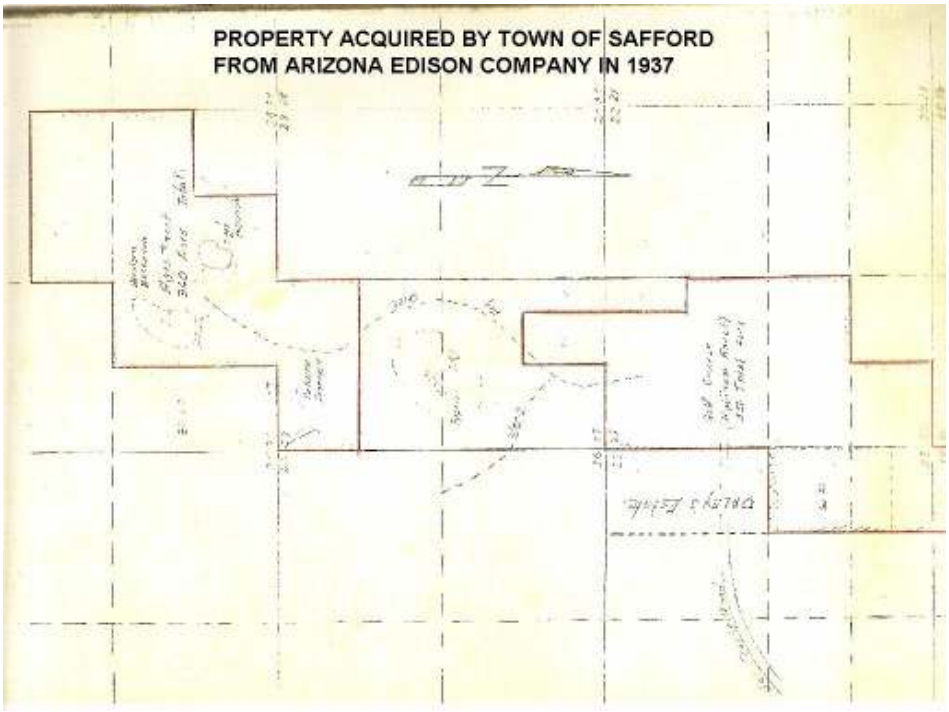
By George A. Platz III

In 1936 the Federal Emergency Administration Department of Public Works (DPW), which was created to stimulate the U.S. economy during the Great Depression, agreed to make grants and loans in the amount of $436,364 to the Town of Safford for the purpose of constructing a new water system based upon water sources in Bonita Creek. The new water system began delivering water to Safford in January 1939 and continues to be the city's major source of water. (A history of the planning and construction of the Bonita Creek water system may be found in a paper by Hal Herbert appearing in the Graham County Historical Society 2008 Symposium Papers.)

Prior to the construction of the Bonita Creek system, Safford's water had been supplied by a system using Mt. Graham water sources that was owned by Arizona Edison Company, Inc. As a condition of terminating its use of the Arizona Edison water system, Safford was obligated to purchase from Arizona Edison the properties comprising that system for the sum of $100,000. Those properties, located several miles southwest of Safford, included two ranches on Frye Creek: the Riggs Ranch, comprised of 360 acres including the Riggs Reservoir, and the Robinson Ranch, comprised of 450 acres to the north of the Riggs Ranch. This purchase was completed on February 26, 1937, with a portion of the grants and loans made to Safford by the DPW.



At some time in 1937 or 1938, after Safford's acquisition of the Arizona Edison properties, a group of Safford residents and businessmen concluded that the Robinson Ranch would be a desirable location for a golf course and recreation area for the people of Safford and Graham County. The existence of an available water system on the property made it an obvious choice for a golf course in desert terrain. On October 31, 1938, four members of that group, S. L. Crandall, J. M. Baker, Clayton Hakes, and Bill Waldrom, appeared before the Safford Town Council and presented a tentative map of such a project. The matter was referred to the Council's Building Committee for further consideration.

On December 14, 1938, the same four members of the golf course group again appeared before the Safford Town Council, and the Council voted in favor of a motion that the Council dedicate about 70 acres of land at the Robinson Ranch for a golf course.

EXCERPT FROM MINUTES OF SAFFORD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING ON DECEMBER 14, 1938

MINUTE RECORD OF Special

MEETING HELD ON THE 14th DAY OF December 1938

STANDARD FORM 054 PRINTED IN U.S.A. REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. STANDARD MINUTE RECORD

PRESENT: Mayor, F. I. Misak, Councilmen, L. F. Long, Joe Horowitz, Andy A. Blake, Grant, Curtis, G. D. Barney and Vearl A. Lines.

