

A glimpse of the past

Historic materials | Sean Dudley

Modern architects are using a range of historic materials and records to help inform their work, as Sean Dudley discovers

Legend has it that when the Canadian National Railway saw Stanley Thompson's work at Banff Springs, developed by the company's major rival – the Canadian Pacific Railway – in 1929, they ordered him to immediately overhaul the bunkering at the Jasper Park Lodge course they had opened four years earlier.

This version of events suggests it was Banff Springs where Thompson first developed his bold and distinctive approach to bunkering that has influenced many designers throughout Canada and beyond. However, when Ian Andrew, ASGCA embarked upon detailed

research into the history of Jasper Park Lodge in advance of a recent project, an alternative truth emerged.

As Andrew explains: "There's a quote from Dr. Alister MacKenzie in September 1928 which reads: 'In Jasper Park Lodge Golf Course, Canada has taken the lead in golf course architecture and has produced 18 holes that within the whole scope of my experience and knowledge are not surpassed.' I thought to myself, could the bunker work have happened earlier?"

Andrew's examination of historic materials unearthed more detail. "Thompson was kept on a yearly retainer and



Historic photographs of the course at Jasper Park Lodge in Alberta, Canada set Ian Andrew, ASGCA on a journey to discover more about the evolution of architect Stanley Thompson's distinctive bunkering

provided an annual report to the Canadian National Railway,” he explains. “He also produced a renovation plan drawn in November 1926 indicating his intended changes to the bunkering, including the addition of multiple new landforms and the introduction of high sand faces to make the bunkering far more visually impressive”. Photographs from the Canadian Amateur tournament in 1929 show that the changes had been made to the course before Banff Springs opened.

“I think of Harry Colt’s Toronto Golf Club as our landmark course. But I also believe Thompson’s work surpassed Colt in Canada and he is our most influential designer. As an architect and as a historian I always wanted to know when that exact moment Thompson had his epiphany

was. I had previously thought this came at Banff Springs, but I’m no longer sure. The more I ventured down the path, the more I believe that it came at Jasper Park.”

Not all research projects will rewrite history. But they do help to inform today’s architects of the decision-making process taken by the designers of America’s first courses. “Golf course architects from the pre-1940 era were forced to utilize the natural terrain to a maximum due to limitations in equipment and budgets,” says Ray Hearn, ASGCA. “These historical jewels and ‘lay of the land’ masterpieces influenced early golf course design in America and still do today.”

Hearn completed a renovation of the Herbert J. Tweedie-designed course at Flossmoor Country Club in Illinois, and says the use of

historical documentation was a vital part of his work there.

“Thanks to access to Flossmoor’s 100 Year Anniversary Guide, I was able to look at the course’s original routing and its evolution over time, as well as the cultural and social history of the club,” he explains.

Hearn also accessed old newspaper articles about the course, including one from 1918 by George O’Neil, a renowned professional and architect in his own right, who included the seventeenth hole at Flossmoor on a list of the best 18 holes in the US he compiled for the Chicago Daily Tribune.

Materials such as these enabled Hearn to make an informed choice as to what he felt the best course of action for Flossmoor would be going forward. “The routing of the Flossmoor course has for the most

part stayed intact for over 100 years,” says Hearn. “With regards to the renovation, I looked at the golf course at Flossmoor as a great work of art that just needed to be dusted off, with the correction of a few weak holes and subtle improvements to others.”

For the recent renovation of Mira Vista Golf & Country Club in El Cerrito, California, which was originally designed by Robert Hunter and Willie Watson, a painstaking study pieced various items together to understand the original architects’ approach.

