

# The First Decade of Women's Golf in St. Augustine 1895-1905

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During the 1880s a few of St. Augustine's hotels provided a limited number of rooms for winter visitors. By the mid 1890s promoters of St. Augustine capitalized on its status as the oldest town in the United States and claimed that it was the oldest winter resort. The custom of leaving northern cities for a respite from cold weather increased with improved railroad travel. The demand for hotel accommodations in St. Augustine brought prosperity to the town during the formative years of Florida's tourist industry. Because of posh resorts, St. Augustine and the remainder of the east coast of the state became known as the American Riviera. Twelve hotels welcomed guests in St. Augustine by the winter of 1894. A few tennis courts and bowling alleys were available for patrons of the Alcazar Hotel. Before golf was introduced in St. Augustine, hotel guests engaged in diversions such as dances, concerts, card parties, and sight seeing at the old Spanish Fort San Marco, known as Fort Marion.

The inaugural golf season occurred in February 1895. Golfers accumulated nine holes by repeating three holes. The course was constructed on the grounds of Fort Marion. Membership in the St. Augustine Golf Clubs, unlike many early clubs, was open equally to both sexes. Women could join the club without sponsorship from a male family member.

When the 1905 season concluded, the first decade of golf in St. Augustine had ended and the sport was well entrenched in high society. It appears that the social and competitive aspect of playing golf was equally important to female golfers in the old Spanish city. Women experienced the freedom to pursue their sport interests in an atmosphere where women were accepted as competitors, in part because their attire was deemed fashionable and appropriate. Anna Marcotte, editor of *The Tatler* wrote about women's golf activities in her newspaper.

The St. Augustine Golf Club attracted women of similar interests and means and became the social focal point for many women. Patrons with abundant leisure time and wealth enjoyed competition and thrived in the social atmosphere. Since many members were not year-round residents the golf club provided immediate access to St. Augustine's social set. The first decade of women's golf in St. Augustine' can be attributed to Henry Flagner's interest in developing the resort, the mild weather, the popularity of golf among visitors who belonged to country clubs in other cities, the coverage of the sport by Anna Marcotte, and the unrestricted acceptance of female members in the St. Augustine Golf Club.