

# ***Golf West of the Mississippi: The Early Courses***

by

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Does the name *Pedley Farms* sound familiar? How about *Del Monte*? Or the *Presidio*? These courses are recognized as the first courses in California, and some of the oldest west of the Mississippi! But, contrary to popular belief, much of what has been believed may be in error. For example, it is generally accepted that the *Del Monte GC*, which was established in 1897, is the oldest golf course west of the Mississippi in continual operation. However at least two courses in Oregon are older, along with one course in Colorado! So, which is it? What is the distinction between the course and the club? Which courses are the oldest in the western United States? If the course moved how is that factored-in? What if it changed names but the course remained?

## **The Founding Courses in the East**

Tradition has long stated that *St. Andrews GC* in Yonkers, NY is the oldest continual Club in America. Founded by John Reid, the “Apple Tree Gang” organized their club on November 14, 1888. It was not the first club, but it definitely was the one that sustained itself during the years as a golf club, thus marking itself as the oldest continual club in the country.

*Oakhurst GC* in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, is recognized as the oldest golf club in the country, having been organized in 1884 when Russell Montague formed the club on his property, and held matches and tournaments there for almost 20 years. The course was abandoned in 1904 and as the grass grew longer, the course vanished until 1995 when it was rebuilt by the new owner Lewis Keller. After much refurbishing by Keller, with the help of architect Robert Cupp, it now hosts a series of matches for special guests staying at the nearby Greenbrier resort, including legendary Sam Snead who had the honors at the inaugural event. The first tee at the *Homestead* course utilizes one of the tees that was part of Oakhurst, and as a result, that tee has been in continual use for over 100 years!

The *South Carolina Golf Club* was in existence in 1788, but records indicate that this was more of a social club than a golf club, and if it actually hosted golf events is in question. Regardless, the War of 1812 wiped out any further mention of the club in Charleston. The same, apparently, holds true for the club formed about the same time in Savannah, Georgia, known as the *Savannah Golf Club*. We do know from shipping documents that clubs and balls from St. Andrews were shipped to Savannah during this era.

*Sarasota, Florida* is said to have had a layout in 1883, while *Burlington, Iowa* claims to have had 4 holes in play in 1881. *Foxburg GC* in Pennsylvania says they played on their greens in 1887, while the *Dorset GC* in Vermont claims to have played in 1886. Many of these claims cannot be documented and as a result are subject to much doubt. The documentation of courses west of the Mississippi is, however, a little clearer, but also has room for doubt!

## **California Golf**

In California, *Pedley Farms* was created by Charles Maud in 1892 as a 9 hole tract. Colonel W.E. Pedley had helped him with the layout and the course was named after him. This course would be redesigned and renamed at least twice through the years. After the first redesign it was named *Arlington CC* and following a 2<sup>nd</sup> rework by amateur champion Max Behr, it was renamed once more, this time *Victoria CC* in 1903 and the Riverside, California layout remains today. However, the course was changed so significantly through the years that very little remains of the original Maud design, but historians do recognize *Victoria CC* as a direct descendent of *Pedley Farms*, and thus the first course in the state, although it would hardly qualify as the oldest continual course!

The second course in California was the golf course founded at the *Presidio* military base in 1895. Created on part of Fort Winfield Scott, the commander had given civilians permission to construct a course, which was completed in 1896 by Robert Johnstone. Initially only 9 holes, the original course had five sand greens and only 4 grass greens. Most of the tees were covered with oil and dirt as the layout was part of the sandy plateau that bordered San Francisco Bay. A uniqueness of the site was that two golf clubs existed at *The Presidio*; one civilian and the other military. The civilians petitioned the base commander to expand the course and in 1908 Robert Johnstone added the second 9 holes. The club ceased operation twice due to wars; the first was in 1898 during the Spanish American War, and the second was during World War I. But it was one incident which occurred in 1912 when a dispute arose between an officer and two civilians which forced the commanding officer to close the course for almost a year. It took an order from the Secretary of War to declare the course open to both groups, and it remained that way until 1995 when the course was opened to the public, following the closing of the base as a military reservation. Through the years, several architects have made changes to the course; William McEwan in 1915, Herbert Fowler in 1921, Robert Muir Graves in 1964 and Desmond Muirhead in 1969.

