

# The Coronado Country Club

By Dean Knuth



**The Coronado Country Club logo**



**Coronado Island in the 1890's with beautiful sand dunes that became the early golf course.**

Golf began in San Diego at the nine-hole San Diego Country Club on City Park (now known as Balboa Park). Golf was brought to Coronado by a non-golfer from San Francisco by the name of John D. Spreckels.

More than a century ago, brothers John D. and Adolph Spreckels owned much of downtown San Diego and all of Coronado. Their father, Claus Spreckels, amassed a fortune by dominating Hawaii's sugar trade and refineries. John was an expert sailor and had sailed from his home in



**John D. Spreckels (1853 – 1926)**

San Francisco and stopped in San Diego harbor to re-stock his schooner, *Lurline* in July 1887. Immediately he liked the city. Elisha Babcock who with two partners showed Spreckels the undeveloped Coronado Island that they had purchased for \$110,000 (More than \$3 Million in 2020). John, always thinking of infrastructure requirements actually began his businesses in San Diego by building a pier and using his shipping line, shipped in coal to keep the Santa Fe trainline from shutting down their local station. Babcock held a land auction for Coronado lots near the end of that year and sales boomed. Babcock began building the stately Hotel del Coronado in March 1887 and all looked promising. Suddenly, in 1888 the great California land boom collapsed. San Diego's population dropped from 50,000 to 8,000. Sales at the hotel tanked and the recession turned into a depression in 1893. Despite the down economy, Spreckels gave the Coronado Beach company a \$100,000 loan and with \$400,000 more, took one-third of the company. Spreckels invested heavily in San Diego at the same time. He said: "I was out to find a big opportunity to do big constructive work on a big scale and in San Diego I foresaw such a chance".

At the same time, both Spreckels were continuing to build new empires across the country under their John D and Adolph B Spreckels Security Companies with John as President. They expanded Hawaiian cane sugar to include growing and processing beets in Salinas, California. They owned a fleet of tugboats and the shipping company. In downtown San Diego John graded the potholed streets, opened a mass transit electric trolley system, built a reliable water works, donated a City Park and large outdoor pipe organ and kept growing. He also bought the rest of the Hotel del Coronado and all the city land, including North Island which truly was an island until World War II. He built a 400-tent city on the beach south of the hotel renting each for \$4.50 a week. He bought two major newspapers in San Diego. He built a railroad to and from Arizona called the San Diego and Arizona railway. He bought and developed Mission Beach. He built what today is called the Belmont Amusement park. He built the Hotel San Diego in time for the

1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition (it stood until being demolished almost 100 years later to build a Federal Courthouse Annex). And he built Spreckels Theatre which still is in use today. He continued to live in San Francisco until a catastrophe hit the Bay area.

On April 18, 1906, all the Spreckels family were in their homes in San Francisco when the great earthquake struck. Their mansions were destroyed, the city was on fire and the Spreckels tugboats were used to help the firefighters. John was so stunned that he got onto his yacht with his family and sailed for Coronado. That is where he lived the rest of his life. He built a mansion near his hotel overlooking Glorietta Bay (now the Glorietta Bay Inn). He included a large pipe organ and he was an adept player.

John was not a golfer, but he loved polo which he believed would fit well together on the same fields. Soon after purchasing the Coronado land and the del Coronado hotel, Spreckels had a nine-hole course laid out on the sand dunes along what later became Ocean Avenue, the future premium lots on the island. He decided that the wealthy hotel guests from the east who wintered at his hotel would want to play the game nearby. Play was on soft sand dunes and soon with no turf making iron shots quite challenging. Bunkers were merely pits dug out from the sand. He hosted a professional invitational golf tournament organized to announce the existence of the new Coronado Golf Links. The course started near the hotel heading north and ended about where Country Club Lane is today.

*John Duncan Dunn reported on the first Coronado championship for the Los Angeles Herald, on 11th February 1900:*

"One of the most successful golf tournaments ever witnessed in California was held on the Coronado golf links. The six professionals who entered were Horace Rawlins and Willie Anderson instructors at Oakland, Alex Smith (Hotel de Coronado). David Stephenson (San Francisco), T.W Tefley (San Rafael) and Jim Melville (Del Monte). The winner was Willie Anderson 95 and 85, 180, Alex Smith 90 and 91, 181. Such scores indicate wonderfully fine golf for the kind of courses you get in the south. I presume that eventually they will grow Bermuda grass in the southern golf courses similar to the ones in Florida. Coconut mat tees would also be great improvement." (Note: Willie Anderson had emigrated from North Berwick, Scotland at age 17 and later won the U.S. Open four times and another major at the time--the Western Open, four times, as well.)

"Anderson's long driving was one of the features of the day. Once he drove clear past the ninth hole 250 yards from the tee and over 200 yards of carry. Two of his other drives to this hole were hole high. Rawlins made a phenomenal approach shot from the beach up over a 30-foot cliff on to the green. On coming to the last green Alex Smith was told he had two more shots to tie with Willie Anderson. His tee shot landed in a bunker and he took his mashie and laid his approach almost dead amid great applause from the gallery. His approach unfortunately rimmed the cup. The players were unanimous in their praise of the orderly gallery. The professionals travel to Los Angeles tomorrow for an exhibition match at the country club."

Also, this is a 1900 account of the facility by Thomas Arnold in his book *Golfing in the Far West*: The next point of the circuit is Coronado, which is 125 miles south of Los Angeles, and on

a long peninsula extending out between the Pacific Ocean and San Diego Bay. This is the spot made famous by the great investment of the Sugar King's son, John D. Spreckels, in the Hotel del Coronado, one of the most noted resorts of California. This is a "perfect wilderness" of hotel building, for it covers four and one-half acres of ground, plus the golf links. The hotel is four stories in height, and contains seven hundred rooms, besides offices, parlors, and reception. The Coronado is the largest hotel in the State and is almost a city within itself. Golfing at del Coronado is under the direction of the Coronado Country Club, an organization of residents of the peninsula, but which extends the courtesies of its greens to guests of the hotel on payment of very modest fees. The course is nine holes, extending in a circle, along the shores of the ocean and working its way toward San Diego Bay almost its entire distance; it is flat, and the soil is of such a sandy nature that it constitutes a continuous hazard from the first tee to the ninth green. This ninth green, is the only turf green of the course; there were nine turf putting greens for a short time, but eight of them 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 nil-for if the ball lands short of the green is impossible where there are sand-greens, it lies 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. But to return for a moment to Coronado. The golf club, with its pretty little club-house and goodly membership, is quite a feature of the place. General tournaments are held two or three times during the year (their season for playing being, as it is at all other California points, 365 days), with local tournaments each month and medal play and special contests every week. This keeps up a continual and never-flagging interest in the game. In the breathing spells there are excellent fishing, boating, tennis, bathing, hunting, and, in fact, all sorts of recreation to demand the attention of the sojourner.

