

Linebarger Golf Course

In 1921, the Linebarger Brothers, who had opened the Lake Bella Vista summer resort in 1917, built a nine hole golf course along the west side of Lake Bella Vista, after deciding that the open field between the lake and the narrow graveled road that hugged the hillside along the west side of the valley could be put to more profitable use than as a cow pasture.

The course was built as a par 35 course, 2616 yards long, with one 575-yard par 5. The surface of the greens consisted of a mixture of river sand and motor oil. The pro shop was based in the Linebarger sales office located at the west end of the Lake Bella Vista dam.

The Linebargers hired local boys to be caddies for the golfers. In 1986, one of those former caddies, Charles Hutchinson of Pea Ridge, donated five old golf clubs that had been used at the Linebarger golf course in the 1920's and 1930's to the Bella Vista Historical Museum, where they are still on display.

One club is identified as a 'Nicoll Indicator.' According to www.capecodgolfclubs.com, *"Nicoll golf clubs are classics in the golf world. The company was located on the ancient Fife town of Leven....The Nicoll golf club company was started in 1881 by a young blacksmith. Just 10 short years later, George Nicoll made a name for himself with his iron-headed golf clubs....The clubs that put Nicoll over the top...were the Indicators, which they produced in 1926. These Nicoll golf clubs featured matching wooden shafts and 'indicators' to tell the player the exact range of each club."*

Other clubs included in the museum's display are a mashie, a niblick, and a mashie niblick. Those names are no longer used in the modern golf world, but the niblick was a club that would have the loft of a nine iron today but was intended to be hit with a squat, side-winding swing rather than a modern upright swing, according to the website www.leaderboard.com. The mashie had moderate loft, similar to that of a five iron today, and the mashie niblick would fall in between those two, more like a seven iron today.

The mashie niblick club on display at the museum is a Jock Hutchison Brand. The www.worldgolfhalloffame.org website lists Jock Hutchison (1884-1977) as a

Scottish American professional golfer, born in St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland, who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1920. He won the PGA Championship in 1920, and the Open Championship at St. Andrews in 1921, the first by a U.S.-based player. (A one-minute video of the event is available on <http://golflessonschannel.com/open-golf-championship-1921-2/>). In 1937, Hutchison won the inaugural PGA Seniors' Championship at Augusta, and won there again in 1947.

By the late 1940's, the old Linebarger Bella Vista golf course was no longer in use, but golf returned to Bella Vista when John Cooper Sr. opened the first nine holes of the Country Club course on July 1, 1967.



This is an artist sketch of Lake Bella Vista completed in 1923, with the numbers added by volunteer Chuck Mushett, who researched the approximate location of each green on the old Linebarger Golf Course. The first tee box was on the east side of Little Sugar Creek, north of the dam, with golfers hitting across the creek to reach the green. To reach the third green,

golfers had to hit up the hill across the two lane graveled road, and then back down across the road to reach the fifth green. Today the four lanes of Highway 71 cut through the former golf course.



One of several commissioned by the Bella Vista Historical Society thirty years ago, this historic marker stands at the south end of the Highway Welcome Center on Highway 71 across from Lake Bella Vista. It was refurbished by Jim Lucas in 2015 and remounted by the City of Bella Vista Street Department.