

**A SCOTTISH GOLF PIONEER DEVELOPS THE AMERICAN WEST
GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT WILLIAM WATSON
1860-1941
By Dean Knuth**



**William Watson Circa 1899 at age 39 Circa 1921 at age 61
(Compliments of Joseph Gladke, Minnesota Golf Historian)**

William Watson was an important pioneer of early golf course architecture who is all but forgotten.

You know the names of Donald Ross, Alister Mackenzie and A.W. Tillinghast. You may not know William Watson, a man whom history has passed over, but you should.

William Watson had a successful career and designed more than 100 golf courses before his retirement in 1930, when the Great Depression began, at the age of 70. Many of his courses have survived for a century, including his first U.S. design, the Minikahda Club in Minnesota. That is where he also landed his first job as head professional.

Watson immigrated from Fife, Scotland, near St. Andrews to America in 1898 when he was 38. He was a prolific designer and a success in California and the mid-west. A number of his best-known California designs have hosted major USGA and PGA National Championships, including Harding Park, San Diego Country Club, the original Brentwood Country Club, Diablo Country Club, Berkeley Country Club, Virginia Country Club and Orinda Country Club. He designed the original The Olympic Club Lake and Ocean courses until a major rainstorm destroyed much of his brilliant work. Annandale in Pasadena is a terrific canyon course working up, down and crossways in canyons and fields. La Jolla Country Club continues to be a full-membership club which was recently renovated with a goal of recovering some of his original design. A favorite course for me is Lake Merced Golf Club near Olympic Club which Watson routed and constructed for Willie Lock. Within ten years, Dr. Alister Mackenzie re-modeled it. In Minnesota his first design--Minikahda Club is excellent and has hosted numerous National Championships. But arguably his best Minnesota course was White Bear Yacht Club with fantastic terrain and design. Interlachen also was a great course that was later remodeled by

Donald Ross. His Westmoreland course (named for “West for more land”) in Evanston, IL which required a massive bottom-layer base, hosted the biggest championships of the time and later was remodeled by A.W. Tillinghast who improved its bunkering. Watson designed and built one of the original courses at Olympia Fields, IL and built a second one with Tom Bendelow, which did not survive.

Many other Watson gems unfortunately also did not survive housing developments on populated land that became more valuable as America grew. William Watson was mature, educated, smart and was comfortable communicating and working for wealthy men.

He was guided by the primary principle of maintaining naturalness in his designs. Watson wrote: “A good rule is to stress the importance of fitting in all grading work to harmonize with the surrounding territory, mounds, slopes, grassy hollows, sand pits, all have their values in beautifying the setting of our greens and in giving them distinctive definition — if artificially arranged without appearance of artificiality.” He also believed that a course is more interesting if every green has a character all its own, giving the player something besides the flag to view in approaching the hole.

From my point of view, besides being a minimalist just as he said, Watson was a master at routing golf holes on the land that he was provided. While he preferred land with significant rolls, dips and terrain, he did very well in laying-out courses on all types of land where he could envision a unique feature for each hole—and all without moving much land. He could envision sidewalls to bound the ball right or left, he could use horses to create contours on flat areas, and he used other skills to keep his courses from ever producing monotony.

He didn’t believe in trees on golf courses. He made this statement to the media when he was building Interlachen Country Club in Edina, MN in 1910:

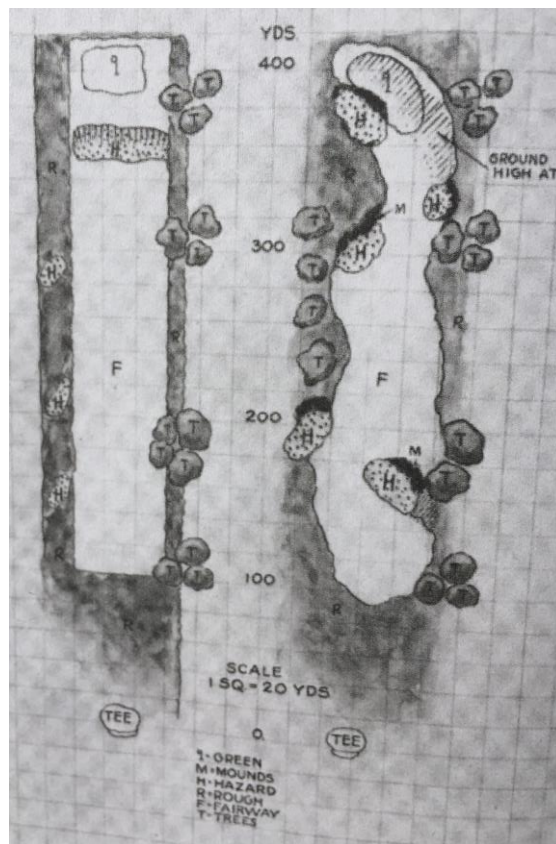
“Completion of the course will require the cutting down of a great many trees on the 146 acres over which, it is laid; but you can’t have trees and golf too. The best golf courses in Scotland haven’t a tree or bush anywhere on them, and when the Interlachen club course is finished it will be one of the sportiest in the country and will be the logical course for any professional matches in this section.”

Watson’s arrival in the mid-west in late 1898 was followed with moving to Los Angeles at the end of the 19th century. He arrived in Los Angeles at a time when there were only 16 courses in California and the greens in southern California were mostly hard packed sand as described in Thomas Arnold’s 1900 book, *Golfing in the Far West*:

“Greens have gone the way of all grass in Southern California—burned up for want of rain. In California turf greens are a luxury that very few clubs can afford to indulge in. It does not rain enough to keep even an imitation of life in the grass, and it would cost a small fortune to irrigate the green properly. And so, it is that we find all of the putting greens there made of hard-packed earth sprinkled over with a fine layer of white sand. The course of the Oakland Golf Club and that at Del Monte are the only exceptions to this rule. About the most lucid description of the earth greens that can be given is that

they look like huge grindstones sunk into the earth. Golf playing on sand-greens is a vastly different matter from playing on turf. Sand-greens are decidedly easier for putting, because the surface, being perfectly smooth, offers little resistance, and the ball rolls with a precision equal to what it would be on a billiard table. Accurate approaches are next to impossible for if the ball lands short of the green where there are sand-greens, it stops dead, and if it strikes on the green it shoots across and off the other side. This makes the game partake of a very undesirable element of luck.”

Course designs in America at the beginning of the 20th Century often featured rectangular shaped greens and trenched bunkers surrounding the greens edge. In the next 20 years, hole designs rapidly modernized, although many courses still were built with horses, which permitted shaping min-contours in the fairways and roughs.



1900 hole on left and 1920 on right

(Courtesy of Golf Course Architecture in America by G.C. Thomas)



Example of Watson's early trench bunkering over the back of the green compliments of San Diego Country Club



Watson's Construction crew in action, compliments of San Diego Country Club

After becoming well-known, Watson also became a promoter of golf in California—including a challenge to Northern Californians to build more golf courses than were being built in Southern California. This interview given in Northern Cal is an example:

February 1922 *San Francisco Call*: WATSON TALKS OF GOLF FUTURE; NOTED LINKS DESIGNER IN SAN FRANCISCO by FRANK P. NOON

“WITHIN five years California will be known as the “golfing state,” according to William Watson, nationally known golf authority and links architect. “In Southern California.” says Watson, “there are forty-eight golf clubs and at least five new courses under construction. Hardly a week passes that I don’t read of some new club being organized. Practically all of the clubs in Southern California have waiting lists bearing hundreds of names.

"In Northern California it’s different. Until very recently there was little talk of organizing any golf clubs. Now that a group of business and professional men have organised the Lake Merced Golf and Country Club the members of the Concordia Club have come forward with an announcement that they, too, want to have a course of their own. The fact that 120 members pledged their moral and financial support to the project seems to ensure the success of the venture. “It is my honest opinion that within a very short time Northern California will have twice as many courses as there are at the present time. A city the size of San Francisco should not only have two municipal courses, but at least ten or twelve private courses. "The trouble is that most men when arranging the details of organizing a club all want to have their course within "twenty minutes from Powell and Market.” Property within such a distance will cost at least \$32000 an acre. Between San Francisco and Burlingame there is room for at least four courses. The contour of the land is such that the courses would in each case be a real test of golf. What if it does take an hour enroute to your club? The idea of playing on an exclusive course should more than make up for the inconvenience of spending an hour to reach your club. When the average person realizes that, it is my humble opinion that there will be more golf courses in the vicinity of San Francisco.” Watson's work in laying out courses here and in southern California has been commended by such experts as Jim Barnes, Jock Hutchison, Charlie Mayo and others. He designed and superintended the construction of the Chula Vista, Annandale, Flintridge, Long Beach, Culver City, Hillcrest and Berkeley Country Club courses. His work in rearranging the La Cumbre and La Jolla courses also earned for him considerable praise from close students of the game in the south-land. At the present time Watson is rearranging the links at Burlingame and has charge of the construction work there. He is also planning and carrying on construction work on the municipal links at Lincoln Park, besides completing plans for rearranging the first eighteen holes at Lakeside. He will also superintend the construction of the Lake Merced Golf and Country Club course, work on which is expected”.

The *Chicago Evening Post* in October 1918 classed Watson with other great “modern” architects of that time:

“The modern architect stands squarely on his record. Men like Donald Ross, William Watson, Willie Park, Walter Travis and Billy Langford have given to the country courses which are conclusive proof of the architect’s ability. It is the true fine architects to turn to when they want a modern layout.”

William Watson's early years.

Watson was born March 31, 1860 at his family's Dura Den Cottage in Kemback, Fife, just eight miles from St. Andrews. He was the first of five children to Mary & John Cobb Watson.



Dura Den cottages where Watson was born

When this crescent of Dura Den cottages was built in the 1830s, the renters worked in a flax yarn spinning business owned by David Yool, a major employer. High quality flax was used for making linen. William's father, John Cobb, was listed as a flax spinner in 1876. John became a member of the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews in 1869 when William was nine and John shared his love for golf with his son. William attended Madras Academy in Cupar which is now called Bell Baxter High School. He attended St. Andrews University for a year (1876-1877), taking a full schedule including mathematics 1 and 2, chemistry, literature, history and Latin. He then worked for his father's business.

William played in golf tournaments at St. Andrews and won sometimes at his home course, Cupar. While Watson was playing at St. Andrews, four-time Open Champion Old Tom Morris was St. Andrews' greenskeeper and professional and designed many great golf courses. One apprentice under Old Tom's tutelage included Donald Ross from Dornoch apprenticed in 1899 before going to America, designing 400 golf courses. The Foulis brothers, David, Jim and Robert made golf equipment for the Forgan factory.

Watson had a major break because he was a golfing friend in St. Andrews with with future banker and American golfing enthusiast David R. Forgan (1856-1931). David, four years older than Watson, was a son of the famous founder of Forgan Golf Club company in St. Andrews. He completed his secondary education at Madras College in St. Andrews before going to Canada and America to become a successful banker in Minneapolis and then to Chicago, where he rose to be the President of the First National Bank of Chicago



David R. Forgan

David also won the first Western Amateur Championship in 1899 played at Glenview Country Club in Illinois. (He also is known for his popular “Golfers Creed”).

(Note: This next section, pages 7-8, 10-13, 15 and 18-20, covering Watson’s first two summers in the Minneapolis area was researched and published by Minnesota golf historian Joseph Gladke who agreed to share his work).

At the advice of his friend, David Forgan, Watson boarded the RMS Etruria in Liverpool, England, in October of 1898 and arrived in Chicago near the end of the year. Forgan must have made an introduction to the Minikahda club officials. C.T. Jaffray was assigned to find a golf professional and he brought-in Watson. (Ed. Note: In another source, there is a chance that Watson had met Judge Martin B. Koon (first club president) when the Judge reportedly visited St. Andrews).

At a special meeting of the Minikahda Club Board on December 31, 1898, the club authorized hiring William Watson as professional of the club:

Minneapolis Tribune, April 12, 1899

“ON THE GOLF LINKS Minneapolis Players Anticipate a Lively Season

Minnekahda (sic) Club has engaged the services of a new man, William Watson, a Scotchman, who came to this country a few months ago from St. Andrew’s . . . Mr. Watson arrived in February and is busily engaged in making ready for the new links which will be put in shape as rapidly as the snow and frost leaves the ground. He is on the Bryn Mawr links, mornings from 10 to 12, and afternoons 3 to 6 o’clock, to meet the members. He is considered a decided acquisition for the club, being a very fine amateur player and an excellent teacher.”

Shortly after William arrived in Minneapolis, he must have sent word back to his father and brother to join him. The 1899 Minneapolis directory shows William Watson (who lists his pro-

fession as teacher) with his father John C. Watson, his younger brother John Martin (who lists his profession as golf club maker), and five other members of his family living at 35 Aldrich Avenue North. The house is no longer there, but it was located near the site of Dunwoody Institute, a short walk to the Laurel Avenue streetcar line that would take them to the Bryn Mawr Club.

While there was much excitement about the new course that was being created at the Minikahda Club, many of the prominent Minneapolis families also wanted to golf near their summer homes on Lake Minnetonka. During the summer of 1898, there had been discussion of creating a new country club on the site of the former 300-room Hotel Lafayette which was owned by James J. Hill and had burned down in late 1897. By the spring of 1899, the Executive Committee of the Minnetonka Pleasure Club (later renamed the Lafayette Club) had secured the 38-acre site.

