

Origins of the York Lake Golf and Country Club

Donald J. Childs



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Figure 1 Logo of York Lake Golf and Country Club.

The forerunner of today's York Lake Golf and Country Club was first known as the Yorkton Golf Club, formed in the spring of 1921:

Yorkton is to have golf.

At a recent meeting, which was well attended, the Yorkton Golf Club came into being.

There were a large number of enthusiasts who are determined to make the club a success on hand, and it is the opinion of everyone that the club could be made a venture that would eclipse all others in the province as regards links and membership. (Saskatoon Daily Star, 16 April 1921, p. 7).

At that founding meeting early in April of 1921, possible locations for a golf course were reviewed:

The location of the links was discussed and various landowners will be approached with the view of securing suitable grounds.

There are a number of ideal locations in the vicinity of the town on any of which a nine-hole course, and, on several, eighteen holes, could be constructed.

Natural hazards abound in the vicinity and there is no doubt that a splendid course will be constructed during the summer. (Saskatoon Daily Star, 16 April 1921, p. 7)

In fact, no golf course was constructed that summer, but by the fall of 1921, the club had hired an excellent golf professional to bring a nine-hole course into play: "At a meeting of the executive of Yorkton Golf Club, Mr. John A. Scott, of Weyburn, was appointed professional for the next season and will move to this point shortly" (Saskatoon Daily Star, 17 October 1921, p. 15).

Scott laid out a nine-hole course on the land of Lieutenant Dr. Thomas Veitch Simpson (World War I veteran and town veterinarian), about a mile and a half out of town. It endures today as the Deer Park Golf Course.

Born in Chiswick, Middlesex, England in 1881 (the son of a joiner, under whom he worked), but coming to Canada in June of 1906 with his wife Sarah and two young children, John Alfred Scott

(1881-1954) initially settled in Winnipeg, where the couple had their third child in 1907, but they had moved to Saskatchewan by 1910, where their fourth child was born that year. In 1916, they lived in the village of Tribune, thirty miles (50 km) south of Weyburn. Scott worked in Tribune as a woodworker and blacksmith and tried to encourage blacksmiths in the district to co-ordinate to charge proper prices for their work (*Canadian Blacksmith and Woodworker* [Winnipeg, March 1916], p. 16).

In 1919, he was hired as a golf professional by the Weyburn Golf Club (formed in April of that year). His first job was to lay out a nine-hole golf course:

J.A. Scott was engaged as professional and has given satisfaction to his club officials.

The work of laying out the course was then commenced, and with a lot of hard uphill work, [he] has succeeded in making a real first-class nine holes



Figure 2 Photograph of part of the nine-hole course of the Weyburn Golf Club. Canadian Golfer, vol 5 no 7 (December 1919), p. 471.

The length of the course is 2,880 yards with grass and earth greens. (Canadian Golfer, vol 5 no 8 [December 1919], pp. 470-71)

Scott wrote about this course to the editor of *Canadian Golfer* in 1921: “Our course this season has been in fine shape. We have both [s]oil and sand greens, which stand up very well in this locality. Visitors from other parts of the West say we have the makings of a really first-class course” (*Canadian Golfer*, vol 7 no 6 [October 1921], p. 422).

Scott was proud of his ability to build and maintain proper grass greens on the prairies: on his watch, there would be no sand greens at Yorkton.

Although his contract with the Yorkton Golf Club did not commence until 1 April 1922, Scott probably arrived in Yorkton in time to lay out the golf course in the fall of 1921. He certainly stayed in Yorkton that winter and in February opened a successful golf school “above the Woolworth building” in downtown Yorkton (*Saskatoon Daily Star*, 7 February 1922, p. 15).

Scott had a 2,995-yard, par-36 course ready for play on 24 May 1922:

Golf Club Opens

The Yorkton Golf Club opened for the season on Wednesday, Victoria Day.

The new nine-hole course was played over for the first time and members were delighted with its splendid possibilities. Considerable work remains to be done on it before it will be in first-class condition, but with time it promises to develop into one of the finest west of Winnipeg.

There are splendid stretches of fairway abounding in natural hazards. (Saskatoon Daily Star, 30 May 1922, p. 15)

On opening day, Scott went round in 41 strokes, which immediately became the course record.

