

**Men sought  
the golden dream. . .**



## IN THE BEGINNING

*It was not for golf that men first came to Cold Springs, but for gold. And it is with that colorful history of the '49ers - so unique to our course - that our own story must begin . . .*

**From every walk of life they came,** the dream-seekers who had heard the tales of gold to be had for the taking . . . stream-beds lined with the precious metal, nuggets the size of a man's fist! No story was too outlandish, no rumour too far-fetched to be believed, and by the hundreds, then thousands, men poured into the gold fields to stake their claims and make their fortunes.

John Sutter's fears had become reality. On the bleak January day in 1848 when James Marshall brought him the nugget discovered in the tailrace of Sutter's sawmill at Coloma, the Swiss captain realized that his land could be overrun by those who heard of Marshall's find. Attempting to suppress the information, he scoffed at reports of the discovery and actively encouraged skepticism among the local people. Gold? Nonsense!

But Sutter hadn't counted on Sam Brannan. An enterprising businessman who knew the opportunity of a lifetime when he saw it, Brannan concocted a plan by which he would make his fortune without ever straining his muscles to dig the earth or pan a creek. Miners would need supplies, he reasoned, and it was inevitable that those travelling to Coloma would pass by his store at Sutterville . . . what if he cornered the market on picks, pans, shovels, and other equipment essential to mining?

Thought spurred him to action and, having acquired the supply, he set out to create the demand. Brannan appeared on the streets of San Francisco, brandishing a jar of gold nuggets and shouting, "Gold! Gold from the American River!" The news spread like wildfire, and within a week the rush had begun as men with visions of glittering riches made their way to the riverbank at Coloma. They were eager, but unequipped. Sam Brannan was ready for them.

**Coloma was the beacon of the Mother Lode,** a brilliant golden light that drew men from all corners of the world. From Chile and from China, and from all America, across the plains, around Cape Horn, the call of gold was answered by those who spoke with confidence that they would work the goldfields six months, a year, and return home wealthy men.

Reality was harder than expected. A miner's life was one of back-breaking labor, hours spent each day waist-high in frigid waters, sifting through the sand and gravel, others forcing shovels deep into the stony earth, baking in the full glare of an unforgiving sun, and searching, always searching, for the gold that proved an inconsistent discovery. A mining claim constituted just fifteen square feet, and competition grew more fierce each day as still greater numbers came to seek their fortunes. Tent cities sprang up, testaments to the tightly-held belief that the hardships to be borne were temporary and that success lay just beneath the next turned stone.

**As crowds increased,** the more adventurous moved on to other areas, and word quickly filtered back of strikes at Kelsey, Diamond Springs, Grizzly Flats, El Dorado, Murderer's Bar, and Old Dry Diggings, which was soon to become known as Placerville. Between the centers of activity at Coloma and Placerville, yet another strike was made and a mining community established. The place was rich, not just in gold, but in another resource highly valued by the miners: fresh, abundant water. The miners called the place Cold Springs.

**In 1849 the gravel bed of Cold Springs Creek** first yielded up its treasure, and by the summer of 1850 some 700 miners had flocked to the camp. While many were transients, staying only long enough to pick up a bit of gold and convince themselves that greater bonanzas were still to be unearthed at camps throughout the Mother Lode, others chose to settle at Cold Springs. A bustling town came into

being, boasting several stores, a bakery, a boardinghouse for permanent residents, a hotel for those just passing through, a schoolhouse which doubled as a church on Sundays, and a watering-hole called the Blue Tent Saloon where thirsty miners gathered in the evenings to exchange stories, ask of news from outlying regions, and escape the rigors of the day.

Run by an individual described as "a man of education and very gentleman-like manners," the Blue Tent did not meet with everyone's approval. Some members of the mining camp, fearing that the drinking establishment was too enthusiastically patronized, formed a local branch of the Sons of Temperance and attempted to dissuade their brethren from indulging in alcoholic excess.

**Miners were far from their families**, cut off from civilization, and harmless recreation was hard to come by, but one answer was found in the creation of the Cold Springs Singing Society. Entertainment provided a welcome relief from the hours of toil, and the society flourished. Talent was welcome, but lack of it did not prevent membership in the group, and the venture expanded to include a singing school when the founders concluded that an audible note was good but an accurate one was better.

Long days were followed by lively nights as the men gathered in social camaraderie, and the violent disputes common to other camps were rare in the little town. But 2000 gold-seekers had come to Cold Springs, all sharing a common goal, and while most were ready to work for their reward there were also those who had other methods in mind.

**Greed, jealousy, and frustration** contributed to lawlessness in the camps, but formalities were few, tolerance non-existent, and crimes were punished speedily with little regard for legal proprieties. Trials beneath a tall tree and spontaneous justice dispensed at the end of a rope had earned Placerville the notorious nickname "Hangtown;" a noose, a bullet, the means mattered little . . . few murderers walked away from the gold fields.