The Courant, July 1899

“Minnetonka Pleasure Club

According to Mr. Watson, the Minnetonka Club course is naturally qualified to be one of the best in this part of the country. A squad of workmen has been engaged in the clearing off of the grounds during the last two or three weeks and when the course is completed it will occupy the land around the club house very attractively. The links will be in nine holes, covering a distance of 1870 yards (with holes ranging in length from 150 to 275 yards in length)”.

Minneapolis Tribune, July 16, 1899

“ON THE GOLF LINKS

When Judge Martin B. Koon, president of the Minikahda Club, teed up yesterday afternoon and drove his ball toward the first hole, he had opened the new club links. The pleasant occasion was attended by fully 150 club members, who expressed satisfaction with what they saw. The new links of the Minikahda on the west shore of Lake Calhoun (Bde Maka Ska) were used for the first time, and the club house was informally opened, although there was an accompaniment of hammer and saw, with a swish of the painter’s brush, as the club members exchanged compliments on their new possession.

The golf links were designed and executed by William Watson, a canny Scot, who was brought to Minneapolis for the purpose. He did well, for the 40 men who played in the opening tournament, were not slow in pronouncing the links the best they had ever played over. This means in figures that the links comprise nine holes, averaging something over 300 yards each to make a total of 3,000 yards once around. There are plenty of bunkers and hazards and the bogey score has been placed at 38.”



Minikahda Club Postcard

In this era, the top professional golfers were British — the great triumvirate of Harry Vardon, John H. Taylor and James Braid. The USGA was organized in 1894 and the top American amateur at the turn of the century was Walter Travis. Golf really took-off in America when Vardon came to America to tour golf courses and perform demonstrations. Vardon also won the U.S. Open during this visit in 1900, thirteen years before Francis Ouimet became the first American born U.S. Open Champion.

As was the practice of many early golf professionals, they would look for winter work in warmer areas. In late 1899, Watson moved to Los Angeles, where golf was just developing. His first job there was as greenkeeper and instructor at the Green Hotel course in Pasadena. Los Angeles Country Club first started in 1897 and moved a few times until, in 1899, it was built as the first 18-hole course in the region. The Southern California Golf Association was formed the same year with five clubs (LACC, Pasadena CC, Redlands, Riverside and Santa Monica). The population of L.A. in 1899 was just under 100,000 but growing rapidly as a winter haven for easterners. Golf was a game for the successful and these early courses were private. The average hourly wage was then 20 cents an hour.

In 1899, his first winter in Los Angeles, Watson laid out Casa Loma in the Redlands over the simply “skinned” fairways that had been built in 1897.



A scraper like this was pulled by two horses to skin fairways

This became the first 9-holes of Redlands Country Club. He also built a course for Hotel Raymond, the first major resort hotel of the San Gabriel Valley which served mainly as a winter residence for wealthy Easterners. The hotel was built by Walter Raymond of Raymond & Whitcomb Travel Agency of Boston, Mass., but was torn down during the Great Depression.

Also, in a significant move, the City of Los Angeles hired Watson to build its first public course in 1900. It was called Garvanza Links, named for the artsy Garvanza neighborhood (now known at Highland Park and close to what has become Pasadena) where Garbanzo beans grew wild. The course also was referred to as LA-Pasadena GC. It was nine holes with oiled-sand greens on land that remains a L.A. city park, although there is no golf. It now sports a skateboard park instead.

In the *American GOLF*, published in New York City and named ‘USGA Bulletin’, this was a noteworthy 1901 mention:

“The first public links to be established on the Pacific coast have been opened in Los Angeles, which already boasts two strong clubs and several minor organizations. The course is within a couple of miles from the centre of the city, is beautifully situated, and is well laid out for good golf, William Watson, an old St. Andrews graduate, having superintended the work. These links, on which any one can play by the payment of a nominal green fee, will be of great value in accommodating the over- flow of golfing visitors during the winter months.”



Garvanza and a sand green

The Minikahda Club's board must have been pleased with William Watson's performance and wanted him to return for the next season. On October 27, 1899, the Minikahda board voted that the chairman of the Sports and Pastimes Committee (C. T. Jaffray) be authorized to offer William Watson the sum of \$330 for his services as professional for the club for the term of April 1 to November 1, 1900. So, Watson was back to Minneapolis by spring for the new season.

Late in 1899, William Watson and his brother John Martin Watson must have decided to become business partners and he came to Minneapolis with their father, John Cobb Watson. J. Martin was 14 years younger than William and a better golfer. He also had training in making golf equipment and balls. This advertisement is from the November 1899 issue of the *Western Golfer Magazine*. This is the first known documentation of the Watson Brothers business.

Courses Laid Out	WATSON	Special Clubs Made
Minneapolis, Minn.	<p>MANUFACTURERS OF</p> <p>ST. ANDREWS GOLF CLUBS</p> <p>AND ALL HIGH CLASS</p> <p>GOLFING PARAPHERNALIA</p> <p>We Manufacture the Very Best Goods at the Most Reasonable Prices.....</p> <p>New Greens prepared and completed under the most experienced supervision</p> <p>Especial Attention given to Western Business</p> <p>Write for ANY INFORMATION you want</p>	Pasadena, Cal.
Professional Instructors	BROTHERS	Repairing A Specialty

Courtesy of Joseph Gladke, Minnesota Golf Historian

According to Joseph Gladke's research, the 1900 Minneapolis City Directory shows John Cobb Watson, along with his two sons living at 3020 Lyndale Avenue South. From here it was a one-block walk to Lake Street, where they would catch the streetcar to the east shore of Bde Maka Ska (Lake Calhoun), where they would then transfer to a boat to get to the Minikahda Club on the west side of the lake. The business section of the Minneapolis directory lists Watson Bros., Minikahda Club under the GOLF CLUB MNFRS heading.

Minneapolis Tribune, March 18, 1900

"The golfing season is not as far away as may seem compatible with overcoats and mufflers. In a very few weeks the links will be open and the golfers will have returned to their element.

Golf was in high favor last year, and the three local clubs, including the Bryn Mawr Club, that organized late in the summer, were the most active properties in the two cities. The royal game will have lost nothing of its hold on popular fancy this year, and the golf talk indicates that there will be more playing this year than ever.

Locally the Minikahda Club stands first in numbers, with its membership of 730 practically the limit. Should there be any resignations this spring, when time for paying the annual dues comes around, there will be vacancies for those on the waiting list, but not many at that, and they will be quickly filled. The Minikahda Club is a very interesting proposition, and the success of its first year lends zest to the prospects for the coming season.

The planting of trees around the club house will add to the landscape beauty of the grounds, and little besides will be attempted this season, except on the golf course, to which attention will be directed to make it the finest course in this part of the country. The desire for larger links will be granted if land is available. . . . It is early yet to plan for games and tournaments. Watson, the professional, who has been spending the winter in Pasadena, Cal., where he is continually on the golf links, will return by April 1, and as soon as the weather permits the golfers will bring out their clubs and go at the sport again.”

Upon his return to the Minnikahda Club, William set out to make additional improvements to the course. He laid out eight new bunkers to better define some of the holes and make it more challenging. Note the new bunkering on the right with high revetment of soil on the greenside that created a forced carry.



Ninth hole compliments of Joseph Gladke, Minnesota Golf Historian

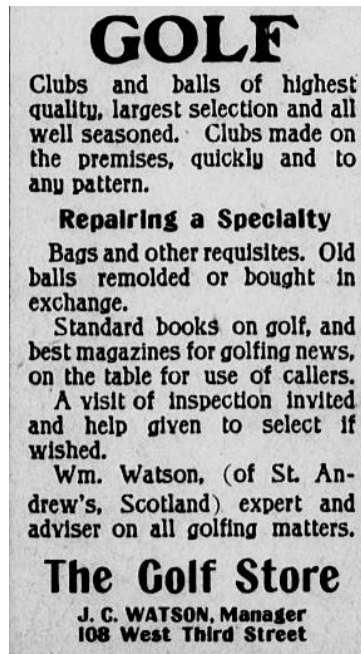
Meanwhile his brother J. Martin decided to accept a better offer after the 1900 season:

Minneapolis Tribune, June 24, 1900

“The Bryn Mawr Club will suffer a loss in the departure of their instructor, Martin Watson. He plays in excellent form and as an instructor he has few rivals in the country. Mr. Watson has been contemplating a move for a long time, and as he has had several good offers, he has decided to go to Des Moines, Iowa.”

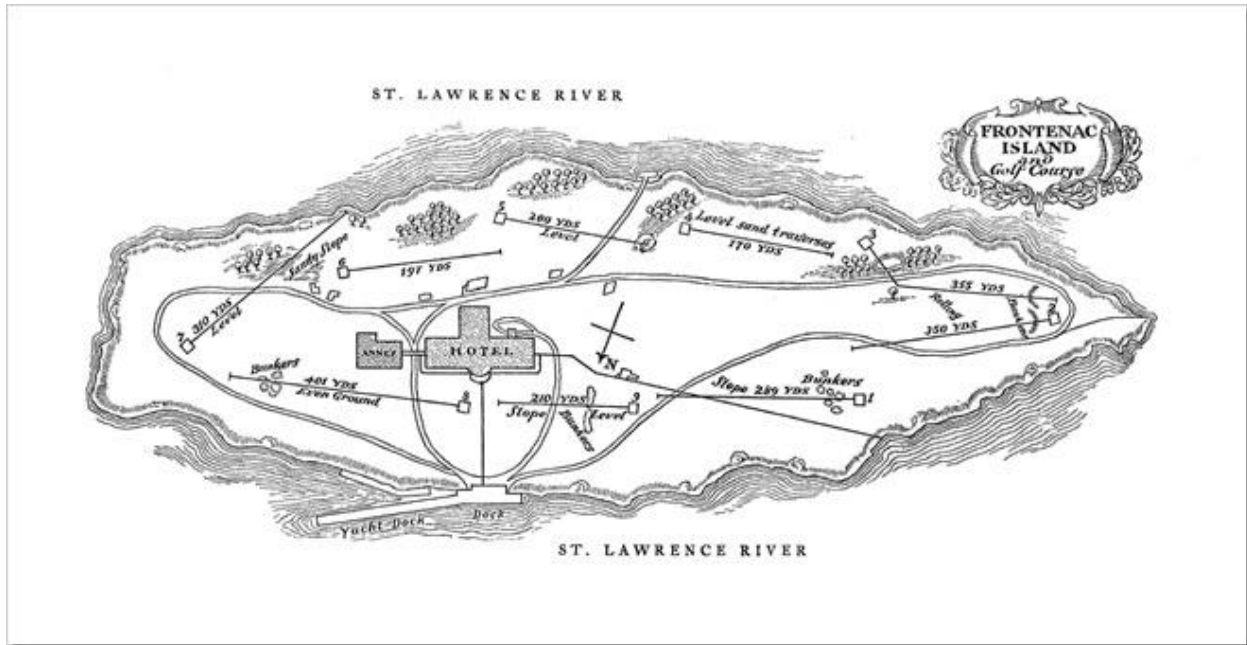
By the start of the 1901 golf season, the Watson brothers having decided to go in separate directions for a few years, John Martin returned to Minnesota and was living at 3100 Hennepin Avenue South (with his profession now listed as GOLF CLUB AND BALL MKR). William decided to stay in California and pursue growing the game of golf by designing and building courses.

Also, he and his father opened a retail golf shop at West Third St. in Los Angeles named the Golf Store. It was the first of its kind in southern California. His father, John Cobb, managed the store, made golf clubs, balls and gave lessons.



GOLF
Clubs and balls of highest quality, largest selection and all well seasoned. Clubs made on the premises, quickly and to any pattern.
Repairing a Specialty
Bags and other requisites. Old balls remolded or bought in exchange.
Standard books on golf, and best magazines for golfing news, on the table for use of callers.
A visit of inspection invited and help given to select if wished.
Wm. Watson, (of St. Andrew's, Scotland) expert and adviser on all golfing matters.
The Golf Store
J. C. WATSON, Manager
108 West Third Street

At a time when essential golf supplies were scarce, especially in the West, William soon opened William Watson Golf Accessories, a mail-order equipment company which showed great foresight--a distribution office in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce building, where he also drew his course designs. Together they also operated the Garvanza Links course in the winter months close to their home. In the summer months John Cobb would return to work in the mid-west and William spent the summer of 1904 remodeling the Hotel Frontenac Golf Club on Round Island, NY and teaching golf there. (The hotel burned down in 1912).



Watson’s nine-hole course at Frontenac Island surrounded by the St. Lawrence River

Watson was proud of his Scottish heritage and later in his golf club design and sales business, he began to stamp “Far and Sure” on his clubs below his name as in the photo below. It is a well-known golf motto that has its roots to the 1681 match in Edinburgh when John Patersone and the Duke of York teamed to defend the Scottish origin of golf against two English nobles who claimed that the game was English. The Duke (and future King) put the famous Far and Sure motto below Patersone’s coat of arms over the house that was paid for with his share of the purse. “Far and Sure” became the motto of the Royal Burgess golf club, the oldest golf club in the world (1735). Then, of Royal Liverpool and Chicago Golf Club amongst others.

