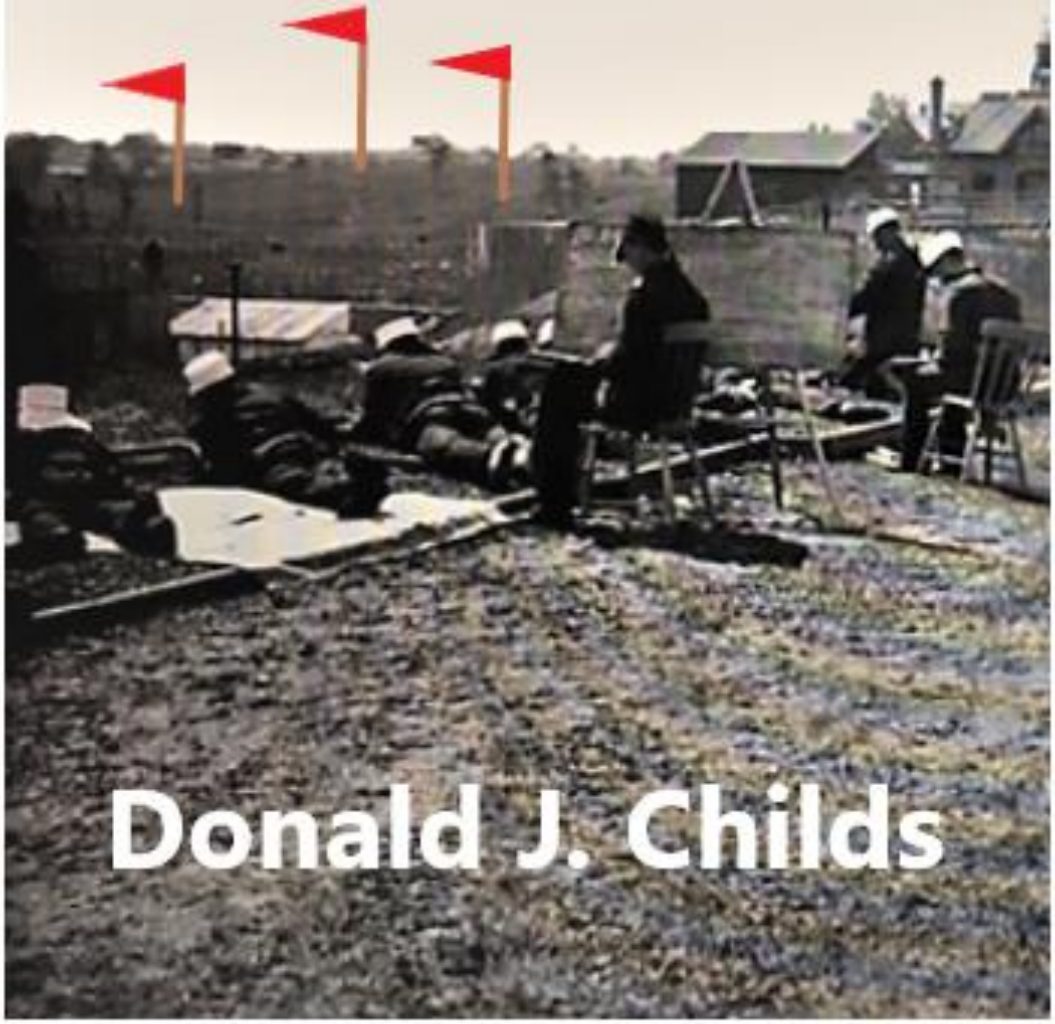
Ottawa's First Golf Course



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Ottawa's First Golf Course

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Foreword

My neighbour Tom Lafrenière introduced me to a fellow enthusiast regarding local golf history, Paul Murray.

In the course of a wide-ranging conversation about golf history of all sorts, Paul mentioned his abiding curiosity about the first golf course of the Royal Ottawa Golf Club, which was located in Sandy Hill during the Club's earliest "pre-Royal" days.

Paul's passion for this topic was infectious, and so when I got home that day, I immediately began researching the topic to see what questions about Ottawa's first golf course I might be able to answer by means of online resources.

The following essay presents the results of my research.

From Scotland, with Love

But for Mrs. James Gibson, of 451 Daly Avenue in Sandy Hill, the Royal Ottawa Golf Club would not have started when it did in April of 1891, nor would it have started in the way it did on a Sandy Hill golf course.

Mrs. Gibson, alias Margaret Jane Renwick (1847-1930), had been born and educated in Glasgow. In 1871, when she was 24 years old, she married Scottish ex-patriate James Gibson in Glasgow and returned to Canada with him.

Born in Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1843, her husband had been in Canada since he was 13 years of age but returned to Glasgow regularly on business. Shortly after the couple's arrival in Ottawa, James Gibson became the partner of Edward Seybold in the Seybold and Gibson wholesale dry goods business, located on Slater Street. The partners later sold their prosperous firm and formed the Eclipse Manufacturing Company. They also built the Central Chambers building in downtown Ottawa, as well as a number of other Ottawa buildings.

Wealthy and influential, active in the Presbyterian church, and dedicated to various social causes (especially the Y.M.C.A.), Mr. and Mrs. Gibson in due course became prominent members of Ottawa's elite society.

Margaret (Renwick) Gibson's claim to Canadian golfing fame is that she invited her older brother Hugh to visit her in Sandy Hill in early 1891.

Figure 1 Hugh Renwick's house, Castlepark, as it looks today, a listed building in Lanark, Scotland.

Back in Glasgow, Hugh Mackinlay Renwick (1837-1913) was working in his father's firm: Wm. Renwick & Company. The Renwicks and their associates were merchants and drysalters: they dealt in chemicals such as dyes, varnishes, and glues, as well as salts

and other chemicals for preserving foods. Drysalters might also sell certain preserved foodstuffs such as pickles and dried meats.

William Renwick passed the business to son Hugh, who thrived.

As a young boy, Hugh Renwick had studied at the Glasgow Collegiate and Commercial Academy, winning the "Caesar and Ovid" prize in the Classical Department in 1851. He chose to make his adult pursuit not classical scholarship, however, but commerce.

And at age 22, furthermore, he engaged even more directly with material matters of the day by becoming one of the original members of Glasgow's volunteer militia movement of 1859, joining what would become the 1st Regiment of Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers (and winning the regiment's shooting competitions in 1861 and 1862).

Still, it may have been the influence of Ovid's model of the idyllic life that eventually led Renwick to leave the grimy, polluted, industrial city of Glasgow for Lanark, the small county town of Lanarkshire. When the railway was extended to Lanark, Renwick leapt at the opportunity to take up residence in the country and commute to his business interests in Glasgow. To express his own happiness at the move, he arranged for the building of an eccentric home called Castlepark (seen above), designed by the famous Victorian architect William Leiper. It was built in 1880 about half-a-mile from the Lanark railway station.

Figure 2 Hugh Renwick's drawing room at Castlepark, as it appears today.

One can imagine the scene, perhaps in the fall of 1890, a decade into Renwick's life in Lanark, when one evening his servant brought the afternoon post to Renwick as he reposed in his drawing room. The letter that would have caught his attention that day would have been the one from his relatives in Ottawa – the letter discussing arrangements for his visit to Margaret's home during the late winter and early spring of the next year.

There is no suggestion that Renwick had ever visited Canada before this.

We know, however, that he was prepared to travel long distances for holidays and to leave his business in Glasgow in charge of others in the meantime, for he enjoyed spending part of the British winter in the

south of France, so he may well have looked for an opportunity to visit Ottawa in the late winter and early spring after such a visit to France.

If Renwick had any reservations at all about visiting Ottawa, the fact that Ottawa had no golf course might have been the main one, for Renwick was passionate about the royal and ancient game.

Figure 3Clubhouse, first tee, and last green of the Lanark Golf Club, early 1900s.

He was a regular member of the executive committee of the Lanark Golf Club (founded in 1851) during the 1880s and 1890s. He was keenly interested in promoting junior golf, serving in 1893 as the first president of the Lanark Junior Golf Club, and offering as a prize for the winner of the junior championship a golf club of the champion's choosing. He was also deeply involved in the reform of his golf club's governmental structures, and when younger members made continual motions in the late 1880s to reform the club's tradition of appointing committee members for life by asking that at least one committee member resign per year, they made little headway until they gathered the support of "the powerful Mr. Renwick" (A.D. Robertson, *The Story of the Lanark Golf Club from 1851 to 1951* [Derby and Cheltenham: New Centurion Publishing, 1951], p. 18).

