

SJ Chan,

the First President of Island Club, the First of Five Generations

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The SICCC Heritage
Chronicles



In this first in a series of long-standing Members of the Club, Member Anthony D'Cruz weaves a nostalgic tale of Island Club's first President SJ Chan and his daughter, Rosa Lim.

*The first Island
Clubhouse, 1932*



The Singapore Golf Club, born in 1891, moved from the Race Course in Farrer Road to Bukit Timah (Sime Road) in 1924. The departure of this exclusively European club left the door open for non-European members of the Turf Club to play in the vacated golf course. Together with some Europeans who did not wish to move to Bukit Timah,

a new golf club was formed in 1 October 1924. It was named the Race Course Golf Club (also known as the Turf Club Golf Course).

The formation of this new club was an historic event as it was the first multi-racial club in Singapore. Three years after its founding, it had to move premises as the Turf Club in Race Course had sold the land to the Singapore Improvement Trust, known today by one and all as the Housing & Development Board. John Laycock, a prominent lawyer and a Municipal Commissioner of Singapore, used all his resources and connections to secure a piece of land for the Race Course Golf Club in the Municipal Catchment area of the Thomson Road reservoirs. On 28 June 1929, the Singapore Municipal Commissioners formally granted permission for a golf course to be laid out.



The Turf Club Golf Club assumed the new name “Island Club” and play began in 1931.

The first president of the Island Club was the prominent lawyer **Mr Chan Sze Jin**, better known as **SJ Chan**. He was President for three years, from 1931 to 1933. Mr Chan was born in Singapore in 1886 and received his early education in Penang and Kuala Lumpur. In 1904, he won the Queen’s Scholarship in the Federated Malay States. At Cambridge in 1907, he took his B.A. LL.B degrees in law tripos. He entered Gray’s Inn as a student. At the Bar Final Examinations in 1910, he was first in first class honours. On 20 March 1911, he was admitted as Advocate and Solicitor of the Supreme Court, Straits Settlements, in Singapore.

Mr Chan was a brilliant scholar and one of the most able of the lawyers in Singapore. He specialised in Conveyancing and Company matters. He served as a member of the Bar Committees from time to time. He held a Commission Rank in the Straits Settlement Volunteer Forces and was a prominent member of all the leading Chinese Societies and Clubs. From 1927 to 1930, he was a member of the Legislative Council Straits Settlements, and from 1935 to 1940, he was a member of the Executive Council. His valuable public services were accorded recognition by the award to him of the C.M.G.

It was during SJ Chan’s tenure as President that the smooth transition from Race Course Road to Thomson Road took place with the co-operation of stalwarts like John Laycock (Captain), Dr HLH Lim, FA Briggs and Wee Kah Kiat. After all the teething problems had been ironed out, he relinquished office, and Dr HLH Lim took over. SJ died in Singapore on 26 September 1948.

SJ Chan’s daughter, **Chan Choo Neo**, was born in 1913. In 1930, she became Mrs Arthur Lim Siew Jin but was known by one and all as **Rosa Lim**. Rosa began playing golf at Island Club in 1935 and excelled in it to such an extent that she became the first Asian in Singapore to play to a single digit handicap. If you were to speak to her today, you would be hard pressed to believe that she is 98 years old. Her eyes sparkle as she reminisces her glory days when she was queen of the links. With humour sharp as a tack and memory undiminished by age, she recalls the halcyon days of gracious living and relaxed club life punctuated by the various tournaments and monthly medals participated in by one and all. Still in her possession are her hoard of

A youthful Rosa Lim in January 1954



medals, cups and trophies garnered during her competition days. She has won no less than 22 LGU Monthly Medals and was the winner of the Siam Cup in 1948 and 1962, the Cathay Cup in 1961, Fatimah Trophy in 1962, and MacDonal Cup in 1960. In 1962, she was runner-up in the Ladies' Championship, and in 1963, she and Dr RS Guthree were the Singapore Open Amateur Championship runners-up.

During the hours Rosa spent playing and practising, her constant companion was her youngest son Daniel. At first, it was with reluctance that Daniel accompanied his mum to the range. He had to be dragged along, but soon the bug bit, and then it became his turn to drag mum along. Blessed with the genes he had inherited, and coupled with his work ethic, he soon became a superb golfer. The tennis bug had bitten as well, and in 1982, Daniel became the SICC Tennis Champion, and in 1985 the SICC Golf Champion. No other member of the club has had the honour of being the Club Champion in these two major sports. Needless to say, Daniel went on to further glory, representing Singapore in both tennis and golf.

Gordon, another of Rosa's sons, became a useful golfer too, and in 1965 won the Gaw Khek Khiam Cup. His son, Dr Jimmy Lim, is a 4th generation member of SICC, and Jimmy's son, Sean Lim, a fifth generation member, is now immersed in the SICC Junior Golf Programme. And so we have Sean, the great-grandson of SJ Chan, the first President of the Island Club, enjoying the fruits of the tree planted by an ancestor he has yet to know anything about.



Rosa Lim at 98, today



A 1948 Straits Times clipping of Rosa Lim winning the SICC's Siam Cup



Rosa Lim with youngest son Daniel