The famous British author Charles Dickens, wrote a chapter on Far and Sure in his 1869 book of articles, “All the Year Round”. On page 546, he wrote:

“Far and Sure is not alone the motto but the rule of golf. Strike the ball that it may fly *far*; strike it also so that it may fly *sure* towards the hole, which is its ultimate destination; such is the whole theory and practice of the sport. At St. Andrews people seem only to eat and drink that they may play golf. They sleep at night that they may rise refreshed for golf in the morning. They make money that they may have leisure to play golf in their holidays, and in the afternoons of their busy lives. No position is too high in life to prevent the occupant from playing golf, none is too low to debar him from the privilege. All ages, ranks, and classes, and both sexes, give way to the fascination of the game. “



Photograph compliments of the Joseph Gladke Minnesota Golf Historian

The most significant early course remodel for Watson was in the winter of 1900 for the Hotel Green in Pasadena. It was a nine-hole course for this elegant hotel filled in the winter months with the wealthy from the east and mid-west. Watson got the contract to remodel the course on the condition that he also would become greenkeeper and professional. It was here that he met the important insurance business owner from Seattle, E.A. Strout, a founder of Seattle Golf Club which would soon be designed by Watson:

Los Angeles Herald, 31 Dec 1900

“E.A. Strout...is spending a few weeks at Pasadena, playing with the professional William Watson, at the Hotel Green links. Last Thursday he beat the amateur record for the course, making eighteen holes in 79.”



Golfers on the 9th-hole by the Hotel Green clubhouse

Here is a description of the course in *American Golfer*, December 1900 issue:

“HOTEL GREEN GOLF LINKS. —A nine-hole course situated about a mile from the hotel and quickly reached by conveyance or by electric car. The course, which is excellent, extends over fifty acres of land of a rolling nature. On the northwest corner a cozy clubhouse has just been erected, with excellent accommodation for golfers. The holes are: 1, Get Away, 265; 2, Cross Road, 195; 3, The Hollow, 218; 4, Trouble, 230; 5, Gauntlet, 220; 6, Tourist, 320; 7, The Swing, 235; 8, Elbow, 245; 9, Pasadena, 215, a total of 2,143 yards. Greenkeeper, William Watson.”

Watson also pulled-off a major deal for the hotel when he convinced Willie Anderson to spend several winters at the Hotel Green teaching golf to its guests. Willie had won the U.S. Open in June 1901 at Myopia Hunt Club. He had emigrated from North Berwick Scotland at age 17 and went on to win four U.S. Opens and four Western Opens (another most important major of that era. He died suddenly in 1910).

This is a description from *Golf in the Far West* by Arnold in 1900 when there were only 16 golf courses in the state:

“The course of the Hotel Green is situated a mile from the Caravansary, on the electric car line that connects Pasadena and Altadena and is the best hotel course in the State. It consists of nine holes. the distance from back tees being something over 2,700 yards, and bogey 37. The ground is rolling, with a small ravine and an old railroad right-of-way to offer natural obstacles, while a number of great oaks, standing in excellent positions, form hazards that if disregarded in the least will prove very disastrous. Two earth bunkers, one on the fourth and the other on the eighth hole, complete the list of obstacles.

On the northeast corner of the grounds a pretty little clubhouse has recently been erected, with reception rooms, lunch room, lockers, etc., and a large veranda on three sides. There is nothing lacking in the golf grounds, and it is thoroughly in keeping with the Hotel Green, which, by the way, is one of the most magnificently constructed and equipped and most perfectly operated resort hotel of this continent. It is the property of Col. G. G. Green, of “Green’s August Flower” fame, and is under the management of Mr. J. H. Holmes.”

The first California Open championship was held in 1901 at the Del Monte course in Monterey, CA and Watson competed in it. However, it was won by Robert (Bob) Johnstone who was much younger and had emigrated from North Berwick, Scotland the year before. Johnstone won commandingly, as he did for years until he moved to Seattle Golf Club and won for years more in that area. It is interesting that Johnstone re-built Presidio’s 9 holes in 1901 and Watson further remodeled it in 1905. In 1910 Johnstone returned to lay-out nine more holes.

Watson’s architecture career in the west quickly took off. In 1901-1902. He built courses that included Pasadena GC and the first nine-hole Seattle Golf Club, a course in Laurelhurst, near where the University of Washington football stadium stands today.



Seattle Golf Club’s first course

The club had only 54 acres on which Watson could work but had great views over Lake Washington. To get to the course, members took a streetcar to a small boat owned to transport them to the club’s private boat dock. Eight years after it opened, the land on which it stood was sold, and the golf professional Robert Johnstone designed an 18-hole course north of Watson’s. Watson’s first American course, Minikahda, also had a popular boat dock to receive members.

Back to Scotland and the cause for the Watsons to move to America

Previously in Scotland, John Cobb Watson's father Alexander Watson had bought the Blebo Flax Spinning Works in 1857 from David Yool at Dura Den. John Cobb Watson became his partner. They operated 4,500 spindles powered mostly by a stream, employing 53 men and 160 women and youths (small hands were preferred to operate the mill). Alexander Watson and Son received a 2000-pound loan from the mill's customer British Linen Company (An enormous Edinburgh company that became its own bank and even printed currency.) The Watsons also had flax farms by tenanting land at Dairsie Mains north of Cupar. In 1868, Alex tragically died in his son's arms while standing at the train platform in Tayport. His obituary said that Alex had "...great business energy and intellectual capacity and was a God-fearing man." John continued to run the company until 1898. He had bought a home in Blebo, Cupar on 17 acres. His wife Mary Martin Watson died in 1894 at age 58.

British Linen sued John in July of 1898 for the 2,000-pound loan amount (More than \$300,000 in 2020 value). Newspaper reports said that there were recent failures in the linen business in Scotland because flax mills in other countries operated for much less money and the rise of cotton in America had severely reduced the importing of linen. John Watson, named as the flax spinner in a legal case could not make payment. The mill was shut down by the sheriff, laying off all employees and it never re-opened. He lost his home and property, and creditors were hounding him. This was the year that William Watson had emigrated to America in the fall.

Just a couple years later in Los Angeles where golf has taken off quickly.

This interesting article appeared in the 25 February 1901 *Los Angeles Herald*:

"Golf is now the principal outdoor exercise at nearly all the California winter resorts. At Catalina the links are occupied daily, and occasionally a mixed foursome or other form of general entertainment is held...At Pasadena, which boasts three courses, much attention is being given to the game. The Hotels Green and Pintesca both support links, and they are crowded every day in the week. The club professional, Gilbert Nicholls, played a match of eighteen holes with William Watson of the Green links Saturday, and won by a safe margin."

The *Herald* on 10 March 1901 then reported: "William Watson, the golf instructor at the Hotel Green links, will during the summer operate a factory in Los Angeles for the manufacture of golf clubs. It is the first of its kind in Southern California."

Then this from the *Herald* on 14 April 1901: "William Watson, golf instructor at Hotel Green, will leave for the north in a few days. Later in the Season he will enter upon his duties as instructor at the links of one of the prominent Southern California clubs, which position he will hold during the summer months." As a continuation of the article, William's father was interviewed which is a rare insight into his depth of love for golf.

"J.C. Watson, an old golfer, father of William Watson of the Golf Store, writes of the royal and ancient game as follows: 'So much has been written about golf during the past few years and so many men with more or less fitness have tried to expound its properties and explain its correct exercise that the subject has become surrounded with

intense interest and invested with a measure of mystery to add to its great attractiveness. As an ardent follower of the game and believer in it, I cannot resist adding my modest contribution in praise of its goodness and doing what little I may to encourage the love of it and to induce others to test its excellence and prove its virtues. To those who already tread a measure on the green sward with driver and cleek, this is preaching to the converted as I have rarely met anyone who proved faithless to this love or to whom the game had not been abundantly gracious if once fairly tried. 'Where bountiful nature supplies a pole of good grass pleasure of the highest kind may be had in pursuit of the game, but on ground such as is most abundant in glorious California the witching game can be played with pleasure and with profit as one of the best restorative agents for body and mind. The writer has wielded his clubs for over fifty years, meeting the same opponent at least once a week for more than the half of this period, and though this is not a biographical sketch, it may interest some to know that such causes produce such effects and that 'age does not wither nor custom stale its infinite variety.' Young men find here a suitable outlet for natural vigor under the most beneficent influences and older ones can sustain strength and in a measure renew youth by reasonable exercise. Invalids can find in its moderate activity and the fine, fresh air or breeze usually prevalent a regenerative process that is most valuable. 'When any doubting brother in the maze of his pitiable inexperience has made caustic remarks about the keenness of players, I have enjoined him, not to talk flippantly about matters too deep for foolish assertion, or the learning of the uninitiated, but to follow the sound advice which I now repeat: 'Go thou and do likewise.'

The *L.A. Herald* reported on 10 November 1902 that John Martin Watson arrived in Los Angeles to join his father and brother:

"John Martin Watson of Watson Brothers, golf instructors, has just returned to the city after a successful season at Des Moines, IA, where he returns next year under favorable conditions. He is now instructing at their own grounds the Los Angeles and Pasadena golf course, where he will continue for the next six months. William Watson, the senior member, has charge of the new grounds at Hotel Raymond, which will soon be ready, and golf in this district seems, to have very hopeful prospects."

The *L.A. Herald* reported the next fall on 12 November 1903:

"William Watson, son of the veteran Scotch golfer, has returned to his former position as professional and instructor on the Raymond Hotel golf links at Pasadena. The nine-hole course has been well patronized throughout the dry months and will be put in the best shape for the tourist season."

Henry Huntington had bought 300 acres of land in now Pasadena and he leased half of it to a group of men in 1905 who in the first year called themselves the Millionaires Club. It became the

Annandale Golf Club in 1906 and Watson was paid to lay-out the course. Instead of sand tees, Watson had 10 by 20-foot coconut fiber mats made for the teeing grounds with oiled sand greens. The club hired his father and brother as assistant professionals. The father was called John and to prevent confusion and John Martin simply went by “Martin”. Martin worked at Annandale in the winters until his retirement in 1938--including summer trips to other states in the summers. J. Martin remained a club professional, traveling to Iowa, Nebraska, Texas, Oregon, Washington, and ultimately retiring in Idaho. In a 1915 interview, Martin estimated that he had given over 20,000 golf lessons since coming to America. His best pupil was his son Forest, who went on to become the Pacific Northwest Amateur Champion in 1926. John Martin died in 1973 at the age of 99.



Annandale Country Club in 1909, a panoramic photo from the Library of Congress

J. Martin Watson and William built the original Arroyo Seco links, and then eventually had a part in building Griffith Park’s first course, which was remodeled by William in 1921. George C. Thomas built or rebuilt two Griffith Park municipal courses in 1923 and 1925. Watson’s course was lost when one of the early Los Angeles Zoo sites took the land.

Watson designed the first Hollywood Country Club near Studio City, California, shortly after his arrival in Los Angeles, but it was quickly built over by developers who, despite the absence of a golf course, continued to promote the non-existing facility as Hollywood Country Club or Hollywood Hills Country Club in a sales ploy by the developers to sell houses.

Their father John Cobb Watson died in Pasadena in 1919 and is buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Altadena, less than five miles from Annandale Golf Club. (It happens to be the same cemetery that Billy Bell, Sr. is buried in).

Watson advertised frequently in the Los Angeles Times and maintained a second office in Chicago. Watson made at least one trip back to Scotland early in his career, possibly in 1901. His ad below said, in part: “An extensive and critical study of the best golf holes in Scotland and England during the past summer enables me to apply the fresh knowledge gained of bunkering, trapping and other matters connected with scientific course construction to American golf courses.”

Laying Out of Golf Courses

I make a specialty of laying out new courses and remodeling old ones on the best up-to-date scientific lines; on plans that afford the maximum of interest and pleasure to all members of the club, be his handicap high or low.

These are some important golf courses I have layed out that are evidence of the character of the work I do:

Altadena Country Club, Pasadena, Cal.
Interlachen Country Club, Minneapolis, Minn.
Westmoreland Country Club, Evanston, Ill.
Midwick Country Club, Los Angeles, Cal.
Toledo Country Club, Toledo, O.
Thousand Islands Country Club, Alexandria Bay, N. Y.

Have also remodeled the well known Homewood and Ravisloe courses of Chicago, making of them much better tests of golf than they were before.

An extensive and critical study of the best golf holes in Scotland and England during the past summer enables me to apply the fresh knowledge gained of bunkering, trapping and other matters connected with scientific course construction to American golf courses.

Shall be pleased to visit and inspect any tract of land contemplated for a new golf course, or to advise with club officials on any question pertaining to a golf course.

WILLIAM WATSON

(Formerly of St. Andrews, Scotland)

1356 Monadnock Bldg.
Chicago, Ill.

or

613 Chamber of Commerce
Los Angeles, Cal.

When writing advertisers, kindly mention *The Golfers' Magazine*.

When the Watson family worked at Annandale, the head bag boy and caddie master was Billy Bell. Bell learned quickly from Watson and was supervisor of construction for some of his designs. Bell became George C. Thomas's preferred construction supervisor. Bell went into business on his own and ironically, became famous for re-modeling William Watson courses, often within a decade of their original design and build. In many cases, Watson's name disappeared as the architect and Bell's name replaced it.

In 1919 Annandale hired Watson as architect and Bell as supervisor again. In six months with the goal of being open by winter season they plowed-under the entire course and had the assignment to build an all grass course with irrigation. Bell was in charge of installing more than 50 bunkers and he used more than 5,000 tons of sand. The course re-opened on November 1st with a total cost of \$55,000. However, they still had difficulty in growing grass in the fairway and the new bunkering was judged too difficult for the membership.