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Bill Waldrom, J. M. Baker, Clayton Hakes and Stan Crandall met with the Council regarding the Golf cours at the Robinson Ranch, and after some consideration upon motion by Vearl A. Lines seconded by G. D. Barney that the Council dedicate about 70 acres of land for a Golf course, said land being subject as to location by the Council, motion carried.

ATTEST: _____ Clerk.

_____ Mayor.

On February 17, 1939, the Graham County Guardian published an article stating that plans were underway by committees of the golf course group to raise the sum of $5,000 for development of the proposed recreational area "on some 70 acres of land owned by the Town of Safford at the Robinson Ranch, located approximately four miles southwest of Safford." The plans included a nine-hole golf course and other recreational facilities as well. On that same date the Guardian published an editorial strongly supporting the project, concluding that it "should have the enthusiastic support of every citizen of the county."

With respect to the remainder of the Robinson Ranch property, the Safford Town Council advertised for bids from farmers and ranchers, and on March 23, 1939 entered into a lease of the property with Graham French and Jesse Hancock. The lease noted that the premises, which included approximately 200 acres of farming land and 100 acres of grazing land, did not include any "land and appurtenances

included in the plans and specifications for the Golf Course to be built thereon, details of which have been studied and noted by the parties hereto."

By the end of October 1939, construction of the golf course was ready to begin, as reported in an article in the Graham County Guardian on October 27, 1939.

NEWS ARTICLE FROM GRAHAM COUNTY GUARDIAN
OCTOBER 27, 1939

CONSTRUCTON OF NEW GOLF COURSE START SATURDAY

Construction of the projected golf course on the old Robinson Ranch, approximately four miles southwest of Safford, will be inaugurated this week end by members of a newly organized Mount Graham Golf association.

In an organization meeting held Tuesday evening, Louis F. Long was elected president of the association; George Platz, vice-president; H. P. Watkins, secretary, and Martin Baker, treasurer.

Construction of the course will be financed by voluntary donations of $5.00 per month by golfers in the county during the period of construction which is expected to be five or six months. Work will be done on week ends only by the association. Donations are to be accepted from interested individuals and others, it was voted.

Platz, county engineer, has designed the course, and he will supervise the construction. Members of the association voted to meet each Monday evening to discuss progress of the previous week end, and make plans for each succeeding work period. Memberships in the association are unrestricted, and anyone interested in golf or the project is invited to the meetings.

A finance committee composed of Clayton Hakes, Sam Cobb, and W. E. Waldrom was named, as well as an operations committee composed of George Grosh, Clyde Naylor, Bill Epley, Stan Crandall, and Rodney Maxwell.

Originally planned to make a recreation area of the Robinson Ranch, the new association hopes construction of the golf course will prove to be the first unit of the project.

Others present at the organization meeting were Marshall Carson, Ryder Ridgway, Harold Love, Frank Evans, Baker Wardlaw, Ralph Crandall, and Phil Bjorkman.

The article notes that the group promoting the golf course had organized itself into the Mount Graham Golf Association, whose officers were Louis F. Long, president; George A. Platz, Jr. (father of the author of this paper), vice-president; H. P. Watkins, secretary; and Martin Baker, treasurer. Others who were members of the Association, as reported in the Graham County Guardian, were Ryder Ridgway, Clayton Hakes and Baker Wardlaw (all of whom would later become members of the Safford Town Council) and Sam Cobb, W. E. Waldrom, George Grosh, Clyde Naylor, Bill Epley, Stan Crandall, Rodney Maxwell, Marshall Carson, Harold Love, Frank Evans, Ralph Crandall and Phil Bjorkman. A design for the course had been prepared by County Engineer Platz, and he was also to supervise the construction of the course.

Louis Long

County Engineer, George Platz, Jr.

Long, president of the Association, was a prominent Gila Valley businessman who owned movie theaters and radio stations in Safford and other communities and who worked diligently with the Chamber of Commerce to promote the Valley. He was also a member of the Safford Town Council that had dedicated the land for the golf course in 1938. Platz, vice-president, was an engineer from Wisconsin who came to the Gila Valley in the mid-1930s to work at the Phelps-Dodge mine in Morenci. He later became Graham County Engineer and was involved in numerous county projects, including improvements to Swift Trail and construction of a Gila River bridge, as well as designing the golf course.