The club secretary boasted about the quality of the new Yorkton course at the end of the 1922 season in a letter to the editor of *Canadian Golfer* magazine:

We have had numerous visitors from as far East as Montreal and New Jersey, and the majority won't believe it was a first-year course, and these same visitors have said we have the best layout for a course west of Port Arthur

The land is undulating, mixed up with trees everywhere and a creek which has to be crossed twice.

There is all kinds of punishment for the player who is anyways off his game.

[There are] nine extra-good grass greens, every one of which has a different layout. [It is] a course, in fact, that will try the best player playing even his best. (Canadian Golfer, vol 8 no 8 [November 1922], p. 650)

Scott was proud of his abilities both as a golf course builder and as a greenkeeper and wrote to *Canadian Golfer* in November of 1922 to boast about the varied locations of his greens on the Simpson property and to explain how he went about maintaining them:

There are no two greens on any course which have the same soil for growth unless soil is brought in from some outside source. [In the 1920s, only the wealthiest golf clubs could afford the expense of bringing outside soil to their golf courses.]

I have at this place [Yorkton] nine grass greens, each having different sub-soil. Some are on the flat, others are on top of a knoll, while two are in a hollow, and one on a side of a hill.

No artificial water is laid on to any of these greens, so ... tell me how [one] is going to get grass of the same texture without [identical] subsoiling. I do not believe in any manufactured fertilizer made, and I will leave it to any members of the club, or any visitor that has been at this course, to tell you of the success had here.

I nursed these nine greens through five weeks of hot, dry summer without a drop of water and have greens to show for it this Fall.

There are ways of greenkeeping known to some, which others know nothing about, which cannot be learned from books, only by experience. (Canadian Golfer, vol 8 no 8 [December 1922], p. 656)

Scott was also a good golfer, establishing a course record of 75 during the first year season in 1922 (five strokes better than the amateur record). And he was ambitious to test himself against other professionals, representing the Yorkton Golf Club in the Western Canada professional championship in Saskatoon in August of 1924: "John Scott, the professional for the Yorkton Golf Club, leaves this weekend for Saskatoon, where he will play in the Dominion championship golf tournament. He will be accompanied by his son, who will take part in the junior tournament" (*Free Press Evening Bulletin* [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 4 August 1924, p. 7)

The Yorkton club very much liked the golf course that Scott had built for it and wanted to purchase the land on which it was laid out, but the price was too high:

The executive reported that the question of purchasing the land had been considered and they had come to the conclusion that, in view of the present value, it was out of the question to purchase at the price asked and recommended that unless the property can be obtained for a greatly reduced price steps be taken to secure other land. A committee was formed to take action. (Saskatoon Daily Star, 16 March 1923, p. 16)

Land for a new golf course was subsequently purchased in the spring of 1924 and, during this process, the Yorkton Golf Club changed its name to Yorkton Country Club:

Yorkton Golf Club has decided to purchase for a golf course the southwest quarter of 28-25-4W, second meridian. This land, which was homesteaded in the early nineties by Tom Brown of North Dakota, lies to the southwest of town and is the property of Edward Spice, barrister, of Winnipeg.

To finance the deal, the Yorkton Country Club, Limited, will be incorporated as a holding company with a nominal capitalization of \$20,000....

Steps will be taken to put the new course in order this summer.

The course belonging to Dr. T.V. Simpson presently used by the golf club will then be vacated.

The new course is ideally situated between town and the summer resort of York Lake.



Figure 3 Summer activity at a beach on York Lake early 1900s.

(Free Press Evening Bulletin [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 17 June 1924, p. 8)

The new course was designed by Scott during the summer and was laid out by the end of August:

Yorkton Has New Nine Hole Golf Course

Can Easily Be Extended to Eighteen; Total Yardage Will Be 3,123



Figure 4 World War I veteran Brigadier-General Alexander Ross, appointed Judge of the District Court in the Judicial District of Yorkton in 1921.

YORKTON – General Ross, chairman of the greens committee of the Yorkton Golf Club, and J. Scott, the professional, together with an architect, visited the new golf links during last week and completed arrangement for laying out the course....