*Del Monte GC* was founded in 1897, when it's 9 holes were laid-out by Herbert Fowler and Charles Maud. Located a few minutes east of the Pebble Beach area, it is referred to as *Old Del Monte GC*. The reason for this is when the course at Pebble Beach was designed by St. Louisan Jack Neville in 1919, it was part of the *Del Monte Golf & Country Club*. Since the club owned both sites, the links at Pebble Beach was not the official name! When the 1929 US Amateur was held at the course, the USGA sent a letter of thanks to the club, and there was no reference made to Pebble Beach! It wasn't until sometime in the 1930's that it was referred to as the *Pebble Beach Golf Links*, and references to Del Monte ceased to exist! The *Del Monte GC* which added their back 9 in 1903, has touted itself as the oldest course in continuous operation west of the Mississippi, however, they cannot dispute the claims of a course in Oregon which was founded almost 5 years earlier!

### **Golf in the Northwest**

Another west coast links that goes back to the earliest days is *Gearhart Golf Links* in Gearhart, Oregon, located in the extreme northwest section of Oregon along the Pacific Ocean. Gearhart had its front nine built in 1892 by the Founders Corporation, while the back nine waited until 1913. Located only three blocks from the Pacific Ocean, Gearhart has been in continual operation since 1892, and would thus rank as the oldest course west of the Mississippi, despite the protests of Del Monte! Of the original 9 holes, 7 exist today, two having been lost to the condos which separate the course from the Ocean. Another legend takes the course back even earlier. It is rumored that several Scotsmen laid out 4 holes in the mid-1880's; if this could be documented, it would make it the oldest continuously running course in the country! Gearhart is a true links course. It has the "loop-type" layout traditionally found in Scottish courses such as St. Andrews, Nairn and Dornoch. Located on 100 acres of well-worn dunes, anyone who has played the Scottish links courses would feel right at home at Gearhart.

Another Northwest course that dates back to the mid-1890's is *Tacoma Country & Golf Club*. Founded in 1894, it too has promoted itself as the oldest club in continual operation west of the Mississippi. In 1904 the club packed up and moved to the present site. So the club may be among the oldest, but the course would fall into the also-ran category, having been built after 1903! Of note is that the original course was recognized by the USGA as one of the first 100 courses built in the country!

Other Clubs existed in Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa in 1901 and earlier. Of the clubs represented at the initial Trans-Miss event in 1901, the following are still in existence; Overland Park Municipal GC (Denver); Field Club of Omaha; St. Joseph CC; Omaha CC; Kansas City CC and Holdrege CC (NE).

### **Colorado, Iowa and Nebraska Golf**

The *Overland Park CC* is a municipal course in Denver that was founded in 1895. The Colorado Golf Association recognizes Overland Park as the oldest course in Colorado. *Overland Park* added their back 9 around 1904 and it has been in existence since its founding at the original site. *Patty*

**Jewett GC**, another Colorado course, is located in Colorado Springs. It is just slightly younger than **Overland Park** having founded their nine holes in 1898. Today the course has an 18 hole and a 9 hole course. However, the exact date when they created their 2nd 9 holes is not clear, although sources have stated that it was prior to the turn of the century! Like Overland Park, Patty Jewett has been in continuous operation since its opening. The **Field Club of Omaha** was built by Harry Lawrie in 1898 with the back nine added for the opening of the season of 1902. The **Cedar Rapids CC** had a club in place in 1901, but the course itself wasn't constructed until 1904 when they hired Tom Bendelow to walk-off 9 holes for them. The **Omaha CC** existed with 9 holes in 1901, but when they moved to their present site the original course was abandoned. Perhaps the oldest course west of the Mississippi is **Fairfield CC** in Fairfield, Iowa. This tiny 9 hole tract has clippings lining the clubhouse walls documenting the course opening in the spring of 1892!

### Kansas City Area Golf

Like St. Louis, golf began in Kansas City, St. Joseph. Omaha and Iowa at about the same time. The first layout in Kansas City was in 1894 when Frank Young & Dr. John Binnie formed **Kenwood Golf Links** at 36<sup>th</sup> & Gilliam. Two years later the club moved to 52<sup>nd</sup> and Wornall Roads, and reorganized as the **Kansas City CC**. The site of that course today is Loose Park in Kansas City. The second course in the area was the **Fairmount GC**, later renamed **Evanston GC**, laid out in the Sterling district off Highway 24. The club would later move to the Independence area, near the present site of I-435 and Truman Road. The **St. Joseph CC** (MO) was formed in 1898 and later moved to its present site in 1912. 1901 gave birth to more new layouts in Kansas, **Leavenworth CC**, **Lawrence CC** and **Topeka CC**.