That course lasted until 1906 when some of the prime land near the hotel was taken for building ocean homes including a second home on Coronado for Spreckels. In 1906 Spreckels had a new 9-hole golf course laid-out and built three polo fields with a two-story clubhouse on the grounds of what truly was the Coronado Country Club. The course now crossed the Spanish Bight along the bight's watery edge which was the north end that separated Coronado from North Island. And over to the San Diego Bay. It had good views of the small city of San Diego.

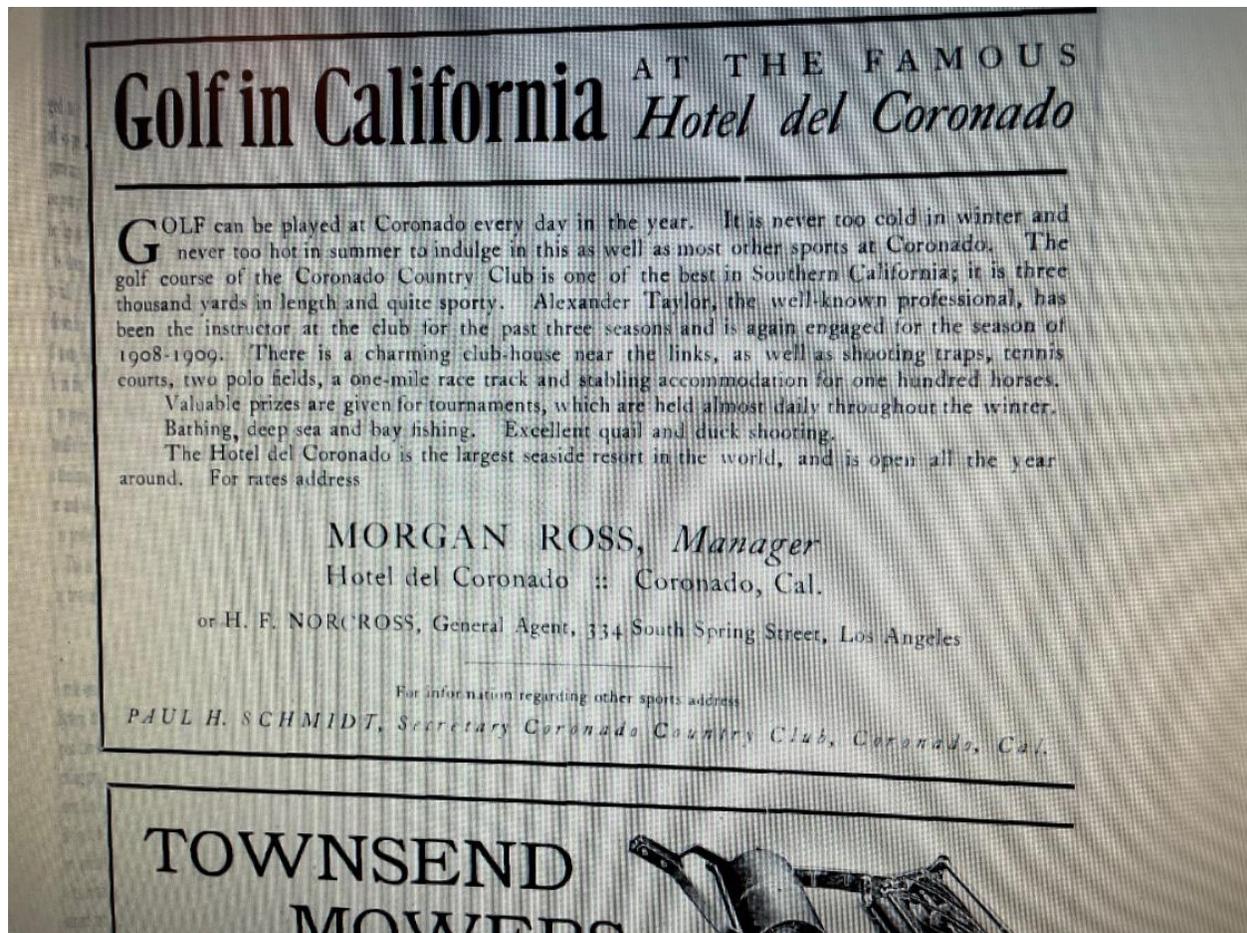


### **Coronado Country Club's clubhouse**

The club was recorded in the annual *American Annual Golf Guide* as:

“Coronado Country Club. Est. 1906 —A short distance from the Hotel del Coronado, with an excellent clubhouse. This is an organization separate and distinct from the hotel but permitting the guests of the hotel to play over its links under certain conditions. There is a nine-hole course, which is extremely picturesque, going along the ocean and bay almost its entire distance. The holes are not named. The distances are: 1, 337; 2, 205; 3, 349; 4, 411; 5, 203; 6, 322; 7, 354; 8, 288; 9, 261, a total of 2,730 yards. The links are open the whole year. President, Graham E. Babcock; vice-president, B. W. McKenzie; secretary and treasurer, N. F. Newlin; directors, T. Graham E. Babcock, I. F. Newlin, W. J. Bailey and J. C. Hizar; green-keeper, Alex Smith.” (Note: Graham Babcock's father Elisha after selling the hotel and island to Spreckels was made General Manager of the hotel and other Spreckels properties. Graham was the first club president. Graham lived only to age 24. Spreckels soon lost confidence in Elisha Babcock and replaced him with Morgan Ross).

The ad below appeared in the *American Golfer* in the fall of 1908. It read: “Golf can be played at Coronado every day in the year. It is never too cold in winter and never too hot in summer to indulge in this as well as most other sports in Coronado. The golf course of the Coronado Country Club is the best in Southern California; it is three thousand yards in length and quite sporty. Alexander Taylor, the well-known professional, has been the instructor at the club for the past three seasons and is again engaged for the season of 1908-1909. There is a charming clubhouse near the links, as well as shooting traps, tennis courts, two polo fields, a one-mile race track and stabling accommodations for one hundred horses. Valuable prizes are given for tournaments, which are held almost daily throughout the winter. Bathing, deep sea and bay fishing. Excellent quail and duck shooting. The Hotel del Coronado is the largest seaside resort in the world and is open all year round”.



Interestingly, topsoil for the golf course would come from a hog farm. Henry and Rudolph Riis in 1911 leased the spit of land four miles south of the Tent City for the purpose of raising hogs. Their 200-acre ranch known as "Hog Ranch" started south of Brickyard Cove (later known as Crown Cove). The hogs ate garbage from the Hotel del Coronado and the city of Coronado. The brothers also raised chickens and cows and horses. The ranch was closed when it was damaged by the rising bay waters following the 1916 flood. The topsoil was cleared off and taken for use at the Coronado Country Club golf course. The people of Coronado began dumping trash in the vacant land and it became an unofficial city dump. (Carlin, *Coronado: the Enchanted Island*, 1998, p. 15.)