In 1922 the club hired Jock Croke of Chicago to add contour to the greens and re-grass them. He followed his plaster models for the new greens. Billy Bell stripped the previous greens first and used the grass to create grass tees. This was finished in November of that year. It took years later for the club to get enough irrigation to keep turf on its fairways, but it was known for at least a decade for having 15-inch rough which obviously grew quite well.

Bell became a significant competitor to Watson, but there was plenty of work for all skilled architects in the Golden Age of golf. Although Watson had great success in the San Francisco area (Olympic Club, Harding Park, and others), his competition there was another Scotsman, William 'Willie' Lock, who had a part in laying out San Francisco Golf Club, the California Club and others. The course that Watson very much wanted to build was at Lake Merced due to its wonderful terrain. The club says that the design contract went to Willie Lock. However, newspaper accounts stated that Watson was superintendent of construction:

16 February 1922 San Francisco Call by FRANK P. NOON

“WITHIN five years California will be known as the “golfing state,” according to William Watson, nationally known golf authority and links architect, who is here to superintend the construction of the Lake Merced Country Club’s course and to rearrange several others.”

Watson was known to provide consulting services to Lock to provide him routing advice, for which Watson was unequaled. In 1916 Lock was listed as the club professional at Sequoyah Country Club, which could be played for 50 cents.

Watson was called back to Minneapolis in 1910 to design Interlachen, which sported his trademark design of a large double green, at the 9th and 18th holes. The green was 175 feet deep and 100 feet wide. The club opened with great fanfare, according to the verbatim club president’s report printed in the *Minneapolis Journal*. The course hosted the Western Open in 1914 and the 1916 Trans-Mississippi tournaments. (In 1919 Donald Ross was hired to re-route the course and Bobby Jones won the 1930 U.S. Open on the way to his Grand Slam. Ross’ new 9th over a pond became the scene of Jones’ famous Lily Pad shot. Jones was attempting to reach the par-5 9th in two shots when two spectators ran onto the fairway during his swing. He mishit the ball toward the lake where it fell about twenty yards short of dry ground. Incredibly, the ball skipped off a lily pad and onto the far bank, just thirty yards short of the green. Jones would get up-and-down for an unlikely birdie).

In 1906 William Watson married Ada Grace Sanborn from Hebron, New Hampshire. He was 46 and she was 34. Ada quickly became a major factor in their business. They would never have children, but she was important in the growth and success of their businesses. In 1913 Ada took over the golf equipment company and moved their one-room office to the Knickerbocker building on South Olive St. in downtown L.A., taking over half the eighth floor (seven rooms) in 1922. Now, Watson could devote all his time to designing and constructing golf courses. Ada visited some work sites with him to learn the supply-side of the construction business and began ordering the construction supplies. For example, in Watson’s 1911-1912 building of Westmoreland Country Club in Evanston, IL, Ada obtained the raw material to make a 25-foot-deep gravel bed under the golf course.



This 1912 piece in American Golfer Magazine added more about Westmoreland Country Club:

“Active work on the grounds of the Westmoreland Country Club golf course one mile west of Evanston will be started in about a month according to announcement made by the officials recently. All preliminary work possible has been completed and all that is holding back the other is the arrival of William Watson, the professional who is to lay out the course and who has been arranging a course at Altadena, Cal. The Westmoreland club is, for the greater part, made up of members of the Evanston Golf Club, who are making the change because they feel their hold upon the present location is insecure, and they wish to get a permanent home. The land, which consists of 121 acres and lies between the Glen View car line and the Glen View road, was purchased outright in preference to leasing. The course will not be ready for play until next year and those members of the Evanston club who belong to the new organization will continue at

Evanston this season. The land is considered among the best in this part of the county for a course and the members are expecting to have unusually good conditions for play. The course will be about the longest in the vicinity. At first the members will use the Glen View electric line for transportation but hope to obtain other means of getting to the club later. It will be a country club in every respect, and will be equipped for other sports beside golf, and the club house will be kept open the year round. As soon as the frost is out of the ground, work will be started getting things into shape for Watson. English grasses will be used exclusively on the course, seed having already been imported for that purpose. The club house will not be built until fall, as it is not considered necessary to erect so long before the course is ready for play. Already there are about 250 members in the new club and as the limit is 350 there is room for only about 100 more. It is thought there will be little difficulty in filling the list. A tentative plan is calling for a distance of 6,442 yards. Watson, with the aid of maps of various local courses and a plan of the grounds, has outlined a course of this length”.



A 1921 view of the 16th green at Westmoreland after Tillinghast and Langford added bunkers

Another innovation that Ada helped in was the revolutionary design of green foundations described in this 1911 issue of *American Golfer* magazine:

“In the new golf course at the Altadena Country Club, recently laid out by William Watson and said to be the finest on the Pacific Coast, there is a putting green innovation that is calculated to conquer climatic conditions. The putting greens are built upon a foundation of crushed rock and are eighty feet in diameter. The drainage of the putting areas and the fair greens will make the course safe in any kind of weather. The course is 6,566 yards long. A club house to cost \$25,000 soon will be built.”

The Watson’s innovation in improving the foundation of greens proved to be a lasting technology that years later became a recommended procedure of the USGA Green Section. Watson continued to use this procedure in building his greens (as opposed to simple “push-up” greens which contributed to the entire industry of golf architecture.

American Golfer magazine reported middle western news in December 1913 that showed Watson's newest contracts:

"Preliminary steps have been taken in the formation of the Moorland Golf and Country Club. The promoters have obtained an option on 230 acres located just south of the Homewood Country Club. It is planned to purchase the ground outright and this will necessitate an outlay of \$100,000, the cost of the ground being \$70,000. Originally it was planned to sell memberships at \$250, but at this season of the year the demand is not as keen as in the spring and a holding company will be formed which will advance the first payments on the option. William Watson and Tom Bendelow, the golf course architects, have been over the property and pronounce it admirably fitted for golfing purposes."

"Bernard Darwin, the English critic, after playing over the Onwentsia club course, pronounced it entirely too easy. His opinion may have had some weight with the directors, as William Watson, the California expert, has been engaged to make improvements which will consist largely of additional traps and mounds. William Marshall, the club professional, has just completed a tour of some of the leading eastern and middle western courses, among these being the Detroit Country Club and the Mayfield course of Cleveland, both of which drew high praise from Edward Ray, the English player. Marshall will confer with Watson and their suggestions will be acted on by the green committee".

The Los Angeles Herald reported in November 1912 that Watson would be wintering in Pasadena area: "The Raymond hotel will open for the winter season December 19. Already a large list of guests have been booked. The golf links are being placed in first class condition and William Watson has been secured as golf instructor".

This piece appeared in the March 1913 *American Golfer*:

"Thirty businessmen of Tucson, Arizona, at a meeting held last month at the Santa Rita hotel, took the preliminary steps in the formation of a Country Club. A committee was appointed to outline a plan of organization and to draft a constitution and by-laws. Preceding the meeting William Watson, the Los Angeles golf course expert, visited a number of available sites and recommended the Stewart property, located about three miles from the city. Mr. Donau announced he had secured an option on 145 acres of this land and on 80 acres additionally adjoining. Watson stated that the Stewart property would furnish a course similar to those at Pinehurst".

Tucson Golf and Country Club was built by Watson and opened the next year. The course was mostly sand and the greens were oiled sand with rakes covered with carpet used to smooth the putting line to the hole. Winds sometimes created sandstorms and the greens had to be regularly oiled to keep them in place. The club shut down during World War II.



Tucson Golf and Country Club taken from the air in 1929

In the summer of 1914, The Chicago Club arranged for Watson to be ‘professional in charge’ of their Charlevoix (Mich.) Golf Club whose links, on the north side of Charlevoix, were gaining a national reputation for routing and course condition. Watson returned seasonally to the Charlevoix Golf Club from 1914 until 1935.

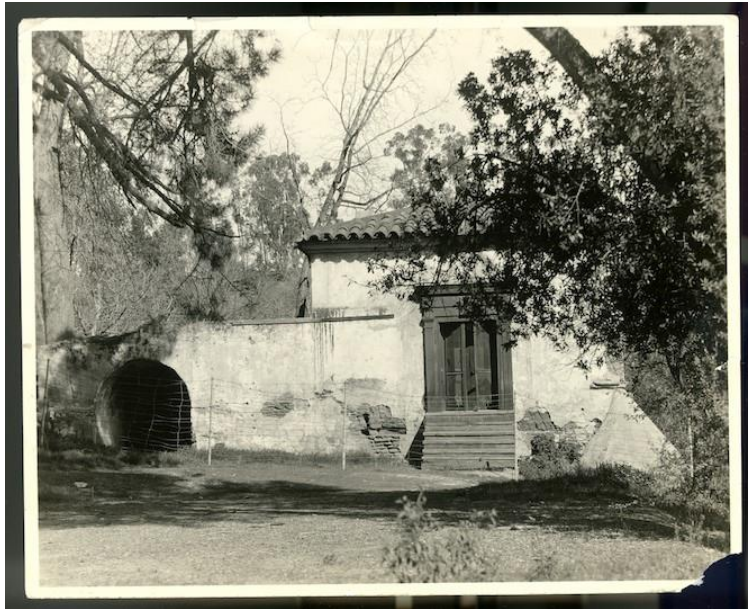
Also, in 1914 Watson built a nine-hole sand green course at the Huntington Hotel in Pasadena the same year the hotel was opened by Henry Huntington. The hotel was the finest winter retreat for the wealthy in the west. Customers came from major cities in the east and mid-west. Called the Huntington Country Club and Huntington Links, it was exclusively for hotel guests and Watson was listed as the club professional in the 1916 *American Annual Golf Guide*.



The Huntington Hotel in Pasadena

Within the 75 acres that Henry Huntington owned was a grinding mill built in 1816. Called the Old Mill and standing a half-mile from the hotel, became the clubhouse for Watson’s golf course

(today it is a historic site called El Molino Viejo which is open for tours).



The Old Mill

The Huntington Links had wonderful hills and was so popular with the guests that the plan was to expand to 18-holes.

However, Huntington also formed the ‘Oak Knoll Improvement company’ across the street from the hotel. It was a luxury area of upscale houses and mansions which he built. In 1918, Huntington saw an opportunity in real estate and abruptly sub-divided all his golf course land and sold off parcels for additional high-end homes. He also sold his hotel, which remains a 5-star part of the Langham collection — The Langham Huntington, Pasadena.

White Bear Yacht Club near St. Paul, MN

It was in 1915 when Watson designed one of his best courses, the golf course at White Bear Yacht Club north east of St. Paul, Minnesota. It is a course that sometimes has been credited to Donald Ross, but this is from Dr. Mark Mammel, historian at the club:

“We have two contemporaneous documents about the course’s origin: first, a brochure from 1918 about the course, on display in the golf house, and second an article in “Golfers’ Magazine” from May 1925. The brochure shows photos of many of the holes and includes the statement “William Watson laid it out. Donald Ross gave freely of his advice in its development and Tom Vardon, the professional at the club, was of great assistance.” In the 1925 article, past Commodore W. G. Graves describes that the early 9-hole course “came into being” but adds no other details, then stating that after acquiring more land “...an 18 hole course was planned. William Watson laid it out. Donald Ross gave freely of his advice in its development and Tom Vardon, the professional at the club, was of great assistance [note that this is a quote from the brochure!]...The original plan tested by play has required very little change or modification. Such changes and improvements as have been made as opportunity afforded have been strictly in line with the plan after experience showed that nothing more was needed. There has been no vacillation and there is no regret for money ill spent and for unnecessary discomfort and interruption to play.”

As additional proof, William Watson spoke to the San Diego media on April 9, 1920 about the design that he had just submitted to San Diego CC (completed in September 1921). In the interview he was asked what three recent designs he was most proud of? He answered: “White Bear Yacht Club near St. Paul, Sunset Hill Country Club near St. Louis, and Westmoreland Country Club outside of Chicago”. He also said that he had superintended the work at all three courses. (Note that Sunset Hill CC is credited from the club’s records with being designed by the Foulis brothers, Tillinghast and Langford improved Westmoreland’s bunkering and Donald Ross might have made some suggested improvements to White Bear).

Olympia Fields

South of Chicago, Olympia Fields founder Charles Beach had a dream of building the largest country club in the world. With nearly 700 acres, Beach decided to make Olympia Fields the first private club in America to offer its members four 18-hole courses all built by well-known Scottish Americans. His clubhouse was built to 110,000 square feet – the largest private golf clubhouse in the world complete with an 80-foot clock tower. (another reference put the square footage closer to 200,000).

The first course was designed by Tom Bendelow and opened in 1916. Bendelow had emigrated from Aberdeen Scotland and gained fame while selling golf equipment for A.G. Spalding. In order to drive sales for golf equipment, he laid-out hundreds of courses, many in one day each with stakes for tees, fairways and greens. He quickly graduated to becoming Spalding’s Director of Golf Course Development at its Chicago headquarters. He is especially remembered for carefully designing the first versions of Medinah’s #1, 2 and 3 courses and for the Eastlake Golf Course in Atlanta that was the first Atlanta Athletic Club. His total golf course count exceeded 700 in his 35-year American career.



Tom Bendelow (1868-1936)

James Foulis, Jr arrived at Olympia Fields in 1917 as head professional and construction supervisor. Watson designed the second course at Olympia Fields in 1918. Bendelow and Watson collaborated on the third course that opened in 1920. Then came the big finish – a course along the northern edge of the property designed by famed Scottish golf architect Willie Park Jr. opened in 1922. It is Park’s North Course that has continued to host big championships.

