

2019 INDUCTEE

1882–1972

# WILLIAM NICHOLS



He arrived in Oklahoma just as it earned its statehood, and immediately helped the game get a foothold by designing a nine-hole sand greens course which was the beginning of Tulsa Country Club. Soon after he was appointed the first golf pro at Muskogee Country Club, which had been laid out by Leslie Brownlee, another Scottish pro from North Berwick who was at Lakeview Country Club in Oklahoma City, the forerunner to Oklahoma City Golf & Country Club.

As golf took hold in the state, Nichols became its foremost practitioner. He helped found and won the Oklahoma Open in 1910, 1911, 1914, 1916 and 1920. Nichols was lured by a larger check to leave Muskogee in 1915, however, and spent two years in Dallas at Lakewood Country Club and

Legend has it that William Nichols made an eagle on every hole at Muskogee Golf Club, a very testing Perry Maxwell layout in which most players are relieved to stay anywhere in the vicinity of par.

Nichols, however, was no ordinary player, no ordinary golf pro and no ordinary steward of the game. Many may not recognize his name immediately, but his contributions laid the framework for golf in Oklahoma to grow into the popular and influential sports it is today.

At age 26, he arrived in Oklahoma in 1908 from Edinburgh, Scotland, where he was a player of note. He was a pro from North Berwick and a frequent foursomes partner of Fred McLeod, the '08 U.S. Open winner. Like many young Scottish pros at that time, Nichols looked to help introduce the game in the vast United States.



*Nichols in Muskogee, Oklahoma circa 1914.*

Dallas Country Club. He returned in 1917, gave up his professional status and went into the insurance business, but remained completely invested in the game.

Nichols helped found the Oklahoma Golf Association, writing its original bylaws and serving as secretary/treasurer for much of the period from 1919-29 and as its president of in 1931-33 and again in 1942. He won the OGA State Amateur Championship in 1925 and 1927 and won the OGA Senior State Amateur in 1939 and 1946.

Nichols became a civic and business leader in Muskogee, a great friend of many influential Oklahomans such as Oklahoma football coach Bud Wilkinson and a great supporter of the Muskogee High School program.

At the club, his status grew over time. The super-talented 1960s state championship teams that included Oklahoma Golf Hall of Famer Bob Dickson, former long-time Muskogee judge Mike Norman and Jim Buchanon were thrilled when he would give them any attention.

"I knew of him for years but only met him a few times," Buchanon said. "In eighth grade we used to stare at the trophy case in the club, it looked like he owned every trophy in there. So he was a legend around the club.

"One day I was practicing hitting my irons and he wandered over to the practice tee and watched me hit several balls. He said, 'son, you'd be better if you hit down and through the ball more.' Well I

tried all my life but I was always more of a sweeper.

"Anyway, he was a consummate gentleman. We didn't see him that often but everyone had great respect for him and what he accomplished."

Like his teammate, Dickson knew Nichols more by the long shadow he cast as a club legend personally.

"My father Ben, who was the head professional there beginning in 1959, knew him much better than I, but we all knew who he was and some of his history," said

Dickson, who won the U.S. Amateur and the British Amateur in 1967. "He was well thought of and a legendary figure in Muskogee and across the state."

Nichols will be inducted Nov. 24 at Southern Hills Country Club along with Bill Glasson,



*Nichols observes with his ever-present pipe.*

Orville Moody, Jim Awtrey and Melissa (McNamara) Luellen. The Oklahoma Golf Hall of Fame induction is open to the public and tickets can be purchased at [www.oklahomagolfhof.org](http://www.oklahomagolfhof.org) or call 918-280-0787. The 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. program includes a cocktail hour, dinner and video introductions of each narrated by Jim Nantz along with acceptance remarks by the inductees or family members.

Nichols and his wife Margaret lived in Muskogee until his death in 1972 at the age of 89. His memory and accomplishments have been kept alive by the excellent record keeping of his grandsons Bill and Tom King.