Articles in the Guardian during November 1939 report that construction began as scheduled on the last weekend of October with a tractor, a bulldozer, a power grader, and the services of members of the Mt. Graham Golf association. The course was planned to have grass throughout on tees, fairways and greens, with water furnished from the Mt. Graham water main that formerly serviced Safford, but it was decided to install temporary sand greens in front of the permanent greens to permit use of the course during the planting and growing of the grass on the permanent greens, which was expected to take between eight months and a year. Heavy equipment construction was completed on seven of the nine holes by November 24, with the remainder to be completed by early December. Meanwhile, the golf association voted to incorporate itself as a non-profit corporation.

On April 8, 1940, members of the Mt. Graham Golf Club Association presented to the Safford Town Council a lease agreement by which the Town of Safford formally leased to the Association the part of Robinson Ranch used for the golf course. The Council voted to accept the lease. (No copy of this lease has been found. The only lease involving the golf course in the early years that appears to have been recorded is a lease dated January 2, 1960, by which the City of Safford leased a parcel of less than two acres to the Mt. Graham Golf Club, perhaps for clubhouse facilities.)

EXCERPT FROM MINUTES OF SAFFORD TOWN COUNCIL MEETING ON APRIL 8, 1940

MINUTE RECORD OF Special

MEETING HELD ON THE 8th DAY OF April 1940

PRESENT: Mayor, F. P. Misak, Councilmen, Grant Curtis, C. D. Barney, Vearl A. Lines, L. F. Long and Joe. Horowitz.

ABSENT: Andy A. Blake.

A Committee representing the Mt. Graham Golf Club Association, met with the Council, and presented a Lease Agreement, which the Mayor read in full to the Council, and said Lease Agreement is between the Town of Safford and the Mt. Graham Golf Club Association, and in which said Golf Club wishes to Lease a part of the Robinson ranch, including some water, after some discussion by the Council, L. F. Long moved, seconded by Vearl A. Lines that said Lease agreement be accepted, subject to the approval of the Law Firm of John L. Gust, motion carried.

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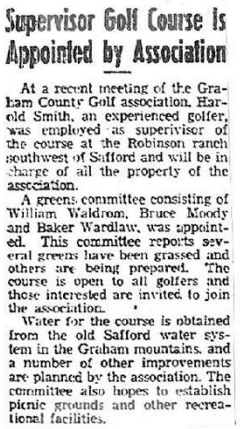
ATTEST: Clerk

Mayor

NEWS ARTICLE FROM GRAHAM COUNTY GUARDIAN
JUNE 21, 1940



Supervisor Golf Course Is Appointed by Association

At a recent meeting of the Graham County Golf association, Harold Smith, an experienced golfer, was employed as superivisor of the course at the Robinson ranch southwest of Safford and will be in charge of all the property of the association.

A greens committee consisting of William Waldrom, Bruce Moody and Baker Wardlaw, was appointed. This committee reports several greens have been grassed and others are being prepared. The course is open to all golfers and those interested are invited to join the association.

Water for the course is obtained from the old Safford water system in the Graham mountains, and a number of other improvements are planned by the association. The committee also hopes to establish picnic grounds and other recreational facilities.

No record has been found of play on the course during 1940, but on February 21, 1941, the Guardian reported on a tournament held there the previous week. The article also noted that four of the permanent grass greens were now in use and in excellent condition. The Guardian also reported on November 28, 1941, that an invitational tournament would be held at the course on December 7, 1941, but one wonders whether that tournament took place in light of other more momentous events occurring that day.

In April 1942 the Safford Rotary Club (which included at least nine members of the golf association) hosted a Rotary Club district conference and as part of the entertainment included a round of golf at the course, reported in the Guardian. The Guardian on April 24, 1942, also announced a tournament to be held at the course on May 3, to which all golfers in eastern Arizona had been invited. Results of the tournament were reported in the Guardian on May 8, 1942.

A significant highlight of 1942 reported in the Guardian on May 22, 1942, was that a "local boy" named Norman Norred, who "learned his golfing" on the Mt. Graham Golf Course while attending school in Safford, won the Arizona State Amateur Golf Tournament. The Guardian further reported that Norred "presented a picturesque sight, using a handful of inexpensive clubs, carried in a faded canvas bag by his kid brother-in-law." (Norred apparently later worked at the golf course; Safford Town Council minutes from April 1948 mention a person by that name who was the caretaker at the Robinson Ranch property.)