Was it murder? Simply an inexplicable disappearance? Late one starry night a well-respected man entered the Cold Springs bordello, never to be seen again. All that was to be found were drops of blood that no one could explain. Suspicion

and rumour ran high. A vigorous investigation followed, but the ladies of the house professed innocence, and when no solid evidence came to light it became clear that steps must be taken to calm the populace. The man's fate was carefully overlooked while word was spread that the tell-tale blood came from a local butcher shop. The "Cold Springs Mystery" remained unsolved.

Swindlers, who thought the miners easy prey, also roamed the camps, and more than one community was outraged by their devious endeavors. Achieving, more or less, the centuries-old dream of turning lead to gold, were a Cold Springs store-keeper and a steamship engineer, whose creative brand of fraud outlasted their alliance by many years. Employing a galvanizing process to coat the lead, the pair manufactured "gold dust" and successfully conducted business with the spurious substance. Only when their product was melted for coins was the deception discovered, and the fast-acting engineer lit out for Central America, leaving the store-keeper to pay the price. Decades later, when the luster of the gold rush had long since dimmed, dusty sacks still held the glowing product of the alchemists of Cold Springs.

**The glory days sped by**, and one by one the camps died out as placer gold grew scarce and hopes of easy wealth grew faint. Of the massive wave of miners who had flooded the gold fields, few remained to work the hard rock mines of the mountains' inner depths; most had heard the new call, bright and strong and full of promise, echoing through the Sierras: Silver! The Comstock Lode had been discovered, and its rising star rang down the curtain on the gold rush. Fortunes had been made and lost, adventures had been lived, the great names of the day and those who would achieve greatness in the coming years had known the passion of the era, and the retreating tide of men left in their wake an imprint on history; America would never be the same.

No voice was heard at Cold Springs Creek, no footsteps broke the silence of the hills. Once-crowded fields lay empty, their soil dispersed, the earth worn down to bedrock. The land had given of itself to men, and now it waited for another time, another dream, to give itself again.



*. . .and one day  
walked away*



# “THAR’S GOLF IN THEM THAR HILLS!”

For a century after the Gold Rush, El Dorado County lay quiet and peaceful, left slumbering by the receding waves of frantic population, its fame and infamy written on the pages of history. Only gradually did it waken and begin to grow, and even by the summer of 1960 the total population was less than 30,000. Placerville, the county seat, could count several of those thousands, but many of the inhabitants came from families long-established in the area, and an individual with a mere twenty years residence was still classified as a "newcomer," untested, unproven.



**Cold Springs - circa 1910**

The people knew each other, knew whose word could be trusted and whose could not. They knew the interwoven family relationships that bonded clans together, knew who was planning marriage, who was splitting up, and the reasons for both.

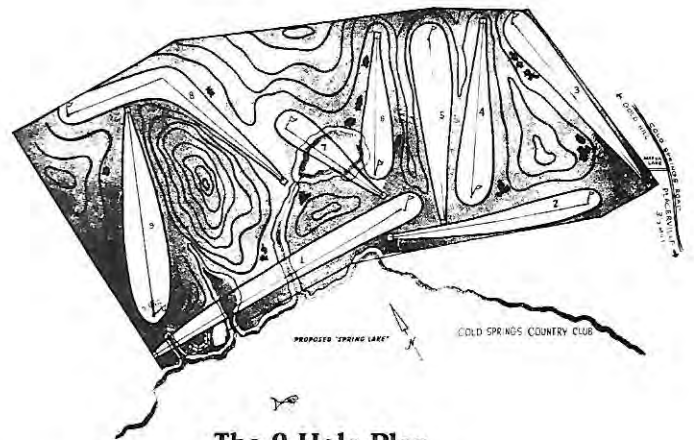
Shopping in Placerville meant Main Street . . . the P & M Market, the Round Tent Store, Ben Franklin's, Florence's, "Cash Merc," Combella's, and others that lined the winding street. The Mother Lode Bank stood at the center of town, as did the Courthouse and Post Office, and avid readers needed only to turn the corner of Sacramento Street to find the library. Amid this intimate environment there met a group of men and women to discuss a matter of mutual interest, and of that meeting was born an ambitious endeavor.



## The land — raw and waiting

We sat and talked that June evening, more than forty of us who shared a love of golf. Among the group were Don Shannon, Bill Crow, Jack and Clara Graves, Bob and Jean West, Martin Baer, Al and Virginia Briggs, Jim Hoffner, John Sarlo, Stanley Barker, and Claude Markle, and we had come to exchange views on an issue familiar to all - the lack of a nearby golf course. The nearest was in Sacramento, and playing there entailed a long drive over two-lane Highway 50, the difficulty of rounding up a game, getting a starting time, and another hour's drive home at the end of the day. Playing a full 18 holes under such circumstances required planning, ingenuity, strategy, and luck . . . all before stepping up to the first tee. The problem was clear, but the obvious answer demanded our willingness to take a drastic step at what could be a very high risk. Was it possible to build our own local golf course? In Placerville?

