



FLORIDA  
DEPARTMENT  
of STATE

## Florida Historic Golf Trail Fact Sheet



Florida's golf history is recognized as one of the oldest in the nation, dating back to the 1890s, when a number of early courses were created along with the development of railroads and hotels in the state. [The Florida Historic Golf Trail](#) program, developed by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources is a collection of more than 50 historic courses throughout Florida established between 1897 and 1949 that golfers can still play today. Some of the courses featured on the trail have retained much of their historic character while others have been modified over the years. Through the Florida Historic Golf Trail, golfers can play on courses designed by world-class architects and played by famed golfers such as Bobby Jones, Babe Zaharias, Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazen, Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus. Golfers track their progress along the trail using the official Historic Golf Trail scorecard, which is available from each [participating golf course](#) and online.

### The History of Golf in Florida

In 1886, Scottish immigrant John Gillespie built a homestead in Sarasota, which included a long greenway with two holes – a golf course –continuing his passion for golf that he had fostered in Scotland. This was the origin of golf in Florida and possibly in the United States. Beginning in the 1890s many prestigious golf courses were built in Florida with resort-style hotels which were established to follow the path of the developing railroad system. The construction of golf courses and resorts continued through the “golden age” of golf course architecture that lasted from the 1900s through the 1930s.

Famous golf course architects were frequently hired to design and build some of these new golf courses. The list of renowned architects include Donald Ross, who designed the Biltmore hotel – now a National Historic Landmark – and masters such as Tom Bendelow, Seth Raynor, Herbert Bertram Strong, as well as firms like Langford and Moreau, Stiles and Van Kleeck and Flynn and Toomey.

### Highlighted Courses on Florida’s Historic Golf Trail

#### ***Bobby Jones Golf Club***

**City:** Sarasota (Southwest)

**Date Established:** 1927

**Claim to Fame:** Sarasota is often referred to as the “Cradle of Golf,” due to the city’s association with John Gillespie’s 1886 homestead golf course which is perhaps the first golf course in the United States.

**Designer/s:** Renowned golf course architect Donald Ross was hired to design the original 18-hole layout in 1926. An addition of a 9-hole, par-30, course was designed by Lane Marshall in 1977 and is was named the Col. Gillespie Executive Course.

**Local Knowledge:** Originally named the Sarasota Municipal Golf Course, it was renamed when Robert Tyre Jones, Jr., known as Bobby Jones, personally dedicated the facility as The Bobby Jones Golf Club on Sunday, February 13, 1927.

**Today:** The Bobby Jones Golf Club boasts two 18-hole championship courses and a 9-hole par three executive course. The original Donald Ross course has been split in half, with nine holes contributing to the north 18-hole layout and nine holes contributing to the south 18-hole layout.

### ***Winter Park Country Club***

**City:** Winter Park (Central)

**Date Established:** 1914

**Claim to Fame:** In 1999, the Winter Park golf course became the first golf course in Florida to be listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

**Designer:** Harley A. Ward and Dow George

**Local Knowledge:** Designed originally as a nine-hole course, it was later expanded to an 18-hole golf course which wrapped around the nine-hole "short" course.

**Today:** The Winter Park Country Club golf course, celebrating its centennial year in 2014, is a par 35 nine-hole course, playing to an enjoyable 2,470 yards, located in the heart of a historic town in beautiful central Florida.

### ***Ponte Vedra Inn and Club [Ocean Course]***

**City:** Ponte Vedra/ St. Augustine (Northeast)

**Date Established:** 1928

**Claim to Fame:** The Ponte Vedra Inn and Club was selected as the site of the 1939 Ryder Cup but was cancelled due to the outbreak of World War II.

**Designer:** First designed and built in 1928 by golf course architect W.D. Clark of Chicago, in 1931 the course was developed by Herbert Bertram Strong into a more extensive 130-acre, 18-hole golf course that came to be known as Ponte Vedra. In 1947, Robert Trent Jones, Sr. redesigned the course in an attempt to reduce some of the course's severity.

**Local Knowledge:** The course now at the Ponte Vedra Inn and Club located in the northern part of St. Johns County was originally named the Jacksonville Beach Golf Links. The Ponte Vedra Women's Open of 1951 was the first championship tournament held at the club drew powerful professionals such as Patty Berg, Louise Suggs and the winner, Babe Zaharias.

**Today:** Ponte Vedra Inn and Club is among the most prestigious courses in Florida.

### ***Biltmore Golf Course***

**City:** Coral Gables (Southeast)

**Date Established:** 1926

**Claim to Fame:** In 1996, 70 years after opening to the public, the Biltmore hotel and resort was recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

**Designer:** Donald Ross. In 2007, golf course architect Brian Silva completed a comprehensive restoration of the course.

**Local Knowledge:** The luxurious Biltmore hotel was built by the visionary developer George E. Merrick. It has attracted the rich and famous since it first opened in 1926. The golf course broke ground in 1925 and on January 2, 1926, Bobby Jones and Tommy Armour played a 36-hole exhibition golf match against Gene Sarazen and Leo Diegel to open the new Miami-Biltmore links as it was first known.

**Today:** The Biltmore Golf Course is home to two rehabilitated 18-hole Donald Ross designed golf courses. The 18-hole, par-71, Biltmore Golf Course features four sets of tees playing from 5,200 to 6,700 yards. The Biltmore is the site of the Junior Orange Bowl International Golf Championship, which invites top amateur golfers from around the world to participate in one of the most competitive amateur tournaments in the world.

## ***Eglin Golf Course***

**City:** Niceville (Northwest)

**Date Established:** 1923

**Claim to Fame:** The Eagle course has two unique holes. Holes number six and seven both require a blind tee shot over a hill. After you play your second shot you must ring a bell to alert the players behind you that it's safe for them to tee off.

**Designer:** Renowned architect firm, William Langford & Moreau completed a significant expansion from a nine-hole to an 18-hole in 1927, which officially opened in November of that year.

**Local Knowledge:** First established as the Valparasio Country Club, Eglin Golf Course (rated #3 military golf course by "Leisure Magazine" for seven consecutive years, as voted by Air Force golfers worldwide) originated as a nine-hole course in 1923 and later expanded to an 18-hole course in 1927. However, Valparasio Country Club went bankrupt in 1929 and was abandoned for a decade. The golf course was reestablished following the purchase of property surrounding the course by the U.S Government for use as an airfield and military installation.

**Today:** The Eglin complex has two championship courses – The Eagle and the Falcon, named after the F-15 Eagle and F-16 Falcon aircraft – and is operated by the 96th Force Support Squadron of the Eglin Air Force Base.

There are more than 50 historic courses to play on throughout the state, so *Come Play on History*.

Discover more about Florida's golf legacy by visiting [FloridaHistoricGolfTrail.com](http://FloridaHistoricGolfTrail.com).

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