NEWS ARTICLE FROM GRAHAM COUNTY GUARDIAN
MAY 22, 1942

FORMER SAFFORD BOY WINS ARIZONA CROWN IN GLOBE GOLF PLAY

For the first time within the memory of Arizona golf players, a local boy, Norman Norred, won the Arizona ameteur golf crown Sunday on the Cobre Valle course, Globe, when he downed Tom Lambie, Phoenix, one of the best tournament players in the state, two up.

Norred, who learned his golfing on the "skin" course with sand greens while attending school at Safford, is a mine worker in the Globe district, and was reported to have presented a picturesque sight, using a handful of inexpensive clubs, carried in a faded canvas bag by his kid brother-in-law, who is an ardent Norred rooter.

Secret of Norred's success was his faultless putting. Without detracting from Norred's stellar performance, it must be said that Lambie wasn't up to the game he played in attaining the finals of the Southwestern tournament at Phoenix.

Norred had Lambie, 20-year-old Phoenix Junior College student, three down at the end of the first nine. There he faltered momentarily but regained his composure to finish strong.

In the semi-finals of the championship flight, Norred disposed of Johnny Cahill of Mesa, 4 and 2, and Lambie downed A. L. Talmage, Sr., of Tucson, 2 and 1.

(The Arizona State Amateur Golf Tournament Was Not Held In 1943 or 1944 Because Of World War II)

No reports of play at the Mt. Graham Golf Course have been found for the years 1943-1946. It is assumed that the course was little used during the years of World War II and immediately thereafter. Not only did the war reduce the number of potential users of the course, but the fuel, labor and equipment necessary to maintain the course for fewer golfers were probably hard to come by. Funds requested by members of the golf association from the Safford Town Council in June 1942 for the "upkeep of the golf course" were apparently not included in the Town budget approved that year. The effect of the war is evidenced by the fact that there was no Arizona State Amateur Golf Tournament held in 1943 or 1944.

Things changed after the war. On May 19, 1947, a group interested in a Mt. Graham Golf and Recreation Association, represented by Chester Peterson, Victor Stewart, Byron Lewis, Mrs. R. P. Brooks, Mrs. Martin Layton, and Mrs. Spencer Hoopes, met with the Safford Town Council and asked to lease a portion of the Robinson Ranch "for the purpose of building a golf course." A Committee was appointed consisting of Councilmen Clayton Hakes, Charles Kirtland, and Baker Wardlaw to study and investigate the possibilities of instituting such a project. Interestingly, none of the persons representing this Association appear to have been

members of the Mt. Graham Golf Association that developed the golf course at Robinson Ranch in 1939, while two of the three Councilmen on the Committee, Hakes and Wardlaw, were members of that prior Association (in fact, Hakes had helped present the original golf course proposal to the Council in October and December of 1938).

The relationship between the 1939 Robinson Ranch golf course and the proposed 1947 Robinson Ranch golf course is clarified somewhat by the following article that appeared in the Graham County Guardian on June 6, 1947:

NEWS ARTICLE FROM GRAHAM COUNTY GUARDIAN
JUNE 6, 1947

GOLFERS IN COUNTY TO START WORK ON COURSE AT THE ROBINSON RANCH

A committee from the golf association appeared before the Safford Town Council recently and presented a proposition in regard to use of the ranch for a golf course and recreation area. The proposition was favorably received by the councilmen. The proposition presented by the golfers follows:

I Purpose

The Mt. Graham Golf & Recreation Association was organized several months ago for the purpose of establishing a golf course and recreational area in the vicinity of Safford.

II Organization

The membership of the association consists of approximately 30 people. The present officers are: Vic Stewart, president; Alma Stinson, vice-president; Carl Heinemund, secretary and treasurer; and Arthur Evans, George Greiner, and Max Wignall, directors.

III History of Activities

The association has spent the last several months making a careful inspection of possible sites for a golf course. It was finally decided that the most suitable location was the Robinson Ranch area, owned by the city of Safford and partially leased to the Gila Junior College for farming purposes. The reasons for this selection were:

1. It's accessibility to Safford and the Valley area.

2. The facilities, which already exist there, were such that less money would be needed for course development (buildings, partial water development, and a semi-finished golf course, in which almost $5000 had been invested by Safford golfers and business men).