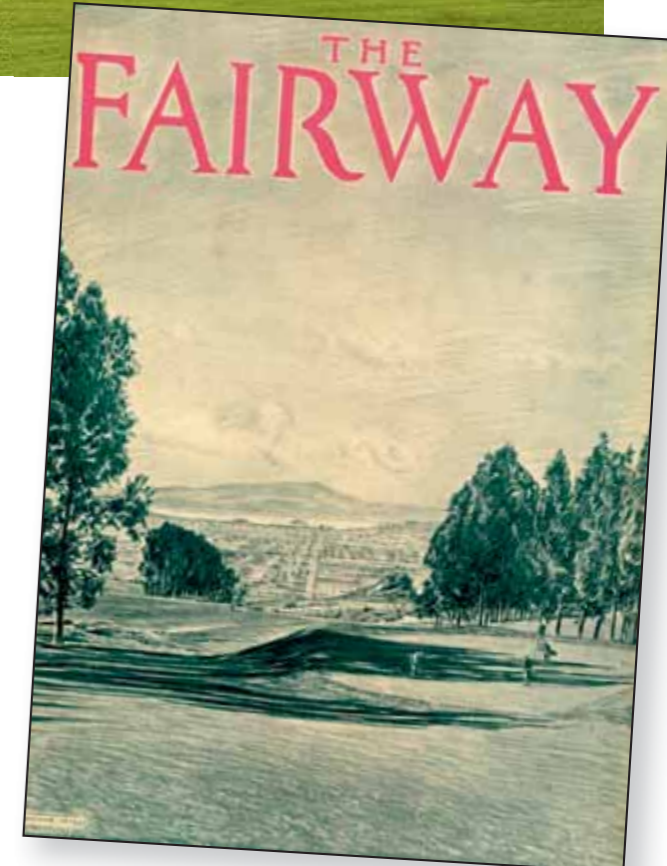
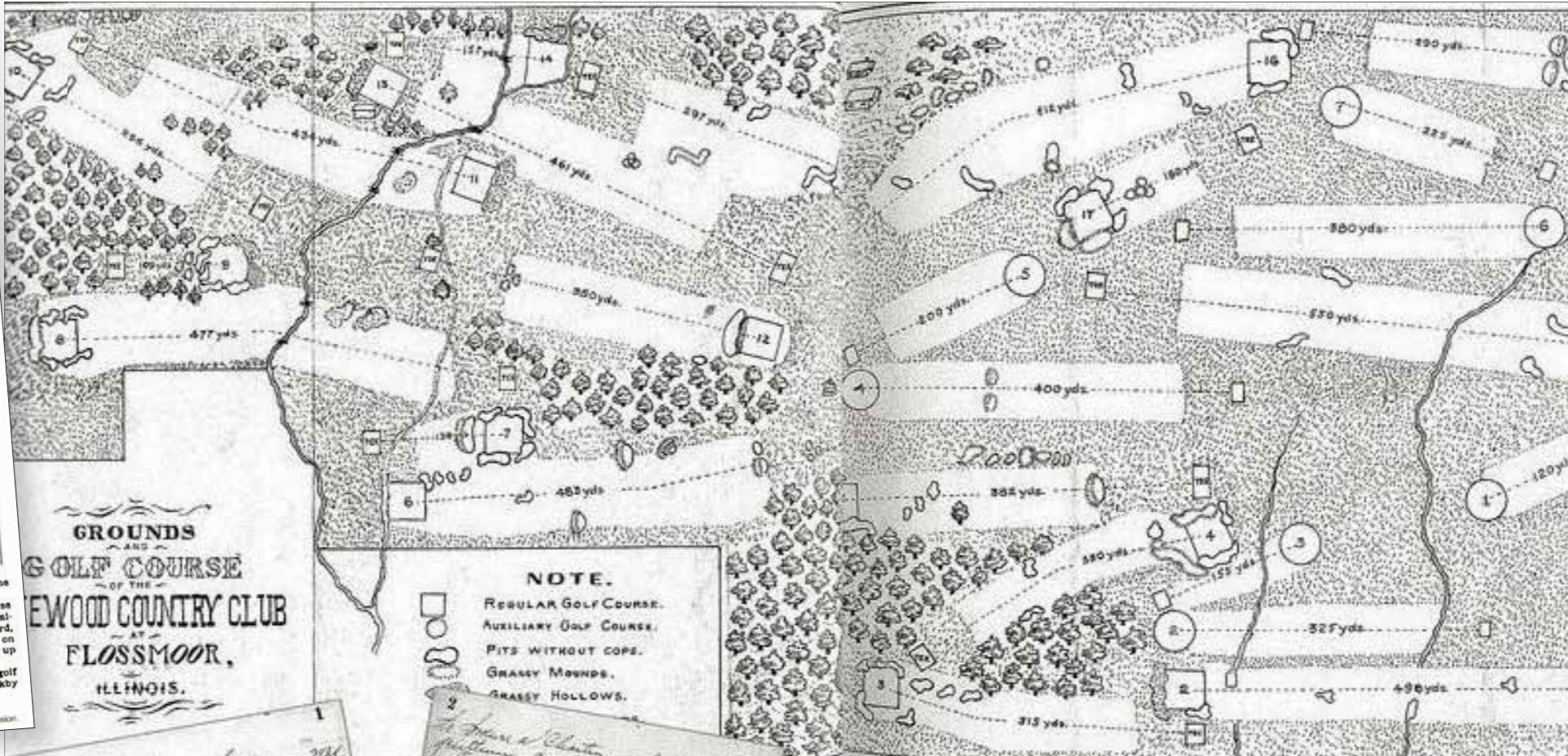
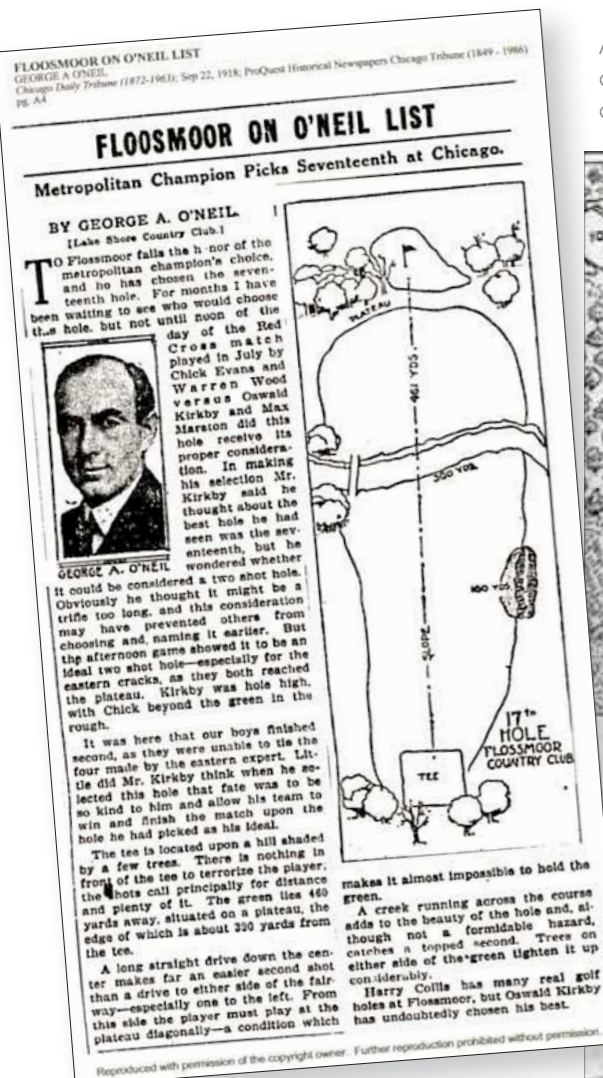
“The club had the old plan, in pieces,” explains Forrest Richardson, ASGCA. “We were also able to unearth some news articles and old photos. We then worked to put the various elements together to create something that could be used to form opinions and assumptions.”