The cleared cultivated land is in excellent condition and practically takes care of all of the nine holes, only some 10 or 12 acres requiring to be cleared of light scrub to make the course playable.

The land has a gentle roll and the holes have all been laid out with the idea of using to the best advantage all the natural hazards and bluffs.

There will be three dog-leg holes and the total yardage will be 3,123, which is the usual championship course length, but sufficient land is left for the extension of the course to 18 holes when required without much alteration. (Saskatoon Daily Star, 27 August 1924, p. 6)

In September of 1924, the club's secretary, magistrate D. Wedderspoon, wrote a letter to the editor of *Candain Golfer* to explain what the Yorkton Country Club was doing:

We ... have made arrangements for purchasing a quarter section of land about three and a half miles from town.

This land offers great possibilities for a nine-hole course of about 3,100 yards. The land is gently rolling and there are numerous natural hazards in the way of trees, etc., which will enable us to have a good course without much expense for clearing.

The fairways are practically wholly on cultivated land, which is being worked down and seeded this month. Carter's Seeds are being used and we had a visit from their representative recently. He expressed the opinion that the soil was very suitable for making a good turf.

We have incorporated the Yorkton Country Club for the purpose of financing the matter....

It is possible that play on the new course may be had next year, but we are not counting definitely on it until 1926. (Canadian Golfer, vol 10 no 5 [September 1924], p. 450)

It took the latter half of 1924 and all of 1925 to build the nine holes of the new course, largely because Scott was doing the work on his own, helped at the beginning of 1926 by club volunteers:

Local golfers are very enthusiastic about the new links of the Yorkton Golf and Country Club.

The turf came through the winter splendidly and the fairways are in splendid shape.

Volunteers are on the links daily, giving them the finishing touches in preparation for the new season's play, and work on the new clubhouse is underway. (Free Press Evening Bulletin [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 27 April 1926, p. 20).

From the beginning, the new course had grass greens worth bragging about:

The Country Club course, laid out on the shores of York Lake, has come into being with astonishing rapidity.

Started only two years ago [1924], it now has a charming little clubhouse, well laid out sporting fairways, and excellent grass greens.

A "pro," John Scott, who planned the course and practically built it himself, lives in a cottage not far from the clubhouse, and looks after the course as well as the members. (Free Press Evening Bulletin [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 28 June 1926, p. 6)

The course was scheduled to be opened for play 24 May 1926 (*Canadian Golfer*, vol 11 no 12 [April 1926], p. 1024).

As of the spring of 1926, the original course on the Simpson property (which is now the Deer Park Golf Course) was operated as a pay-for-play course:



Figure 5 Lieutenant T.V. Simpson. Glenbow Archives NA-2878-44.

Two golf courses will be in operation in Yorkton this year, according to an announcement by Dr. T.V. Simpson.

Dr. Simpson states that the course which has been in operation during the past few years by the Yorkton Golf Club will be carried on again this year, but on practically the same conditions as prevail on municipal courses in larger centres.

Dr. Simpson states that he is making arrangements for competent men to take care of the greens.

No club will likely be formed, but those wishing to play over the links can either take out a season ticket or play single games.

(Winnipeg Tribune, 13 March 1926, p. 15)

In fact, a club would soon be formed for play on the town's original course, such that by 1929, the new Deer Park Golf Club provided the player, Fred Scott, who would contest the finals match of the Amateur Golf Championship of Northeastern Saskatchewan with a Yorkton Country Club player, Charles Beck, Jr. (*Leader-Post [Regina]*, 4 September 1929, p. 14).



Figure 6 Albert Kam, Jericho Golf Club, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1908. City of Vancouver Archives.

The club pro John Scott seems to have left the golf industry at the end of the 1926 golf season and taken employment in Yorkton as a warehouse caretaker, leading the Yorkton Country Club to replace him in the spring of 1927 with a new golf professional:

Albert Kam Pro at Yorkton Golf Club

Albert Kam, of Winnipeg, has been secured as professional at the Yorkton Golf and Country Club for the coming season, it was announced at a meeting on Monday, when officers for the year were elected.