3. The physical attributes of the site (scenery, shade, and water) for the development of an outstanding golf course and recreational area. The development of this latter area was particularly considered as a means of supplementing the present recreation facilities of the city of Safford. The site could be easily developed to provide a swimming pool, tennis courts, softball diamond, picnic grounds, and play area.

IV. Development of Plans

The Mt. Graham Golf and Recreation Association would develop this area, subject to the acceptance of the City of Safford of proposition V below, as follows:

1. To complete the plan and layout of the course under the supervision of Arthur Evans and George Greiner.

2. To start immediate work on the completion of the course in accordance with these plans. Labor would be furnished by the 30 active members of the association, and loans of labor and material have been offered by a number of valley people including: Buster Pursley, Paul Johns, and Richard Larson. The first step in the development would be the installation of temporary sand greens, clearing the fairways of rocks, begin the construction of hazards, but with the attempt to have the course playable within 30 days.

4. Upon the completion of this preliminary course, to initiate a membership drive to raise approximately 100 members and $5000.

5. To complete the laying out of water lines so that grass greens and tees may be installed, when water is available.

6. To furnish one of the existing buildings into a modern club house. A portion of the materials and labor have been promised.

7. To conduct a golf tournament, and by other promotional activities to encourage out of town participants. It is felt that such recreational inducement would be of benefit to the reputation of the town of Safford and a stimulus to local business.

8. To ultimately grass the fairways and to help in the development of the recreational area, in whatever way the city of Safford deemed advisable.

9. To conduct the Golf and Recreational Association as a semi-private organization whose revenues would be devoted to the development of the Robinson ranch area.

10. Graham County has unofficially stated that they will provide and maintain a good road to the area.

V Proposition

The Mt. Graham Golf and Recreational Association therefore proposes that the city of Safford:

1. Terminate the lease with Gila Junior College, an action which at one time had the concurrence of President Harless.

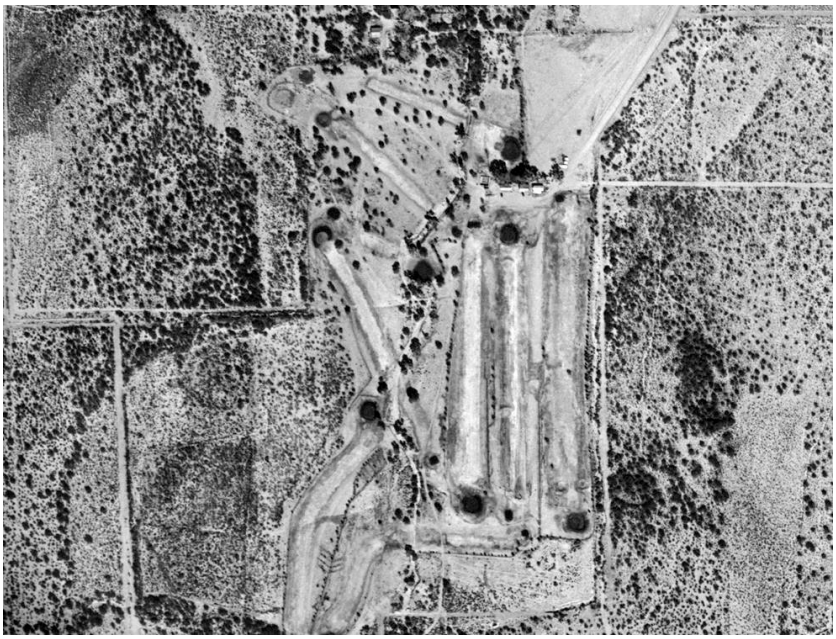
2. Give to the Golf Association a written agreement, or lease for the development and use of the area and such water as not needed by the city of Safford; such agreement would be of sufficient length so as not to jeopardize the investment of labor and money by the Golf Association.

That article reports on the May 19, 1947 Town Council meeting and quotes extensively from a document presented to the Council at that meeting by the new Mt. Graham Golf and Recreation Association. The document states that the new Association, consisting of approximately 30 people, had been organized several months previously and had been making an inspection for possible sites for a golf course. It further states that the Robinson Ranch area was considered the most suitable location for three reasons: "(1) Its accessibility to Safford and the Valley area; (2) The facilities, which already exist there, were such that less money would be needed for course development (buildings, partial water development, and a semi-

finished golf course, in which almost $5000 had been invested by Safford golfers and business men); and (3) The physical attributes of the site. . . .”