*American Golfer* April, 1910: Miss Isabella Smith, one of the leading women golfers of the Chicago district, on March 9 won the golf handicap tourney prize of the Annandale Country Club of California with a gross score of 83. Col. W. J. Hogan of the Annandale Club offered the trophy, and the event was open to all players of the Southern California Women's Golf Association. Miss Smith has been one of the largest prize winners the past two years in Southern California. MISS ISABELLA SMITH, woman champion of Coronado Country Club, 1909 and 1910.

On Dec 1, 1911 Coronado Country Club was admitted as an Allied member club of the USGA.

By 1912 the course was expanded to 18 holes, but with Ocean Avenue extending to the north, there were just several holes on the Ocean side, then playing up to the Spanish Bight and then across along the Bight and other holes along Alameda, then to the San Diego Bay with holes along the Bay. It was now playing at 6,200 yards as recorded in the *American Annual Golf Guide 1920*,

“CORONADO COUNTRY CLUB (CORONADO). Estd. 1906. Holes—18. Length—6,200 yds. Sand Greens. Pres., W. Clayton; V. Pres., Read G. Dilworth; Sec. and Treas., Major Colin G. Ross; Chmn. Green Comn., W. A. Turquand. One mile from Hotel del Coronado, one mile from U. S. Grant Hotel, San Diego. Visitors' charges—Guests of Hotel de Coronado entitled to buy monthly tickets at \$10.00 or daily at \$1.00. Professional—Robert Simpson. Sunday play is permitted, caddies available. “



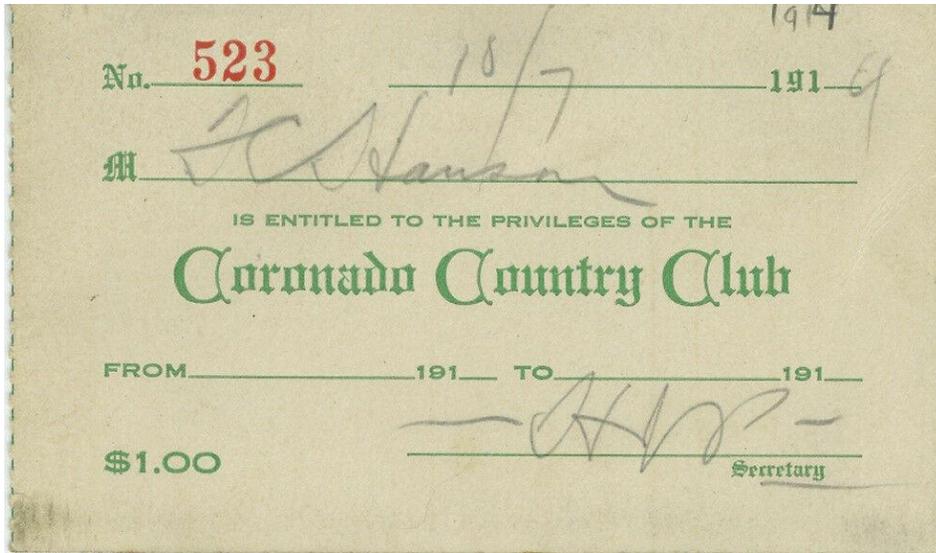
**Coronado Country Club looking southwest with golf course and polo fields. The white line is a causeway to North Island.**



**A view of the Coronado Country Club separated from North Island in the foreground by the Spanish Bight**



**Bay side holes and polo field lower left with North Island and Spanish Bight in-between**



**A 1914 \$1.00 pass for guest play (about \$36 in 2020)**

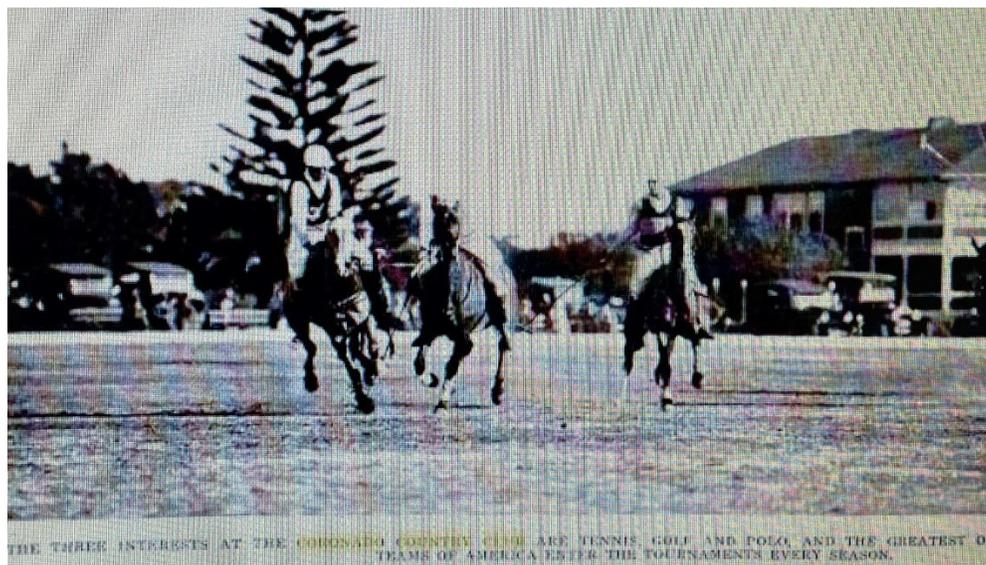


**Aerial photo of Coronado Country Club in 1922 after William Watson had grassed the course**

**The clubhouse and parking lot is in the middle of the photo with the beach of the Spanish Bight in the foreground**

**Irrigation piping was installed throughout the course.**

The best woman golfer at the club then became Mrs. Luther M. Kennett. By scoring her third successive win in the championship of the Coronado Country Club, Mrs. Luther M. Kennett, formerly Miss Isabella Smith, of Chicago, secured permanent possession of the trophy.