American Golfer, April 1921 issue reported—“Two courses from plans by William Watson and Tom Bendelow were started and the work was carried forward rapidly. In 1917 James Foulis, Jr., came to the club as professional, and under his construction supervision the No. 1 and No. 2 courses were completed and put in first-class shape, and the No. 3 course was constructed and opened for play in June of 1920.”

“Park was first hired in 1919 by the club to review and modify the first three courses, concentrating on No. 3,” wrote Tim Cronin, author of “Golf Under the Clock Tower.” “Park spent four days and came up with improvements for all three. The minutes aren’t specific, but the presumption is that the board liked his work so much, they hired him for No. 4.”

Park, a two-time Open champion, eventually spent 40 days on property to oversee Olympia Fields’ signature course. It was one of his last designs – and one of his best. “I am satisfied now that your Number IV Course is the equal of any golf course I have ever seen,” Park once wrote, “and I know of none that is superior, either in beauty or natural terrain.”

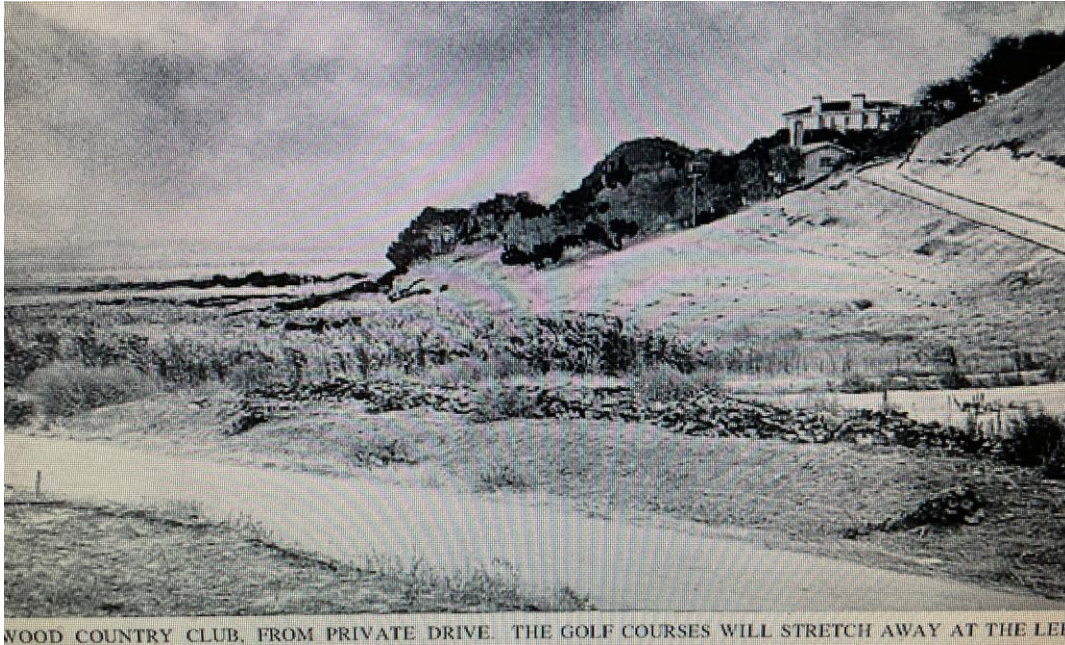
After World War II, Olympia Fields faced economic hardships and sold off half of its land, keeping the No. 4 course intact while creating a composite South course from holes used on the other three courses. Most of Watson’s work was lost in the downsizing and only a couple of his holes remain on the South Course.

Second Hollywood Country Club

Reported in the January 1920 *Golf Illustrated*:

“ALONG THE PACIFIC COAST THE purchase of the country estate of W. F. Holt by the recently organized Hollywood Country Club means the eventual addition of two golf courses to the Los Angeles section of Southern California. And these additions will be the more interesting because one of them will be a nine-hole course laid out especially for women—a plan much talked of in other parts of the country, but rarely carried out. The other course will be eighteen holes. As the estate is a three-hundred-acre tract, there will be ample room for not only these developments, but for the polo field, the twelve tennis courts, the shooting traps and the open air plunge which the club proposes to include in its special attractions. The property, six miles from Hollywood, and reached by a fifteen-minute drive through Laurel Canyon or Cahuenga Pass, stretches along Ventura Boulevard for half a mile and the conformation of the land is such as to provide sporting possibilities for golf. The house, a modern building of twenty rooms, sets well up on the hillside and commands a sweeping view. Some fifty thousand dollars will be spent upon it—for a dining terrace, a ball room and other clubhouse needs. The club will be limited to

six hundred members, with only life memberships sold at the outset. The former owner is the president. Mr. Holt is known to nearly everyone in California, particularly in financial circles. He is the original Jefferson Worth in Harold Bell Wright's novel, "The Winning of Barbar Worth." and the story was written around his activities in Imperial Valley.

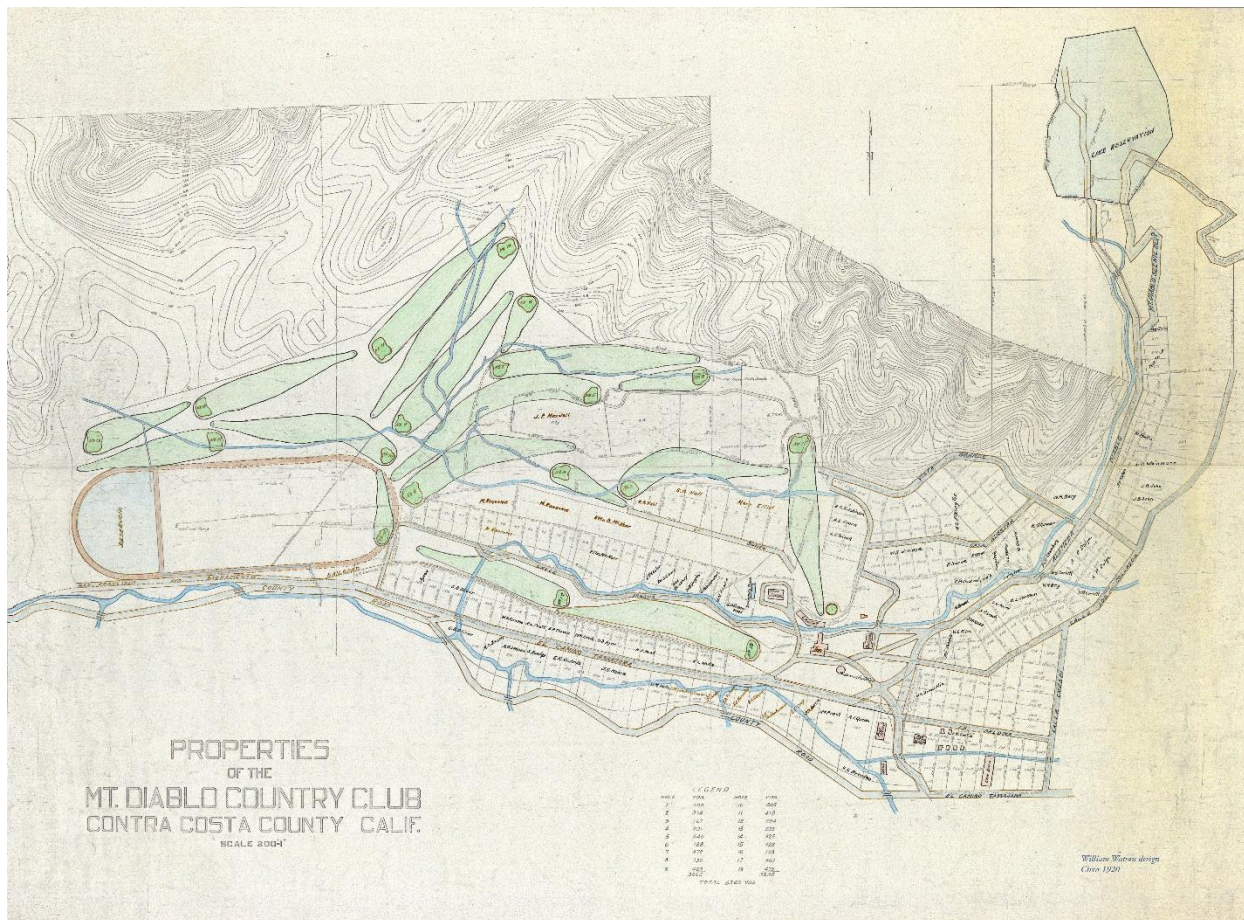


Site on the ocean of Hollywood Country Club 1919

Diablo Country Club in Northern California

Diablo Country Club in Northern California (the Mt. Diablo name was shortened) recently renovated its Watson-designed course back to its original layout, work performed by golf course architect Todd Eckenrode. David Mackesey added: "William Watson's 1920 design work to expand Diablo from 9 to 18 holes emphasized the best of Jack Neville's 1915 nine-hole routing while incorporating the natural elevations on three tee boxes for added length. For the second nine holes, he started with back-to-back par 5's and added two long and challenging par three's. Tee boxes are mere steps away from the prior greens, making the course a joy to walk. He named the holes in 1925, names we use to this day."

The club shared the design drawing by Watson from 1920 below.



Diablo Country Club design by Watson
(Compliments of the Diablo Country Club)

Hacienda Golf Club

Also, in 1920, the Hacienda Golf Club in an area near Whittier, Fullerton and Anaheim was created and as written by founding member Dr. Herbert Tebbetts, the club reversed supervision roles. It hired Billy Bell to supervise Watson in constructing the first nine holes. According to the *Whittier Daily News* in 1924 just Watson was brought back to design the back-9 through barrancas and canyons. Having personally just played the course, the back-9 clearly is different than the front. The 380-yard 15th and 200-yard 16th are spectacular designs.

La Habra Star, 16 June 1920 NEW GOLF COURSE 'DIFFERENT' IS PROMISE

“The Hacienda Country Club is no longer a possibility, but a reality, announces the president, Alonzo Bell, ex-tennis champion. About 150 acres have been secured north of La Habra, in a valley surrounded by hills opening toward the setting sun, giving the long twilight much appreciated by business golfers. William Watson, who is laying out the course, declares it will be a sporty one and that it will utilize many natural canyons and undulations. The length between holes will be as follows: One, 458 yards; two, 82b yards: three, 351 yards; four, 160 yards: live, 335 yards; six. 508 yams seven, 137 yards; eight, 430 yards; nine, 371 yards; ten 342 yards;

eleven, 400 yards; twelve, 314 yards, thirteen, 125 yards; fourteen, 393 yards: fifteen. 194 yards, sixteen, 480 yards: seventeen, 381 yards; eighteen, 447 yards; total. 6152 yards. Two nines that balance are quite a hobby with Mr. Watson, he having achieved the same result in the San Gabriel Country Club's newly arranged course. Each hole will have its own particular feature, and the entire course will have grass greens and fairways, and in many ways will be different from any other Southern California course.”



15th tee shot at Hacienda Golf Club

Berkeley Country Club

In 1920 Robert Hunter found hilly land that would become Berkeley Country Club. Hunter gave credit to William Watson as the architect and Hunter was construction supervisor, yet Watson himself once stated that when he was engaged as architect, he found little to alter in Hunter’s plans. Hunter had even made models of each green. (Hunter is well-known for his co-design credits with Alister Mackenzie on Cypress Point Club, the Meadow Club and Valley Club of Montecito).

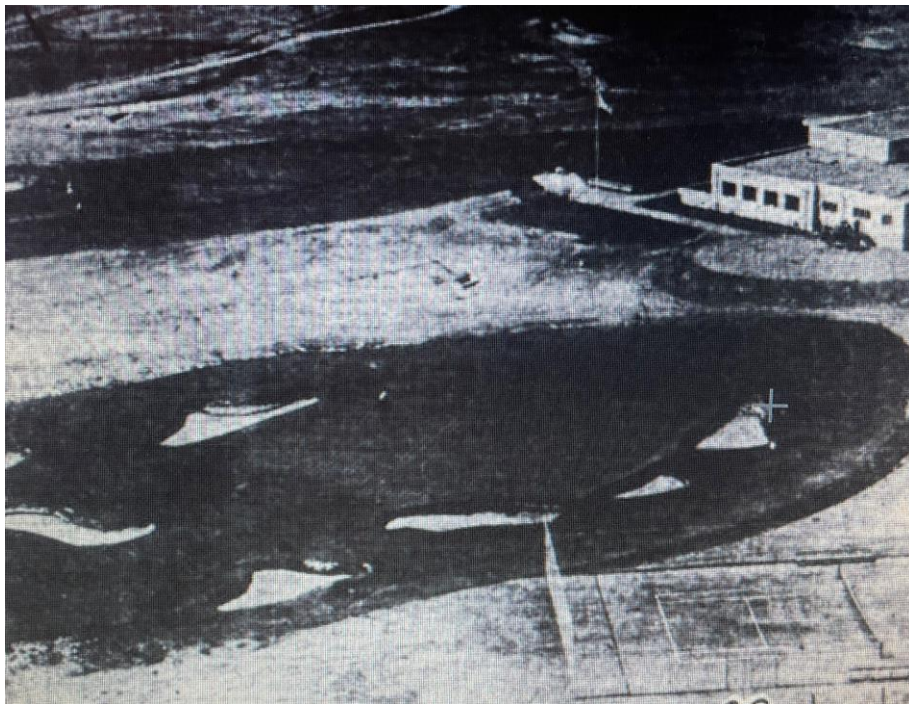
San Francisco Call, April 1921 reported on Watson’s work at Berkeley Country Club

GROUND BROKEN FOR GOLF CLUB; Work On Links Under Way at Berkeley Country Club

“Ground has been broken for the construction of the Berkeley Country Club and President C. C. Newkirk of the club declared that the building operations will be speeded up as much as possible in order to house the members on the golf course at the very earliest date that good work will allow. “The golf course of the Berkeley Country Club, which is still under construction, nine holes being nearly completed, has been visited by a great number of golf experts and all agree that we have one of the choicest courses that ever lay outdoors,” President Newkirk said.” For this splendid result we have to thank William Watson. who laid out the course, and his assistant, James S. Watson, who has been superintendent of construction from the beginning, Robert Hunter, secretary of the club, has contributed vastly to the success of the undertaking by his advice, his knowledge being founded on experience by playing over nearly every golf course of prominence in America and abroad. Joseph F. Brooks, vice president of the club, has rendered invaluable service in every department of the work. Among the members of the board, as well as of the club, there has been manifested a fine spirit of co-operation, the enthusiasm being remarkable. The other members of the board of directors, in addition to those mentioned, are Fred G. Athearn, William Cavalier, E. M. Downer, A. F. Hockenbeame. James B. Keister, E. F. Eouideck, W. J. Mortimer, Frank L. Naylor and Vernon Peck, all of whom have devoted much time and energy to the development of the beautiful property of the club, which comprises 165 acres.”