Renwick was powerful in all sorts of areas – in political affairs, in church affairs, and in horticultural affairs. He participated in national and local political affairs as a representative of Lanark, appearing on debate platforms throughout the county of Lanark, in which he also served for many years as a Justice of the Peace; he was a senior layperson in the Elgin Place Congregational Church in Glasgow, a leader in missionary donations and the one who hired the organists; he offered prizes at county flower shows and won prizes himself for his roses. Yet the golf prizes that he donated both to his Club and to other clubs, and the golf prizes that he won himself, outnumbered all others. When Renwick was appointed Club Captain in 1895, he donated the "Renwick Medal" to the Club, which has been presented to the winner of the Lanark Golf Club's season-long handicap competition annually since 1895. Renwick himself won

the Club's scratch competition in 1894, being awarded the Club's "Claret Jug" as its champion golfer of the year.

Figure 4 Old Tom Morris at St. Andrews, circa 1890s.

He was also a course designer to be conjured with, it seems, for he collaborated with one of the greatest architects of all time – Old Tom Morris – in the planning of the conversion of the Lanark Golf Club's 12-hole course to a full 18-hole course: "In 1897, the full round of eighteen holes was played for the first time: sites for greens had been selected by George Sayers, but the plan was finally arranged by Tom Morris …; he, in turn, was aided – or rather instructed – by J. Arthur Vassie and Hugh Renwick" (Robertson, p. 4).

Although Ottawa may have struck Renwick in prospect as a golf wasteland, he nonetheless arrived in Ottawa with his golf clubs in hand, for he began his long holiday in the winter and spring of 1891 with a visit to the mecca of French golf in those days, Biarritz, home of the famous golf course laid out in the late 1880s by Tom Dunn and his younger brother and golf apprentice, Willie Dunn, Jr. Renwick was such a regular visitor to the French resort that he sponsored prizes for its competitions (*Golf*, 6 March 1891, p. 397).

Renwick would leave France for Ottawa at the end of February.

The rest is history ….

Or at least it is the history of the earliest days of what became the Royal Ottawa Golf Club and its first golf course.

Renwick Does Sandy Hill

As the 1904 golf season was coming to an end, more than 13 years after Renwick's visit to Ottawa, the Ottawa Golf Club co-operated with the *Ottawa Journal* in the production of a lengthy article on "How the Game of Golf Came to Ottawa and How it Has Since Progressed" (10 September 1904, p. 15). This is how we learn that "During the spring of 1891 a keen Scotchman and a most enthusiastic golfer landed in Ottawa in the [person] of Mr. Hugh Renwick of Lanark, Scotland. This was enough to start the fire burning, and as soon as Mr. Renwick got busy with his Scotch friends so soon the fever for golf began to grow" (op. cit.).

His sister Margaret and brother-in-law James presumably introduced Renwick to elite members of Ottawa's society at a number of events held during his visit, and as passionate golfers are wont to do, Renwick must have proselytized on behalf of the game among the sportsmen he met.

We can make a good guess at the identity of some of the new friends he made who would become important to the founding of the Ottawa Golf Club.

Figure 5 Dr. John Thorburn, early 1900s.

One was Dr. John Thorburn, who, like Hugh and Margaret, had been born in Lanarkshire, Scotland. Thorburn and Renwick's brother-in-law James Gibson were both Elders of the Presbytery in Ottawa, and so it would have been natural for Gibson to have introduced Thorburn to his fellow son of Lanarkshire, Hugh Renwick.

A graduate of the University of Edinburgh, Thorburn had become a teacher and thereafter an expert in education, eventually awarded honorary degrees by McGill University and Queen's University, including an honorary doctorate from the latter. After a distinguished career in Scotland and Nova Scotia, he was appointed headmaster of the Ottawa Grammar School (which would become the Ottawa Collegiate Institute), and upon retirement from this post he became head of the Canadian Geological Survey, Chairman of the Board of Civil Service Examiners, Chairman of the

Board of Examiners of the Royal Military College at Kingston, President of the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society, and so on, and so on.

Thorburn was a neighbour of Margaret Gibson's on Daly Avenue. It is quite possible that even before he was introduced to her brother, he had seen Hugh Renwick walking past his house with his set of golf clubs in hand and made a point of talking to him about them.

In those days, when the device known as a golf club appeared in Canadian towns, most people had never seen one before, so they were invariably interested to learn what this odd tool was for and how it was used. James E. Darling, an employee of the Bank of British North America who introduced golf first to Brantford in the early 1870s and then to Halifax in the mid-1870s, spoke of the reaction of people in those days to the site of golf clubs. On his way from Brantford to Halifax in 1873, Darling found that his golf clubs made him a curious figure: "I remember, going down the St. Lawrence on my way to Halifax, the many inquiries as to what my clubs were for. We had to change to a small steamer to run the rapids, and, having no cabin for this part of the trip, I was carrying my clubs in my hands. The boat was full of American tourists, and the strange clubs, especially the irons, seemed to excite their curiosity" (*Canadian Golfer* [July 1915], vol 1 no 3, p. 189). Darling's account of reactions to his travelling across Canada with golf clubs in his hands allows us to imagine the response of Sandy Hill residents in March of 1891 to the site of Renwick strolling along the street with his golf clubs.

Thorburn will have known what Renwick's "tools" were for, of course, but he would have been surprised to have seen them carried about his neighbourhood. A month later, however, Thorburn would become one of the three people who supervised the laying out of a golf course in Sandy Hill by a Montreal golf professional on April 27th.

Another of Renwick's new friends in Ottawa was not "Scotch," but rather Liverpudlian. According to Charles Hunter, an early member of both the Niagara-on-the-Lake and Toronto golf clubs in the 1870s and 1880s, "The Ottawa Golf Club was instituted in April, 1891, through the efforts of the late J. Lloyd Pierce and Hugh [R]enwick, of Castle Park, Lanark, Scotland" ("Golf in Canada," *Athletic Life* [February 1895], p. 47).

Born in Liverpool in 1846, and maintaining his official residence at Queen's Gardens, Paddington, London, John ("Jack") Lloyd Pierce was a successful lumber baron in the Ottawa Valley when he died suddenly in Ottawa in September of 1891. Long active in the Ottawa Cricket Club, he had been converted to golf by Renwick in March and April of 1891, was a founding member of the Ottawa Golf

Club on April 13th and was another of the three Club members who supervised the laying out of the golf course by the Montreal golf professional.

The third of the Ottawa Golf Club members who accompanied the Montreal golf professional as he laid out the golf course, and probably the most important in terms of the history of the Ottawa Golf Club, was Lieutenant-Colonel D.T. Irwin, who was no doubt another of Renwick's new Ottawa friends.

Walking the Talk

One presumes that through his enthusiastic description of golf at various social events in Sandy Hill in March of 1891, Renwick not only created curiosity about golf amongst the sportsmen of Ottawa's elite society, but also prompted a number of them to start thinking in quite practical terms about where they might be able to secure open ground where they could try this ancient royal game and Renwick could perhaps instruct them in the art of the sport about which he was so passionate.

I imagine a conversation in a Sandy Hill home, perhaps on an evening in the middle of March in 1891, that must have gone something like the following:

> *Hugh Renwick saw the bemused smiles of his indulgent Canadian auditors as once again he waxed enthusiastic about the merits of what he was fond of calling the best game ever invented. They had heard him say it all before.*
>
> *He paused for a moment, and then he decided to take a new tack: "Gentlemen, further talk on my part is pointless. Let me show you the wonders of the game. Find me a good stretch of open ground convenient to Sandy Hill and I shall teach you to play golf. Nay, further, I shall make of each man here a golfer – for life!"*
>
> *Not everyone took Renwick seriously, but Jack Pierce did, and so he asked what he hoped would be a helpful question, "What about the Rifle Range, Mr. Renwick? Would that do? A few of us have in the past tried to drive a golf ball across this ground – as best we could, until it became lost in the swamp…."*
>
> *"Well," said Renwick, "from what I've seen of it, I would hazard the opinion that a number of rudimentary golf holes could be laid out there quite quickly. But what of the shooting competitions? One wants hazards on a golf course, but not hazards of that sort!"*
>
> *When the laughter died down, Dr. Thorburn mused, "The Rifle Range, you know, is not used in the spring. The land is too wet for too long in March and April, so neither practice nor competition tends to be scheduled for this time of the year. As it happens, of course, this spring has been exceptionally dry, so perhaps Jack's*

suggestion is worth considering. Still, we would need permission to use the range. The Militia does not take kindly to trespassers."

Thorburn smiled at Pierce at this point, and Pierce answered the look with a wink. They both knew the person they must speak to, and so they called almost in unison to a man of military bearing on the far side of the room, "Colonel Irwin, sir … do you think we might have a word with you?"

Lieutenant-Colonel D.T. Irwin worked on the Headquarters' Staff of the Canadian Militia. He acknowledged the appeal by his friends Pierce and Thorburn by turning smartly on his heel and advancing towards them, with just the hint of a limp in his measured steps: "Here I am, gentlemen …. at your service!"

