"Masters" proves that some things just never change.

By MARK LESLIE

S o, you golf purists out there in Golf Kingdom think we should return to the Glory Days of the early 1900s. Those were the days, weren't they, when there were no squabbles about maintenance, "chocolate drops" along fairways, or carry shots to the green, or overwatered putting surfaces, or golfers who lamented hazards, or developers' cries of "More distance. I want more distance!"

Well, the masters themselves — you know, Mr. Tillinghast, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Macdonald, Mr. (Bobby) Jones and others are here to set the record straight. Here, that is, in the new book, "Masters of the Links — Essays on the Art of Golf and Course Design."

Edited by Geoff Shackelford, whose "The Captain" brought us insights into the life of architect George Thomas, this pot-pourri illustrates that some things never change. Though the essays were written during golf architecture's Classic Era — those times which are to golf as the 1920s are to American graffiti-ites — you might think they were fashioned in 1997.

For instance, this is from Charles Blair Macdonald in 1928:

"Viewing the monstrosities created on many modern golf courses, which travesty on Nature, no golfer can but shudder for the soul of golf. It would seem that in this striving after 'novelty and innovation,' many builders of golf courses believe they are elevating the game. But what a sad contemplation!"

"Mortoring to Southampton, I pass a goodly number of new courses. As I view the putting-greens it appears to me they are all built similarly, more or less of a bowl or saucer type, then built up toward the back of the green, and then scalloped with an irregular line of low, waving mounds or hillocks, the putting-green for all the world resembling a pie-faced woman with a marble wave. I do not believe any upper saws in nature anything approaching these home-made putting-greens. Then, scattered over the side of the fairway, are mounds modeled after haycocks or chocolate-drops. The very scene is disgusting."

• Was Robert Tyre (Bobby) Jones Jr. talking about "the masters" when he wrote this in the USGA Green Section Bulletin in February 1932: "Of our two great American preferences — the one for placing the green bunkering where it is close to the putting surface, and the other for soggy greens which will hold any kind of pitch, whether struck with backspin or not — I can not say which induced the other which came first. The closer guarding, in many instances, makes a soft green necessary if the hole is to be playable, and easy pitching, on the other hand, makes it necessary to decrease the size of the target in order to supply any test. I quarrel with both ends of this proposition, whichever is to blame. These two are together reasons, I think, why our golf courses in the main lack the subtlety of the British links, and why our golf does not demand the strategy or the intelligent planning it should.

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— An observation from Charles Blair Macdonald in 1928
carry shots. So, you think Mr. Nicklaus invented this design? Think again, as you read what William S. Flynn wrote in the USGA Green Section Bulletin in October 1927:

"America has developed a more or less stereotyped shot to the green that is the high, all-carry shot. This has been brought about, no doubt, by the fact that fairways and particularly approaches have gone unwatered during the summer when the ground has become hard. It is much simpler to play a high carry shot to a soft green which gets water than to attempt a pitch-and-run to a green with a cement-like approach."

• And, is it a new thing to have equipment changes affect course design? Here's Thomas again, zeroing in on the U.S. Golf Association's regulations levied on golf balls: "These changes ... make the problem of the constructor more confused than ever, because he must endeavor to prepare his entire course for a variable standard, and must provide, for the expediating problem, a green which later will take care of any oval, balloon, or cannon-ball upon which the governing body may insist."

Don't you just love it?

Other insights abound, and many will take you aback. For instance, what would A.W. Tillinghast have thought about today's penchant for 7,000-yard courses? "The fetish of distance is worshipped entirely too often and there should be a quick end to it," he wrote in Golf Illustrated in March 1933. "Very recently in California during one of the open tournaments, we heard a noted player ask his opinion of the course. 'It's too damned long' came the instant and candid reply — and this answer was made by one of the longest hitters in our land.

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Section 9 — Communication (with members, media and the general public)

Sections 4-7 will conform to the following structure:

1) Introduction
2) Regulatory Requirements to summarize how the topic is governed in Canada and by whom (i.e. municipalities, provincial bodies, or federal institutions)
3) Standard Operating Practices is the heart of each topic. Figures, tables, contact numbers for individual provinces and discussions of all relevant issues are discussed here.
4) Colleague Examples outline what the industry has adopted from legislative requirements. Proactive superintendents' histories are included, as well as industry leaders' opinions on the subject matter.

The project team consists of Kirk Morrison (co-writer), President of Bel'MK Engineering Ltd., Calgary, Alberta, who has extensive experience in assembling environmental codes of practice for a number of industries, and me. A steering committee has been comprised for editing purposes and is headed by Chair Designated Chair (CGSA's Alberta director), superintendent at Cottonwood Golf and Country Club in Dewinton, Alberta, and includes golf course superintendents across the country.

The steering committee and writers were intentionally chosen from all sides of the country in order to create a holistic document that would have a national focus.

It is nearing its completion, and sponsored opportunities are still available for the copy, binding and distribution process. Interested industry affiliates should contact Vince Gillis, CGSA executive director, at 905-602-8873.