The document goes on to state what the new Association would do to develop the area, the first two items being (1) “To complete the plan and layout of the course . . .;” and (2) “To start immediate work on the completion of the course in accordance with these plans. . . . The first step in the development would be the installation of temporary sand greens, clearing the fairways of rocks, begin the construction of hazards, but with the attempt to have the course playable within 30 days.”

The document submitted to the Town Council, together with the fact that the Safford Town Council appears to have taken no action in 1947 to modify its designation of the 70 acres of Robinson Ranch property it dedicated for a golf course in December 1939, suggest that the efforts of the new Association were directed at rehabilitating the golf course built in 1939 from the neglect of the war years and not building a brand new course on the Robinson Ranch property. The following aerial photo taken in 1953 shows that the course continued to occupy approximately 70 acres of the property.



In any event the efforts of the new Association were successful and golf returned to the Robinson Ranch property in 1947.

No effort has been made for purposes of this paper to research in similar detail the history of the Mt. Graham Golf Course after 1947. There are, however, several subsequent milestones worthy of note here.

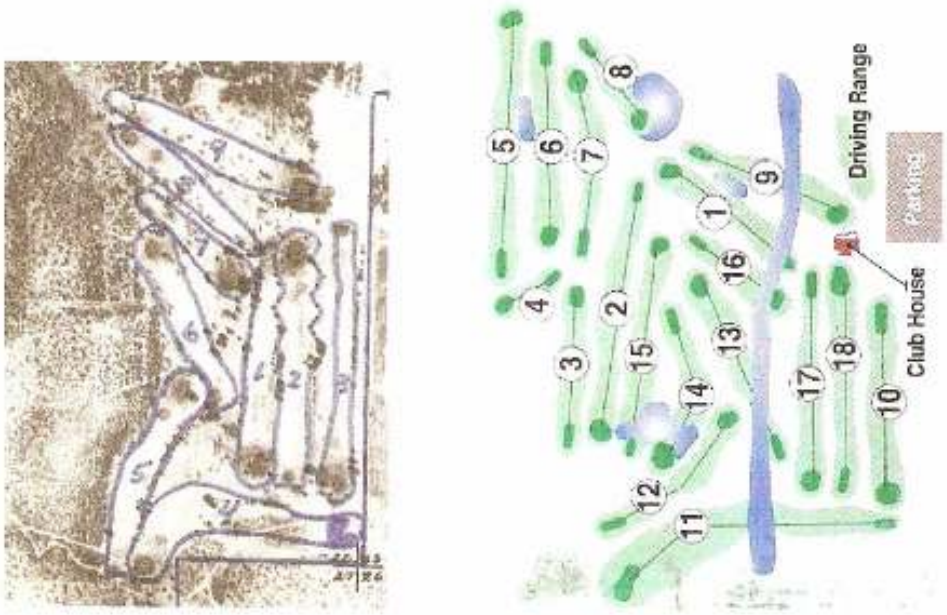
In 1967 the Town of Safford completed the installation of a watering system for the golf course. The system provided extensive underground piping for the watering of greens and fairways on all nine holes of the course.

In 1975 effluent water became available for irrigation of the course, as a result of a $95,000 grant from the Bureau of Reclamation.

In November of 1977, after a lengthy development process that took more than six years, a second nine holes was opened at the Mt. Graham Golf Course adjoining the original course to the west, making the course the only 18 hole layout within 50 miles. At approximately the same time, the City of Safford took over the direct operation and management of the course.

In July 1981 the front and back nines of the course were switched. Most of the original nine holes of the course (except for 8 and 9, now 1 and 9), together with two of the new holes (now 14 and 15) became the back nine, and most of the new holes which had been added in 1977 (now 2-8), together with original holes 8 and 9 (now 1 and 9) became the front nine.

COMPARISON OF GOLF COURSE LAYOUT
1970 AND 2010



In May of 2009 relatives of 16 men who worked on the golf course in 1947 caused the following plaque to be placed on the Mt. Graham Golf Course clubhouse commemorating the 16 men and stating that they "created the first nine holes of this golf course."

No mention is made on the plaque of any of the other 14 members of their association (including five of those other members who presented the association's plans to the Safford Town Council in May of 1947). Nor does the plaque mention any members of the prior association who first selected the Robinson Ranch site, obtained Town Council approval for the golf course there in 1938, and designed and built the original golf course there in 1939.

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the Graham County Historical Society and its Director, Hal Herbert, in the preparation of this paper.