Renwick as Golf Course Architect?

Renwick's seminal role in the birth of golf in Ottawa was well-known over 100 years ago.

In addition to the newspaper article of 1904 that mentions Renwick, there was a history book in which his contribution to golf history was discussed. In *The Hub and the Spokes: Or, The Capital and Its Environs* (1904), Anson Albert Gard writes: "In 1891, Mr. Hugh Renwick, of Lanark, Scotland, a golf enthusiast, came to the Capital. He was soon playing with an enthusiastic following, among whom were the late Mr. J. Lloyd Pierce, Lt.-Col. D.T. Irwin, Mr. A. Simpson, Dr. John Thorburn, Mr. S.H. Fleming, Mr. J.D. Fleming, and about 50 others" (p. 85).

In 1906, the *Ottawa Journal* provided a more detailed account of Renwick's role in the laying out of the first golf course:

> *While on a visit to Canada years ago, he found a few Ottawa men beginning to struggle with the mysteries of golf, on the old rifle range on Sandy Hill – where now the latest beautiful park of the Improvement Commission is overlooked by the civic hospital [this park is today known as Strathcona Park].*
>
> *Mr. Renwick, who was and is a keen golfer, promptly gave his unselfish aid to the Ottawa beginning. He laid out a course of nine holes, personally superintended the making of the greens, and in other ways helped to start golf upon a healthy existence in Ottawa. (6 October 1906, p. 11)*

When Renwick died at the beginning of 1913, a similar item in the *Ottawa Journal* recalled that "he was an enthusiastic golfer" and that when visiting his sister "many years ago" he not only "made many friends" in the city, but also, "upon "finding that the game was not being played in Ottawa," "took steps towards the formation of a club, and laid out the first course of nine holes on the old Rifle Range" (*Ottawa Journal*, 17 January 1913, p. 6).

Did Renwick really lay out a nine-hole course on the "old Rifle Range" and supervise the construction of the greens? If so, what would his golf course of March and April have been like?

The *Ottawa Journal*'s report in 1906 that Renwick "personally superintended the making of the greens" is probably borne of romantic poetic license (6 October 1906, p. 11). At most, in the few weeks that Renwick was available to instruct his new friends in the art of golf, he would have sunk cans or

flowerpots into the earth on and near the Rifle Range and organized a circuit on which golf balls could be driven in sequence toward short stakes marking the holes. There would not have been much time or money spent on these golf holes in the few weeks between the melting of snow that spring and the late-April arrangement for Royal Montreal's golf professional to come to Ottawa to lay out the permanent course. After all, from the middle of April, plans were afoot to have a golf professional lay out a proper golf course as soon as possible, so we know that club members did not regard whatever Renwick had laid out as anything more than a provisional and temporary course. The golfers probably did not even arrange for the grass to be mowed or cropped: it would still have been dormant, and the whole Rifle Range area might well have been fairly waterlogged after the spring melt.

But the idea that Renwick had laid out a golf course of some sort on the Rifle Range itself sometime in March and early April of 1891 seems to have a basis in fact.

One finds an odd article in the *Ottawa Journal* in the spring of 1960 that also claims that the first golf course in Sandy Hill was indeed laid out right on the Rifle Range. In "Origin of Golf in Ottawa," Harry J. Walker suggests that Ottawa's first golfers targeted the Rifle Range as a location for golf because it was on government-owned land that they thought they might be allowed to use:

> *It seemed hopeless to accommodate golf with rifle-shooting on the same terrain. But the government was co-operative and permitted the use of the ranges for golf between rifle meets. The rifle butts were converted into tees and a natural hazard was a small swamp between the butts and the 600-yard range. A Montreal professional was engaged and a nine-hole course was laid out on the rifle range with a small clubhouse erected at the end of Blackburn Avenue. (7 May 1960, p. 32)*

Walker, a local writer who, from the 1930s onward, published articles and books about the history of the Ottawa Valley, gives no indication of where he got the information presented in his article, but some of it is accurate and some of it is inaccurate.

First, Walker says the Ottawa Golf Club had 30 members by 1895 when it had more than three times that number. Second, he says the Club moved to its Chelsea Links because its Sandy Hill course was overcrowded, which is incorrect: it was urban development in Sandy Hill that crowded out the golf course. Third, as we shall see, nearly every 1890s reference to the golf course in relation to the Rifle Range says not that the golf course was on the Rifle Range but rather that it was either west of the range or behind it or in rear of it. Fourth, as we shall also see, Walker's location of the clubhouse "at the

end of Blackburn Avenue" is contradicted both by city directories of the 1890s and by newspaper advertisements in 1895, all of which refer to the clubhouse as located at the south-west point of the intersection of Russell Avenue and Osgoode Street.

Such mistakes perhaps undermine confidence in Walker's claims about the first golf course.

Still, there is at least one other reference to the clubhouse as lying "at the end of Blackburn Avenue," and it may help us to identify the sources of Walker's information. The reference is by Robert Marjoribanks in his book, *Royal Ottawa Golf Club 1891 – 1991* (1991): the original clubhouse was "near the end of Blackburn Avenue" (p. 11, cited by Paul Murray, email to the author, 11 May 2021). Since there were members of Royal Ottawa in 1991 who thought that the original clubhouse was near the end of Blackburn Avenue, I assume that Walker had also picked up this idea from Royal Ottawa members in 1960. His newspaper article seems to have derived less from archival research than from anecdotes told to him by members of the Royal Ottawa Golf Club – and they were telling him versions of the stories told in the *Ottawa Journal* in 1906 and 1913.

And so I do not dismiss Walker's information about the earliest golf course completely out of hand just because so much of his article is inaccurate. I suspect that he gathered important information from Club members in 1960 but did not fully understand what he had been told by the different people he talked to.

In particular, I think he conflated some Club members' talk of the course laid out by a Montreal golf professional at the end of April in 1891 with other Club members' talk of the first course in Sandy Hill – the one on the Rifle Range using rifle butts for tees and a swamp as a hazard: the temporary course laid out by Hugh Renwick.

Walker's detailed account of the geographical features of the Rifle Range golf course are compelling in their specificity. The references to the rifle butts, the 600-yard ranges, and the intervening swamp are not made up out of thin air.

It seems likely that at the end of March and beginning of April in 1891, there was indeed a temporary, rudimentary golf course laid out on the Rifle Range proper, and that it was the work of Hugh Renwick Walker's information suggests a line of play from south to north, from the butts – the raised earth that stops bullets that have passed through the targets – over a swampy area to the base of the Rideau bluff, on top of which the 600-yard shooting bays were located. But play probably went back and forth across this area to a number of holes.

The painting below shows an early view of the Rifle Range from the top of the Rideau bluff, looking from north to south.

Figure 6 Depiction of the Rideau Rifle Range of the 1860s to 1890s from Old Ottawa and Bytown Pics Facebook page (accessed by Paul Murray on 23 May 2021 [email to author, 23 May 2021]).

The rifle butts in the distance are few and far between, suggesting that the painting dates from the 1870s or 1880s.

Mind you, shooting practice took place here as early as the 1860s, from "100, 200 and 300 yards" for cadets, and from "200, 400, and 600 yards" for soldiers (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 1 November 1867, p. 3; 17 August 1868, p. 1). By 1893, contests took place "at 800 and 900 yards" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 August 1893, p. 5).

Notice in the painting above that in the right foreground, a cart track with ruts for two wheels moves towards a bridge over a creek. On the right, a foot path proceeds across higher ground toward the main rifle butt and the flagpole in the distance.

We see the same things in a similar perspective of the Rifle Range in the photograph below, which shows a shooting competition, presumably during the early 1890s.