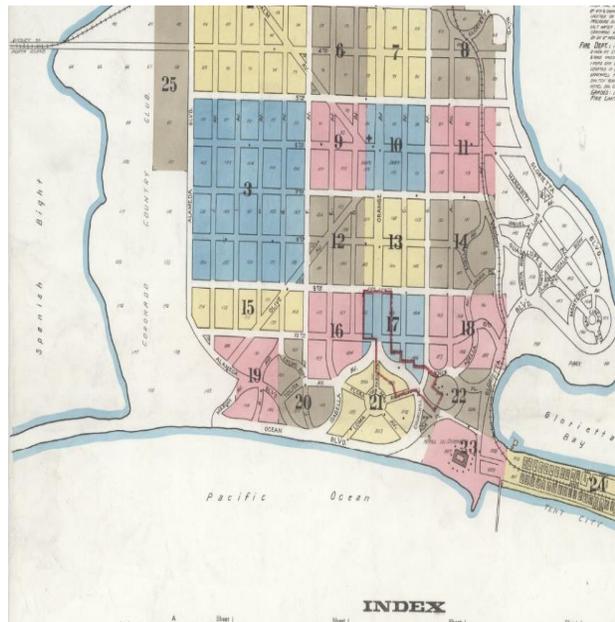
### **Polo matches on the grounds**

This 1913 news report stated: “Coronado Country Club now is a large ground with the clubhouse in the middle. occupying a sweeping stretch of extensive grounds for 18-holes, tennis courts and three polo grounds commands a splendid view of the Pacific and Point Loma. The current President is William Clayton who was an incorporator of San Diego & Arizona Railway Company with John D. Spreckels. The club is almost ten years old and in the 1913 season held its eighth annual polo tournament. Practice games begin 1<sup>st</sup> January and the tournament in March each year and are attended by famous poloists from all over the world. Teams from Canada, England, the Hawaiian Islands and the east compete. The paddock and training grounds accommodate 200 polo ponies, and the field is the best in the country and is the center of winter polo interest. The 18-hole golf course is another attraction of this finely equipped country club.”



**Spectators trying to watch a polo match**

The United States entered World War I in April 1917 and the U.S. Government immediately seized North Island from Spreckels. He was eventually paid \$6 million in 1921 (about \$78 million in 2020). The Spanish Bight was filled-in with harbor dredging in 1941.



**This 1929 Fireman's map shows Coronado Country Club to the left from top to bottom**

### **The Prince of Wales visit in 1920**

The HMS *Renown* arrived on Wednesday, April 7, 1920 at 10:00 a.m., dropping anchor in what is known as the Coronado Roads two miles south of Point Loma alongside several American warships which had been ordered south from San Francisco to welcome the British battle cruiser. There could be no doubt of the warm greeting to await the Prince of Wales. The last thirty-five miles or so of the approach witnessed an escort of American naval vessels, seaplanes circling above and closer in a squadron of land planes joined in forming an aerial circus. There followed a gun salute from the shore batteries of Fort Rosecrans on Point Loma. As the ships anchored the crews stood at attention while bands played in turn their national anthems. A contingent of civilian and military dignitaries were taken out by a United States sub-chaser to go aboard the *Renown* and pay their respects to the British complement. At 1:00 p.m. the Prince of Wales and staff were ferried over to the flagship *USS New Mexico* for a luncheon.

Afterwards the Prince of Wales, accompanied by members of his entourage, boated across the bay. At the municipal pier the party met with several hundred British-born residents and their families including a number of ex-war veterans. The presentations were made by Major Halford D. Gerrard, honorary British vice-consul in San Diego. Subsequently a motorcade was formed to proceed through the downtown district to afford the citizenry a chance to catch a glimpse of the prince. At the city stadium the prince addressed briefly a throng estimated at 25,000. His speech consisted of pleasantries. He thanked the American Navy for the impressive sea escort and the city of San Diego for its hospitality. He dwelt upon the delightful climate and the exuberant floral display. The final daytime call was at U.S. Grant Hotel where Mayor Wilde and civic leaders received the British guests.

The initial evening affair of April 7 was a dinner at the Hotel del Coronado for the prince which was preceded by an unexpected visit by the Prince of Wales and his staff to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Claus Spreckels son of John D. Spreckels on Ocean Boulevard. How this improvised "cocktail hour" came to pass was John D. Spreckels had penetrated protocol to persuade the prince to stop off at his home on the way to the Hotel del Coronado.

April 8, 1920, aboard the *Renown enroute to the Pacific, the Prince of Wales*" attended functions at the del Coronado and first met Wallis Spencer and her husband LCDR Spencer. To begin with, the prince availed himself of an open morning schedule and chose to get in a nine-hole round of golf from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., a foursome on the Coronado Country Club links. He dressed in English tweeds, golf oxfords, striped stockings, shirt and collar of gray with a fine blue stripe, and Panama hat, "a symphony in gray." He went back aboard and changed into a British Naval Officer uniform and hosted the wives of Senior U.S. Navy Officers for a tea on his ship. Wallis's husband was the senior officer at North Island in charge of flight training and this granted her an invitation to the tea that he hosted in the afternoon onboard *Renown*. That evening the Spencer's then attended functions at the del Coronado where the Prince was guest of honor. Some years later the Spencer's divorced and she became Mrs. Wallis Simpson before another divorce and then came her famous marriage to the former Prince of Wales who became King Edward and abdicated His throne for her.



**Doreen Kavanagh was California Women's Golf Champion 1921, 1922, 1923 and 1924 as a member of Coronado Country Club**

In the first year of Prohibition in America, the October 1920 issue of *El Patio* gave an in-detail report of the year:

### **GREAT GOLF SEASON FOR CORONADO COUNTRY CLUB**

“The golf committee of the Coronado Country Club this week completed the winter program. The first nine holes which have not been played on for some months to give the grass a chance, will be thrown open on January first when the first tournament will begin. From then until the end of Coronado's annual gay season there will be plenty of events to give every golf lover, resident or visitor, all the sport the most ardent fan could wish for. The program is the best ever arranged by the club and the course vs will be in better condition than it ever has been. Money and attention have been lavished on it this year and the work of making it just as good as nature intended would be possible is only begun. Grassing the bunkers will be one of the improvements for next season and it also is expected that the south fence, which lessens the attractiveness of the course from a scenic standpoint and acts as a poor bunker where a good bunker might be, will be removed. There is a feeling among the resident members of the club that Bob Simpson is playing better golf than he ever did and they want to see him measure his skill this winter with any

outside professional who feels that he would like to have a try for the Simpson scalp. A purse that will likely attract a flock of professionals will be hung up and behind it will be a lot of Coronado money which will say that Bob will cast it off. 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, Eighteen-hole, medal play, sixteen to qualify. Qualifying round eighteen holes, to be played Saturday morning, January 1st. First round to be played in the afternoon. Second round to be played Sunday Morning, January 2nd. 1 bird round to be played in the afternoon. Finals to be played January 3rd. Cup presented by Hotel del Coronado to the winner of event, medal to holder of best score in qualifying round, cups to winners of each flight. Entrance Fee \$1.00. Handicap Best Ball Foursome January 15th. Match play against Par. Cups to winners. Entrance Fee \$2.00 per team. One Day Tournament January 22nd. Under Handicap. There will be as many flights as there are groups of eights. Nine holes to qualify, each round to be nine holes. Prizes to winners of each eight. Entrance Fee \$1.00 Match Play Against Par February 5th. Under Handicap. Cup to winner of event. Entrance Fee \$1.00. Hotel del Coronado Handicap February 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th. For trophy presented by Hotel del Coronado. Qualifying round eighteen holes, sixteen to qualify. Each round to be eighteen holes, played in the morning. Cup to winner of tournament, silver medal to holder of best score in qualifying round."