In September of 1901, the **Trans-Miss Golf Association** held its first tournament in Omaha and the initial members were;

<i>Kansas City CC</i>	<i>Levitt CC (Nebraska)</i>	<i>Holdrege Field Club (NE)</i>
<i>St. Joseph CC</i>	<i>Evanston CC (KC)</i>	<i>Omaha Field Club</i>
<i>Des Moines CC</i>	<i>Town &amp; Gown CC (Colorado Springs, CO)</i>	<i>Overland Park CC (Denver)</i>
<i>Cedar Rapids CC</i>	<i>Leavenworth CC (KS)</i>	
<i>Omaha CC</i>		

Do not make the assumption that these clubs had been around for years. In many cases a club was formed one year, could not make expenses or membership goals [in some cases the clubhouse burned and the members did not rebuild], and many clubs folded the following year. This occurred with **Leavenworth GC** and **Lawrence GC** as they were listed in 1901 directories but not found again! Another example is that members of the **Cedar Rapids CC** entered the 1901 matches, yet their course was not built until 1904!

### St. Louis Golf

The history of golf in St. Louis goes back to 1892 when **St. Louis CC** formed a club in the Bridgeton area. While polo was the sport being played at that site, in 1895 the decision had been made to relocate to the Clayton area where a 9 hole course was laid out by James Foulis, opening in October 1896. By the end of 1897, **The Field Club** [forerunner to **Bellerive CC**] had been formed in the Bellefontaine Neighbors area and its members were competing against clubs from Kansas City, Omaha and St. Joseph along with St. Louis CC. Six additional courses were all formed prior to 1900; **The Jockey Club** (1898), **The Kinloch Club** (1898), **The Carondelet Park Links** (1898), **Triple A GC** (1898)[located in the northwest section of Forest Park], the **Florissant Valley CC** (1899) and the **Jefferson Barracks Links** (1898). None of these early layouts had 18 holes and none exist today at their original locations!

**Robert** and **James Foulis** were creators of many of the early courses in the area. James, who had won the 2<sup>nd</sup> US Open in 1896 at **Shinnecock CC**, was the golf professional at **Chicago GC**, the first 18 hole course in the country and one of the original member clubs of the USGA, while Robert had spent some time at **Onwentsia CC** before coming to St. Louis. Robert and James had learned their course design under the watchful eye of none other than **Old Tom Morris** at St. Andrews Scotland! As they

walked that legendary Course with Old Tom, he pointed out what mother nature had created along with the subtleties he and *Allan Robertson* had added - the pot bunkers, the mounding, the placement of the greens. While the “lay of the land” in St. Louis hardly matches that found in Scotland, they would have been influenced in their design by what they had learned on those walks. *Charles Blair Macdonald*, creator of St. Louis’ current layout said that when he built the **Chicago GC** he tried to match the distances at **St. Andrews** as best he could.

**Glen Echo** and **Normandie** share many common traits; both were opened in 1901, and both were on the property owned by the Lucas family in the Normandy area, and both would be designed by Robert and Jim Foulis. The driving force behind **Glen Echo** was Colonel George McGrew, club Founder and its first president. When the club formally opened on May 25 with 9 holes, virtually every dignitary in St. Louis was on hand, including the mayor of St. Louis, Rolla Wells. It had been a “backward spring” and as a result, only 9 holes were originally opened due to the heavy rains which plagued the area through May. However, by early July, the full 18 holes were open for play.

The **Normandie CC** group was led by John Lowry, William Plant, Walter Gilliam and Dr. William Hall. They too, planned an 18 hole layout and on October 6, 1901, the course opened with 9 holes. The back nine would wait until the following spring, opening the full 18 holes on April 27, 1902. **Normandie’s** opening was much more subdued than **Glen Echo’s**; the announcement, which noted the opening the following Saturday, appeared in the *Post-Dispatch* and the *Globe-Democrat* only a week before.

Both of these courses had been planned with 18 holes in mind from the beginning. When they announced their intentions, it was thought that they would have the first 18 holes in the area. However, they would not! Area newspapers had, for several months, been bemoaning the fact that no 18 hole layouts existed in the area. Because of this, no national events were planned! But it was an earlier 9 hole layout that first expanded. The first 18 holes in the area belongs to the **Triple A Club** which had their 18 holes open in June of 1901 at their original location in the northwest section of Forest Park. Despite this announcement their joy with their new layout was short-lived as the coming of the 1904 Worlds Fair also marked the demise of the Triple A golf course, as the land was needed for planned buildings near the Washington University area, and the entrance to the Worlds Fair.