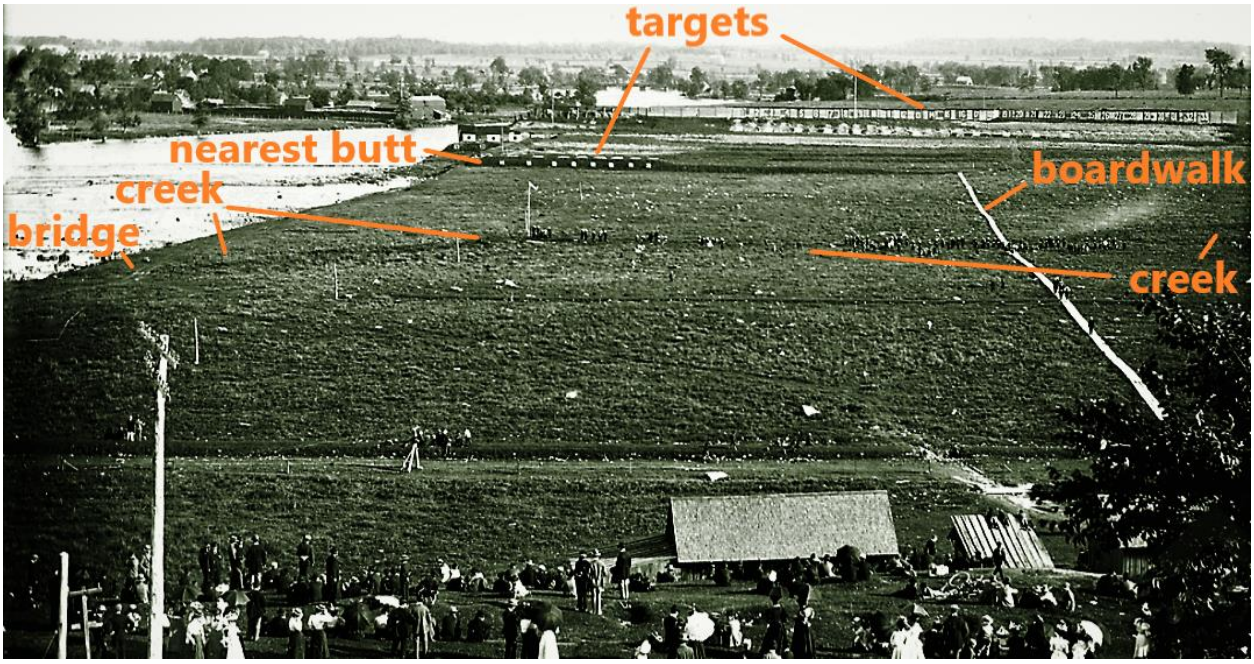


Figure 7 Enlarged, annotated detail from a photograph of a late nineteenth-century shooting competition on the Dominion Government's Rideau Rifle Range.

As in the painting, the perspective shows a view from north to south. The photographer stands at the top of the Rideau bluff where the 600-yard shooting bays were laid out. The Rideau River is on the eastern side of the range.

The rifle butts at the end of the range are clearly visible; this is where the teeing ground of the golf course to which Walker refers was apparently located. One can also detect a small creek running through the middle of the Rifle Range to the bank of the Rideau River where it seems to cross under a small bridge. The swampy area mentioned by Walker must have been most pronounced on either side of this creek. The wetness of the whole area is suggested by the fact that a boardwalk has been laid out along the western side of the range.

Spectacular Golf

As soon as the snow had melted in Sandy Hill, Renwick and some of his new friends literally made a spectacle of themselves on the Dominion Government's Rideau Rifle Range.

Other important members of Ottawa society came out to watch Renwick swinging never-before-seen hickory sticks with iron and wooden heads on them. Everyone could perceive a general similarity in shape between these hooked sticks and the Canadian hockey stick, but the motion used to swing the stick so that it would contact a small rubber ball and propel it forward had never been seen before. (The hockey slapshot would not be invented until the 1960s.)

The *Ottawa Journal* recalls the variety of reactions to the spectacle that Renwick and his friends made: "[Those] who had never seen or heard of it disparaged the idea of golf links, and practically looked on the game as one that took about half the day to start and the balance of the day to finish. It was a kind of an old woman's game that anyone could play" (10 September 1904, p. 15).

Then there was the reaction of the local Scots: "Those who inherited the taste for the game from their forefathers were eager to take it up" (op. cit.).

Perhaps most interesting was the reaction of the real sportsmen of the city: "many an athlete went out to see and laugh at what golf was, [only] to come back and appreciate it as about the game which affords scope for the most science and certainly must give the best exercise of any game in the world" (op. cit.).

But most important was the reaction of certain men of influence:

> *there were others who knew the merits of golf, although their opportunities of practice or chance to show what they might do had been but scanty. In this year, assisted by such sterling adherents of the game as Mr. J. Lloyd Pierce, Lt.-Col. D.T. Irwin, Mr. S.H. Fleming and others, the first real Ottawa Golf Club was formed. (op. cit.).*

Incidentally, this 1904 article may well have been written by *Ottawa Journal* owner Philip Dansken (P.D.) Ross, by then a stalwart member of the Ottawa Golf Club, but originally one of those who was quite sceptical of the merits of the game:

Figure 8 In 1891, P.D. Ross stands beside the Cosby Cup, awarded to the champions of the Ontario Hockey Association. Ross's Ottawa Hockey Club defeated the Toronto St George's club to win the championship.

"The game is not active enough for me. I want something with more pep to it," said P.D. Ross back in 1897 when his old friend and early backer in the newspaper business, Charles Sparks, asked him to join the Ottawa Golf Club ….

The tall, lithe lover of nearly all forms of outdoor sport then in the last year of his thirties, who only a few years previous had relinquished his place on the forward line of the Ottawa Hockey Club, laughed at the idea that golf could ever have any fascination for him.

One lovely summer afternoon they persuaded him to give the game a try. The initial attempt wasn't a success. He spent a lot of time in the bunkers, dubbed drives galore and at the "19th" hole shocked devotees by regretting the loss of an afternoon's rowing. It was just an "old ladies' game."

*He was persuaded to have another try. On the third tee, he "connected." Like a shot from a gun, the ball went straight down the fairway for 200 yards. That was the start of 40 years' devotion to what he eventually called "the greatest game invented by man." (*Ottawa Journal*, 8 July 1949, p. 19)*

The 1904 article's description of those who initially scoffed at golf as a woman's game but who soon came to realize that it was worthy of a lifetime's study and application comes across as Ross's ironic *mea culpa*: "In the 1890s, there were none so blind as I, who would not see."

If the 1904 article was indeed written by newspaperman Ross, we might find particularly interesting this sentence: in 1891, "the first real Ottawa Golf Club was formed." We might find in it a hint that Renwick's

cohort of enthusiasts had been regarded as a golf club of an unofficial (not “real”) sort, or perhaps a more interesting hint that Ross was aware that even before 1891 there had been other groups of golfers (not quite a “real” club of them) playing the game on the area’s fields and meadows.

Renwick and the Lanark Silver Bell

Hugh Renwick's name does not appear in the newspaper lists of the first officers of the new Ottawa Golf Club that was organized at the meeting conducted across the evenings of the 13th and 20th of April in 1891: he was returning to Scotland and so would neither serve on the Club's first executive committee nor become a member of the Club – at least not until 1904, and without his knowledge, when he became the first person elected an Honorary Member of the Ottawa Golf Club (apparently in connection with the Club's review of its history, as detailed in the 1904 *Ottawa Journal* article quoted above).

In 1904, the Ottawa Golf Club had wished to recognize that "It was largely due to his suggestion and initiative that the club was organized…. [He] aroused the interest of a number of prominent citizens in the 'royal and ancient' game and the Ottawa Golf Club was organized as a result" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 8 October 1906, p. 9).

Renwick seems to have learned of his lifetime membership by accident, which implies that the Club neglected to inform him of the honour or was at least unsuccessful in communicating its decision to him. His response (both to the honour and to the oversight) was most gracious:

> *Dear Sir,*
>
> *Two years ago, I was favored with a list of the members of the O.G.C., and I noticed that the honor of life-membership had been conferred upon me. I have long intended to express in some way or other my gratification at this distinction, and have thought that a prize for competition would speak for me better than words. A cup or medal is the usual form, but it has occurred to me that something more uncommon might be preferred.*
>
> *This little country town where I now reside [Lanark] is one of the most ancient royal burghs of Scotland, and it possesses (and treasures) a silver bell, said to be the gift of "King William the Lion" in 1166 for the encouragement of horse-racing. Without doubt this relic of the past is very old, though there is no winner's commemorative medal extant before the year 1628….*
>
> *By permission of the Lanark town council I have had a duplicate made of the bell and its accompanying stand, which I now beg to offer to the O.G.C. for annual*

competition, in the hope that it may be of interest to the competitors and conduce to the prosperity of the club. The bell itself, and the engraved medal affixed to the stand, are facsimiles of the originals, exact to the smallest dint and scratch ….

Figure 9 An exact copy of the Lanark Silver Bell (made some years after the Ottawa Golf Club's copy), said to be the oldest sporting trophy in existence. The Ottawa Golf Club's copy of the trophy was presumably destroyed in the clubhouse fire of 1909 or that of 1930.

I make no suggestion as to the details of the annual competition, leaving these matters entirely to the club.

If my gift be accepted, the town clerk here requests me to stipulate that neither the Golf Club, nor anyone else, shall be allowed to make any further copies of the bell.

The box containing the above-named articles has been sent to my brother-in-law, Mr. James Gibson, 451 Daly Avenue, who will hand them over to you, on demand.