San Diego Country Club

Watson also designed the San Diego Country Club as described in the San Francisco Call, 22 August 1921



GOLF CLUB TO BE OPENED IN SOUTH; San Diego Course Ready for Play on September 3

SAN DIEGO, Aug. 22.—Another golf course -will be added to the long list of southern California links when the San Diego Country Club opens its new course with a tournament September 3, 4 and 5. The course is within convenient distance of San Diego and affords a view of ocean and mountains. Experts declare it to be strictly Scottish. Approximately \$250,000 has been invested by the club in the course, there being 160 acres of land. and a \$50,000 clubhouse on the property. Three tennis courts are being built at the clubhouse. The course was designed by William Watson of Los Angeles and will be in charge of “Jimmy” Simpson, one of the best-known professionals on the Pacific coast. The yardage for the course is as follows: First hole, 360; second, 410; third. 164; fourth. 505; fifth, 388; sixth, 186; seventh. 318; eighth, 465; ninth. 385; tenth. 480; eleventh. 320; twelfth, 198; thirteenth. 449; fourteenth, 382; fifteenth, 525; sixteenth. 139; seventeenth. 321; eighteenth. 425. The eighteenth hole is declared to be one of the most remarkable on the coast, being well trapped and with the natural undulating fairway affording a keen test to the experienced golfer. The sixth hole also plays a prominent part in contributing to, what experts’ term, a “sporty” course. The three and one-half miles of fairway, sufficiently wide at all points, is all in grass, kept green by seven miles of water piping, while the greens themselves are a vast expanse of velvety turf. The course is composed of two big nine-hole loops, which will have “right of way” at all points, crossing neither each other nor being crossed by any roadways. Par for the new course is 36 on each nine and this will give contestants something to shoot at, as par is figured on yardage alone, no consideration being given the hazards. The total yardage is 6420 for the eighteen holes.

Virginia Country Club

Also, in 1921, Watson’s new Virginia Country Club opened as reported in this article:

Los Angeles Herald, 30 August 1921 “NEW VIRGINIA LINKS OPEN THURSDAY; Long Beach Club Will Add Classy Course to Ranks of So. Cal. Golf Organizations

By E. W. KRAUCH Another new golf course with grass greens and tees will be officially added to the ranks of the Southern California Golf Association Thursday, when the links of the Virginia Country club at Long Beach are thrown open for play. And at the same time the old course of the beach club, where many championship events have been staged in the last 12 years, will be formally placed in the discard. The new course is located on a site practically adjoining the old affair. It is 6424 yards in length. It covers 135 acres. William Watson, considered one of the best golf course experts in the country, laid out the links and had full charge of all construction work. Professionals who have looked over the course during the last few weeks declare it to be a truly championship affair and there is but little doubt that it will be the scene of many title events in coming years. A new clubhouse has also been constructed and will be formally opened Wednesday night, at which, time a big dinner dance is to be held with over 300 attending. Galen H. Welch is president; Dr. A. C. Sellery, vice president, and Phillip McCaughan, secretary and treasurer. The board of directors is made up of the following members: Llewellyn Bixby, William W. Campbell. C. J. Curtis, Col. Charles K. Drake, Dr. A. C. Holladay and Ed J. Gillette. The present membership of the club is 360. with a limit set at 400. Dr. A. C. Bellery has been appointed chairman of the green committee, which is composed of Llewellyn Bixby and C. J. Curtis. How many persons are members of golf clubs in Southern California who have never played the royal and ancient game to date? There probably are a few in every club who hold

membership cards but have yet to play their first game. The Virginia Country club at Long Beach has one member who has been connected with the beach club for close to 12 now and has yet to feel the thrill that goes with a perfectly hit ball. He is Dr. W. Harrison Jones, one of the men who was Instrumental in organizing the beach club some 12 years ago. "I have not yet got to it," was the reply I got."

"Here is the yardage of the new Virginia Country club course at Long Beach:

Hole	Par	Length	Hole	Par	Length
1	5	560	10	3	160
2	4	436	11	4	358
3	3	193	12	5	434
4	4	341	13	4	374
5	4	400	14	5	554
6	4	375	15	3	163
7	3	128	16	4	416
8	4	385	17	4	365
9	4	328	18	4	435

The grand opening of the California Country Club reconstructed by Watson was announced in this article in the *Los Angeles Herald* on 12 March 1921:

"Members of the exclusive California Country club will tonight enjoy for the first time their new club home, the occasion being the formal opening of the building. Tomorrow they may play on their reconstructed 18-hole links. The club site is composed of 57 acres near National boulevard at the western outskirts of the city. The building itself crowns the brow of the highest point between the city and the beach and commands a view of the Wilshire district, the ocean and the beach towns all the way from Santa Monica to El Segundo. While the building of the clubhouse has been going on the course has been entirely reconstructed by William Watson, famous golf course expert. And while the links bear the reputation of being one of the "sportiest" in Southern California because of its hills and natural hazards. Mr. Watson has added nearly a hundred sand pits, chocolate drops and bunkers to enhance the enjoyment of the game. Many experts claim the course to be unsurpassed. EASILY ACCESSIBLE The club's proximity to the city makes It easily accessible while its position gives it the advantage of the cool ocean breezes in summer, the golf season. The officers of the club are Harry H. Culver, president, Watt L. Moreland. vice president: Harry McNutt, secretary: John C. Carson, treasurer."

San Francisco Call, 14 March 1921; WORK ON SEMI-MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE NEAR OAKLAND TO START WITHIN FORTNIGHT New Links Situated “Twenty Minutes From Oakland”; William Watson, Noted Designer, to Draw Up Plans and Superintend Construction Work By FRANK P. NOON

“WORK on a semi-municipal golf course “twenty minutes from Oakland” will commence within a fortnight, it was learned today. The course will be a nine-hole affair of 3100 yards, situated on the east of Foothill boulevard, between Ninety-second and Ninety-fourth avenues. William Watson, well known here and in the West as a golf course designer, expressed himself as pleased with the “location” and predicted that with a few minor changes the proposed course could be made into one of championship caliber.

The new club will be known as the Beverly Terrace Golf Club. W. I. McNicoll, well known here and across the bay in golfing circles has been appointed secretary pro tem. A charter membership list has been started and persons here and in the transbay cities may secure further details of the club, etc., by communicating with McNicoll, at the offices of the Tribune in Oakland. The idea permeating the directors of the club is to keep the cost within the reach of golfers unable to join even the least expensive of local and transbay golf and country clubs. To meet such a demand, it will not be necessary to supply inferior greens, fairways or tees, as many might believe necessary where the initiation fee is reduced to the minimum. The clubhouse as proposed by the directors will consist chiefly of locker and lounge rooms. The initiation fee will be \$60 according to McNicoll, who points out that but 200 members will be taken in at that fee. Watson, who will supervise the construction of the work on the new course, is now constructing the new Berkeley Country Club course, as well as remodeling the Claremont and Mount Diablo course. During the past few years Watson has designed and laid out such courses in Southern California as Annandale, San Gabriel, Flint Ridge, Hill Crest and San Diego, as well as numerous courses in and around Chicago. The idea of starting this semi-municipal course, McNicoll points out, is not to discourage direct municipal course construction, but rather to encourage civic authorities to construct similar courses where people of limited means may play golf without having to pay exorbitant prices, such as membership fees and other incidental expenses incurred in joining the average club.”

Watson also grassed the Coronado Country Club course by the end of 1920 as reported locally: “A study of the program will show Coronado players and the visitors who will come here from all parts of the country that a season of splendid sport is in store for them. Invitation Tournament New Year’s Day, 1921-- Opening of new Grass Course by architect William Watson.”

(Note: Coronado Country Club was shut down in 1952 and sold as Country Club Estates by the Spreckels Estate).

1920 to 1933 was the era of Prohibition of alcohol in America and developers were looking to build resorts in Mexico just south of San Diego. Also, in 1921 this San Diego article announced that Watson became architect for a Rio Rosarito Organization Selected a site in Baja Mexico:

By E. W. KRAUCH “New golf clubs are sprinkling up like weeds in all sections of Southern California, but the latest in this territory is down in Lower California, about 25 miles due south of San Diego. This club, which is to be known as the Rio Rosarito Golf and Field club, has just been organized and is backed by a large number of big businessmen and sportsmen from all over the country. A 500-acre site of the famous Rancho Rosarito, located on the ocean, just below the border, has been acquired by this organization and it is planned to eventually put in four separate golf courses of 18 holes each. Besides the links, numerous other sporting contraptions, such as handball courts, tennis courts, blue rock traps and others, will be installed to take care of the members. (Note: Today it is known as Real Del Mar Resort near Ensenada). TO LAY OUT COURSE The acreage covers both flat and rolling country and over this land officials of the club will lay out the proposed golf courses. The first 18 holes are now being laid out by William Watson, one of the golf course architects in the and actual construction work Will be started in a short time. Watson has looked over the land and declares that conditions at this spot for golf are as ideal aa anywhere on the North American continent. All-year golf is a certainty. One course is being laid out on the shore line, representing conditions in Scotland, with the level ground for fair greens and the fairways cut with natural canyons, sand dunes and gorges for hazards. The other three links will be built combining the level ground with hilly, rolling land a little farther back from the ocean.”

The *Los Angeles Times* on 9 October 1921 reported the opening of Tulare County Golf and Country Club 60 miles north of Bakersfield over 143 acres.

“William Watson, prominent professional golf expert of the Pacific Coast, was engaged on the 18-hole golf course with natural hazards, clear fairways and smooth greens laid out and opened for play”. (Note: it now is a public course in an area of livestock and agriculture).

This article in the *San Francisco Call*, 12 May 1922 debunks the frequent claim that Willie Lock designed the Encinal Golf and Country Club course:

WORK ON ENCINAL COURSE STARTS; McLEOD TO DIRECT CONSTRUCTION By FRANK P. NOON; “THE site of the proposed Encinal Golf and Country Club course on Bay Farm Island (Alameda), across the bay, reveals a veritable golfers’ paradise. The rolling ground is covered with a rich crop of grain and William Watson, the Chicago golf architect, has expressed himself as being highly pleased with the quality of the soil. Watson today appointed Jack McLeod to superintend the construction of the course. McLeod has been in charge of the reconstruction work at the Burlingame Country Club and is said to be quite expert in his work. The original site that was being considered on another part of the island was abandoned after consultation with Watson and other golf experts As most of those behind the project held out for the seaside course, the board of directors officially approved the new site and ordered Watson to start the construction work Immediately, So far as seaside courses are concerned, it is expected by those in charge of the construction work that new course will be superior to the Lakeside and Pebble Beach courses. At the Encinal course you may step off the tee at the tenth and got a handful of the finest of white sand, still wet from the receding tide with which to tee up your ball and drive a screamer down the fairway, with the salt of the sea bracing you. The combination of rich peat soil and an unlimited supply of sand will make this new course

one of the finest on the coast. Watson's greens are all patterned after famous holes on Scotch and English courses, and great care has been given to the location of the tees, which will also conform to best models at home and abroad. Watson considers the location of his tees as seriously as he does the placing of his greens. As the first essential of a modern golf course is a cheap and sufficient water supply, the Encinal course in this respect is ideally situated. Wells with an unlimited supply of water have been located. The essential conditions to make the Encinal course the future scene of championships are many. Climate, soil, and a plentiful supply of water gives Watson the opportunity to create a second St Andrews. Louis James, president of the club, announced today that the membership fee for the first 200 members would be \$500, the next fifty \$550, the next hundred \$600 and the last fifty \$750. Membership in the club is proprietary. Monthly dues will be \$10 payable from the date on which 200 members have been elected to membership. Information regarding membership in the club may be obtained by addressing the secretary, Encinal Golf and Country Club, 816 Syndicate building, Oakland.”