**Glen Echo** had 18 holes in 1901 [see figure 4]and has remained a private club at the same location since then. But there was one hiccup in its history. Despite the terrific beginning it received, by 1915 **Glen Echo** was in dire financial trouble and was forced to declare bankruptcy. As part of the bankruptcy, the club changed its name to **Ridgedale CC** from 1915 to 1921, when the **Glen Echo** name was once again recalled. So as a club, there was a significant break in its history. But the course has been essentially un-changed, with only a few holes modified since the original design. [See sidebar for specific changes]

**Normandie GC** has also had several changes in its history. The original layout [see figure 5] had 13 holes on the west side of Normandie Drive and five on the east side. By 1919 the club’s finances were such that it was able to secure an additional 118 acres to move the holes to the west side of the drive. Robert Foulis made these changes and the present layout depicts his efforts. In 1985 the club ceased as a private club and opened its doors to the public.

So where does that bring us today? First, one must distinguish between a “Club” and the “Course” as often Clubs were established prior to most courses. Secondly, if a club did not exist at a course, it was usually not recognized as a course worth mentioning. Finally, with communication the way they were 100 years ago, it is not inconceivable that information was, at times, less than accurate. We only need to point to information published today to show how this still occurs. For example, Pebble Beach continues to publish information that it hosted the first US Amateur west of the Mississippi in 1929. Unless the Mississippi River was re-routed in the mid-20’s, the 1921 US Amateur at St. Louis CC was west of the Mississippi! Yet this error continues to be promoted, and often the error becomes fact to many. Another factor that affects our ability to date courses accurately, occurs in defining the date. Is it the date the club was founded, or the date construction began, or finished? Or is it the date of the first matches? Each club may have their own method of dating their facility, making life for golf historians

very tedious. That being said, the list below is reasonably accurate in depicting the events which occurred at the early clubs.

Oldest continual Golf Club in North America (1873) .....	<b>Royal Montreal GC</b> (Canada)
First Golf Club in the US (1884) .....	<b>Oakhurst Golf Links</b> (West Virginia)
First Golf Course in the US .....	<b>Undetermined</b>
Oldest continual Golf Club in US (1888) .....	<b>St. Andrews</b> (NY)
First Golf Course west of the Mississippi (1892) .....	<b>Pedley Farm</b> [ <i>Victoria GC</i> ](California)
Oldest continual Golf Course west of the Mississippi (1892) .....	<b>Gearhart Golf Links</b> (Oregon)
Oldest continual Golf Club west of the Mississippi (1894) .....	<b>Tacoma C &amp; GC</b> (Washington)
First 18 hole Course in the United States (1895) .....	<b>Chicago GC</b> (Illinois)
Oldest continual Golf Course in California (1897) .....	<b>Del Monte CC</b> (California)
First 18 hole course in St. Louis (April 1901) .....	<b>Triple A GC</b> (St. Louis)
Oldest 18 hole course west of the Mississippi (May 1901) .....	<b>Glen Echo CC</b> (St. Louis)
Oldest 18 hole public course west of the Mississippi (1902) .....	<b>Normandie GC</b> (St. Louis)

As you can see, St. Louis courses occupy a spot “front and center” in the birth of courses. We also led the way for further expansion westward. For additional “firsts” and other golfing feats associated with St. Louis, see the sidebar at the end of the article!

Portions of this article are from the book *Golfing Before the Arch; A History of St. Louis Golf* by Jim Healey. Additional information provided by Neil Hoteling of the Pebble Beach Company; *The Architects of Golf* by Geoffrey Cornish and Ron Whitten; *California Golf* by Mark Soltau; and from *When Golf came to Kansas City* by Kenneth Krakauer.