I am your obedient servant,

Hugh Renwick

*(*Ottawa Citizen*, 8 October 1906, p. 9)*

Renwick's gift also made news in Scotland, with a Glasgow newspaper observing:

The Ottawa Golf Club should feel themselves in no small way privileged in being the possessors through the generous impulse of Mr. Hugh Renwick, Castlepark, Lanark, of the only existing replica of the Lanark silver bell ….

The gift, as such, is very characteristic of Mr. Renwick who is much esteemed in the county town for his unostentatious kindness of heart and geniality of disposition.

*Advancing years have naturally limited the scope of Mr. Renwick's recreations, but he takes a keen interest in golf, and he is the donor of the Lanark Golf Club's monthly medal. His life of quiet retirement is varied by the duties of the Justice of the Peace, and by the active interest he takes in some of the helpful organizations in the royal and ancient burgh. (*Ottawa Journal*, 24 November 1906, p. 2)*

An article in the *Ottawa Journal* in 1913 commenting on the death of Hugh Renwick notes that in addition to the fact that "he took steps toward the formation of a club," he "was the donor of a very unique and handsome trophy which is played for annually as the club championship cup" (17 January 1913, p. 6). It was mentioned in the club's 1909 fixture list – "Oct 5 – Club championship, Renwicke [sic] trophy" – and it was thereafter often called the "Renwick trophy": the "Renwick trophy … is emblematic of the championship of the Ottawa golf club" (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 May 1909, p. 2, and 26 September 1910, p. 5, respectively).

I have found no references to the trophy by Renwick's name since this time, but it is still awarded annually to the winner of the club championship for men.

The only contemporary newspaper photograph of the copy of the silver bell that Renwick gave to the Ottawa Golf Club that I have found appeared in the *Ottawa Journal* the day after his brother-in-law James Gibson delivered it to the club on 5 October 1906.

Figure 10 Ottawa Journal*, 6 October 1906, p. 11.*

The silver bell itself is identical in the two copies seen in the photographs above, but the stand for the Ottawa version of the silver bell was obviously much more elaborate: "The bell … rests on the wings of double-headed eagles who hold in their beaks a large circlet upon which is fastened the shields bearing the name of the horse and owner winning the trophy each year" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 8 October 1906, p. 9).

Royal Ottawa has since replaced the shields bearing the names of horses and owners who won the trophy in Lanark with shields bearing the names of its club champions (as can be seen below).

Figure 11 The author's photograph of the "Renwick Trophy in December of 2022

Interestingly, Ottawa developed a second connection to the Lanark Silver Bell in the early 1920s when a World War I veteran in Ottawa produced the engraved silver inscription plate that had long been missing from the original bell's stand:

> *The silver inscription plate has travelled far since it was lost or purloined from the Lanark silver bell some years ago. A few weeks ago, an ex-service man applied to Mr. [T.H.] Blair, as an active worker in St. Andrew's Society, for assistance to get to Western Canada, where he had prospect of employment. The case being a thoroughly deserving one, the assistance was furnished. In departing, the ex-service man, in appreciation of Mr. Blair's kindness, gave him as a souvenir a curious relic which he stated he had picked up on a battlefield in France.*
>
> *The plate bore this inscription: "Bell presented by King William the Lion to the Royal Burgh of Lanark, Scotland, 1166." (*Ottawa Citizen*, 6 September 1922, p. 3)*

Blair returned the plate to Lanark, where it was re-united with the bell.

Figure 12 Employees of Hamilton & Inches display the new stand for the Lanark Silver Bell. Professional Jeweller*, 28 August 2012.*

In 2012, however, the original 400-year-old wooden stand for the Lanark Silver Bell was deemed too fragile to be constantly handled by the winner of the annual horse race at which the Silver Bell is still awarded annually, so the Edinburgh jewellers (and warrant holders to Her Majesty the Queen) of the Hamilton & Inches company were commissioned to provide an updated, more durable stand for the Bell.

Since Hamilton & Inches produced another permitted copy of the Lanark Silver Bell in 1909, three years after the Ottawa Golf Club copy had been made for Renwick, this company may well have been the one that Renwick commissioned to produce the copy for the Ottawa Golf Club.

De la Cherois T. Irwin as Golf Course Architect?

One of Ottawa's 1891 converts to golf was Lieutenant-Colonel De la Cherois T. Irwin, and the subsequent history of the Ottawa Golf Cub would prove him to have been perhaps the most important one, and not only because he was probably the one who got permission for Renwick and his disciples to lay out a primitive golf course on the Rifle Range.

In the few weeks that the ground had been clear of snow in the spring of 1891, Renwick had generated sufficient enthusiasm for golf amongst the sporting gentleman of the city that by the first week of April Colonel Irwin was one of several gentlemen who decided to form Ottawa's first golf club and promptly arranged for an announcement in the newspapers on April 9th that there would be a meeting at Russell House four days later to organize it.

The time was ripe for golf to be established in the nation's capital, for although golf had not yet become popular in the United states, it was beginning to attract notice in Canada, especially in Toronto, where the *Globe* newspaper promoted the game for the type of men that Renwick had attracted to the Rifle Range in Sandy Hill. An article in May of 1890 introduced the game to *Globe* readers, outlining its history, and the nature of the game. "Golf has a language of its own"; it is "evolved, refined, decorous, filled out with dignity, but not altogether unlike the sanguinary games that used to fill the playgrounds" ("The Game of Golf—Another Scotch Athletic Exercise Becomes Popular," *The Globe*, 17 May 1890, p. 2).

More interestingly, the article explains the value of the game for the kind of professional men and leaders of society who played it:

> *Golf is a manly and eminently healthful recreation. The walk is a tonic, and the clear air that blows over the heights gives zest … and surely it promises pleasure enough—an afternoon of healthful pedestrianism in the pure country air…. The pace can be made easy or smart … and thus the exercise adapts itself to the age and exuberance of its players… The brain is used, too, for calculation is required and one must make allowances for wind and a dozen other things. (op. cit.).*

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, to learn that when people interested in founding a golf club first met in Russell House on 13 April 1891, they echoed the terms in which the game was being promoted in the

newspapers by declaring that they were forming a club “for promotion of this healthy and satisfying game” (cited in Robert Marjoribanks, *Royal Ottawa Golf Club 1891 – 1991* [1991]).

It turns out, however, that Colonel Irwin himself was ready to take up golf in the spring of 1891 not for the general reasons rehearsed in the newspapers, but for quite personal reasons: he had suffered an injury that prevented him from playing the sport that had hitherto been his passion.

By 1891, Irwin had become a distinguished figure in both the British Army and the Canadian Militia. Born in Ireland in 1843, he had entered the British Army when just 17 years of age, receiving a commission as lieutenant when 18. He subsequently passed the entrance examination for the British Army Staff College with a standing placing him fourth among all who took the exam that year.

Even before graduation in the early 1860s, Irwin had accepted a post at the School of Gunnery in Kingston, Ontario. By the late 1870s, he had become Canada’s Inspector of Artillery and Warlike Stores, and in due course he was charged with erecting defensive artillery around Victoria, British Columbia, in response to observations of Russian Squadrons patrolling along the North American west coast in the mid-1870s as far south as San Francisco.

