

Historical Roots of Victoria Golf Course in Edmonton

By the turn of the century, many sports leagues in the area were forming clubs. Although the town of Edmonton was not established until 1892, the Cricket Club had been founded in 1882, as had the Rugby Football Club. Lacrosse was introduced in 1883; baseball in 1884; the Edmonton Rifle Association founded in 1886, and Edmonton's first tennis club was in place by 1891. Organized hockey was established in 1894 in both Edmonton and Strathcona. Clearly, it was time for golf. In April, 1896 the Edmonton Golf Club, common parent to the Edmonton Country Club and Victoria Golf Course was established on land owned by the Hudson Bay Company.

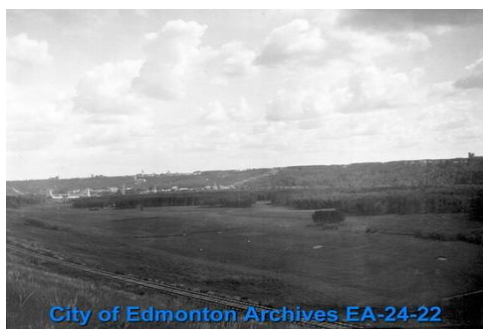
The first course of only 5 holes was located on the north side of the river valley near the original Fort Edmonton, which was still part of the NWT. The holes were ill-defined and perilous. The first had its tee located close to today's 107th Street and 96th Avenue. It ran downhill, easterly, brushed an old graveyard and terminated at a green near the original Edmonton Power House, east of Rossdale Road. The second hole probably ran northeast, but little is known about it. The third hole was nasty, brutish and long. It ran west, uphill, and (after 1902) across the Edmonton Yukon and Pacific right of way (which would connect, via the river valley, the Low Level Ridge and the Groat Ravine to the west). Beyond that the golfers had to negotiate the many rutted tracks leading to John Walter's ferry crossing, where the 105th Street Bridge now stands. These combined challenges made No. 3 hole "a very sporty one". Another hole lay near the point where the High Level Bridge now enters the north river bank. The last hole apparently extended east, paralleling 97th Avenue, and returned, downhill.



Fort Edmonton 1880 – showing lower area where the original course was constructed.

After Alberta became a province in 1905, and Edmonton became the capital, the land was sold to the government to construct the new Legislative building. The Hudson's Bay Company then offered the Edmonton Golf Club a lease on a parcel of land, known as the Hudson's Bay Flats, which was just west of the original course. In 1907, the Club developed seven holes, then expanded it to nine and operated "The Golf Links", as it was known, for a few years.

However, by 1910 the golfers realized that the new city (incorporated in 1904), wanted to expand, so began looking elsewhere for a private location. A separation resulted when the city purchased the Flats from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1911, for about \$10,000. Many members, who had started the Edmonton Golf Club about 25 years before, left for their new site in 1912. The golf course was then combined with adjacent land to make the area into a park which was officially opened in May, 1914. Thus the efforts in 1907 lead to Edmonton becoming the owners of the Municipal Golf Links, Canada's first municipal golf course.



“The Golf Links” in 1910 and the renamed Victoria Golf Course mirroring the view south east to the High Level bridge about 2010

Plans to expand the course started in 1922, with completion of 18 holes by 1927. However, the discovery of a large coal deposit on the course land almost brought closure to this era in golf history. In 1930 Mr. J. B. Little, who owned the mining rights of the area, received a number of offers to mine his land. Test holes revealed a six-foot seam of coal 184 feet below the surface. Fortunately, this never occurred and golfing in Victoria Park continued.

In 1949, the City announced that it would soon become the biggest golf course in the Dominion of Canada. The City purchased eight acres of land located west of the present boundaries for \$12,000, and on May 11, 1951 officially opened the course with 27 holes in play. However, this expanded course operated for only three years until the land was needed for the construction of the Groat Bridge.



Golfers putting on Victoria Golf Course – 1955

In 1957, the Edmonton Municipal Golf Course's name was changed to Victoria Golf Course. The driving range was officially opened in 1961. Both continue as part of one of the busiest municipal golf courses in the world. A portion of that success can be attributed to the talents of a select group of Golf Professionals who worked at the course over the years. The list includes John Inch (1915-1919), Bert Gee (1919-1949), John Aitken (1950-1993) and Kevin Hogan (1994 to present). John Aitken has the distinction of being the longest serving Golf Professional (43 years) in the course's history.



Entrance walkway to club house at Victoria Golf Course – about 2015

During the summer golf season Victoria is home to several Men, Ladies and Junior leagues. The adjoining Victoria Park plays host to the Victoria Park Cricket Club and is a popular location for cross-country skiers and skaters in the winter months.

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The information was taken from several websites, but the main sources were:

The City of Edmonton

https://www.edmonton.ca/activities_parks_recreation/golf_courses/victoria_golf_course/history.aspx

The Edmonton Golf and Country Club

<https://www.edmontoncountryclub.com/staging-area/Golf/History.aspx>

The City of Edmonton archives

<https://cityarchives.edmonton.ca/>

Photos 3 and 5 taken by Anne-Ward Neville and Doreen Gares