



Niagara Golf Club circa 1875

This is the oldest surviving golf course in North America. Like all golf courses, it has changed over the years. Its greens have been moved, its holes lengthened, new bunkers built, the rough cut back. But the fairways of this course remain where they were 135 years ago, inside a tight rectangle of land bounded by Lake Ontario, Fort Mississauga and the stately homes of Queen and Simcoe Streets.

There are still members who recall the man who brought golf to Niagara on the lake in the 1870's and who, at the time of his death in 1931, was considered to be Canada's oldest golfer. John Geale Dickson, founder of the Niagara Golf Club, came from a prosperous old Upper Canada family. He and his family have had title to many of the stately homes in Niagara including the Peterson/Romance home on John Street and the Grand Victorian on the Niagara Parkway.

There are few records from this time; however, we do have an accounting of a match played over the Mississauga Links in 1878, by Dickson, Hunter and four friends from Toronto. This appears to have been a congenial gathering of sportsmen engaged in a leisurely round on an otherwise empty course, for we are told that

“a pony cart followed them from hole to hole, laden with every possible beverage which the human tongue could desire”. After the morning round they lunched all afternoon, dallied over cigars, “by which time it was too late to renew the contests of the morning”.

John Geale Dickson's brother Robert Dickson became the first Captain of the Niagara Golf Club organised in 1881. Whatever the condition of the Mississauga links in 1878, it was apparently in good shape by 1882, when a Toronto newspaper had this to say:

“This golf course at Niagara is perhaps unsurpassed, and bids fair to become the St. Andrews of Canada. Its central position, ease of access by rail or steamer, and large area, combine to make it one of the best that could be selected for matches between other clubs on neutral ground”.