littlefield who defeated Al Seanor. Seanor and Littlefield would go back and forth over the next few tournaments until Littlefield moved to California in 1927. On August 9th, Seanor beat the course record by turning in a score of 70 over 18 holes and had a 32 for nine holes - 4 under par. He beat the old course record holder, Glenn Littlefield, who had 71.

In the 1926 State Golf Tournament Al Seanor won the men's championship and Mrs. Ott, once again, won the women's tournament for the 4th consecutive year.

The off season saw many social events at the club. Men's smokers, bridge tournaments, New Year's eve parties, and club dinners. On October 30th the club held a Hard Times Halloween Dance. The festivities included the 'burning of a giant brush pile and outdoor games. Members are expected to dress in keeping with the program. Anyone who appears in a 'Tux' is threatened with a plunge in the 'duck pond'." Hijinks being the call of the day.



The Casper Country Club had an exciting visitor in 1927. On August 25, master golfer and trick shot artist, Joe Kirkwood, performed at the club. Joe Kirkwood was an Australian golfer who won numerous tournaments around the world. However, he spent more of his time touring around and demonstrating his trick shots. On Thursday the 25th he entertained the people of Casper. Kirkwood first played a round of golf with A.C. Riker as his partner, against Jimmie Mason and Al Seanor. Kirkwood and Riker won the match. Then came the exhibition of tricks - for \$1.50 to defray the costs of retaining his services (\$20.50) members of the public could watch and awe over....

“Successive drives with one club at slightly increased elevations; the art of hitting a ball in every position, including one teed on top of and one under the toe of Bon Biggs' shoe; hooks and slices at will; push shots;

drives long straight and fair with various clubs, and the ability to hit eight balls fast and far enough to keep seven of them in the air at once were just a few of his examples of master golfing. After sending them in curves to both rights and left he used a right-handed club to execute a pull in shooting left-handed. He shot two balls with one club, slicing one and hooking the other. He smashed at one with a niblick with such a delicate touch that he lifted it to his hand. He drove two balls with two clubs at the same time, and drove a ball from behind one three inches in front without touching the later. He set them on top of one another and placed them at will, also driving one from the face of a watch.”

Joe Kirkwood returned to the club on two other occasions - in the early 1940's and again in the late 1940's.

In 1927 tournament news...An invitational was held at Casper Country Club with participants invited from Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska and other surrounding states. Al Seanor won the invitational. And, not a surprise anymore, Mrs. Ott won both the Invitational and the Wyoming State Tournament for the women.

In 1928 big changes came to both the Casper Country Club and the Community Golf Club. Alex McCafferty, after being in Casper since 1922, had decided it was time to move on and headed to Colorado and then on to Utah. He was replaced by Al Seanor, yes, the same Al Seanor who won numerous tournaments at the country club. He handed in his amateur card to turn into a golf professional (sucker.) Jimmie Mason decided that he needed to move on too and headed to Walla Walla, WA. On May 13th Hugh Forgey arrived in Casper from the Moila Country Club in St. Joseph, MO to take over the head professional hat.



Ruth Scott Hocker Collection, Casper College Western History Center

Casper Country Club.

The city golf tournament in July of 1928 was playing along as usual. The players from Casper Country club and the Community club were duking it out on the links for city champion honors. Earl Williams, from the Community club, was a 17-18 year old student at Natrona County High School (he age changed depending on which article you read). He was defeating every player he was matched up with. C.M. Bettinger was also playing excellent golf for the Community club team. But then, on the Friday of the tournament, some back room dealings went on (oh to be a fly on the wall). The Sunday paper reported that “Bettinger until recently has been playing with the Community club golfers, but a few days ago cast his lot with the country club players when he became a member

of that organization.” Williams and Bettinger went on to meet in the finals and I imagine that there was just a bit of trash talking from the Community club players who felt betrayed. Bettinger ended up winning the tourney, but the trophy was officially in the hands of the Community club since Bettinger was registered with them at the start of the tournament.

Once again the Wyoming State Golf Tournament was held at the Casper Country Club in 1928. Twelve clubs from around Wyoming would be represented. During the event, in addition to the exciting golf matches, there would be several social events, including a Friday event banquet and dance and a ladies’ bridge party on Saturday afternoon.



And, to no one’s surprise, the women’s champion, for the 7th time, was Mrs. W.F. Ott. In a repeat of the city tournament we saw Earl Williams and C.M. Bettinger contending for the state title. This time, young Earl took home the honors.

On September 23rd Mrs. Ott established a new women’s record on the course when she turned in a score of 37 over 9 holes using the men’s par.

The bar set for the course record was being lowered bit by bit in 1929. On May 23rd A.C. Riker turned in a 9-hole score of 35 and 36 - for a total of 71. On May 30th C.M. Bettinger turned in a score of 69. Not to be outdone, professional M.H. Forgey turned in a shattering course record of 64 on August 4th.