Orinda Country Club

Another of Watson’s best-known surviving courses is Orinda Country Club that he designed in 1924 and that Todd Eckenrode restored in 2015-2016. The longtime golf course superintendent Josh Smith summed-up his course by saying, “Watson’s routing here is particularly impressive. He went up and down and around the hills and over creek crossings but created a nice walk and with no two holes alike. Watson clearly cared about the variety of holes and especially the par-3’s, including a short one that was challenging. He also didn’t overuse bunkers.”

The Olympic Club

Meanwhile, at The Olympic Club, the existing course on the Lake was unsatisfactory, with too many blind shots and poor routing. Both Seth Raynor and Herbert Fowler proposed plans for changes to the layout. Nothing progressed until after the club purchased over 300 acres of land that William Watson laid out as two new courses, the Lake and the Ocean as reported in this article:

San Francisco Call; 26 April 1922 PLANS FOR O. C. LINKS WHITING TO SUPERVISE WORK by FRANK P. NOON

“THE plans recently drawn by Sam Whiting. Olympic Club pro. and William Watson, Los Angeles golf architect, for the new course at Lakeside have been officially approved by the board of directors and the golf committee of the Olympic Club, it was learned today. Work will start within a fortnight. Plans for the piping of the course are practically completed it was stated, and the members of the golf committee are anxious for the work to get under way. Members of the Olympic Club and the Lakeside Golf Club will be to play eighteen holes throughout the period of construction, it was explained. Upon completion of the “Lake” course work will commence on the, “Ocean” course, giving the Olympiads who go in for golf thirty-six new holes to play. The announcement that work will commence on the new course will be received with much enthusiasm by the members of the Post street club. Sam Whiting will supervise the construction of the course.”

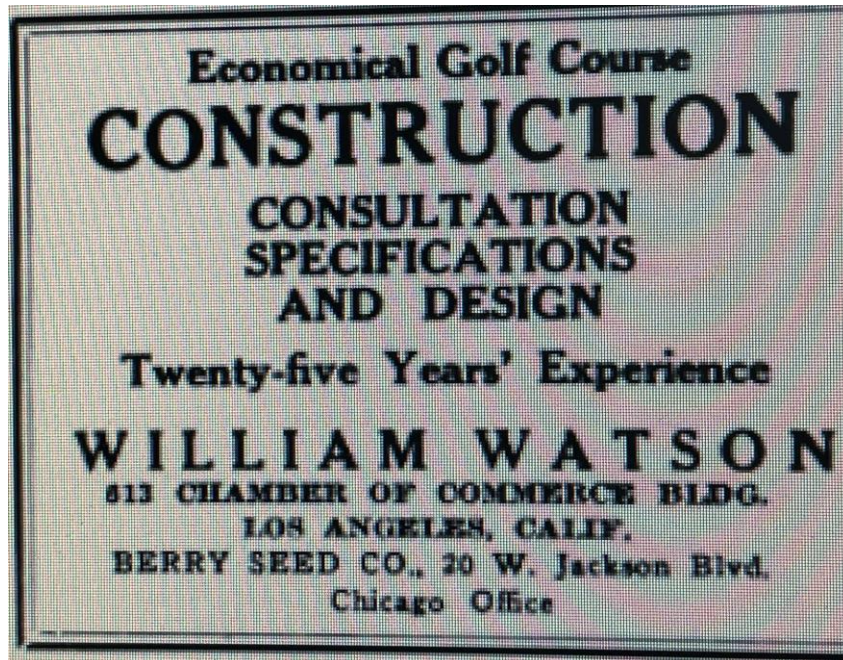
The courses were built in 1922-1923 using bent grass on the greens and fescue in the fairways. The Lake and Ocean courses opened in May 1924 and were heralded as the 'St. Andrews of America' in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. But, in February 1925, portions of the holes on the West side of Skyline Boulevard were damaged by heavy rains. Another slide-induced rainstorm in February 1926, and a subsequent geologist's report on the cliffs proved that changes had to be made to both courses. Whiting, working on his own, drew-up plans later that year for what is now considered the Lake Course.

In 1924 Watson did a total remodel of San Jose Country Club. At the same time, Watson designed Harding Park, a municipal course with Whiting as his construction supervisor. That opened on July 18, 1925, nearly two years after President Warren Harding — a widely scorned leader and avid golfer — died at the Palace Hotel while visiting San Francisco. Watson's fee was \$300. Construction costs were about \$295,000. It was the site of the 2020 PGA Championship.

By 1925, Watson's reputation as golf course architect had earned him national distinction and his counsel was requested by some well-known designers of the time, including George C. Thomas, Donald Ross, Billy Bell, Tom Bendelow, Sam Whiting, Willie Lock and Robert Hunter. Since his first American design in 1899, Watson had laid out more than 100 golf courses throughout the United States.

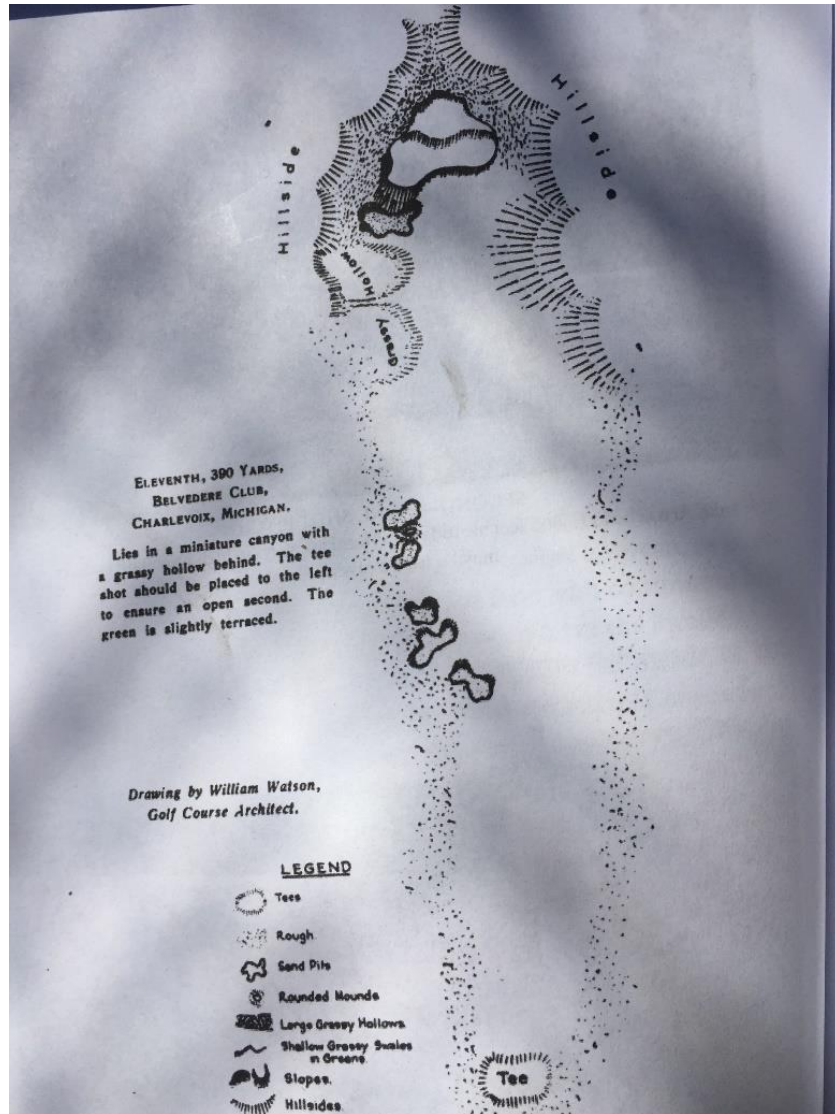
Los Angeles Athletic Club decided to build a golf course for its members, which later became Riviera CC. Watson was the early years consultant to LAAC and he produced several versions of a routing plan. However, the club instead hired George C Thomas and Billy Bell who completed their own routing design and completed construction in 1925-1926.

Watson continued to place advertisements in *American Golfer* magazine, sometimes marketing an economical approach to design as in this one:



The *Los Angeles Times* August 26, 1923 reported on the Biona Golf and Country Club between downtown L.A. and Venice. It was incorporated but not built. Then, in 1924 Watson designed Westward Ho Golf Club in Sawtelle (now West Los Angeles) as a nine-hole private course on 25 acres which likely was the same course. It later became public and then was purchased by developer George Cordnely, Sr and bulldozed by his building crews in 1951 to build more apartments/condos. Land there today is worth billions.

Watson would spend twenty-two summer seasons in Charlevoix, yet Belvedere Golf Club is his only known original Michigan design. By early 1926, the design work for Belvedere was completed.



Watson's drawing of Belvedere's 11th hole

(Compliments of *Golf Course Architecture in America* by G.C. Thomas)

In the summer of 1927, Belvedere Golf Club officially opened, and Watson, at age 67, was retained as its first professional. Watson fulfilled dual professional responsibilities at both the Belvedere Golf Club and the Charlevoix Golf Club seasonally from 1927 – 1930. He would arrive in Charlevoix in late June and leave for California about a week after Labor Day.

Watson probably would have continued designing golf links, but the stock market crash of 1929 shut down the creation of new courses. Watson's last known design was the El Sobrante Golf Club in San Pablo, CA in 1929, which would have been beautiful, but it was never completed due to the Great Depression. The Oakland papers were enthusiastic, not knowing of the looming crash:

“Sponsored by a group of prominent Oakland businessmen formed a new golf club for the East- bay was formally announced in March 1929 by John G. Shipp, secretary of the newly-formed organization. The El Sobrante Golf club, as It will be known, will boast of a complete 18-hole course plotted by William Watson, famous San Francisco and Los Angeles golf architect, situated on 216 acres of ideally adaptable land in a protected valley just north of the San Pablo Dam highway and within an hour's drive from the heart of Oakland. Construction will proceed as rapidly as possible and it is expected that the course will be open for play not later than September 1, 1930.”

He had one last remodel left in him in California at age 70 as reported in the *Morning Call* in May 1930. The name is a misnomer, because Santa Barbara Country Club closed in August 1921 and became a new club, Montecito Country Club officially in November with course renovation and the installation of irrigation.:

“New turf greens and fairways are planned at the Santa Barbara Country club as the result of a meeting of the board of directors held yesterday. The financial condition of the club was reported in excellent shape and information given out that the directors plan a number of noteworthy improvements on the links this summer. A report was read from William Watson, the noted golf architect who is now at Annandale. wherein details were outlined along broad interesting lines for the new grounds already proposed for the club. Mr. Watson will have charge of the Santa Barbara Country club improvements.”

He then re-designed Charlevoix Golf Club in Michigan.



Watson circa 1930 at age 70

Watson spent his later winters at his West Los Angeles home at 1111 Whitworth Drive, with his wife Ada and summers at Charlevoix. He died at his Los Angeles home at age 81 on September 2, 1941. He is buried at Pacific Crest Cemetery, Redondo Beach, CA in the Pacific Mausoleum. A brass plate on his name marker includes “Far and Sure”.

About his first name

Two sources, one of them the late golf historian Tom MacWood, said that although Watson was sometimes called 'Willie', he detested the name because when Watson came to this country, he was 38, a grown man. Back in those days, according to George Thomas--- "calling an educated gentleman older than him, 'Willie' would have been viewed as disrespectful." Furthermore, in all the many references that I found on Watson, he always was referred to as William. However, use of "Willie" has persisted to this day.

Watson's architectural style

The man's architecture has been described as classic and strategic in design. He particularly admired for his routing. He excelled at using natural landforms to shape the contours of fairways and roughs, as a way of running the ball off them, away to more difficult next shots. Alternatively, the golfer could attempt to carry these features, if bold or skilled enough. His reputation was that he created extremely difficult courses that were heavily bunkered but thoughtfully placed.

Architect Todd Eckenrode is a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, and his Origins Golf Design team has grown tremendously in Southern and Northern California. Besides other famous courses such as Brentwood Country Club, Todd has restored six courses where Watson was the original designer, including Virginia Country Club in Long Beach. "His name, his star, is certainly rising," he said. "As we all got interested in architecture in the last decade or two, we are finding these gems like Orinda, Diablo, Harding Park and Belvedere."

Eckenrode named two major features of William's designs: "Number one, Watson utilized the bold, often severe features of the existing terrain beautifully in his routings," he said. "He wasn't afraid to play along a sweeping hillside or up and over a ridge. He understood how to align a golf hole that would take maximum advantage of the contours and kick-slopes and would reward a player who could figure that out. He had a wonderful way of using diagonals, of rewarding the player who recognized the proper angle.

"Number two, he never practiced a cookie-cutter approach to design. He was terrific in using the land's natural features, but he was also skilled at creating features when needed. For example, at Orinda and Diablo, in Northern California, he brought in the tractors and created wonderfully irregular greenside mounds that tied in superbly to the green contours. Just off the green, between the mounds, he constructed closely mown swales that pull the ball away from the green. It inevitably led to interesting recovery shots."

Country Club magazine wrote in 1925, "(Watson) holds the belief that a course is more interesting if every green has a character all its own, giving the player something besides the flag to rest his eye on in approaching the hole." When William spoke to the press while building San Diego Country Club in 1920, he said, "I design by the situation and natural features of the land. I also want each hole of a course to be unique and with different feature when completed. Also, my ambition is to site the courses of California to vie with the links of Florida and the south as attractions for American golf enthusiasts." He added: "My Annandale course reconstruction was

my first attempt to bring a real course to Los Angeles and it was so appreciated that I have done reconstruction work at Virginia Club in Long Beach, Flint Ridge, San Gabriel and the California Golf Club. With San Diego Country Club where the site offers great contours much to my liking, I will build my first entirely grassed course in the region.