**The Coronado Country Club cups were awarded**

Cups to runner-up and to winners of each flight. Entrance Fee Coronado Amateur Championship February 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th. For trophy presented by Coronado Country Club. Qualifying round thirty-six holes, sixteen to qualify, to be played February 21st. First and second rounds of eighteen holes to be played in the mornings of February 22nd and 23rd. Semi-finals to be, thirty-six holes to be played February 24th. Final round of thirty-six, to be played February 26th. All flights, except Championship Flight, to be played under handicap. Replica of trophy to winner, gold medal for holder of best score in qualifying round, cups to winners of each flight. Entrance Fee \$2.00. Amateur —Professional February 26th. Thirty-six holes. Cup to amateur and cash prize to professional. Professional Event February 27th.

Thirty-six holes. Cash prizes to be divided first, second and third. Entrance Fee \$1.00. Golf Ball Sweepstakes There will be golf ball sweepstakes every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday during the season. Entries must be made with Golf Professional, Mr. Robert Simpson, at the Club,

**GOLF EVENTS FOR WOMEN** Coronado Amateur Championship February 10th, 11th, 17th and 18th. Details of play of the Championship will be arranged by the Ladies' Golf Committee, according to the entries received. Entry must be made with Golf Professional before 3 p.m. of the day preceding qualifying round. Other Events Ladies' Handicap Competition. Mixed Foursome. Suitable prizes will be given. Golf Committee. Mrs. Luther Kennett, Champion; Mrs. C Hull, Mrs. Oscar de Bretteville. **OUT-OF-BOUNDS RULE** From every golf course in America moans are going up over the new USGA out-of-bounds rule which impairs the loss of a stroke as well as loss of distance as the penalty for going beyond limits set by the club committee. The chief mental pleasure that a player derives from the game is the low score that he can bring to the club house. Any rule that tends to make his score higher will never make a hit with him.

The American Golfer makes a suggestion, which when applied to the Coronado Country club course, in El Patio's opinion, would remove a hardship the new rule puts on those who play the course. It is that when a ball is out of bounds but still on the club property the penalty should be loss of distance only. Alameda Avenue and the street that parallels the thirteenth hole would, of course, have to be out of bounds with the most indulgent green committee, but El Patio can see no reason why the penalty is so severe at the fifteenth and sixteenth holes where the wildest, slice will not send the ball off the club property. The loss of distance at those two holes would seem to El Patio to be sufficient penalty. This is what the American Golfer has to say about it: "Close study of the effect produced by the out-of-bounds rule where both stroke and distance are lost under the new penalty has brought out two main points. "The first is that golf courses, as far as possible, should have no out-of-bounds where the ball doesn't actually leave the boundary of the property. Where this happens, the penalty is fully deserved. "There are courses, however, where out-of-bounds within the domain of the course predominate. In cases of this sort the penalty is a trifle severe and a local rule should be used to meet the situation, lowering the penalty to the loss of distance only. Too many local rules are confusing, so each club, as far as possible, should see that an out-of-bounds stake, not off the course, is put up only as a last resort."

**A WONDERFUL SCORE** Playing twice around the second nine holes at the Coronado Country club a few days ago Bob Simpson turned in a score of 66 for the 18 holes, thus breaking his own record of 67 made during the summer of 1919. Bob is the only man who has ever got under 70 for eighteen holes on the Coronado course and some of the best professionals in the country have

had a try at it. The popular professional's 66 was absolutely perfect golf. It is doubtful if any other golfer in the world could equal it until he had played over the course a great many times. On the first round Bob got two birdies and an eagle and on the second, four birdies. He was necessarily playing at the top of his form and those who watched him said it was a magnificent exhibition of golf. The score card showed the following: Out 5 4\* 4 2\*\* 4 8 4 3\* 4—33 In., 4\* 5 4 3\* 3\* 3 4 3\* 4—33 \* Birdie. \*\* Eagle. Par. 74.

ON THE COMMITTEE W. E. Harper has been elected to a place on the golf committee of the Coronado Country Club. If the meetings of the committee are held at night Mr. Harper may be able to find time to attend. He plays every morning and afternoon but has not found a way to play at night. When he does, he will have to resign from the committee.

Coronado Country Club hired William Watson in 1921 to make improvements to the course, add some bunkering and to grass the course with an irrigation system. Watson was responsible for designing more than 100 golf courses in the west and mid-west. His most recent work was the completion of the nearby San Diego Country Club”.



**“Looking across the eleventh green to the Naval Air Station. In the water many planes ride at anchor and there is never a time when a golf player cannot look up and see anywhere from one to a dozen planes in the air above him. Dirigibles and balloons also help to make the whole Coronado course one of the most fascinating in America”.**

Looking from the tenth tee. No course in America has a more attractive vista than this as there are always a number of war ships on the blue, sun-lit waters of San Diego Bay.

A glorious view for late afternoon golfers. In the distance Point Loma, behind which the winter sun, which brings a summer climate to the links all winter, sinks behind and paints the sky a hundred colors. This view is toward the Pacific Ocean; other views in this El Patio are toward the bay. The Coronado course is the only one in the country so situated as regards two bodies of salt water”.

*San Diego Union* 2 January 1921 **Coronado Country Club’s 18-Hole Course Opened with Inaugural Golf Tournament**

“THE golf tournament and the formal opening of the improved 18-hole golf course by William Watson at the Coronado Country club yesterday are two features which marked the beginning of what is expected to be the most interesting season of golf ever enjoyed at the renovated club. Players yesterday were profuse, after the day's play. In congratulating MW Colin O. Ross, secretary, and Robert Simpson, the club's professional, on the improvements made in the course. Some of Coronado's most consistent golfers, however, during the play quietly “ensued" Simpson when their iron shots occasionally landed in one of the cunningly devised traps. The fairway grassed now with new grassed greens and newly trapped and bunkered by architect William Watson, the course is slowed up accordingly and scores suffered by comparison with those made over the old, smooth sand course in previous tournaments. L. B. Hakes, jr., scoring 78 was winner of a medal for lowest score in qualifying round of Coronado’s inaugural tournament.

1923 book California Southland – A feature of Coronado Country Club which members are inordinately proud is Polo. Of course, there is golf, and a very good 18-hole course borders the shore. The first nine holes are along the Pacific Ocean and the Old Spanish Bight, that narrow inlet between Coronado and North Island where Naval Aviation is trained. The last nine holes include along San Diego Bay. Across the Bay the city sparkles and gleams in the sun, rimmed by the Cuyamaca and Mexican mountains, changeless since earth’s making but changing to the mood of sun and cloud. The tennis courts are the best and contestants from all parts of the state are drawn to two annual tournaments. Socially the club offers a center for the Island, the three hundred members include officers from the military bases. The entertaining at Coronado Country Club is never by program or routine but the members arrange frequent dances, formal and informal.