(Winnipeg Tribune, 31 March 1927, p. 15)

A Regina newspaper was perhaps a bit surprised that the little town of Yorkton (population 5,000) had landed such a big fish: it added to the club's press release cited above the observation that "Kam was formerly at the St. Charles Country Club, Winnipeg, and the Windsor Park course of the same city" (*Leader Post [Regina, Saskatchewan]*, 1 April 1927, p. 15).

Albert Kam had been born Albert Oscar Waldemar Kamienski in England in 1881, the son of the Polish professional horseman Count Waldemar Alexander Oscar Kamienski and the English professional horsewoman Jenny Hengler, the two most famous performers in England's most famous equestrian circus, Hengler's Grand Cirque, run by Jenny's father, Charles Hengler.

Shortening his name not long after he came to Winnipeg in the early 1900s, Kam worked on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean over the next three decades, serving as the golf professional at golf clubs in Winnipeg, Vancouver, England, and Wales. Between 1906 and 1929, he laid out, remodelled, or built golf courses in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Bristol, England.

Kam seems to have been chosen for the Yorkton job at least in part because of his greenkeeping skills: "It was announced that the service of Albert Kam, of Winnipeg, had been secured as pro for the season, and he is expected to arrive here about April 15, when the work of getting the greens in condition will start" (*Free Press Evening Bulletin* [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 31 March 1927, p. 16). Kam had big greenkeeping shoes to fill, but his work on the course soon showed results: "Albert Kam, new pro at the club, has the greens and fairways in good shape" (*Free Press Evening Bulletin* [Winnipeg, Manitoba], 30 April 1927, p. 20).

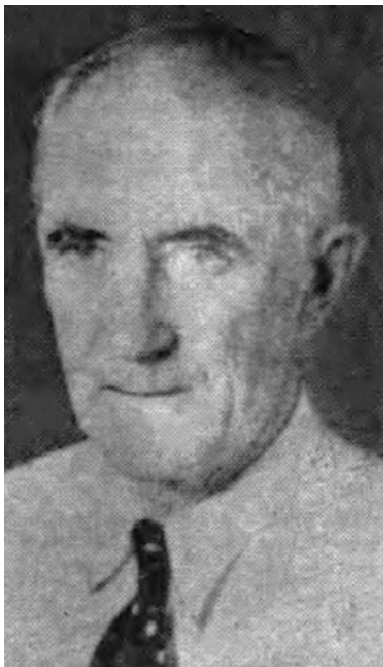


Figure 7 Albert Kam (1881-1955), *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 11 January 1935, p. 1.

Kam left the club after the 1929 season, but he continued to work on golf course design and construction in Western Canada.

In 1935, the *Prince Albert Daily Herald* described him as "well known in the West ... as a professional golfer and landscape engineer" (*Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 11 January 1935, p. 1).

Since 1934, he had been working on Waskesiu Golf Course (in Prince Albert National Park), where "he built the rolling greens of the new golf course" and "assisted in widening fairways": "Kam [was] engaged last year [1934] as subforeman in the Park and given a free hand in designing the greens along with some other architectural work in connection with the course" (*Prince Albert Daily Herald*, 11 January 1935, p. 2).

Kam was replaced at the Yorkton Country Club as of the 1930 season by Thomas O. Winship.

The latter was just sixteen years old when he sailed from England to Canada in 1929, perhaps invited to work under Kam as an apprentice. Whatever the case may be, he served as Yorkton Country Club head pro for the 1930 season.

He was just seventeen!

Perhaps not surprisingly, the job seems to have proved too much for him. He did not continue as head pro for the 1931 season. Mind you, we find him still living in Yorkton in 1931. At the time of the census taking that spring, he was a lodger at 168 Second Avenue in the home of Province of Saskatchewan mining engineer Ernest B. Webster: Winship told the census taker that he was a “Pro Golfer” who had, alas, “no job.”

He was replaced for the 1931 and 1932 seasons by Thomas Percy Chester.



Figure 8 Tommy Chester (1904-2002). Winnipeg Tribune, 15 September 1945, p. 16.

Tommy Chester came to Yorkton from Winnipeg’s St. Charles Country Club, where he had worked as an assistant professional for three years under head pro and accomplished tournament player Eric Bannister.

