

The Alberta Ladies

Strong-Minded and Independent



Ladies took up golf as a popular sport in the 1950's. The Calgary Municipal Course (Shaganappi), 1954. *Glenbow Archives NA-5600-7564.*



n forming the Alberta Ladies Golf Union in 1912, Alberta's lady golfers proved to be stalwart representatives of the province's traditions of independence and excellence.

For more than a quarter century they resisted the sweet-talk of the Canadian Ladies Golf Union (CLGU and later the CLGA) to become a provincial branch of the national organization.

In 1928 they gave up their independence - the last provincial body to do so - much to the delight of the CLGU who proclaimed in the *Canadian Golfer Magazine* that organized ladies now formed a "chain across the Dominion."

The continuing success of the Alberta Ladies within the CLGU through the following decades can be seen in the photographic records scattered throughout Alberta clubs of the crowds of golfers gathered picturesquely on lawns and tees wearing long dresses, summer hats and golf shoes.

It was likely in the 1950's that the Alberta Ladies flair for organizing popular, well-attended events began to attract a new generation of female golfers to the game, accompanied by camaraderie-inducing ideas such as an illustrated yearbook, tournaments for

golfers of all handicaps, and a determination that golf could be enjoyed by ladies of all ages and abilities.

This determination to run an organization that appealed to newcomers as much as it appealed to the low handicap tournament stars, would prove to be the underlying strength of the Alberta Ladies.

By the 1970's, it was obvious to all that the Alberta Ladies were on the right track.

A Belief in Golf for Everyone

For example, in 1967 the Ladies started the Marg Ward Tournament for high handicap golfers, named after a golfer who had a belief that golf was for everyone.

Absolutely Fun

Thelma Coutts, the high energy president of the Alberta Ladies in the mid-1980's, recalls the speed with which the tournament brought new ladies into the sport, all of whom were looking for a way to meet other golfers and participate.

"It was absolutely fun for everybody," said Thelma.

Almost immediately there were waiting lists to play in the tournament, she says, and at one event an overly enthusiastic vice-president took 169 entries when 120 was considered the maximum.

Thelma, also a highly-regarded rules official, acknowledges that with the number of beginners entering "Sometimes you just had to 'blink.' If you called everybody you'd have nobody left in the tournament. I told my 'rules' to be kind," laughed Thelma.

The Alberta Ladies organized every tournament at every level with the same emphasis that the golfers, regardless of their results, have a good time. "We had reasonable entry fees, there was a dinner, prizes in as many flights as we could afford, door prizes, and flowers everywhere," said Coutts.

The success of the Ladies' tournaments could be attributed to two strategic plans made by the organization.

First, the organization was run like a machine that would have put many oil companies to shame. The Ladies left nothing to chance, and nothing to the last minute.

The Board set the policies and made the decisions. From there the responsibilities were precisely delegated, filtering their way through to the organization's seven zones responsibilities where the smallest details of the golf's season were given full attention.



Louise Waring, 1953 Calgary Junior golf champion.
Glenbow Archives A-5600-6708.

Second, and this was possibly the real genius of their success, the ladies of the host clubs were asked, and they always accepted, to ensure the golfers felt welcome.

And, in what almost became a competitive exchange between host clubs, the results were always spectacular: from fashion shows to dinners and entertainment.

In what would become a tradition, the evening's entertainment progressed from piano recitals to skits and, as Thelma Coutts recalls, these were performances often hilarious and occasionally risqué.

No matter what their score was on the course, every lady golfer had a good time, made new friends and planned to return the next year.

With this sense of dedication and enthusiasm pervasive throughout the organization, it is no wonder the events attracted such a strong following from the province's lady golfers.



Alberta Ladies Golf Tournament 1950 at the Calgary Golf and Country Club.

The AGA and ALGA Merge 2000

Undoubtedly the merger of the Alberta Ladies Golf Association into the Alberta Golf Association was a sad day for many lady golfers, particularly those who felt their efforts to promote golf had proven successful and should continue within an independent organization.

However, it should be noted that the Alberta Ladies survived the 1929 merger with the ever-dominant CLGU and went on to produce a stunningly successful provincial program.

Perhaps there is good reason to believe the future of the Alberta Ladies is still waiting to be told.

POINT OF INTEREST

The Confederation Park Ladies Group

Typical of the emerging popularity throughout Alberta's communities, the Confederation Park Ladies Group formed in 1974 to play on the municipal, nine-hole course built for Canada's centennial.

Today's 80 members who obviously enjoy their golf play Tuesdays on a course known for its "sloping greens." The members say the greens are sneakily tricky, and the course has decades-old trees to bounce your ball off.

For non-golfers, the Ladies point out, the course is open for cross country skiing in the winter and is host for the annual Lions Christmas Festival of Lights.

"We participate annually in the City of Calgary Ladies Tournament with three other municipal golf courses for the coveted trophy."