Richardson and his team created a full timeline of the course, charting the progress from its original layout to the course that is in play today.



Photo: Mike Houako, courtesy of Forrest Richardson & Assoc.

A 1929 article by George O’Neil (left) helped inform the work Ray Hearn, ASGCA completed at Flossmoor Country Club. Also pictured is the original routing of the course, which was originally named Homewood Country Club



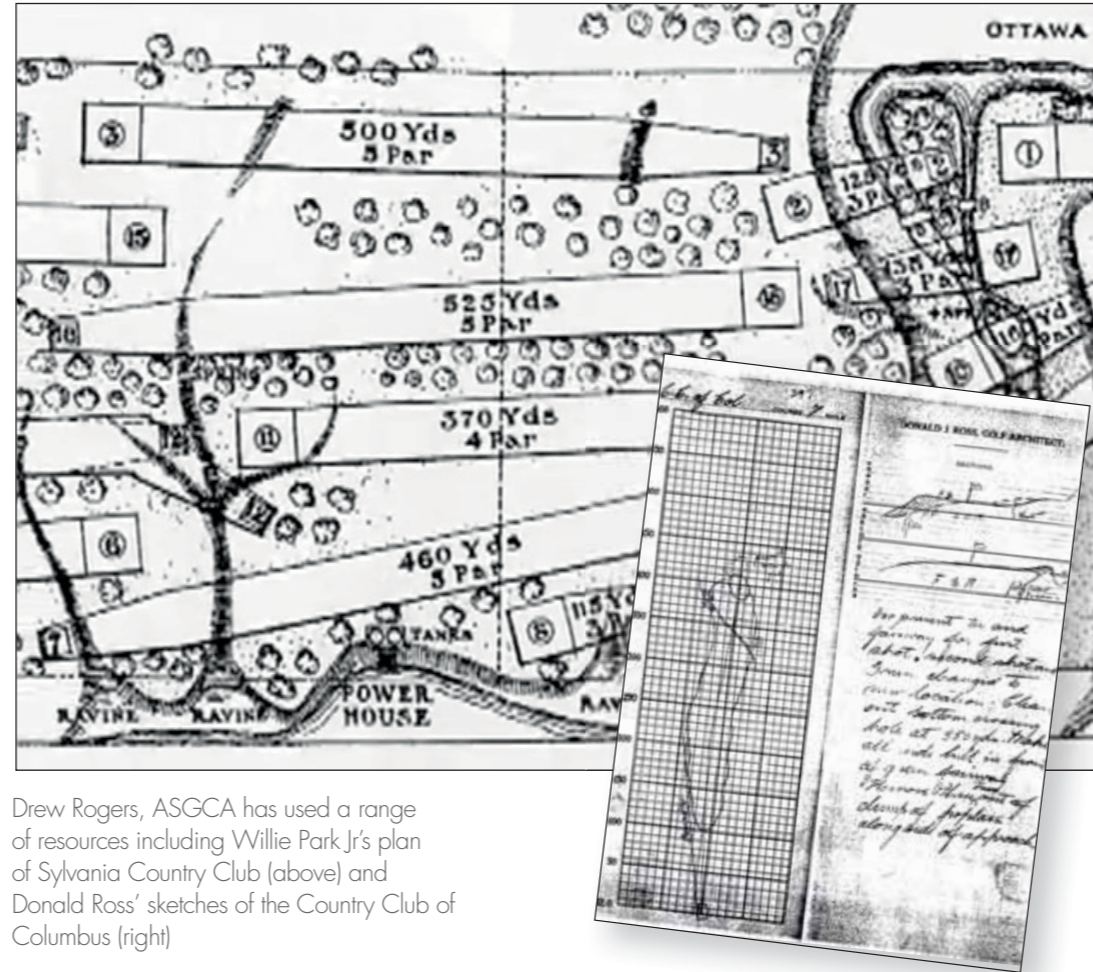
The restored sixth green at Mira Vista Golf & Country Club (above), and as featured on the front cover of *The Fairway* magazine, 1930



Note the differing bunker styles in the two aerials shots that informed Robert McNeil's work at River Vale Country Club. The left photo is dated from 1944, while the right photo was taken in 1961

He says that compiling the history of the course at Mira Vista has helped to revitalize the club, "in a way that has brought pride and respect to the original design". "With the full timeline, we were able to reference aspects of the course from both a time and an intent perspective," Richardson continues. "The timeline gave us a feel for what the founders wanted to

do and how they viewed the course and club. The intent came from knowing what Hunter wanted from the course." "Historic materials help to establish a greater understanding of how a course might have been originally conceived, how it has evolved through time, what sort of influences took place and what their impact was," says Drew Rogers, ASGCA.



Drew Rogers, ASGCA has used a range of resources including Willie Park Jr's plan of Sylvania Country Club (above) and Donald Ross' sketches of the Country Club of Columbus (right)

"Photos and notes can be somewhat hard to find, but if they exist they are usually in club archives or vintage books, magazines and newspaper articles. Some clubs develop books about their history, and those are like gold!"

For Mark Mungeam, ASGCA, inspiration came in the form of the program for the 1928 U.S. Open. He has recently completed a project on the North Course at Olympia Fields Country Club in Chicago, and was able to restore elements of holes by referring to the hole-by-hole guide, which included photographs and a plan image of each hole on the course that Willie Park Jr. had laid out just five years before the event was held.

"On the first hole for example, the plan revealed a bunker with a grass island on the right side of the landing zone," says Mungeam. "And on the fifth, Park had placed a central bunker about 20 yards from the putting surface. These features

had been lost over time and we were able to restore them faithfully using the detailed information from the U.S. Open program, along with other materials."

Their archive of high quality materials has allowed the club to remain faithful to Park's original design intent, while incorporating the additional length necessary to host the game's elite players.

Drew Rogers has also carried out a number of projects at courses designed by the legends of golf course architecture, including Harry Colt, Donald Ross, and Willie Park Jr. When it comes to working on these courses, he believes that access to historic archives, such as the Tufts Archives in Pinehurst, North Carolina, can be hugely beneficial.

"Aerial photos are great because we can very directly assess sizes, locations, vegetation, fairway widths, and even previous alignments and corridors," Rogers explains.



Mark Mungeam, ASGCA referred to the hole-by-hole guide of the 1928 U.S. Open program for a recent project on the North Course of Olympia Fields CC in Chicago. This enabled some of Willie Park Jr's original features to be restored on the first (above) and fifth (top) holes, among others





A vintage style of bunker creation in evidence at Pine Needles, North Carolina

“By having a progression of aerial photos through time, it’s very interesting to look at how vegetation emerges and eventually dictates the character of a course.”