Born in 1904, Chester started in the game as a caddie at a Winnipeg golf club in 1913. He served an apprenticeship in club making over the next six years at various Winnipeg clubs under well-known local pros such as Hugh Fletcher, Ernest Penfold, and Richard (“Dick”) Holden.

Then, as a sixteen-year-old, he was engaged by the T. Eaton Company to make golf clubs for the sports department of this national department store chain’s Winnipeg operation. Chester spent seven years (1920-1927) as an Eaton’s clubmaker before accepting an invitation in 1927 to return to the ranks of Winnipeg’s assistant golf pros at the Niakwa Country Club.

Chester did not return as the Yorkton Country Club pro for the 1933 season.

In fact, he may have returned to Winnipeg before the end of the 1932 season to take up the head pro position at the Charleswood Golf Club (formerly the Alcrest Golf Club), where he would serve until 1974 (except for four years of work in an aircraft factory during World War II). In recognition of his service to Canadian golf, he was in 1999 made a Life Member of the Canadian Professional Golfers Association.



Figure 9 Tom Chester. *Winnipeg Sun*, 31 March 1999, p. 10.

Today, part of the site of the old Charleswood Golf Club is known as Thomas Chester Park, named after the club's long-serving pro, as is the park's Thomas Chester Pathway.

Upon her husband's death in 2002, Chester's widow, journalist Margaret Chester (née Brown, 1916-2010), had written the Assiniboine Community Committee for permission to purchase a memorial to her husband and place it in the existing park; the Committee decided instead to rename the park after him.

Of course, the story of the early days of the Yorkton Country Club involves more than the doings of its golf professionals.



Figure 10 C.W. Beck, jr. *Free Press Prairie Farmer*, 20 August 1930, p. 26.

Presumably having been instructed first by head pro Scott and then by head pro Kam, Charles Wesley Beck, junior (1901-64), quickly became the Yorkton club's best golfer, his exploits recounted in many newspapers, as well as in *Canadian Golfer* magazine.

Beck's father, the son of a German immigrant, had been born in Ontario but came to Yorkton in the late 1880s. He owned and operated a hardware store in downtown Yorkton. Charles Beck, jr., eventually took it over. His uncle Levi Beck (1860-1936), known in the early 1900s as "The Merchant Prince of Yorkton," owned a boarding house, flour mill, implement dealership, butcher shop, harness shop, confectionary, bakery, lumberyard, general store, and two grain elevators.

Twenty-four-year-old Beck won the 1925 club championship with a score of 81, thought to have been a record score for amateur players on the original course, but actually one stroke higher than a score made in 1922 by a visitor to the course (*Leader-Post* [Regina, Saskatchewan], 2 October 1925, p. 8). And Beck won the club championship again in 1926 on the club's new course, and probably remained club champion for many years afterward, although

newspaper reports of club championship contests are incomplete. *Canadian Golfer* reported in 1929, however, that "the Yorkton (Sask.) Club championship trophy ... was **again** won in 1929 by

Charlie Beck, Jr., Northeastern Saskatchewan Champion and runner-up for the past two years for the Free Press Trophy” (*Canadian Golfer*, vol. 15 no 6 [October 1929], p. 505, emphasis added).

Beck was a regular contestant in the latter two competitions.

The Northeastern Saskatchewan Golf Championship was an annual tournament established by the Yorkton Country Club in 1927. Beck twice won it the three years in a row, first from 1927 to 1929, and then from 1931 to 1933 (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 7 September 1937, p. 14). The tournament was not held from 1934 to 1936, but was revived in 1937 (Beck competed again, but finished six strokes behind the winner over 36 holes.) As many as 100 golfers participated in the tournament (*Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 September 1937, p. 24).

The prestigious Winnipeg *Free Press* Amateur Golf Championship drew to an annual competition in Winnipeg the best amateurs from Manitoba, Western Ontario, and Eastern Saskatchewan, who had to win regional competitions to earn a place in the Winnipeg finals. Beck finished second in 1928 and 1929, but he finally won the Free Press Trophy in 1930:



Figure 11 C.W. Beck (right) and D.G. Walker. *Free Press Prairie Farmer* [Winnipeg], 28 August 1929, p. 28.

