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Off The Fringe

Superintendents as Historians

UNEARTHING A CLUB'S PAST CAN LEAD TO A BETTER FUTURE. HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON HOW TO DO SO **By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor**

Shortly after taking over as superintendent of the Fox Chapel Golf Club just north of Pittsburgh, Jason Hurwitz was cleaning out the maintenance facility. There he found an innocuous Tupperware box that contained an array of plans for the course, the most-prized being a brittle sheet of paper that was repeatedly folded. That paper happened to be the original Seth Raynor drawings for the course that opened in 1924.

More than 500 miles to the east and a few months later, Bill Morton, the superintendent of The Misquamicut Club in Watch Hill, R.I., was digging through the basement of the large stone clubhouse. It has long been known that much of the club's archives were thrown out years ago, but Morton went searching anyway and made two major discoveries: correspondence among members indicating that Raynor redesigned five holes in the spring of 1914, making it some of his earliest work; and information revealing that Walter Travis was commissioned to redesign the original 18-hole Thomas Bendelow course in 1916. Travis drew up and delivered the plans and was paid, but the club never undertook the construction. In 1922, Donald Ross spearheaded a total renovation.

Both cases highlight the role of superintendents as archeologists and historians doing what they can to unearth and preserve history. Delving into the history of a course is a trend that dates back perhaps only 25 years. From the 1940s through the mid 1980s, very few golfers thought about architecture,



never mind preserving it. At the same time, designers focused on "modernizing" courses rather than maintaining and protecting them. Modernization meant the eradication of random hazards, that quirky greens were turned into placid putting sur-

faces, and that hundreds of thousands of unnecessary trees were planted that chocked off angles of play.

Finding out the true history of a course is not always difficult. Here are some tips to do so:

■ Check in the attic and the cellar. As Fox Chapel and Misquamicut reveal, sometimes the past is under your nose.

■ Contact the professional historians. During my research of Highland Links in Truro, Mass., I walked the 300 yards from the pro shop door to the historical society door and uncovered photos, scorecards and history that contradicted the club's own — and wrong — history.

■ Check out local and regional newspapers. Many of the larger publications now have historical archives that can be accessed via the Web, sometimes for free. If not, spend time at the library on some rainy day looking at newspapers on microfilm. It's amazing what a little browsing can unearth.

■ Talk with older members, and see what they remember or might have stashed away. The catalyst for the restoration of Lookout Mountain (Ga.) Golf Club came when the widow of a deceased member was going through his possessions and found the original hand-colored linen plan drawn by Raynor dated Nov. 13, 1925. ■