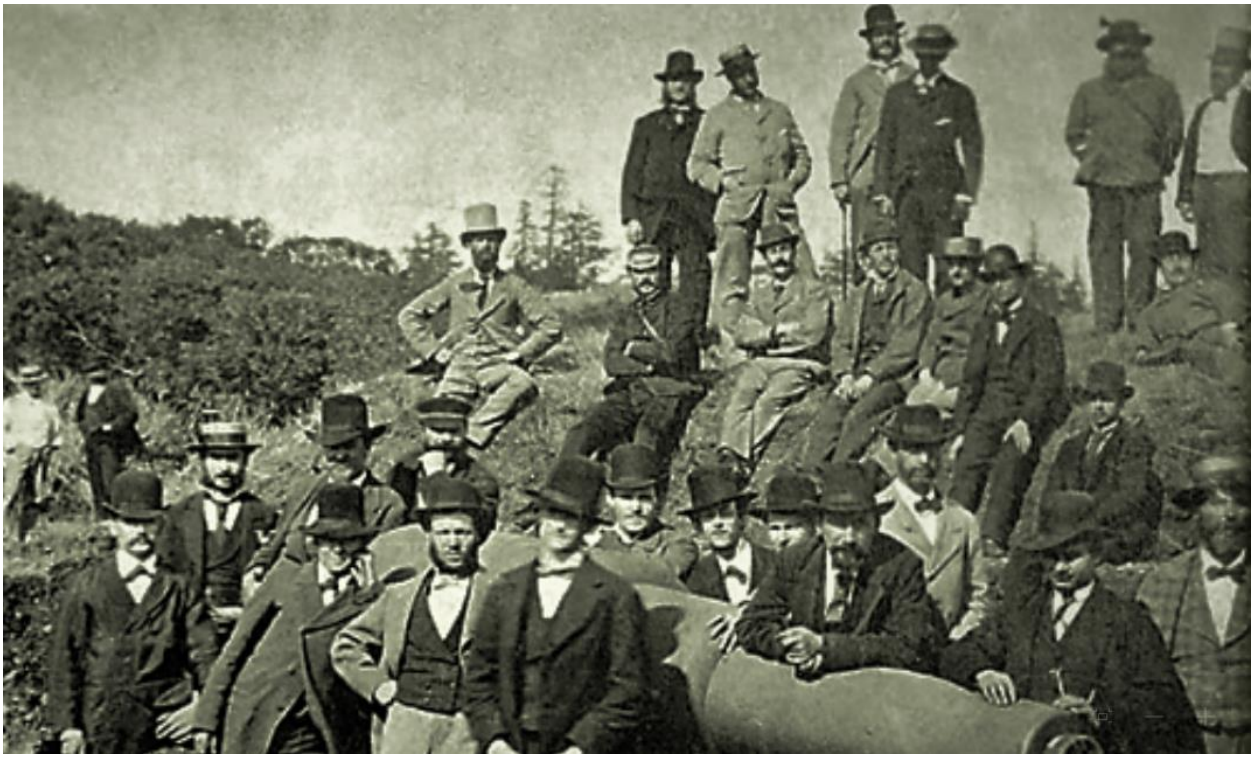


Figure 13 Lieutenant-Colonel D.T. Irwin, the only person in uniform, in the centre of the photograph, with some of the 50 men trained to operate the guns installed in Victoria in 1878 (they had not yet been provided with uniforms).

Now promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and also appointed commander of the Artillery of Canada, Irwin succeeded in a number of reforms in the functioning of this unit and ultimately earned it the designation “Royal.”

Soon afterwards, however, Irwin retired from the Royal Canadian Artillery to serve on the Headquarters Staff of the Canadian Militia in Ottawa, where he retired from the militia altogether in 1897 after 25 years of military service and pursued in retirement his interests in philanthropy, art, and theatre, in which he was “well known to be unrivalled in the arrangement of … scenic effects” (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 9 February 1891, p. 4).

Irwin had always been an athlete and sportsmen, and so he would not have been averse to trying the game if he could be convinced of its athletic and sporting merits. His winter sport was curling, in which he battled Dr. Thorburn for the championship of the Governor General’s Curling Club in 1891 (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 21 February 1891, p. 1). He had been a member of the Quebec Golf Club when stationed in Quebec City, but seems not to have been a plying member of the club – apparently having been what we might call a social member, since he was a member of the Quebec Racquet Club, whose clubhouse the golfers shared,

Figure 14 Lieutenant-Colonel D.T. Irwin, circa 1890.

It turns out that Renwick and his well-travelled golf clubs arrived in Ottawa at just the right time for Irwin, who was then in his late forties. A newspaper item in 1928 notes: “Always taking an active part in athletics and sports, Col. Irwin felt at a loss in 1891 when an injury prevented him from playing tennis, of which he was a skillful exponent” (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 March 1928, p. 13).

Walker says that at the Ottawa Tennis Club in 1890, “while participating in a tournament, Colonel Irwin slipped and severely injured a tendon in one of his legs. This crippling injury forced him out of active participation in tennis. This was a severe blow to an athletic soldier, and Colonel Irwin decided to find an

active participating sport that a man with a broken tendon could play" (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 May 1960, p. 32).

Figure 15 Cartoon – captioned, "He looked for, and found, a sport that a tennis player with a broken tendon could play" – spoofing Irwin's reason for becoming interested in golf in 1891. Ottawa Journal*, 7 May 1960, p. 32.*

The 1960 article claims that Irwin was actually the one who "thought of golf" for Ottawa: "Colonel Irwin, together with Dr. John Thorburn, W.L. Marler and Jack Pierce, an Ottawa lumberman, talked it up and decided to explore the possibilities of organizing a club here" (p. 32). The 1928 article even claims that "In company with three friends, he obtained a set of rules for golf, procured the necessary paraphernalia and laid out a nine-hole course in Sandy Hill" (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 March 1928, p. 13).

We know, of course, that there are inaccuracies in these accounts of Irwin's role in the development of the first golf club in Ottawa – if for no other reason than that they make no mention of Irwin's inspirational precursor Renwick – but we have agreement that Irwin was the leader among the four Ottawa residents who were generally recognized as the local movers and shakers behind the formation of the Ottawa Golf Club.

Of course, we have met two of Irwin's friends and golf co-conspirators – John ("Jack") Lloyd Pierce and Dr. John Thorburn – and now we know the third: "W.L. Marler."

Figure 16 Waterford Lake Marler and wife Sarah Knowlton Foster, circa 1900.

Waterford Lake Marler, born in Drummondville, Quebec, in 1844 (he died in New York City in 1914), was in 1891 the manager of the Ottawa branch of the Merchants' Bank. He was a great sports enthusiast, organizing Ottawa's bankers in various sporting clubs, such as the bicycling club. When the Ottawa Golf Club was formed, he was president of the Rideau Curling Club, and thereby regularly in touch with the people who would join with him on the executive committee of the Ottawa Golf Club, for they were all members of his curling club. Marler and the Ottawa Golf Club's vice-president from 1891 to 1895, Charles Magee, were the Club's main skips.

The most important inaccuracy in the 1928 story about Irwin is the attribution to him of credit for the laying-out of the first golf course in Sandy Hill.

On the one hand, with regard to the laying-out of Renwick's temporary golf course, Irwin probably did no more than secure permission to use the Rifle Range as a site for practising golf in March and early April of 1891.

On the other hand, with regard to the first proper golf course laid out in Sandy Hill, Irwin was undeniably thoroughly involved in the process, but primarily as a witness. Irwin, that is, was actually on the Sandy Hill site to observe the work of the Montreal golf professional as he designed the Ottawa Golf Club's first course: "Mr. Davis, a professional player, of Montreal, arrived in the city yesterday at the request of the committee of the Ottawa Golf Club to lay out the club's grounds and select suitable spots for the holes. He was accompanied over the grounds by Col. Irwin, Mr. Pierce and Dr. Thorburn" (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 April 1891, p. 4).

Due Credit

Figure 17 William F. Davis, early 1890s. Golfer *(December 1895), vol 2 no 2, p. 51.*

The 1928 newspaper article's attribution of the laying-out of the golf course to Irwin, who was merely a spectator at the event, and its complete neglect of William F. Davis (the golf professional of the Royal Montreal Golf Club from 1881 to 1892), reflects a trend that persisted from the 1890s into the early twentieth century: credit for laying out a golf course was often given to the **gentleman** who led the committee in charge of hiring the golf professional to lay out the course.

The golf professional was regarded as a tradesman, not a gentleman. And so when he plied his trade as a golf course designer, his name might mean no more to those who hired him than the names of the bricklayers, carpenters, and plumbers who built Club members' homes in Sandy Hill.

Note that the first international golf superstar, Harry Vardon, winner in the late 1890s and early 1900s of six British Open championships and one U.S. Open championship, was not allowed to become a member of a golf club until the 1930s, when his own club made him an honorary member. In Canada, also in the 1930s, George Cumming of the Toronto Golf Club was the first golf professional so honored. Karl Keffer, for 32 years the golf professional of the Royal Ottawa Golf Club, was the second.

The change in attitude toward Keffer over the course of his career in Ottawa was huge: first hired to be the golf professional at the Ottawa Golf Club in 1911, he lived in rooms at the clubhouse and his job was recorded in the census that year as that of "servant."

Certainly the golf professional of the 1890s was also thought of as a servant, as we can see in the *Ottawa Journal*'s list of the various prerequisites – in addition to vacant land – for establishing a proper golf club: "The other requisites seem to be a well-appointed clubhouse, imported costumes of

wonderful hues, and strange construction, innumerable curiously bent sticks, and a number of high-salaried servants [golf professionals], also imported" (3 August 1894, p. 6).

Still, there was an anonymous writer for the *Montreal Herald* in 1891 who was ahead of the curve in terms of the way golf architects would be viewed in the future. Although spelling his name wrong when explaining who had laid out the Ottawa Golf Club's first golf course, the writer conferred on the architect a worthy honorific when calling him "Professor Davies [sic]" (*Montreal Herald*, 25 May 1891, p. 2).

William F. Davis

Born in February of 1861 in Scotland, Willie Davis learned the game of golf in North Berwick, home of the golf course that has bequeathed the famous "Redan" green design to world golf course architecture.