Yorkton, Saskatchewan, has in Charles Beck, Jr., one of the most promising players in the West.

For three consecutive years he found himself in the grand finals of the annual Winnipeg Free Press golf tournament, and after two of these finals, the Yorkton golfer was forced to content himself with the runner-up honours.

This year, however, he managed at last to win this important championship which is participated in by clubs throughout the West.

In winning the coveted title this season, Beck defeated a luminary who was not only medallist this year but the champion in 1929.

The superior play of Beck won for him triumph over Duncan G. Walker, of Sherridon, Man., by a 5 and 4 score.

Walker is a product of far-famed St. Andrews [Scotland] and was runner-up in the Scottish Amateur Championship in 1921.

It is very gratifying to know that the smaller Western towns are now producing golfers of championship calibre. (Canadian Golfer, vol 16 no 8 [December 1930], p. 644)

Beck also entered the 1929 Saskatchewan Open, standing tenth after the first round, with just seven professionals and two amateurs ahead of him, but he withdrew from the competition before the second round (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 7 August 1929, p. 13).

Beck also regularly served on the executive committee of the Yorkton Country Club. Throughout the early and mid-1930s, he served in the onerous position of club secretary.

During World War II, Beck entered the Canadian Army at the rank of captain in the Royal Canadian Artillery and commanded Yorkton's 64th Field Battery. The latter was mobilized for active service in the summer of 1941 and it was immediately built up to wartime strength, with the prospect before it of defending Canada's west coast (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 22 August 1941), p. 3. Beck travelled across Saskatchewan throughout 1941 recruiting for the 64th. In December of 1941, he was promoted to the rank of major.

After the war, Beck settled in Burns Lake, British Columbia, with his wife Esther and their daughter and son. He was active in the community as a leader of business and sports organizations. He died of cancer in Burns Lake in 1964 (in his sixty-third year).

Although throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, newspapers often referred to the club as the Yorkton Golf Club or the Yorkton Golf and Country Club, it was officially the Yorkton Country Club, Limited, and remained so until at least 1934. But newspaper reports of club activities in 1935 and 1936 are virtually non-existent, and, as we know, the Northeastern Saskatchewan Golf Championship that the club had hosted annually since 1927 was not held from 1934 to 1936.

The golf course may have been severely impacted during the mid-1930s by the ongoing drought afflicting Saskatchewan throughout the decade. When the golf course was laid out in 1924, it not only bordered York Lake, but it "also had a small lake of its own" (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2). Things changed drastically, however, during the 1930s: "during the dry years, the water supply disappeared. The grass greens reverted to sand greens, and the golfer's private lake dried" (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2). The level of York Lake itself also dropped dramatically. Club activities would have been severely curtailed – if not prevented outright – by such a catastrophic decline in the golf course.

1933 may have been the year that the golf club suffered the greatest stress.

We know that Tommy Chester was not re-engaged as the club's golf professional in 1933. One might have presumed that he was tempted away by an offer he could not refuse from the Winnipeg golf club where he was hired as head pro, but it may also have been the case that the Yorkton Country Club simply could not afford to retain his services.



Figure 12 Undated photograph of the Yorkton Hotel, Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

More suggestive of distress at the Yorkton Country Club in 1933 is the fact that in March, General Ross approached the executive committee of Yorkton's Deer Park Golf Club with a radical idea. Subsequently, at the Deer Park Golf Club's "annual meeting held in the Yorkton Hotel," "a proposal

made by General A. Ross that the Deer Park Golf club amalgamate with the Country Club was thoroughly discussed" (*Star-Phoenix* [Saskatoon], 10 March 1933, p. 17).

Had the General presented himself cap in hand? Had the Yorkton Country Club already lost its lake? Had its greens already died? Was the club itself in danger of expiring?

If so, the General will have been greatly disappointed by the reaction to his appeal by the majority of the members of the town's other golf club:

Yorkton Men Turn Down Proposal to Merge Deer Park With Country Club

[The] proposal made by General A. Ross that the Deer Park Golf Club amalgamate with the [Yorkton] Country Club was thoroughly discussed and after being put to a vote was turned down by more than a two-thirds majority.