“I have made use of things like old meetings notes and club ledgers, as sometimes all you’re looking for is some sort of indication that something did or did not at one time exist, and if so, when,” Rogers adds. “It all really helps put the puzzle pieces together so that a story can be told. It helps modern memberships gain a greater understanding of how their club came to be and why. If there is good reason to consider some restorative efforts to the course, we look to find the rationale and support through history to help us understand the

intent and then execute the work with greater accuracy.”

John Fought, ASGCA, also referred to the Tufts Archive when restoring the original Donald Ross design at Pine Needles in North Carolina. “We utilized old aerial photography, Ross’s concept plan and many photos from the original construction,” says Fought. “These materials help the current generation understand the changes that have occurred, both manmade and through natural evolution.” And for his ongoing work at Rosedale in Toronto, Canada, Fought has transposed the course as depicted in a 1939 aerial over a plan of the existing golf course.

Aerial photography can be invaluable. “At the start of our work

at River Vale CC in New Jersey, the club provided several high quality aerial photographs that helped us to pinpoint the ‘moment in time’ that we wanted to embrace relative to the bunker styling,” says Robert McNeil, ASGCA. “This photography provided some clarity and comparative information relative to the classic style of 1944 versus the ‘saucers’ created in the 1960s.

“What this photography also presented was the original mow lines on the golf course as well as several bunkers that had been lost or moved over the years. From this we were able to scale the bunker size and perimeters, locate the original fairway mow lines in the field and develop a reasonable and effective tree management program.

“One of the most important foundational elements of restoration is to establish a respectful understanding of what it is you are attempting to restore. This is sometimes challenging as each golf course evolves from its original design, strategies and style.

“It is common for a greens committee or chairperson to boldly state ‘we want all the bunkers exactly like they were when the course was originally built in 1900-and-something.’ This is where the architect can guide the research and develop restorative directives that are sensible, reflect the true character of the golf course and embrace historical elements and characteristics that fit into the current layout and demands of the game.” ●

Case Study - The Old White course at The Greenbrier Resort



Lester George, ASGCA completed a five-year restoration of The Old White course at The Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia, US, between 2001-2006.

Originally designed by C.B. Macdonald and Seth Raynor and opened in 1914, the course has held the Greenbrier Classic on the PGA Tour since 2010.

The Old White was drastically changed over the years, but after sitting down with club’s historian and director of golf, George used a series of aerial photographs and used an innovative technique to identify and analyse the Old White’s original layout.

George’s project took five years to complete, but the intensive nature of the work is why it’s been regarded as one of the strictest restorations of a Raynor/McDonald course in the US.

“Where it says ‘Casino’ (below), that’s the clubhouse. There’s an awning on that building, between the clubhouse and the tennis courts, that is still there at the same elevation today. Once we had the photograph, we looked at the shadow of the trees that are still there, such as ones around the 18th green. We could tell roughly what time of day the photograph was taken. By measuring the shadow on the awning, which I knew was a known height, I

could transfer around the golf course, and look at all the bunkers and tell how deep they were. I studied aerial photography and military photographs when I was in the army for many years, and so I felt like I had a pretty good understanding of two dimensional light and depth, and shadow and form. I applied what I already knew and got lucky and found this one shadow that was consistent from the 1920s to today.”



“At the top of the photo (above) is the twelfth hole, and to the right of the ‘s’ of ‘Yds’ is a bunker, with the sand and the brow visible. I restored that bunker as part of my work there. Further down the fairway there’s a section that looks like tall grass, or a blip if you will on the left hand side. That’s where the hell bunker would have been. Between there and the green there’s a creek, and you can see where the fairway comes down to a point. We restored the creek and put sand back into the hell bunker. These are the kind of things we were able to pick up thanks to the photograph.”

“On the third hole (below) you can see the Biarritz and the horseshoe-shaped bunker around it. For resort play, as the bunker goes all the way round, a forced carry on a 220-yard hole is pretty tough. So we took some artistic license and put in Biarritz bunkering like we’d seen it at other courses, which is left and right, front and back. These are the kind of decisions we had to make.”



“The 18th green (above) has the horseshoe contour in it, which Raynor and McDonald always put in their short hole. So when I built the 18th green back as it was, I built a remnant of it as I didn’t have the room to go all the way to the creek anymore. It’s a brow and it’s in the middle of the green, and the first year they held the Greenbrier Classic there people were saying ‘What the hell is this? It’s three feet high!’ We reintroduced it to keep it fun for the resort golfer, but when the tour came they asked whether to keep it, and I said ‘only if want to be accurate!’ Now it’s one of the most talked about holes on the PGA Tour.”