For several hours the possibilities and obstacles were discussed . . . financing, acquiring a suitable site, creating a membership . . . and it was unanimously agreed that a tremendous amount of work would be necessary if the idea were to become a reality, but we were more than willing to put forth the effort. The group believed our goal could be achieved with a membership of two hundred, each membership selling for \$350. Money was tight, and it would be no easy task convincing two hundred people to part with that sum in favor of a golf course that was, as yet, no more than a dream. But if everyone did his part it just might be possible.



## The 9-Hole Plan

The next step would be preparing the Articles of Incorporation and, in order to defray the expenses, everyone at the meeting was asked to contribute \$15 which could later be applied to his membership fee. That night there could be no absolute certainty that a golf course would ever be built, but our enthusiasm was high, and \$500 was raised.

An immediate search began for land, and the hunt led to Cold Springs where Jerry and Lois Brown had available acreage.

Overgrown with brush, laden with fallen trees, and piled high with mine tailings, the site was a raw monument to the gold-seekers who had used up the land and left it abandoned. Exposed bedrock met the eye, decay was evident all about,



but as John Sarlo and Don Shannon walked the length and breadth of the proposed site they saw that it still held promise . . . a new promise, not of glittering metal, but of lush, verdant, fairways and greens. They spoke with the Browns about the land and the possible construction, and an informal agreement was made . . . not with notarized papers, but with a handshake.

September 26, 1960, saw the christening of the Cold Springs Golf and Country Club. At a meeting that night the name was finalized when it was decided to proceed with a membership drive and file the Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit organization. The first business at hand was the question of construction and operating costs, which were figured on the basis of club members doing much of the physical work ourselves. With an estimated \$70,000 for construction, and an average monthly operating cost of \$1,633,

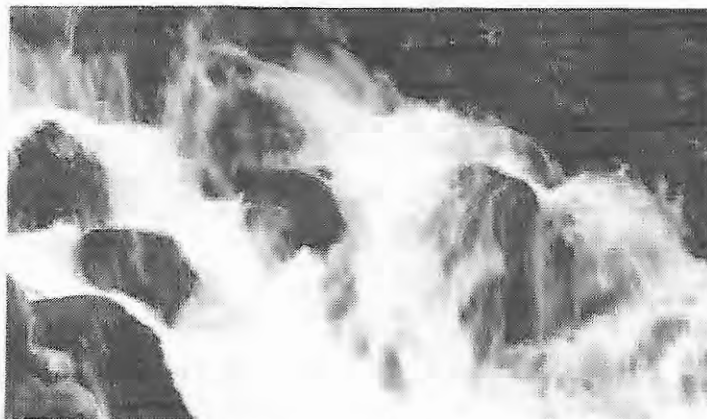


**Excavation for the pond**

the club members felt that we could look forward to a surplus of \$600 to \$800 each month, thus ensuring future funding for improvement projects down the road. Jerry and Lois Brown, who were planning to build a 90-acre lake bordering the proposed course, reported that they had the go-ahead to begin excavating. (The project was never completed, due to poor water quality.) Don Shannon offered encouraging news, reporting that two professional golf course superintendents had inspected the project site and given it their unqualified approval. Plans were moving smoothly, and to proceed with the formal incorporation and begin construction only two more things were necessary — a Board of Directors, and a paid membership of two hundred.

The fledgling club elected as its first President Bob West, with Stanley Barker serving as Vice-President, Claude Markle as Secretary-Treasurer, and James Hoffner, Al Briggs, Jack Graves, and Don Shannon as Directors. Within a few months, John Sarlo became Secretary-Treasurer, a position he has held ever since.

Concentrating on the pressing need for memberships, the Board's first efforts were aimed at making the club's benefits as attractive as possible. "Family Memberships" were created, in which all the privileges of belonging to Cold Springs would be extended to the primary member, his wife, and all children living at home. Further, a member would hold proprietary interest in the club . . . not only would he play the course, he would own a share of it equal to each share



**Water was pumped from Weber Creek**

held by his 199 co-owners. Cold Springs would belong to its members, and they would make the decisions that would affect its future.

Moving ahead on the wings of faith and hope, the Board asked John Sarlo to design the course, but one all important stumbling block still remained in our path: money. Capital was essential to begin construction, and the financial situation was grim. Endless hours were spent struggling with the dollars and cents facts of the matter, looking at the numbers again and again to see if a possibility had been overlooked, if the totals might somehow have been wrong, but the answers were invariably the same. The determined optimism of the club had not been reflected in the general response of the community, where attitudes ranged from the carefully reserved "let's wait and see," to expressions of outright skepticism . . . "A golf course way out there? It's impossible!" "They'll never really build it, it can't be done!" . . . so spoke the pessimists.

Neither were the banks encouraging; none was eager to make the club a loan. Although a beautiful golf course could be created on the land chosen by the club, the soil quality ruled out the potential for subdivision and, if the club failed, a bank could be left with property of limited use and value. Why take the risk? Rather than acting as a deterrent to our plans, this only increased our commitment. It might require spending funds not actually available, but a golf course would be built!



**Discussing the #7 green**