The polo is one of the best in America. There are three fields, thus allowing an alternate field for each day’s play and the third is a practice field. The growth in fifteen years has resulted in a turf almost two feet thick, so strong and interwoven with Bermuda grass that it is impossible for the horses to tear it up. It is carefully watered in the summer and brought to perfection by the winter rains. The stabling is special with 200 barn stalls. Some hold two ponies and each is fully equipped for grooms and tack. The teams competing in 1923 will be Denver, Midwick, San Mateo, Riverside, New York and an Army team”.

The eventual downfall of Coronado Club could be foreseen beginning the next year. John D. Spreckels’s brother Adolf and business partner died in 1924 and John’s wife Lillian died the same year. John’s health immediately took a turn for the worse with severe back pain that forced him to stay in bed in his Glorietta Bay mansion. He died on June 7, 1926 from respiratory paralysis associated with his spinal condition. As with his directive, he was cremated, and his

ashes were put next to those of his family's ashes in San Francisco. Mayor Bacon of San Diego organized a massive memorial service in San Diego. All transportation was shut down during the service as were all public buildings. White flags were flown at half-mast throughout the city. John's favorite songs were played on the outdoor Spreckels pipe organ at Balboa Park.

Immediately, the brother's securities company in San Francisco started selling-off their empire in accordance with John's will. The largest companies and buildings were sold first. The land for the Coronado Country Club was sold last according to the directive of his will.

Anderson Borthwick was a leading banker in San Diego and saved his club, San Diego Country Club in the down economy years. In his oral history he said this about Spreckels: "He ran the polo matches; and he operated the golf course. The city had the use of that golf course, and he offered to give it to them, to the City of Coronado, two or three times, and they wouldn't take it because he was paying the taxes on it. If the city owned it there would be no tax revenue. He was a good-hearted fellow in his own way. But he was a gruff fellow to approach because he was very short in speech, he wouldn't give you too many words. When you went into his office, it was, "Yes" and "No" and "Goodbye" and that was it. But when you analyze what was done in the community; the transit system and all those hotels; the Spreckels and the Union buildings, the First National Bank and other real estate which he owned around here, I have a great admiration for that fellow. A wonderful guy. when the brothers died, the heirs, rather than manage the businesses which Mr. Belcher was doing at that time as president of the company, wanted distribution so they sold off all those assets."

In 1929, three years after John's death, the Estate let-on their intent to sell the grounds of Coronado Country Club, but also to find another location for a golf course and they were focused on the Silver Strand down from the hotel. The heirs held-onto the Hotel del Coronado until 1948. The filing stated:

"Strand proper Including the state commission an option to purchase, the Spreckels interests, owners of the property, reserve approximately 200 acres of high sand dunes near the southerly end of the strand. This tract lies east of the paved highway and fronts on San Diego bay. It is the intention of the owners to later develop this tract into a golf course for patrons of the Hotel del Coronado after the grounds of the Coronado Country Club, now in use, have been subdivided into building sites. The state commission is said to have agreed to this reservation by the Spreckels interests. At the meeting of the directors of the State-County Parks and Beaches Association in San Diego yesterday a resolution accepting the proposition was adopted by unanimous vote, and a committee appointed to co-operate with the state commission. This committee is composed of William T. Hart, president; Gen. Joseph H. Pendleton, John W. Snyder, George S. Parker and John H. Andrews, vice presidents; George W. Marston, regional chairman, and Tam Deering, executive secretary."

In June, 1940, the Coronado Country Club reported to the *Coronado Eagle* newspaper the following news: "According to unconfirmed rumors today plans are drawn up for the construction of a new and completely equipped club house at the Coronado Country club. ' The

new building is believed to be scheduled for construction within the next few weeks, after the awarding of a contract by the Spreckels companies, owners of the golf course. The present structure will be torn down, it is said, and the new building erected on the site. The specifications for the new club will include modern facilities for members and guests at the golf club with lockers, showers and lounge. Exterior of the building probably will be of stucco and shingle. Estimated cost of the new club building was not learned, but requests for bids are said to have been issued to contractors whose quotations will be considered within the next few days.”

However, the Spreckels Estate had no intention of building a new clubhouse. Four years later, Coronado Country Club became a nine-hole course:

*Coronado Eagle*, March 1944: “Golfing at the Coronado Country club has been cut in half—literally—for the duration. The Eleventh Naval District announced today that construction of temporary housing facilities for Naval Air Station personnel will begin this week on the northern half of the links. Hereafter, golfers will be confined to the nine holes south of Fourth avenue, the part nearest Hotel del Coronado. Costing \$3,500,000 and covering 82 acres, the project will consist of enlisted barracks, bachelor officers’ quarters, mess hall, dispensary, ship’s service and administration building. Approximately 5000 enlisted personnel and 600 officers are expected to be quartered in the new structures. In addition to the new construction north of Fourth avenue, an area extending 1500 lineal feet south of the thoroughfare, exclusive of the club house, also will be occupied. The project is expected to be completed in four to six months. Hodges and Cam, Los Angeles contracting firm, has been awarded the contract for the job.”

By the end of World War II, M. Bert Fisher, Spreckels Securities company stated an intention to subdivide the remaining Coronado Country Club. He stated that buildings south of Fourth St. and west of Alameda have all been sold and are to be moved immediately. Improvements on the golf course property, will be subdivided under the name Country Club Estates.

In August, 1947 according to the *Coronado Eagle* newspaper: “golfers, Alameda-Blvd. residents and a large cross-section of citizenry crowded the Coronado high school auditorium for the start of a race against time in the raising of \$25,000 for an option on the golf course. They read copies of an entirely tentative plan for retaining the course and developing it as a real community attraction. After contacting R. S. Regal, Spreckels Companies representative at San Francisco, Louis Millen announced he had “definite knowledge” that the Spreckels interests had made no commitment. Millen, chairman of the meeting, made this statement in connection with last week’s disclosure by Elmer Perry, Los Angeles, who told the Planning Commission he held an option and wished to co-operate with the city in developing the course for residential purposes. Millen said he’d been informed that Coronadans could show their good faith by putting up a substantial sum, and \$25,000 would make possible a six-month option. Two hundred fifty subscriptions of \$100 each were sought immediately—within the next two days or so. The earliest came while the meeting still was in session. A colored diagram showed the proposed layout for a 9-hole golf course; a golf club and a private beach-tennis-golf club near the ocean;