(Star-Phoenix [Saskatoon], 10 March 1933, p. 17)

Oh, the ignominy!

After the wilderness years of the mid-1930s, however, the club made a comeback. By 1937, it had been re-organized and had changed its name to Southwood Golf Club, the property now being

owned by the Southwood Golf Course Association (*Leader-Post* [Regina, Saskatchewan], 7 September 1937, p. 14).

Southwood hosted the Northeastern Saskatchewan Amateur Golf Championships in 1937 and 1938. In advance of the 1937 tournament, preparation of the golf course was supervised by “Jack Scott” – perhaps the original pro, John A. Scott, or perhaps his son, John A. Scott, Jr. (born in England in 1902): “Entries for this tournament are coming in from all parts of the district, and Jack Scott, who is in charge of the Southwood course, where play will take place, is working overtime to have the course in excellent condition” (*Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 September 1937, p. 24).



Figure 13 John Knox, Jr. *Star-Phoenix* [Saskatoon], 25 April 1939, p. 14.

In the spring of 1939, perhaps as a sign of its renewed energy and seriousness of purpose, the Southwood Golf Club again hired a full-time golf professional: twenty-seven-year-old John Knox, Jr.

After serving three years as secretary-treasurer of the Kindersley Golf Club, Knox decided that he wanted to make golf his career and declared himself a golf professional. The Southwood job was his first appointment.

Knox brought with him to Yorkton a carefully considered opinion as to how the game should be played – and taught:

He took up golf at the age of eight and has played continuously for 19 years.

He has tried out the various scientific theories of golf which have been practised in the United States during the past 15 years and states that during the past three years, he has achieved a greater measure of success with the artistic theory of golf. (Star-Phoenix [Saskatoon], 25 April 1939, p. 14)

Poor Knox, however, chose the wrong time to become a golf professional, for World War II broke out in September of 1939, and the Southwood Golf Club faced another existential threat. With more and more aspects of public and private life in Canada becoming focussed on the war effort, attendance at the golf course declined. Members drifted away. And maintaining the course became difficult because of “shortages of tires, gasoline, and labor during

the war years” (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2). The club certainly could not afford the luxury of employing a golf professional.

By 1946, the shareholders had “put the course back in good shape,” and the lake on the golf course property had returned, but attendance had not recovered, and so, “they ... decided to sell” (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2). On offer was “a fully equipped nine-hole golf course with a private lake,” including also a “clubhouse, ... tool sheds and stable” (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2).

The Southwood Golf Course Association was perfectly aware that a buyer “might toy with the idea of changing over to dairy farming”; still, “the owners of the Yorkton Southwood Golf Course” let it be known that they “would rather be stuck to golf”: “for they’ve spent 26 years [actually, 22 years] fixing up the course, which one shareholder described as having fairways as good as any in the province, and better than most” (*Leader-Post* [Regina], 21 September 1946, p. 2).

The wishes of the shareholders – not to mention those of the generation of volunteers who had helped to make the club and the course viable for decades – were answered. The golf course was saved – saved, in fact, by knights in shining armour:



Figure 14 The Knights of Pythias is a fraternal organization celebrating the values of loyalty, honour, and friendship.

GOLF COURSE TO CONTINUE

The Southwood Golf Course, which was recently offered for sale, has been leased for five years by the Yorkton Knights of Pythias.

The lease begins next spring and members of the club said the course will be operated as a public course. (Leader-Post [Regina], 8 October 1946, p. 2)

General Ross, longtime member of the executive committee of the Yorkton Country Club, and chairman of the club’s greens committee when the golf course was laid out in 1924, was also a longtime member of the executive committee of the Yorkton Lodge of the Knights of Pythias: he may have played a key role in this arrangement.

Without this timely intervention by the Knights of Pythias in the proposed sale of the golf course, the latter might not have survived long enough to have been donated by the Southwood Golf Course Association to the

Crown in the mid-1950s to form part of York Lake Park – a donation made on the condition that the land be preserved in perpetuity for use as a golf course by the community.

Three cheers for the Knights of Pythias!