But 20-year-old Davis was "imported" to the Royal Montreal Golf Club in April of 1881 from the Royal Liverpool Golf Club at Hoylake, Liverpool, where he had served as apprentice to the professional Jack Morris, nephew of Old Tom Morris. The Club agreed to pay his way, second-class, from Liverpool to Montreal.

Davis was paid £1 ($5) per week by the Royal Montreal Golf Club and may have received a similar payment for his week of work in Ottawa at the end of April of 1891. Note also that he signed his Montreal contract of 1881 under the last line, which specified: "I am to get all that I can earn for making and repairing clubs and balls" (*Montreal Gazette*, 22 October 1921, p. 21).

This is an attitude and an expectation that Davis probably brought with him to Ottawa. Club Secretary Alexander Simpson wrote: "Members of the Ottawa Golf Club are notified that W. Davis, the Montreal professional, will be on the Ottawa links on Wednesday and Thursday of this week to give instructions in the game to anyone desiring it. He has the necessary clubs" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 29 April 1891, p. 3). He would be paid for laying out the golf course, for his lessons, and for his clubs.

Davis's contract with Royal Montreal specified what prices he would charge for clubs, balls, and instruction – charges that were probably similar to those he applied to materials and services offered to members of the Ottawa Golf Club in the spring of 1891: "Tariff: 2s 6d for clubhead (60c); 2s for making shaft (50c); putting new horn on, new lead and splicing and gluing, 6 pence each; making up a ball, 4 pence" (*Montreal Gazette*, 22 October 1921, p. 21).

His teaching at Montreal would have been more lucrative but for the Club's insistence on its share of the fees: "for teaching beginners his charge was to be a shilling, or twenty-five cents, a round of nine holes, one-third of which was to be returned to the club" (*Montreal Gazette*, 22 October 1921, p. 21).

Davis could make his own hickory shafts and wooden clubheads, but he was dependent on a supply of iron heads and metal putter heads from England and Scotland. Few of his golf clubs survive. The putter shown in the photograph below is stamped "Royal Montreal" on the shaft. The driver is not marked with any affiliation.

Figure 18 The names stamped on the putter (W.Wilson, Maker, St Andrews; P. Paxton, Eastborne) might be explained as follows: the iron clubhead was forged in St Andrews, Scotland, by William Wilson, and then sold to Peter Paxton, golf professional at Eastbourne, England, who sold it to Davis, who added the shaft in Montreal and stamped it with his name and club affiliation.

There are no known clubs by Davis with an Ottawa Golf Club affiliation.

It turns out that clubmaker Davis promised more regarding the making of sets of golf clubs than he could deliver, as the club noted with frustration at the beginning of the 1892 season: "Much inconvenience and disappointment was caused during the early part of the [1891] season through the failure on the part of the contractor [Davis] to supply a sufficient number of playing clubs; this has now been overcome, and the secretary is prepared to supply a complete playing set for from $5.75 to $7" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4).

This was not the first time that Davis had disappointed a golf club.

After several years at the Montreal Golf Club in 1881, the Club President gave him a dressing down for not devoting enough time and care to greenkeeping:

> *If you take every afternoon a wheelbarrow and spade or the small lawnmower, and take [to] the green from hole to hole, removing all objectionable obstacles and cutting all the grass that can be cut, you would soon have the green in a very different state from what it is.*
>
> *It was supposed that as soon as the green was put in your care you would take some interest and pride in having it as perfect as possible.*
>
> *I instanced to you that Tom Morris and David Park both personally did at St. Andrews and Musselburgh the same kind of work we expected from you here. You replied that Morris, at Hoylake, had charge of that green, but that he paid a man for doing the manual work.*

> *You must understand that his position there and yours here are very different. He has a club of 500 members to attend to, with a green made for twenty years. Our club of 25 members requires, compared to the other club, little time, and one principal object we had in getting you here was that our new and rough green might be made as like the long-made green as can be done. (*Montreal Gazette*, 22 October 1921, p. 21)*

Davis would not back down. He left the Royal Montreal Golf Club for several years, but, as the only golf professional in North America until the early 1890s, he was still able to make a living from his club-making, ball-making, and instruction skills. He soon married a Montreal woman, and they began to raise a family. Davis was finally rehired by the Club in 1889.

Davis's inability to deliver the clubs and balls to Ottawa that he had promised may have been due to the fact that he was unexpectedly taken away from Montreal in the summer of 1891. Wealthy men on Long Island, New York, were planning a golf course and they wanted Willie Davis to design it.

In July of 1891, therefore, less than three months after his work in Ottawa, Davis was invited to Shinnecock Hills. It is clear from the account of his work there that he did not build golf courses just anywhere. A review of this account may give us some insight into his work in Ottawa less than three months before:

> *Davis was … requested to come down and look over the sand hills of Long Island and pass his opinion upon their golfing merits. He did not at first sight launch forth into eulogies of their similarity to the old St. Andrews course in Scotland, notwithstanding the fact that they, like St. Andrews, were sandy and had the crisp, bracing odor of the sea air close by. That portion of the Shinnecock Hills over which Willie Davis was taken did not meet with his favor at all…. [W]hen Willie Davis was anxiously asked what he thought of the grounds, … "with a sad voice, and troubled look, Willie Davis replied, …. 'Well, Sir, I don't think you can make golf links out of this sort of thing.'"*
>
> *At this point, however, it was suggested that they visit the hills across the railroad track, about half a mile to the north, where the ground had more of the qualities of a sandy turf, and it was while viewing this section … that Willie Davis's face lighted up, and with true golfing ardor he exclaimed: "This is more like it." (*New York Times*, 8 March 1896, p. 25)*

One presumes that a few months before this work on Long Island, Davis had offered the same honest, forthright evaluation of the Club's available land to Irwin, Lloyd, and Thorburn.

In April of 1892, in his summary of the development of the links in 1891, the Club Secretary may echo Davis's emphasis on sandy soil as fundamental to the success of a golf course layout: Simpson pointed out that in 1891 play had lasted until December and he opined that owing "to the sandy nature of the soil, it may be resumed so soon as the snow has disappeared" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4).

At the beginning of the 1893 season, Davis left Montreal for Newport, Rhode Island, where he laid out a nine-hole course and worked as golf professional for seven years. Then he moved to the renowned Apawamis Club in Rye, New York, where he died of pneumonia in 1902, one month shy of his 41st birthday:

> *Amateur and professional golfers attended the funeral of Willie Davis, the professional attached to the Apawamis Golf Club, this afternoon.*
>
> *The funeral took place from his residence near the club house, but the interment was only temporary, as the body will be shipped to Montreal within a few weeks for final disposition.*
>
> *Davis was the pioneer professional golfer in the invasion of the United States of what is now a very popular game. (*Montreal Gazette*, 13 January 1902, p. 2).*

The pall bearers were all members of the Apawamis Golf Club, a further testament to the good impression that Davis had made on the wealthy and powerful people who were members of that club.

Davis's widow Mary returned to hometown Montreal with her husband's body and the couple's young children who all went out to work as soon as they could, as their mother soldiered on as a domestic servant, living out her life in the homes of others.

Location! Location! Location?

Monday, April 27th, 1891, was a big day for golf in the nation's capital city.

First, a bona fide golf professional, Willie Davis, had laid out a proper golf course for the new Ottawa Golf Club.

Second, one of the four men on the golf grounds that day – a group comprising William F. Davis, Lieutenant-Colonel De la Cherois T. Irwin, Mr. John Lloyd Pierce, and Dr. John Thorburn – seems to have struck the first shot on the new golf course: "A trial was made of the ground and it was found very satisfactory for the purposes" (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 April 1891, p. 4).

I take the sentence "a trial was made of the ground" to mean that the four men tried a round of golf over the staked-out golf ground and found the layout to their liking.

Figure 19 Willie Davis addresses the golf ball on the golf course he laid out in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1893. Photo late 1890s.

So just where was the golf course that Davis laid out?

In 1909, Irwin looked back on the first five years of the club's existence and described the location of its golf course: "The club links consisted of a large portion of unoccupied ground to the west of the then Rideau Rifle Range, on which there were laid out five or six holes, while the elevated ground on Sandy

Hill furnished five or six more" (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 December 1909, p. 17). These two areas are marked on the map below, as well as the location of the clubhouse.

