

Saving masterpieces of the masters

Ross Society championing a call to preserve famed courses

By PETER BLAIS

They grew up playing Wampanoag Country Club in West Hartford, Conn., and came to appreciate the subtle, contoured greens requiring well-placed pitches and deft putting strokes.

As adults they traveled the country, finding other Donald Ross-designed courses as much, or even more to their liking. They also found, much to their dismay, that the architect's classical work had often been tampered with.

"Many of Ross' courses have been changed over the years and bear no resemblance to what was there originally. There is a strong movement to get back to the original lines of golf courses which were playable for many different levels of player. Restoring and preserving them to stay in line with Ross-ian ideas are among the things we are trying to do," said Barry Palm, executive vice president/corporate secretary of the Donald Ross Society.

Hartford natives Palm, Steve Edwards, Michael Fay and Bruce Taylor founded the organization in January. It has grown to 125 members and includes such notables as Ben Crenshaw and CBS commentator Ben Wright.

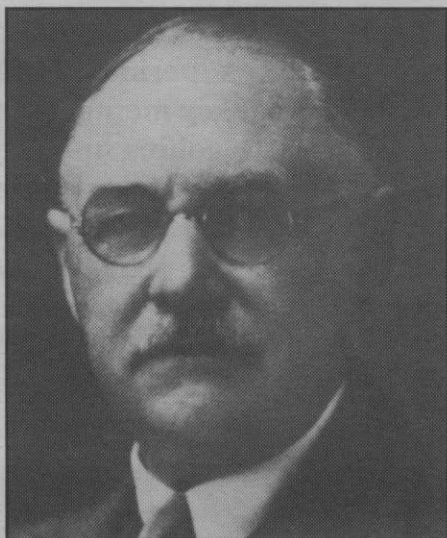
Prior to the Depression, Ross was directly involved in the construction of most of the courses bearing his name. From 1930 on, his crew, which numbered around 3,000, did most of the work while he oversaw projects from Pinehurst.

Since preservation was not a major issue in the 1930s and 1940s, many of the original blueprints weren't preserved, according to Palm. However, the society can help put course officials in touch with the Tufts Family archives at Pinehurst's Given Library, which still contain 100 or so original designs of Ross' earlier work. The Scotland-born architect considered those his best.

The society is also establishing a scholarship fund financed by membership contributions and a percentage of the entrance fee from next May's three-day society tournament at Pinehurst. More than \$8,000 has already been raised, with Plainfield (N.J.) Country Club, a Ross course, kicking in \$1,000.

"The money will go to a worthy student who embraces the classical school of thought involving golf course architecture. It will be based on financial need and love of the game," said Palm. (Golf course design is not a course of study at any college. Most architects come from landscaping backgrounds.)

Ross first became involved with the sport in his native Donroch. The son of a stonemason, he was an apprentice carpenter before Donroch Golf Club secretary John Sutherland, who gave him his early lessons about turf and



Donald Ross

course design, urged Ross to go to St. Andrews. There he learned club-making from David Forgan and studied golf under "Old Tom" Morris.

In 1898, at age 26, Ross emigrated to Boston where he became pro/greenskeeper at Oakley Country Club. He met members of the wealthy Tufts family of Medford, Mass., who made him the winter golf professional at a resort they were developing in Pinehurst.

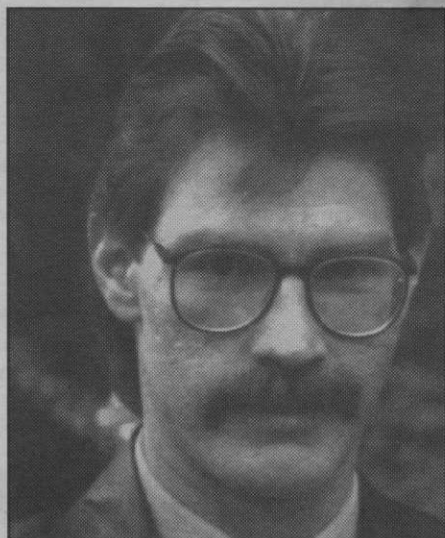
His design and refining of Pinehurst complex courses made him one of the nation's most sought-after architects from 1912 until his death in 1948 at age 72.

Along the way he designed such well-known courses as Seminole GC in North Palm Beach, Fla.; Oak Hill CC in Rochester N.Y.; and Salem CC in Peabody, Mass.

Ross is credited with developing between 400 and 600 courses, although the exact number is unknown.

"We've verified 390 to this point," said Palm.

Many of those courses are private. One of the society's most successful projects has been setting up a network that lets members at various Ross courses help one another get



Ross fan Barry Palm

onto their home turf.

Approximately 50 Ross courses have been the sites of United States championship events.

The society is putting together a book concerning the tournaments held at those facilities.

While Ross courses have proved a challenge to the nation's best golfers, one of their major assets have always been their playability for all skill levels, according to Palm.

"One of Ross' favorite sayings was that 'golf should be a pleasure, not a penance,'" said Palm, a six-handicapper.

"On a Ross par 4, I might hit a driver and a 3-iron where a 20-handicapper would hit a driver and 3-wood. But both of us could still be on the green or in good position to pitch up and get a par. Many courses today are penal for the high-handicapper. His courses are enjoyable for everyone."

The other major characteristic of Ross courses is the greens.

"They're very subtle and require a deft putting technique. He always located his greens first and then worked from there backwards along the fairways. In many cases the greens are crowned, like an inverted saucer. They

require a knowledge of where to hit your shot or it might just roll off because of the pitch," said Palm.

Palm's knowledge comes from playing approximately 50 Ross courses. Pinehurst No. 2, followed closely by Salem Country Club, are his favorites.

"Some people want to play the top 100-ranked courses in the country. My goal is to play all the Donald Ross courses before I die," said Palm.

For more information on the Donald Ross Society write 7 Fairlee Road, West Hartford, Conn. 06107; or call 203-561-2431.

The Value of Strategy



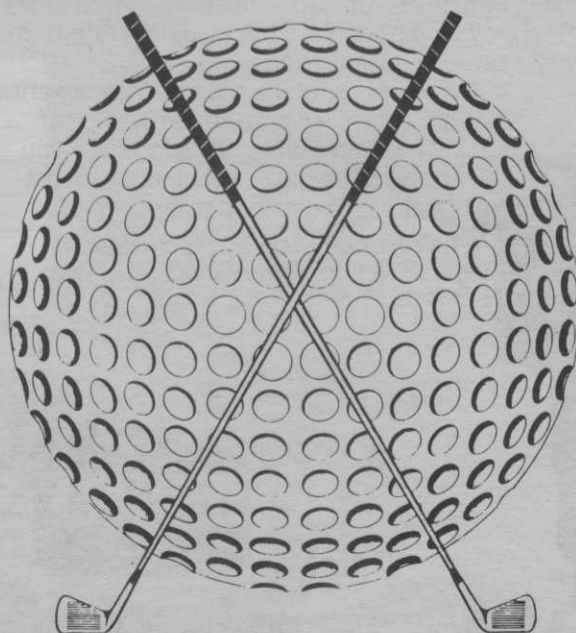
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