

# The Class of 2014



## “The Foursome”

### Civil Rights Pioneers

The movement to build municipal golf courses in America in the early 20th century was seen as a way to democratize the game, allowing the poor and middle-class the chance to enjoy the values of health, recreation and camaraderie associated with playing golf... so long as you were white.

But these same values were largely denied to men and women of color.



Through the 1930s to the early 1950s, minority golfers in Kansas City, as in the rest of the country, had few places to play. Jim Crow segregation was the order of the day. African-Americans were allowed to play on the nine, hardscrabble holes of Swope Park #2 (but then, only on Mondays and Tuesdays) while whites had access to the well-kept eighteen-hole course up the hill: Swope #1.

That changed in March 1950 when “The Foursome” showed up and demanded the right to play the famous A. W. Tillinghast design they had heard so much about. **Mr. George Johnson** a life-long golfer whose roots in the game traced back to an old potato farm in Wyandotte County; **Mr. Reuben Benton** (r) a newspaperman and later, co-owner of the *Kansas City Call*; **Mr. Sylvester “Pat” Johnson** and **Mr. Leroy Doty** (above left) both active in the Heart of America Golf Club, challenged authority and convention and (literally) risked life and limb to open public facilities to minority golfers in Kansas City.



Facing the wrath of white patrons and employees, The Foursome laid their money on the counter and walked to the first tee to usher-in an era of integrated golf in Kansas City. It was not without further challenges, but the courageous acts of these four men paved the way for others who followed.