Historic photographs are an excellent source for proper golf course restoration.

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD

The key to any relatively headache-free golf course restoration is the ability to refer to historic photographs. Even if you have the architect's blueprints and members with active memories, old photographs provide unquestionable evidence about how the course used to look.

If the photographs are at all sharp and are accompanied by dates, they document what the architect and his team built. They also provide an authoritative rebuttal when the green chairman decides he is A.W. Tillinghast reincarnated, the membership claims the course should not be touched even though the old photos reveal something special that needs to be recaptured, or the supervising architect's theory of restoring and placing Ross-style bunkering in the modern era includes a symbolic Feng Shui-inspired homage.

Restoration projects have often failed or lacked quality results because no one set aside the time to find old photographs, magazine articles, scorecards and aerial shots. Often, they didn't know how and where to look. However, with a little time, patience and research, you can often discover some great old photos, which could help return your course to its original splendor.

Seeking old photographs and other historical information about your course can be fun — and even a little addictive. If you're a superintendent, it's a good excuse to get away from work while still actually doing your job. So here are some tips on how to approach your investigation — where and what to look for when looking for old golf course photographs.

**Background check**

Before you get on the phone, brush up on the past by reading a club history or talking to local history buffs. Take a drive around the course to notice key points like mountains or old buildings that may not be as prominent today, but which would have stood out before trees took over your course.

Make sure you know any different names your course may have had in the early days. Note the dates of old professional or high-level amateur tournaments the course possibly hosted. Those were often covered by newspapers or had programs printed.

Many defunct newspaper photo collections have been donated to libraries, and you'd be amazed what you can find in those old photo files. But make sure to emphasize finding pre-Depression or pre-World War II information because many courses which shut down during those tough times reopened and looked significantly different.

If you haven't already, let people at your course know you're looking for leads. You may be amazed at what kind of items members might have. A photo of someone teeing off on No. 6 in 1945 might be useful in showing bunker evolution after the course had been in play for 20 years. Old scorecards can also be useful. So inquire in newsletters, on bulletin boards and in committee meetings to obtain these materials.

**Get on the phone, 'Net**

This is the most time consuming and least glamorous aspect of the search, but persistence on the phone or online can also save you a lot of effort.

*Continued on page 44*
Old aerial photographs are the most reliable of all information and the key to any restoration project.

Course restoration – if you can find them
You'd be amazed at the old photos of golf courses you can find at libraries.

Collection of pre-1940 Golfdoms is excellent. Accompanying hotel makes quick and reasonably priced research trips possible. (626-654-2354, email: golflore@earthlink.net)

World Golf Hall of Fame Collection, Jacksonville, Fla. — Photos, periodicals and books finally accessible to researchers. Old A.W. Tillinghast 1930s letter collection could greatly help in researching changes to your course. Tillinghast documented his visits to hundreds of courses across the country. Former USGA curator Karen Bednaraski heads this collection. (904-940-4000)

Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del. — Remarkable source for sharp, high-quality aerial photos of Eastern golf courses. Ask for the Dallin Aerial Survey list of courses to determine if your layout is included. If it is, you've struck gold. If you stop in to see them in person, don't miss the Pine Valley aerial file. (302-658-2400, ext. 277)

Tufts Archives, Pinehurst, N.C. — Ultimate source for Donald Ross information, photographs and renderings. If you have a Ross design, this is your first, and perhaps only, stop. (910-295-3642).

British Columbia Golf House Society, Vancouver, B.C. — Good source for information relating to Pacific Northwest and Western Canadian courses. (604-222-4653)

National Archives and Records Administration, Cartographic and Architectural Branch, College Park, Md. — Hit or miss source for old aerial photos. Most are from late 1930s and most are shot from high up. But researchers have had excellent results here when all else failed. Be ready with map coordinates or map photographs of your course when submitting orders. Prices are reasonable. (301-713-6400)

George Bahto — If you have a Charles Blair Macdonald, Seth Raynor or Charles Banks design, you probably already know about Bahto. If not, his e-mail is ggb313@aol.com.

tillinghast.net — A fast-growing and wonderful Web site devoted to A.W. Tillinghast. The Wolfe brothers and Bob Trebus are assembling the Tillinghast Society and excellent documentation of all of Tillie's work. A must if you have a Tillinghast design.
Picture This
Continued from page 44

When you go
There is plenty to remember when departing on your investigation. Be prepared or else you may have to make return visits:

- Make sure you have plenty of time set aside, preferably a full day if you are checking out multiple sources.
- Go by yourself unless the person you bring along is just as passionate and knowledgeable about your course as you are. Otherwise, you won’t get your work done.
- Bring a folder for receipts so you can be reimbursed for expenses.
- Bring your checkbook in case you find some prints that you want copies of (libraries rarely take credit cards).
- Bring some cash and change in case they will let you make photocopies of prints or magazine articles you need. Always ask for copies to be made on the copier’s “photo” setting, which sometimes gives enough detail that you won’t need to order reprints of photos. But when feasible, get reprints made. Detail matters in a restoration.
- Bring a notepad and take extensive notes of everything you see regarding your course or other courses of interest. You’ll be amazed how much those notes will come in handy.
- Bring a magnifying glass if you are going to be studying aerials.
- Bring along any other photos or books on your course that help you identify photographs while you search.

If you do locate a good aerial collection, be ready to spend some of the club’s money. And don’t let the club skimp if you do locate aerials because you’ll want enlargements made to further aid your efforts in figuring out old green contour lines and the location of various other features.

Finally, have fun with this. Treat yourself to a nice lunch, take a break to check out something of interest to you and take your time. Your efforts in researching old photographs can make or break a restoration project. Depending on what you dig up, a good collection of old photographs will not only make the process less subjective, but can also significantly impact the future of your classic course.

Geoff Shackelford has researched old photographs for four of his books, including The Golden Age of Golf Design. His e-mail address is geoffshackelford@aol.com.

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If you’re patient, you might find an old scorecard.

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Golfdom July 2000