

## Golf Historical Society

### **George C. Thomas Jr.**

by John Jones - 2008 SCGA Hall of Fame program



*George C. Thomas Jr.*

**W**hen George C. Thomas Jr. arrived in Southern California from Pennsylvania in 1919, S.C.G.A. President Ed Tufts of the Los Angeles Country Club must have thought he had died and gone to heaven. Thomas was a superb golfer who had designed golf courses and been on prestigious greens committees on the east coast, and was the perfect man to carry out W. Herbert Fowler's plans for the new 36 hole complex of the Beverly links.

Thomas did more than design golf courses. He was a horticulturalist (the Thomas Rose is still grown), and was a pioneer aviator who commanded the first active American bombing squadron in France during World War 1, where he survived three major crashes. According to the legendary journalist Scotty Chisholm, Thomas was almost as well known in 1926 as a fisherman as he was as a golfer, having "caught more tuna this season than any other family in Southern California waters."

Thomas became one of the great golf course architects in the first "Golden Age" of golf course construction in Southern California in the 1920s.



*Riviera CC 2nd green with 10th in background. Thomas & Bell 1928*

In 1921 he designed his first original golf course in southern California with Roy Tufts at Red Hill Country Club (1921) in Upland. In 1922, Thomas finished the North Course at Los Angeles Country Club<sup>1</sup> using several of the acres which once comprised the 1911 Norman Macbeth, Charles Orr, Joseph Sartori and Ed Tufts design<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to the promise of SCGA President Ed Tufts to the city fathers of Los Angeles, Thomas designed the new Municipal #2 (1923) at Griffith Park, later renamed Harding Memorial (1924), as part of the 36 hole complex that included Wilson Memorial (1926), before joining forces with William P. "Billy" Bell to design and build La Cumbre (1923), Ojai Valley (1924), El Cabellero (1924), Bel Air (1926), Fox Hills (1927) and Thomas and Bell's masterpiece, the Riviera Country Club (1927).

After collapsing on the eve of the California State championships at Pebble Beach in 1926, due to an undisclosed illness, he was confined to his home in Beverly Hills where he wrote the classic book, "Golf Course Architecture in America". Thomas also authored important books on Rose growing and Game fishing. He died suddenly of a heart attack in 1932 while planning improvements to The Los Angeles Country Club's south course.



***Billy Bell and George C. Thomas 1926***



***George C. Thomas IV and John Jones 2008***

- 1** - Herbert Fowler's North Course was redesigned in 1928 by Thomas & Bell.
- 2** - Original Beverly course designed by Tom Bendelow. 1911 LACC Green Committee as listed, plus George Schneider and Nat Wilshire.

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