There were other changes in 1929. The State Tournament was held in mid-August instead of over Labor Day weekend like it has always been. Earl Williams did not defend his state title as, after graduation, he took a job as the golf professional at the Midwest Golf club. And, much to the relief of women golfers across the state, Mrs. Ott did not compete in the 1929 Tournament. She stayed at her home in Monterrey, CA and was not back in time. Two golfers from Laramie won both the men’s and women’s titles that year.

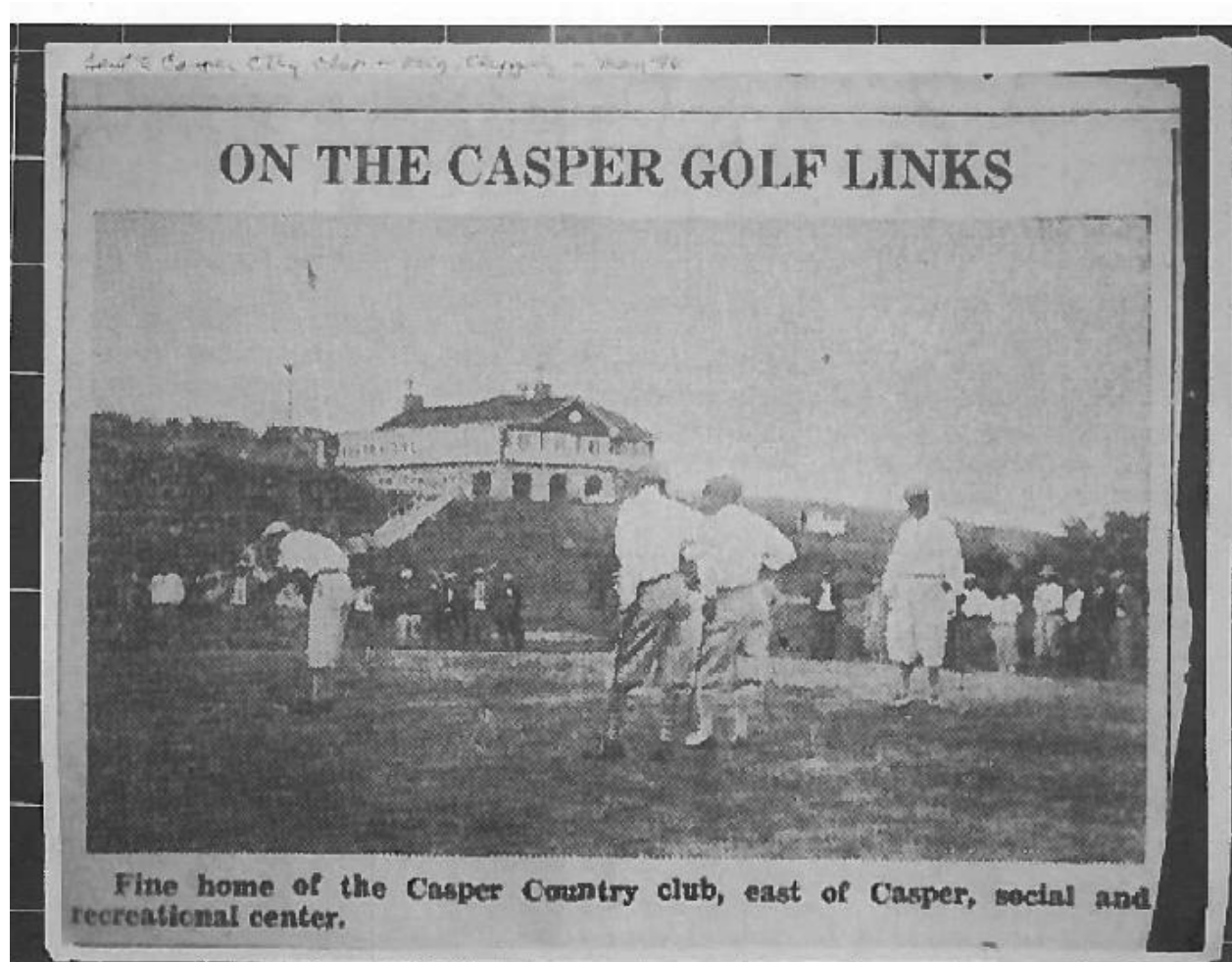
1929 ended well for A.C. Riker as he won the City Golf Championship by beating 16-year old Gene Shaw of the Community club.

My research ends there. October 29th brought the stock market crash and life changed for the country and for Casper. But the Casper Country Club continued on through booms and busts, wars, floods and droughts, and contentious membership issues. Our 95th birthday will be in one month thanks to a visionary and optimistic group of citizens that had the energy and resources to bring the spirit of golf to a booming town in the middle of the Wyoming prairie.

They carved a beautiful course out of scrub brush and rocky soil and built a beautiful clubhouse out of local materials providing a home for thousands of golfing Casperites over the last century.

The 1920's was a fascinating decade full of political shenanigans and corruption, prohibition and gangsters, Hollywood scandals, sporting sensations, and most of all, optimism. People wanted to have fun, live life and just enjoy an afternoon on their local links. I'm sure Alfred Mokler would love to play a round with you.

The End



Presented April 28, 2016

Natrona County Historical Society

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