

Once Upon A Time In North Park

Morley Field, the Balboa Tennis Club and the San Diego Tennis Hall of Fame

By Steve Hon

John G. Morley was Park Superintendent of all San Diego City Parks from 1911 to 1938. He oversaw the development of Balboa Park as well as other city parks during his tenure. In the master plan developed for Balboa Park in the 1920s, the northeast corner of the park was designated for outdoor sports, including a golf course. During the early years of the Depression the City Council authorized a bond issuance to provide for recreation facilities in the area along Upas Street. In January 1933, the North Park Recreation Center was dedicated with a municipal swimming pool (Bud Kearns Memorial Pool) **eight tennis courts**, two baseball fields, shuffleboard courts and play areas. On June 28, 1934, the Park Commission voted to officially name the Recreation Area in Balboa Park along Upas Street from Alabama to Arnold Streets "Morley Field." The tennis courts at Morley Field were a welcome addition to the three tennis courts that had been built at the University Heights Playground (renamed North Park Recreation Center in 1969) in 1924.

Across Florida Canyon, the Balboa Tennis Club had begun in 1922 when a small group of tennis players raised \$5,000 and with the cooperation of the City, constructed six tennis courts adjacent to the present War Memorial building where the San Diego Zoo now has their parking lot. In 1924, San Diego Tennis Association received a lease from the City to operate the courts for the public and a small clubhouse and locker rooms were built in 1935. In 1939, Articles of Incorporation were drawn up and the Balboa Tennis Club was formed as a public, nonprofit corporation to "foster and develop the game of tennis in San Diego.... and to encourage competitive play with other clubs of this and other communities." In June 1966, the club moved to its present location at Morley Field and in July 1983 assumed all the operational responsibilities for the Morley Field Tennis Complex which now consists of 25 hard courts including the Maureen Connolly Brinker Tennis stadium. The Balboa Tennis Club is committed to running a superior tennis facility. In 1989 Balboa Tennis Club was rated as America's Best Public Tennis Facility by the United States Tennis Association (USTA) and in 2003, the Balboa Tennis Club received the Outstanding Tennis Facility award for large facilities by the USTA.

Since August of 2006, the Balboa Tennis Club is also now home to the recently opened San Diego Tennis Hall of Fame. Behind the glass of three cabinets in the Club house at Morley Field are photos, memorabilia and stories about the initial 10 members of the San Diego Tennis Hall of Fame. They are: Bill Bond, Maureen Connolly Brinker, Michael Chang, Dorothy "Dodo" Cheney, Wilbur Folsom, Jean Doyle Garrett, William S. Kellogg, Fred Kinne, Ben Press and Karen Hantze Susman. Three out of the ten initial inductees have a strong connection to North Park. Maureen Connolly Brinker grew up in a home on Idaho Street and learned to play tennis under Wilbur Folsom on the tennis courts at the University Heights Playground. Maureen won nine major singles titles including three consecutive United States Open titles and three Wimbledon championships. Her career ended in 1954 after she severely broke her leg in an equestrian

accident. In addition to teaching Maureen Connolly Brinker to play tennis, Wilbur Folsom taught hundreds of players tennis at the University Heights Playground courts and later at Morley Field. Wilbur was a long time resident of University Heights himself, and despite having lost a leg days after graduating from San Diego High School, he became a institution on the local tennis courts until his death in 1968. Fred Kinne's day job was as a reporter and newspaper editor for the San Diego Evening Tribune. On weekends, he offered free lessons to kids at Morley Field. Fred taught thousands of kids over the years including Brian Teacher, who won the Australian Open in 1980.

For more information on these 10 San Diego tennis legends please visit the Balboa Park Tennis Clubhouse at Morley Field. For more information on the activities and programs of the Balboa Tennis Club please check out their website at **Balboatennis.com** or call (619) 295-9278.