

OUR GOLF COURSE, AS FIRST IMAGINED AND THEN CREATED

By Brent D. Rector

“The last four holes, especially the sixteenth, ought to be very difficult in order to provided good fighting ground for the finish of a hotly contested match.” -
WILLIAM B. LANGFORD, golf course designer and civil engineer, in his 1915 monograph of articles he wrote for the *Chicago Evening Post*

William Langford and Theodore Moreau established their partnership as golf course designers in 1918, during what is known as “the Golden Age of Golf Design,” a period of explosive growth in all aspects of the American golf landscape, both literally and figuratively. Many of the greatest golf course designers in history honed their land-sculpting skills during this time, including the two men who brought our “Quiet Fields” to life.

I have searched for Langford and Moreau’s design that turned into Blythefield Country Club’s golf course. A final plan hasn’t been found. Maybe our actual course routing was never created on paper. There is a preliminary version for our course, dated March 7, 1927, by “Langford and Moreau, Landscape Engineers and Golf Architects,” entitled *Golf Course for Joseph Brewer, Esq., Grand Rapids, Michigan*.

Our course was not built exactly like this 1927 preliminary blueprint from Langford and Moreau. There may have been a later blueprint but, if so, it has been lost with time. Perhaps the blueprint we have was the only one used, with revisions made when shovels went into the ground. This often happens as the architect refines his design as the course is built. Our course was under construction in 1928 and had its grand opening in 1929.

The best evidence of how our golf course was built is a 1938 aerial photograph from Michigan State University’s photo archives. It’s doubtful that there were changes between 1929 and 1938. Our grand opening was celebrated on June 14, 1929, just a few months before the October 29 “Black Tuesday” market crash. The Great Depression followed and continued throughout the 1930’s. It is unlikely that there were golf course changes during that difficult period.

See the following page to compare the 1927 Langford and Moreau drawing with the 1938 MSU aerial photograph. This comparison reveals several differences.



1927 Langford and Moreau drawing

Note that the L&M team did not use color in their 1927 drawing. In the early 1990s we hired Tom Doak to develop a bunker plan. As part of his work, Doak colored a copy of the L&M black and white drawing so that the features could be seen more readily.



1938 aerial photograph from Michigan State University

CARD OF COURSE

HOLE	YARDS	PAR	HOLE	YARDS	PAR
1	445	4	10	560	5
2	540	5	11	120	3
3	140	3	12	385	4
4	470	5	13	230	3
5	165	3	14	520	5
6	370	4	15	195	3
7	480	5	16	350	4
8	330	4	17	460	5
9	400	4	18	430	4
OUT 3,240		37	IN 3,290		36
GRAND TOTALS YARDS 6,530 PAR 73					

No.	Out	Length	Par
1	445	4
2	540	5
3	120	3
4	435	4
5	165	3
6	375	4
7	480	5
8	330	4
9	400	4
		3,290	36
In	530	5
10	140	3
11	385	4
12	230	3
13	520	5
14	195	3
15	350	4
16	460	5
17	430	4
18		
		Out 3,240	36
		In 3,290	36
		6,530	72

Also compare L&M’s proposed hole-by-hole length and par for the course (found in the lower left corner of their 1927 drawing) with the actual par when our course was built.

Above: 1927 proposed length and par from Langford and Moreau.

Right: From a 1929 newspaper article on the opening of BCC. Total yardage as built was 6,530 yards, a little shorter than the 1927 preliminary plan.

As built, the basic routing of our course looked quite similar to the 1927 drawing, but there were significant differences.

- The 1927 plan showed a row of lots on the bluff. I counted 24 building sites that would have looked out over the Grand River valley, extending from just south of the 10th tee all the way past the 15th green. There would have also been a few more lots just west of the original farmhouse, which is now the home of Mike and Linda Manica. Houses on the bluff would have required a road through the course, starting at the clubhouse, going west along the bluff, and then looping around the 4th green to tie into Rogue River Road. This plan for a road and homes on the bluff was thankfully abandoned. Some homes were eventually built near holes 2 and 3, but not until many years later.
- The preliminary design had five par 3’s, which was somewhat typical of William Langford’s style. Of the five par 3’s, numbers 13 and 15 were built in the same direction as they were planned, but the other three (holes 3, 5, and 11) were built in different directions than shown in the drawing.
- The original plan had six par 5’s (#2, 4, 7, 10, 14, and 17), which would have made par for a course par of 37-36=73. As built, #4 became a par 4, making course par 36-36=72.

- The northern border of the course would have been further south, not crossing a quarter-section line of Plainfield Township. This east-west line is on Rogue River Road going west from Northland Drive to where Rogue River Rd. curves, just north of #3 green. Beyond there, going further west, you can see a straight row of trees on this line. As built, #4 green and part of the fourth fairway (at the dogleg) extend north of the quarter-section line. (Did Mr. Brewer buy more land north of this quarter-section line, making room for #4 fairway to cross the east-west quarter-section line?)
- The L&M design shows many more bunkers than were eventually built. By my count, the drawing had 35 greenside bunkers and 35 more in or at the edge of fairways. As built, the course had 25 greenside bunkers and only one fairway bunker, a large cross bunker on #13 near the river. (I know from my caddie days that it was still there in the 1960's.) Members called it "Lively's Bunker." Old club rosters listed Charles Lively as a member. My guess is that the bunker got its name because he visited it frequently. It's gone now, but the dip in the rough area where it was located can still be seen.

We have several more aerial photographs which were taken over the years. They reveal how our course has changed from its beginning almost 100 years ago. There have been significant changes, but the basic course routing as first imagined by Langford and Moreau has remained intact. Future installments of *Did You Know?* will focus on these changes, especially changes in yardages by creating and moving tees (both forward and back), changes in the number and location of bunkers, and changes in trees that were planted but later died or removed.

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P.S. Our most recent changes were in 2021 by architect Chris Wilczynski. We need an aerial photograph of our course showing his changes. An experienced photographer is available but we need an airplane and pilot. Anyone able to help? We are hoping to get this done next summer.