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### **Courses West of the Mississippi**

- 1892 *Pedley Farms* founded with 9 holes
- 1892 *Gearhart Links* opens 9 holes in Oregon
- 1894 *Kenwood GL* opens in Kansas City
- 1894 *Tacoma C&GC* opens 9 holes in Washington
- 1895 *Overland Park GC* opens 9 holes in Denver
- 1896 *St. Louis CC* opens 9 holes
- 1896 *The Presidio GC* is founded with 9 holes
- 1896 *Burlingame CC* (CA) opens with 9 holes
- 1896 *Kenwood GL* is renamed Kansas City CC
- 1897 *Del Monte GC* is founded with 9 holes
- 1897 *Fairmount GC* [later Evanston GC] founded in Kansas City
- 1898 *Patty Jewett GC* opens 9 holes in Colorado
- 1898 *Field Club of Omaha* opens 9 holes
- 1900 *Menlo CC* (CA) is founded with 9 holes
- 1901 *Triple A GC* opens 18 holes in June
- 1901 *Glen Echo CC* opens 18 holes in July
- 1901 *Normandie CC* opens 9 holes in October
- 1902 *Normandie CC* opens 18 holes in April
- 1902 *FC of Omaha* opens 18 holes in April
- 1903 *Algonquin GC* opens with 9 holes
- 1903 *Del Monte CC* opens 18 holes
- 1904 *Cedar Rapids CC* opens 9 holes
- 1905 *Claremont CC* opens in Oakland, CA
- 1905 *Burlingame* closes and club moves
- 1908 *The Presidio* opens 18 holes
- 1908 *Westwood CC* opens 18 holes
- 1912 *The Presidio* is closed following a dispute
- 1913 *The Presidio* reopens by order of the Secretary of War
- 1919 *Del Monte G&CC* [Pebble Beach] opens

### ***St. Louis Area Early Courses***

- 1896 *St. Louis CC* opens in Clayton
- 1897 *The Field Club* opens in NE St. Louis
- 1897 *Triple A Club* opens
- 1898 *The Jockey Club* opens near Grand & Natural Bridge
- 1898 *The Kinloch Club* opens
- 1898 *Florissant Valley CC* opens
- 1898 *Carondelet Park Links* opens
- 1899 *Jefferson Barracks Links* opens
- 1899 *Bogey Club* opens
- 1900 *Kinloch* course closes
- 1901 *Triple A* opens 18 holes
- 1901 *Glen Echo* Opens
- 1901 *Normandie* Opens
- 1902 *Triple A* opens 9 holes at new site in SW Forest Park
- 1903 *Florissant Valley CC* closes
- 1903 *Algonquin* opens 9 holes
- 1905 *St. Louis Jockey Club* closes
- 1905 *Carondelet Park links* closes
- 1908 *Westwood CC* [Westborough] opens
- 1909 *St. Louis CC* opens 18 holes
- 1909 *Bogey Club* opens 9 holes
- 1910 *St. Louis CC* opens 27 holes
- 1910 *The Field Club* moves to Normandie area and reorganizes as *Bellerive CC*
- 1912 *Forest Park* opens 9 holes
- 1914 *St. Louis CC* opens 18 holes in Ladue
- 1917 *Sunset [Hill] CC* opens

### **St. Louis Golfing Feats' & Firsts**

1. First formal Golf matches played in the St. Louis area; October 8, 1896
2. First 18 holes west of the Mississippi - Triple A GC - 1901
3. Oldest 18 hole private course in continual operation west of the Mississippi - Glen Echo CC - 1901
4. Oldest 18 hole public course in continual operation west of the Mississippi - Normandie GC - 1902
5. Designer of Pebble Beach GL - 1919  
Former St. Louisan Jack Neville
6. First US Amateur played west of the Mississippi - St. Louis CC - 1921
7. First US-born player to win the US & British Amateur - Former St. Louisan Jess Sweetser (US-1922; British-1926)
8. First winner of the US Publinks - Eddie Held - 1923
9. First US Womens Amateur played west of the Mississippi - 1925 - St. Louis CC
10. First US Publinks played west of the Mississippi - 1929 at Forest Park
11. First female golf pro in the US - Virginia Pepp - 1930
12. First USGA event televised - US Open - St. Louis CC - 1947
13. PGA record for 8 consecutive birdies - Bob Goalby - 1961 - St. Petersburg Open
14. One of the founders of the Sr. PGA Tour  
Bob Goalby - 1980
15. First US Mid-Amateur - Bellerive CC - 1981
16. First winner of the US Mid-Amateur - Jim Holtgrieve - 1981
17. First sub-30 round in a USGA event - 29 - US Mid-Amateur - Mark Boyajian (St. Clair CC) - 1983 Cherry Hills CC (Denver)
18. Player with only 3 US Opens victories - Hale Irwin (1974, 1979, 1990)
19. First Major Championship played on Zoysia - 1992 PGA at Bellerive CC