“Remember, that Watson spanned two generations of architecture,” Todd said. “He was prolific pre-1920 and post-1920.”

David Mackesey of Diablo Country Club added: “In those early years, he didn’t have motorized vehicles to take care of the course. Pre-World War I, you didn’t use severe elevations because it was too hard to maintain.”

After 1920, he began utilizing bolder parts of a property, with elevated tees, elevated greens and the occasional blind shot.” Said, Mackesey.

So why isn’t Watson better known? Eckenrode theorizes that much of Watson’s outstanding work was eclipsed by other designers. “A lot of Watson’s best work was done before the mid-1920s” Eckenrode said. “There were a lot of great architects who followed in the mid- and late 1920s. He fell victim to clubs wanting to enhance or change what they had, so much of his really good work went away.”

“Much of what he did was changed or replaced,” agreed Mackesey. “He hasn’t had a widely recognized signature course available for the golf world to study. That has all changed now that Diablo Country Club has restored and honored Watson’s impressive work on our links.”

In addition, nearly all the important tournaments from 1900-1928, as well as the publications of the day, revolved around the East Coast, and to a lesser extent, the Midwest. The U. S. Amateur and the PGA Championship did not venture west until 1929, and the U.S. Open until 1948.

Watson’s Minikahda played host to the 1916 U.S. Open and to the 1927 U.S. Amateur, won by Bobby Jones, but architects generally didn’t enjoy the celebrity they do today. Olympia Fields number 3, a 1920 William Watson design, hosted the 2013 U.S. Open, but the club reports that none of his original layout remains today.

Watson embraced a minimalist design philosophy, where golf holes were found and not built. He disliked artificiality. Every bunker and mound he constructed had a purpose. Some shapes were simple, others more complex, but always he insisted on naturalness.

William Watson was a significant pioneer in bringing the game to enthusiastic American golfers. It is time for more of today’s golfers to recognize him for his accomplishments.



San Diego Country Club's grassed course in 1925

In his 30 years of golf course design, he worked in 14 states with this breakdown: CA 71, IL 12, MN 8, NY 4, AZ 3, CO 3, MI 3, WI 2. Additionally, one course each in OR, UT, ND, WA, VA, Missouri and Baja Mexico.

Thanks to original research by Dennis "Marty" Joy II, the Head Professional at Belvedere, below is his chronological list of William Watson designs and renovations (with corrections made during my research) and with the guidance of others:

- The Minikahda Club – Minneapolis, MN 1898 (w/Foulis)
- Hollywood Country Club – Hollywood, CA 1898, closed.
- Casa Loma – Redlands, CA 1899
- Ferndale Course – Ferndale, MN 1899 (6-hole course)
- Hotel Green – Pasadena, CA 1899 (r)
- Lafayette Club -- Minnetonka Beach, MN 1899 (9-holes), still operating
- Bryn Mawr Golf Club – Minneapolis, MN 1899 (r) (Lasted ten years as members left to join Minikahda and Interlachen.)
- Hotel Raymond – Pasadena, CA 1900 & 1901 (r)
- Pasadena Golf Club – Pasadena, CA 1900 (r) & 1920 (r) and since 1946 is the Altadena Town and CC)
- Garvanza Links – Pasadena, CA 1901, also called Los Angeles Golf Links (The 9-hole course was the first public course in the west).

- Seattle Golf Club – Laurelhurst, WA 1901, (9-holes, moved eight years later and the new course was designed by the head professional Bob Johnstone.)
- Alexandria Golf Club – Alexandria, VA 1903 (r) (Besides installing improvements, he superintended the links and gave golf instruction. It no longer exists.)
- Hotel Frontenac Golf Club – Round Island, NY 1904 (r ex)
- Presidio – San Francisco, CA, (9-holes built by military around 1896, then by Bob Johnstone in 1901. Rebuilt by Watson in 1905. Expanded to 18 holes by Johnstone in 1910).
- Annandale Golf Club – Pasadena, CA 1906: 1919 (r) Greens re-done by Jock Croke and tees sodded by Billy Bell in 1922
- Denver Country Club – Denver, CO 1907 (r) (Foulis had designed and brought in Watson for remodel.)
- La Cumbre Golf Club – Santa Barbara, CA 1908
- Interlachen Country Club – Edina, MN 1909
- Toledo Country Club – Toledo, OH 1909 (r & ex)
- Menlo Golf Club – Redwood City, CA 1909
- Virginia Country Club first site, now Recreation Park GC – Long Beach, CA 1909
- Homewood Country Club – Homewood, IL 1910 (r) (now Flossmoor)
- Brentwood Country Club – Brentwood, CA 1910
- Westmoreland Country Club – Wilmette, IL 1911
- The La Crosse Club – La Crosse, WI 1912
- Altadena Country Club – Altadena, CA 1912 (later Pasadena Golf Club and in 1946 changed to Altadena Town and CC)
- Ravisloe Country Club (Public) – Homewood, IL 1912 (r) (Remodeled later by Donald Ross.)
- Thousand Islands Country Club - Alexandria Bay, NY 1913 (r)
- Midwick Golf Club - Los Angeles, CA 1913
- The Golf Links – Wellesley Island, NY 1913
- San Marcos Hotel Golf Course - Chandler, AZ 1913 (w/Harry Collis)
- The Huntington – Pasadena, CA 1914 (9-holes for guests of the finest winter resort for the wealthy. Listed as the club professional in the 1916 American Annual Golf Guide. 2,600 yards with sand greens for hotel guests.)
- Lincoln Park – San Francisco, CA 1914 & 1922 (r)
- Evanston Golf Club – Evanston, IL 1914 (r & ex)
- Fargo Country Club - Fargo, ND 1914
- Tucson Golf and Country Club – Tucson AZ 1914
- Onwentsia Club – Lake Forest, IL 1914 (r)
- Kalamazoo Country Club – Kalamazoo, MI 1915 (r & ex)
- White Bear Yacht Club - White Bear Lake, MN 1915 (w/Ross advising later, perhaps bunkering later), but it is a Watson original.
- Olympia Fields Country Club #1 – Olympia Fields, IL 1916 (r & ex w/Bendelow, but their work no longer exists.)
- Minneapolis Golf Club – Golden Valley, MN – 1916 - 1920 (r & ex w/Bendelow – today Golden Valley Golf & Country Club)
- Sunset Hill Country Club---St. Louis, Missouri 1917 (with Foulis brothers)
- Winona Country Club – Winona, MN 1917 (Bendelow r in 1919)

- Culver City Country Club - Culver City, CA 1917 (changed to The California Country Club) 1920 (r) then William Dicks new grass greens in 1921
- Olympia Fields Country Club #2 – Olympia Fields, IL 1918 (work no longer exists)
- Brentwood Country Club –Los Angeles, CA 1918 (Club started in 1916 with first 9-holes)
- Inglewood Country Club – Inglewood, CA 1919
- Wanakah Country Club – Hamburg (Buffalo), NY (r) 1919
- Ingleside Club – Phoenix, AZ 1919
- Hollywood Country Club – Hollywood, CA 1919, 18 holes and added 9 holes in 1921
- San Diego Country Club – Chula Vista, CA 1920, opened 1921 all grassed course
- Olympia Fields Country Club #3 – Olympia Fields, IL 1920 (w/ Bendelow) (work no longer exists)
- Flintridge Country Club – San Gabriel, CA 1920
- Claremont Country Club – Claremont, CA 1920 (r & ex)
- Berkeley Country Club – Berkeley, CA 1920 (w/ R. Hunter) – Became Mira Vista CC in 1934 and today is Berkeley Country Club)
- San Gabriel Country Club – San Gabriel, CA 1920 (r)
- The Country Club – Salt Lake City, UT 1920
- Hacienda Golf Club – La Habra Heights, CA 1920 (w/ Charles Mayo)
- Hillcrest Country Club - Los Angeles, CA 1920
- Griffith Park #1 – Los Angeles, CA – 1921 (r) replaced by G. Thomas
- Colorado Springs Golf Club – Denver, CO 1921 (r 1927)
- Ridgeview Country Club – Duluth, MN 1921
- Oakland Links at Lake Chabot – Oakland, CA 1921(Actually designed by Willie Locke, but Watson visited it and consulted on routing the same year)
- Beverly Terrace Golf Club – Oakland, CA 1921 (a municipal nine holes 20 minutes from the city did not last past the Depression)
- California Country Club—Los Angeles, CA 1921 (total remodel)
- Virginia Country Club current site, Long Beach, CA 1921
- Tulare County Golf and CC –Strathmore, CA (Today it is a public course)
- Rio Rosarito Golf and Field club, 1921, Rosarito, Baja Mexico (Now Real Del Mar)
- Sunset Canyon Country Club – Burbank, CA 1922
- Burlingame Country Club- Burlingame, CA 1922 (r & ex)
- Encinal Golf & Country Club – Alameda, CA 1922 (San Francisco Call, 12 May 1922 describes in depth that Watson, not Lock designed the course with Jack McLoud as his construction superintendent).
- Stoughton Country Club – Stoughton, WI 1922
- Coronado Country Club – Coronado, CA 1920-1922 (r) (Re-grassed the course by the end of 1920).
- La Jolla Country Club – La Jolla, CA 1922 (Listed for decades as Billy Bell who later remodeled the course. It was recently renovated by Todd Eckenrode.)
- Rocky Mountain Country Club, Denver, CO - 1922
- Lincoln Park – San Francisco, CA 1922 (r)
- Las Turas Golf & Lake Club - Oxnard, CA 1923
- Mt. Diablo Country Club – Contra Costa County, CA 1925 (r & ex) Now Diablo CC
- Griffith Park #2 – Los Angeles, CA 1923 (Watson consulted, but designed and built by Billy Bell and George Thomas)

- Lake Arrowhead Country Club – Lake Arrowhead, CA – 1923
- East Bay Country Club – Castro Valley, CA 1923
- Clover Field Golf Course – Santa Monica, CA 1923 (First laid out by Watson, fully opened in 1928 and George Merritt then was credited). Named changed to Santa Monica GC.
- Fort Washington Golf & Country Club – Fresno, CA 1923
- Orange County Country Club - Santa Ana, CA 1919 and remodeled 1923 (now Santa Ana Country Club, Watson first worked on the course in 1919)
- Olympic Club (Lake Course) – San Francisco, CA 1924
- Olympic Club (Ocean Course) – San Francisco, CA 1924 (w/ Whiting) (Washed away and rebuilt by Whiting)
- Clear Lake Highlands – Clear Lake, CA 1924
- Encino Country Club – Encino, CA 1924
- Orinda Country Club – Orinda, CA 1924
- Turlock Country Club, Turlock, CA 1924
- Escondido Country Club, Escondido, CA 1924 (Eventually became a retirement community course. Sold to a developer in 2012, fought in court for seven years. 2019 began construction of 380 homes).
- Westward Ho Golf Club – Sawtelle, CA 1924 (nine-hole private course on 25 acres in West L.A. became public when purchased by developer George Cordnely, Sr and bulldozed by his building crews in 1951 to build more apartments/condos.)
- San Jose Country Club total remodel- San Jose, CA 1924-1925
- Los Angeles Athletic Club (Became Riviera CC) – Santa Monica, CA 1925 (Watson was the early years routing consultant, B. Bell & G. Thomas design and construction)
- Belvedere Golf Club – Charlevoix, MI 1925
- Castlewood Country Club---Pleasanton, CA 1925 (first course, opened Oct 17, 1926 according to Livermore Journal with grassed greens. Later (r) by Billy Bell Sr.
- Minne Monesse Golf Club – Momence, IL 1925 (Still operating as a public course)
- Multnomah Golf Club – Portland, OR 1925 (Routing by Watson, Credited to Willie Locke)
- Foothill Blvd Club – Oakland, CA 1925 (Designed by never built)
- Harding Park – San Francisco, CA 1925 (Site of 2020 PGA Championship)
- Belmont Country Club – Los Angeles, CA 1926
- San Gorgonio Country Club – Beaumont, CA 1926 (9-hole)
- Shawnee Country Club – Lima, OH 1927 (r) of Bendelow 1909 course
- South Shore Golf Club – Momence, IL 1927
- Women's Golf & Country Club – Van Nuys, CA 1927 (Ada Watson, became Director of Sports.)
- Hotel Del Mar Golf Club – Del Mar, CA 1927
- Momence Links – Momence, IL 1928
- Oak Knoll Golf Links – Oakland, CA 1928 (r) (Watson consulted to design the routing, but Willie Locke designed the course.)
- Sonoma Golf Club – Sonoma, CA 1928 (w/ Whiting)
- El Sobrante Golf Club – San Pablo, CA 1929
- Santa Barbara Country Club (name had been changed to Montecito CC in 1921)—Santa Barbara, CA 1930 (r)

- Charlevoix Golf Club - Charlevoix, MI 1930 - 1931 (r)

Other Clubs Unknown dates in the 1920's:

- Paso Robles Country Club – Paso Robles, CA (Still operating as a public course)
- Clearlake Golf Club – North San Francisco, CA

ex = expansion

r = remodel

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