and, at the northern end, a portion for home-sites. But regardless of the outcome of the current movement to save the golf course, Coronado still needs to purchase the Strand “hog ranch” for dumping purposes, several authorities said—and they were in favor of acquiring the golf course too. The asking price of all the land west of Alameda, belonging to Spreckels, and at which a concern reportedly is considering its purchase, is about \$400,000. Sale of the subdivision area proposed in the local plan, with other considerations, should bring an estimated net of \$250,000, after allowing for expenses of improving the area, the Aug. 4 meeting learned. A good 9-hole course is better than a poor 18-hole course, said Roy Bickford, who explained water upkeep is a big maintenance item in this part of the country. The proposed country club would overlook the ocean on one side, the golf course on the other. Dues, the bar and facilities, and rental of the cabanas and cottages would produce financial returns, the report stated. Home-sites would be available along part of Alameda and in a semi-circle at the north end of the course. These desirable sites could sell at a substantial figure. Other lots would be for sale in the area north of 4th-St. Deed restrictions would protect present Alameda property owners, and a landscaped park along and near the boulevard also was planned. First step in the suggested organization would be a syndicate to handle early details and operate a private “Coronado Country Club.” It would offer Founders Memberships at \$1,000 each and individual subscriptions of \$100. Its authority would terminate upon formation of a non-profit California corporation with a suggested capitalization of \$500,000 and with 3500 shares of \$100 par value stock as the suggested authorized stock. The corporation, Millen said, would offer the property to the city at the lowest possible figure. C. T. Anderson, former mayor and Chamber of Commerce president, brought up the possibility of the golf course not panning out. “What assurance will we have that your organization won’t subdivide it?” None, if the city doesn’t want it, Millen replied. But he stressed the saving of the golf course is the main objective; if that fails, the organization would have no choice but to liquidate in the form of a subdivision. Anderson was not necessarily opposing the plan, and the Chamber of Commerce office had assisted in notifying citizens about the meeting. This is the cheapest golf course, but it’s highly improbable the people would vote bonds for it, said Benson Scott, Planning Commission chairman. Some say it’s a luxury Coronado can’t afford. Scott briefly reviewed the availability of the hog ranch, golf course and 1<sup>st</sup> St. area for sale by Spreckels. He believed the hog farm is “No. 1,” because it could provide a city dump as well as a golf course and is one of the best pieces of ground in the Bay area. It would be a far better golf course than the present one, but more expensive, Scott continued. A million-dollar bond issue would enable the city to collect handsome dividends, from the Spreckels land, Scott believed. The hog ranch is the only project of the three that would carry its own way, said Mayor Abel. It’s available for \$750 an acre, compared to \$2600 an acre for the Alameda land. Alan Laing complained he’d come to hear a discussion about private citizens acquiring the golf course, but instead, “We’re having a City Council and City Planning Commission meeting, conducted in the usual manner, and getting nowhere.” The crowd applauded, and some cheers were heard. “After looking at this tough I believe we’ve got a golf course, Laing said. Far better is the residential aspect it now has, warned Glenn Wade, city planning director, first financially he has no thoughts in the matter. There has not been enough consideration of municipal insurance,” said Wade. Acquisition of this golf course is a good investment in municipal insurance . . . Buy it while you can still buy it. Later on you can’t buy it.” He said, conceding that the committee recognizes this as an ambitious program, Millen said that, nevertheless one man offered to furnish \$50, 000 if a sum could be raised to match it. As. a citizen, Mayor Abel favored the basic golf course idea, but as a councilman, was concerned over the future of more than 100 acres

which the city owns, in the area between the course and North Island. Millen recalled the Planning Commission believed this was an ideal location for a golf course, but cost of its resurfacing would be prohibitive. Ken MacArthur reported the old 18-hole course's largest water bill, June the past six years had been only \$3300, in 1942. and last year's entire bill \$1,000, but the 9-hole course needed twice as much water as it got in 1946. Even if the golf course is acquired, Coronado still needs the hog ranch as a municipal investment, said Anderson. Acquiring the hog farm is imperative, agreed J. Harold Peterson, Planning Commission member - otherwise we'll be dumping rubbish in the streets and paying the Spreckels Company to haul it to the ferry. But Peterson also said the city needs the golf course, and was ready to sign for his contribution—a movement started by Capt. Ajax J. Gray, USN, ret. Subscribing \$100, Gray said he'd resided here 27 years, and such meetings invariably had resulted in nothing being accomplished. The city is stymied regarding a bond issue figure it could tell the people, because the Spreckels representative never has given a figure, in writing, Abel said. When Millen disclosed a golf course option was available for \$25,000, the mayor indignantly asked why the company hadn't accepted a \$50,000 option on the 1<sup>st</sup> St. property. Serving on the golf course committee are Bickford, Mrs. Louis A. A. Dean, Commo. A. H. Gray, USN ret Robert-Thorne, Capt. I. I. Yates, USN ret., and Millen, all of whom were present, and Walter Fitch, absent.”

In a 1949 edition of the *Coronado Eagle*, it was reported: “Country Club Estates, will be commenced as soon as the land is cleared, Spreckels Securities representative said. Lots will be handled under the same procedure as was followed in the Bayview Estates subdivision, with local real estate brokers handling all sales. The Bayview Estate lots were sold within two days after their sale was authorized by the Real Estate Commission, Fisher reported. The 26 lots were put on advance sale about a week before the commission's report was filed. A thirty-day continuance was allowed the count on the partners' petition to subdivide their Silver Strand ocean front property across the highway from the City's strand acreage. The owners had requested permission to divide the 7500-foot frontage into lots for single-family dwellings, with 500 feet at each end of the strip to be zoned for commercial use. The State Park Commission is seeking to buy the land for a park, however, and has asked the County for financial aid for the purchase. It was reported that the commission has offered to supply \$50,000 from state funds if the county will furnish \$65,000 for a total purchase price of \$115,000 —although the figures were not verified by any of the principals. The city of Coronado was offered the entire tract of land on both sides of the highway for \$200,000, but the bond issue lost in last April's municipal election. Purchase of the land on the Bay side was subsequently approved at a special election in September for \$175,000.”

The owner of the San Diego newspapers (and other newspapers) bought Spreckels Glorietta Bay home as his own until his own death. This is a description of the property in his own newspapers in 1949:

“Sale of the Copley Block, to be subdivided into apartment house sites, was reported this week. Although the names of the purchasers of the property have not been announced, it was learned

yesterday that the property will be held in trust for the new owners by the trust department of the Security Trust & Savings Bank in San Diego. Coronado and San Diego interests are represented in the purchase, it was stated. Louis Millen, vice president of the Strand Realty Company, is handling the transaction. The Copley mansion and extensive grounds are at the head of Glorietta Blvd. across Orange Ave. from the Hotel del Coronado, commanding a view of Glorietta Bay. The large home, complete with 20 rooms, 10 baths, a pipe organ and an elevator, was built by John D. Spreckels, "sugar king of Hawaii," who first entered San Diego harbor to reprovision his yacht, the Lurlin. Spreckels fell in love with Coronado and purchased an interest in the Coronado Beach company. He and his brother Adolph later bought out the company, whose holdings included the Hotel del Coronado, Coronado Country Club, the former Tent City, streetcar and ferry systems and large land holdings in the city. After the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906, Spreckels built the palatial home here, and lived in it for several years. It is believed that the same contractor who built the residence also constructed the original Public Library building, which was presented to the city by Spreckels. The late Col. Ira C. Copley, owner of the San Diego Union, Tribune-Sun and other newspapers throughout the country, purchased the property in 1936, and made it his home until his death. It has been unoccupied for several years. The famous Marsh's Japanese tea gardens were situated on the northerly one-third of the block for many years and bring back pleasant memories to old-time Coronadans who have spent enjoyable hours strolling over the grounds or sipping tea and eating rice cakes. Although the structures were demolished years ago, the rolling grounds of the tea garden may still be seen near the corner of Adella and Ynez Place. The garden entrance was on the Adella avenue side of the block."

