

# Early Golf In America

By Sean Tully



Digging deep into early American history one can find a handful of references to golf as early as the 1700s. It wouldn't be until 1873 for golf to take a foothold in North America and then it was in Canada at Royal Montreal Golf Club. It would be another 11 years for an American course to take shape and pay homage to golf in Scotland by taking the name of St. Andrews Golf Club. Looking to the Bay area we can see that golf first makes an appearance at Burlingame in 1893. From all that I have been able to read it appears that Burlingame was the first golf club in California and one of the earliest courses West of the Mississippi. Yes there are some other courses that make this claim, but I have yet to see anything that can prove their point.

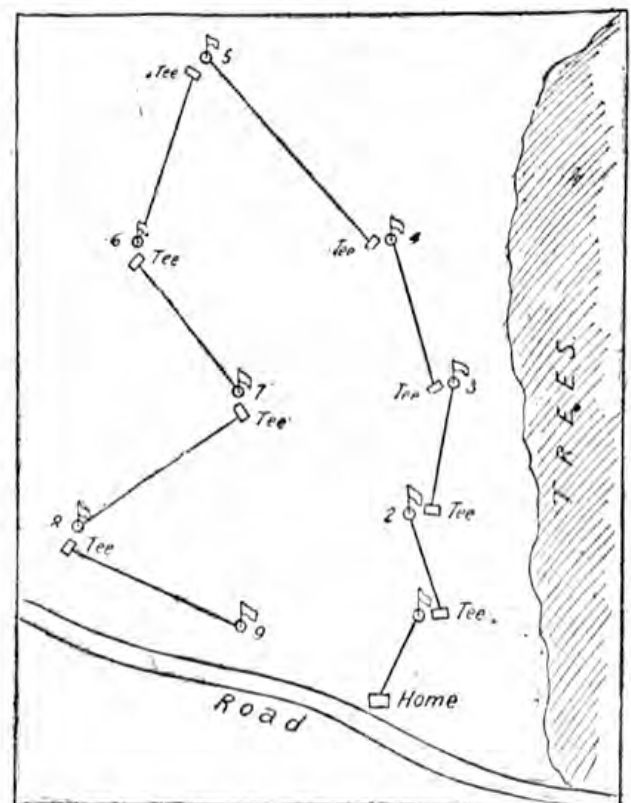
Of all the questions that I am asked the one that comes up the most often is: what is the oldest course west of the Mississippi? A number of courses use this in their marketing to gain publicity to their given course, but it is often self-defined. The more obvious themes are how many holes the course had when it was first formed and if it is still on the original property. We may never know for certain which course was the first and would have to do a lot of research to come to some sort of a conclusion.

Golf was a new game that was finding its way as more people made the transition from an agrarian society to that of the industrial age. Land was often leased and rudimentary routings were laid out with simple clubhouses built or adapted into an existing home. Most courses were laid out as only nine holes and as the game found more followers the need to add holes or move to another more suitable property was prevalent. As our cities grew the courses were pushed out of the cities in search of more land. A course like San Francisco Golf Club is on its third site after moving from the Presidio looking for an 18 hole course and getting away from the cavalry maneuvers that were run over the course. They would have to move from their second course as it was to be subdivided, so the club was looking again for another property and settled on their current location.

One of the more interesting things that I look for is old routing maps of golf courses that can show just how simple the original golf courses were laid out. The earliest courses were laid out in as little time as to place some stakes in the ground to represent a tee and another green. The greens as described at the Presidio were little more than 15 feet in diameter with a small red flag to mark the "goal" as it was called in a newspaper article.

The article went on to describe the game to the non-golfing public which highly outnumbered those that played golf at the time. Over the next 30 years golf would grow

to such an extent that the city would struggle to keep up with its popularity.



MAP OF THE GOLF LINK NOW BEING PREPARED ON A TRACT OF LAND WEST OF THE PRESIDIO. THE FLAGS MARK THE GOALS.  
(From a sketch by Mr. J. H. Hardy, a golf devotee.)

## Last Issue's Quiz Solution

The photo in the last issue was of the 9th hole at Lake Chabot, a course designed by Willie Lock.