

Golf Historical Society

A Brief History of Long Beach California's Early Golf Courses

by john jones

Long Beach opened the first nine-hole **municipal golf links** in California, in July 1899, at the intersection of Alamitos and Ocean. The first tee was opposite the Riviera hotel/apartments.

The LA Times of August 1899 said, *"The Long Beach golf links have been completed and are in frequent use by devotees of the brassy and lofter. The course, which is three miles in length, is on the Alamitos tract, and is reached by a cement sidewalk running all the way from town. The greens are turfy, which is a rare quality in Southern California. Difficult bunkers and hazards are formed by lines of eucalyptus trees and by streets crossing the course. Efforts are being put forth to organize a club into the keeping of which the links may be committed."*

Of course, when they say "greens" they mean the entire hole. The putting greens were sand.

City treasurer Charles L. Heartwell and city engineer Goucher, "laid out" the links. Other's might have been involved.

The Long Beach Municipal Links were approved by the city trustees in May of 1899, and by September they were being operated by a group of citizens who called themselves the Country Club of Long Beach. The new club was led by Long Beach legend and Virginia Country Club founder Arthur Goodhue and city treasurer Charles Heartwell.

The links were gone and forgotten by the summer of 1900.

The Country Club of Long Beach would later reform in 1909 at the hotel Virginia as the **Virginia Country Club**. The new club was once again led by Arthur Goodhue. They hired Arthur Rigby of the Los Angeles Country Club to build their first nine-hole course on the "Anaheim road". This course would become the **Recreation Park golf course** after 1921, when Virginia's 10 year lease ended, and the club moved to their present location at the Rancho Los Cerritos.

Construction of the **Lakewood Country Club** started in 1932. The site had been the home of the famous old **Cerritos Gun Club** on the 8000 acre Rancho Los Cerritos near Bixby station. Ed Tufts and many well known Angelino's belonged to the gun club. They had a clubhouse surrounded by a huge water shed that was full of duck and quail in the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th. By the time Lakewood golf course was being planned, the area was somewhat abandoned and was known as the airport bog. The golf course became the first step in a large new community development that would be named after the course, Lakewood.

William P. "Billy" Bell chose to dig the large lake in the middle of the property in order to drain the land and use the dirt to shape what was a very flat area into the beautiful course we know today. Art Sunderland was the "groundskeeper".

Their first professional was the worlds longest driver of the ball, Jimmy Thomson. North Berwick born Jimmy "drove the 375 yard 11th hole during the 1929 Open at Muirfield. His ball rolled between Ed Dudley's legs while he was putting on the green".

In 1937 at the North American Long Driving contest his 20 drives averaged 316 yards, with the longest 386! He won the 1938 LA Open played at Griffith Park.

Jimmy's wife was screen actress Viola Dana.

The first ball struck at the opening festivities for Lakewood golf course on March 24, 1933, was hit by **Bobby Jones**.

"He drove the first ball off the first tee at 3:30 sharp. It was a good drive, according to observers, who report the ball cleared the trap 200 yards down the fairway. The pill was then retrieved, autographed by Bobby, and will hang in the club's trophy case."

Where is the ball today?

Although Lakewood was considered a "Bell Masterpiece" when it opened in 1933, A.W. Tillinghast worked with Billy in 1937 making some changes to the course. It is still an outstanding example of Billy Bell's mastery of golf course design and construction.

Lakewood golf course would go on to host the prestigious Long Beach Open, the California State Open, the Southern California Public Links championship and other high profile tournaments.

In 1952 the the County of Los Angeles bought the golf course from the developers, to stop them from subdividing the land, keeping it open as the [Lakewood Country Club public golf course](#) .

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