Nov 1949: A scheduled meeting of prospective members of the Coronado Athletic Association has been postponed until Friday, Nov. 18, because of the Armistice Day holiday, it was announced yesterday by Adm. Jonas Ingram, chairman. Members will meet for luncheon at the Colony Cafe. "By next week, we hope to have our incorporation completed and be able to complete planning for a membership drive, the chairman stated. Adm. Ingram added that the organization is investigating the possibility of leasing or buying the land on which the Coronado Country Club building is located. The building has been donated to the association for use as a clubhouse, but costs of moving and subsequent remodeling may be prohibitive."

According to the *Coronado Eagle* in Feb 1950: "Members of the Coronado Athletic Club voted Friday to abandon plans for moving the Coronado Country Club building to a site on the Silver Strand, for use as a clubhouse. Individual members of the organization expressed a desire to aid the Coronado Municipal Golf Club in its current project of constructing a golf course on Rancho Carrillo, rather than undertake a fund drive for a building at the same time. A barbecue and carnival, originally scheduled Feb. 18, has been postponed until a later date when more favorable weather can be expected, it was stated by carnival chairman Laurence Priddy. The carnival had been planned as a benefit for the club's building fund."

Also, reported by the *Eagle* shortly after this report that the subdivision of the golf course into 113 lots was about to begin:

"Improvement work on the Coronado Country Club subdivision will probably begin during January, it was stated yesterday by Victor Selton, representative of property owners Robert

Nordblom, M. Bert Fisher and Herman Miller from the Spreckels Estate. The tract includes 113 building sites, to be known as the "Country Club Estates.", Final bids are being requested for improvement projects, Selton reported. Under the California law, the owners will be required to re-file a tentative subdivision map, since more than a year has elapsed since the original was approved—but it is expected that the procedure will be routine, since the map is the same as the one previously sanctioned, it was stated. Improvement costs on the property will probably approach \$100,000. Selton remarked. Present tenants of the land, including the golf course leaseholders and the riding stables, have been notified that their occupancy is on a day-to-day basis."

Also in 1950: "The Coronado Country Club and riding stables were being dismantled this week as partners M. Bert Fisher and Herman Miller representing the Spreckels Securities company completed plans for the sale of lots in the Country Club estates, west of Alameda Blvd. between Eighth and Fourth Streets. The 113 lots in the subdivision, which runs to a depth of one and one-half blocks west of Alameda, will probably go on sale within three weeks, the partners stated, following necessary grading work and the installation of sewers. The golf shop wing of the clubhouse is being moved to continue to serve as an office for the golf course. Three greens which were located within the boundaries of the subdivision have been relocated. and a nine-hole course will continue to operate. New Street Included An extension of Eighth St. will connect with Country Club Lane, which is to parallel Alameda Blvd. one block west. A double row of lots will front on the lane, with the others fronting Alameda. The owners stated yesterday that they have filed a petition with the city planning commission requesting a zone variance permitting them to erect a large sign and a tract office on the subdivision for a period of six months, for the purpose of selling lots."

By 1951 the *Eagle* reported: "The Coronado Country Club Estates handling the last big subdivision of this city, reports it is about to enter the second phase of its selling campaign. The company warns that anyone wishing to make a choice of lots would have to be making their selection soon, because they are beginning to get scarce. The company is now ready to just sell the lots to anyone wishing to invest in the land and do their own building either now or at a later date. The company points out it does not make the building of a house a requirement for a right to purchase a lot. "In fact, we would like to encourage considerable individual planning and building, in order to give variety to the plot," Victor Selten, manager, said. The houses which have been built on the tract to date have averaged about \$25,000 each, according to Selten."

June 1952 the *Eagle* reported that the City Planning Commission set requirements for the new subdivision: "Coronado Country Club Estates Annex will be required to comply with all of the important regulations governing any of Coronado's other residential areas, if recommendations drafted Tuesday night by the City Planning Commission are adopted. The commission, at its session, examined carefully the objections heretofore raised by many local property owners, and the instructions by the city council to study the needs for residential areas of this type. In general, recommendations, which will go to the council, called for: 40-foot streets north and south; 48-foot streets east and west at Sixth and Eighth streets; 5-foot sidewalks with 4-foot parkways between the sidewalks and front property lines; 4-foot easements at the rear of lots for utilities, and minimum square footage per lot of 7500 feet. Fire hydrants are to be required at distances not over 750 feet apart. The recommendation of the city engineer that adequate sanitary sewage

systems be installed, with a pumping station, was adopted. A committee was appointed to check the feasibility of an outlet at the south end of the subdivision at Tenth street. The recommendations of the planning commission are to be presented to the city council for consideration and action, according to Mark Beauchamp, Jr., chairman, who presided at the Tuesday night meeting.”

Finally, the Coronado Country Club was officially closed in September 1952 announced by the *Eagle* in this short bulletin: “After more than 52 years of operation, the Coronado Country Club will be forced to cease operations after Sunday. This will mean the closing of the golf course and all other activities of the organization. unless provisions for future operations in another locality can be made.”

This is a current description of Country Club Estates. “Referred to by locals as “Country Club”, is located in northwest Coronado, on the perimeter of the Village and adjacent to Naval Air Station North Island. This completely residential neighborhood is bordered by Sunset View Park, McCain Blvd, Alameda Blvd and South O Street. Country Club Estates gets its name from the fact that the neighborhood was once the site of the historic Coronado Country Club and polo grounds. Built in the 1950’s and 1960’s by a single developer Bill Lyons, the original, mostly single-level homes have long been renovated, but the neighborhood’s serene, tree-lined streets and air of seclusion and privacy still remain”. (Note: in 2020 the prices for a home in this neighborhood vary between \$2 Million to \$6 Million).

A fitting end to this story is to report that the current municipal golf course opened on December 19, 1957. The *Eagle* reported: “A ribbon cutting ceremony on the first tee of the new Coronado Golf Course occurred at noon. Coronado had been without an 18-hole golf course since WWII when the Coronado Country Club was shortened to 9-holes and closed completely in 1952. By the mid-50’s the land had been developed into residential homes called Country Club Estates. The new Coronado Municipal golf course opened on the southeast end of Coronado with holes on San Diego Bay and Glorietta Bay. Coronado receives a nominal lease agreement from the San Diego Port Authority”. Today it remains a popular course which is fairly priced.