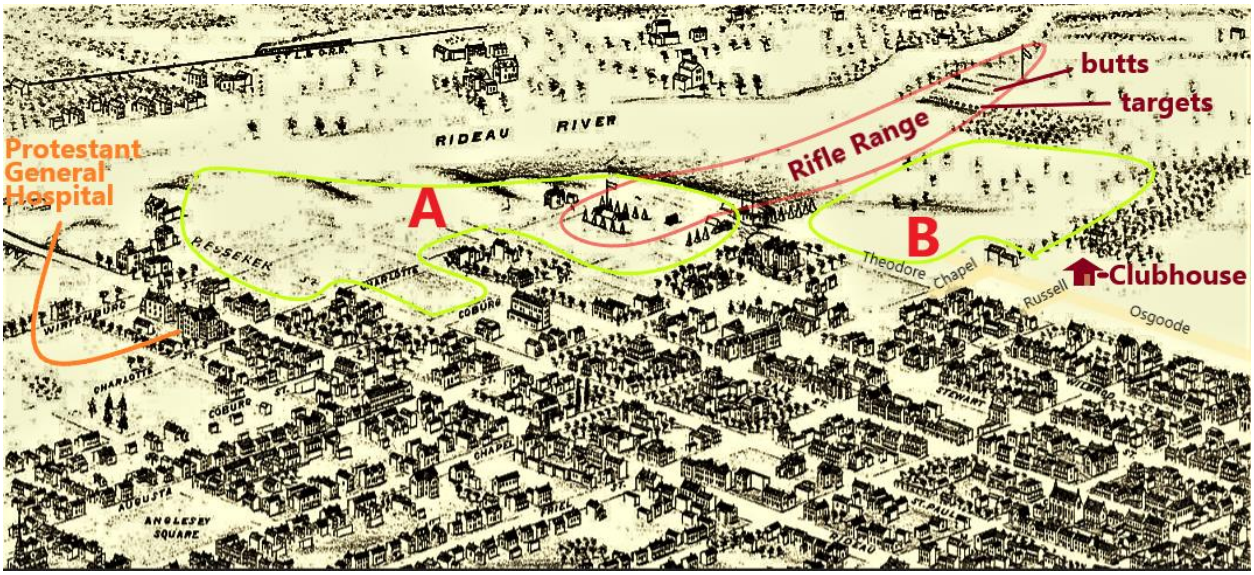


Figure 20 1876 Bird's Evey View map of Ottawa with the two areas of the Willie Davis Sandy Hill golf course marked on it as A, "the "elevated ground on Sandy Hill," and B, "unoccupied ground to the west of the then Rideau Rifle Range." Osgoode Street did not exist in 1876, nor did Russell Avenue or the extension of Chapel Street from Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue east)to Osgoode, but I add them to this map to show where the Ottawa Golf Club's clubhouse would be located in 1891.

The "elevated ground on Sandy Hill" that Irwin mentions was the eastern part of the area known as the Besserer estate, which comprised lands granted to Lieutenant René-Leonard Besserer in 1828 between Rideau Street to the north and Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue East) to the south, and between Waller Street to the west and the Rideau River to the east. Besserer died suddenly after the land was granted to him and so his brother, Louis Besserer, a veteran of the War of 1812 and a businessman in Quebec City, inherited the estate.

Louis Besserer relocated to Ottawa in the 1830s to develop the lands. They were subdivided beginning in 1834 by his land agent, William Stewart, who laid out the street plan for the estate. Development was slow until after Ottawa was named the capital of Canada in 1857. The influx of politicians and civil servants upon the completion of the Parliament Buildings in1865 triggered the transformation of the Besserer estate from a sparsely populated neighbourhood at the edge of the city to a sought-after upper-class residential neighbourhood.

After Besserer died in 1861, his family was forced to sell off much of the estate at distressed prices because of his debts – much of the land being acquired by one of the executors of the estate, Besserer's land agent at the time, Henry Newell Bate.

By 1891, no houses had been built further east on Besserer Street than Charlotte Street, except for one house on the north side of the street and one house on the south side of the street, apparently opposite each other near the Rideau River. There were no houses on either side of Daly from Charlotte Street to the Rideau River. Stewart Street was empty of houses from one lot before Charlotte Street all the way to its end near the Rideau River, where two houses were located on its north side. Thomas Bate, the son of the major Besserer estate landowner Henry Newell Bate, owned a house at the corner of Wilbrod and Cobourg on the north side; thereafter Wilbrod was nothing but vacant lots on either side all the way to the Rideau River. In fact, on the south side of Wilbrod and the north side of Theodore, there was a corridor of vacant lots extending from Augusta Street all the way to the Rideau River. The last establishments on Theodore Street, sitting side-by-side, were the house of W.H. Davis and the 600-yard range of the Rideau Rifle Range, with a vacant lot remaining between the Rifle Range and the Rideau River.

The "large portion of unoccupied ground to the west of the then Rideau Rifle Range" was part of what was known as the By Estate, located south of Theodore Street. It had been owned by Colonel John By, the engineer responsible for the construction of the Rideau Canal. In 1832, By purchased 800 acres bounded by Theodore Street to the north, the Rideau River to the east, Gladstone Avenue to the south and Bronson Avenue to the west. By died in 1836 and the land was willed to his descendants and developed by agents later in the 19th century.

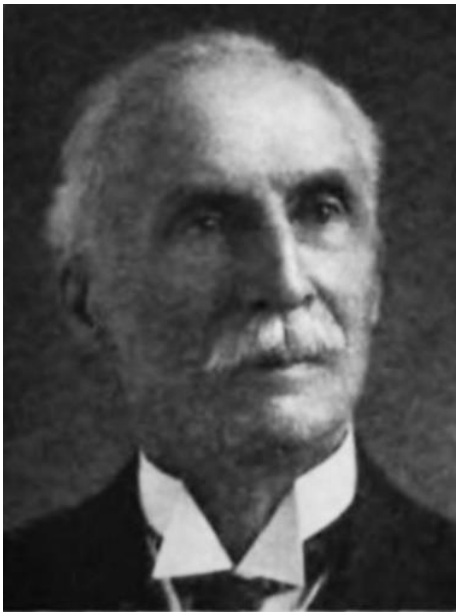


Figure 21 Charles Magee, early 1900s.

The primary agents in the development of this area of Sandy Hill were Charles Magee and his two partners, lumber baron John Maclaren and industrialist and former Member of Parliament Robert Blackburn (their partnership was incorporated in 1883 as the Freehold Association of Ottawa). They acquired the remaining unoccupied ground of the By estate in 1876. The By estate developed later than the Besserer estate and was characterized by middle-class houses on smaller lots reflecting denser development.

Although every street in this part of Sandy Hill would have at least one house under construction on it by 1901, as of 1891, there had been no development of the area between Osgoode Street and Anne Street (today's Mann Avenue).

By 1891, this “unoccupied ground” had been nominally rented by Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, but only insofar as she was represented by the Dominion Government’s Minister of the Militia. The government rented it from the Freehold Association of Ottawa (comprising partners Magee, Maclaren, and Blackburn) for $500 per year. The government had rented all of this land from Magee and his partners, but it used only the 15 acres along the Rideau River’s edge, which was known as the Rideau Rifle Range. The government complained vociferously in 1891 when the city levied taxes for the whole parcel of land, even though the government used but a small portion of it (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 1).

I think we can see now how Walker’s 1960 description of the first golf course as having been laid out on the Rifle Range through the cooperation of the government came about. Up to 1891, the federal government seems to have nominally controlled all of the “unoccupied ground” where Irwin says five or six golf holes were laid out west of the Rifle Range, so the whole parcel of land may have been described as the government’s Rifle Range land when the golf course was laid out in April of 1891. Using only 15 acres of this ground, the government allowed the Ottawa Golf Club to use the rest of the land for its golf course.

Deferring for the moment the question of how many holes the golf course had, we shall consider Irwin’s description of a golf course split evenly between two relatively distinct locations.

Incomplete, Ambiguous, Vague Descriptions of the Location

The earliest reports in the *Ottawa Journal* refer not to government land, but rather to land donated to the Club by Charles Magee, a dry goods merchant, founder and director of the Bank of Ottawa, landowner and real estate developer who was not only a founding member of the Ottawa Golf Club but also its vice-president from 1891 to 1895.

The day that the Club was formed on 13 April 1891, we read that "Mr. C. Magee placed at the disposal of the club for practice the large meadow in rear of the rifle range" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1891, p. 4). A week later, we read that "The work of laying out the field back of the rifle range, lent by Mr. Chas. Magee, will be commenced at once" (*Ottawa Journal*, 21 April 1891, p. 4). The *Montreal Herald* observed that "The use of a fine and suitable stretch of ground adjoining the rifle range was very kindly offered by Mr. Charles Magee" (16 April 1891, p. 2).

Do these articles refer to the "elevated ground on Sandy Hill" that Irwin mentions? Or do they refer to the other land that Irwin mentions, the unoccupied ground west of the Rifle Range?

We know that Magee and his partners owned the "unoccupied ground" west of the Rifle Range. It seems to have been Henry Newell Bate who owned most of the "elevated ground on Sandy Hill."

With streets such as Besserer, Daly, Stewart, Wilbrod, Theodore, Charlotte, and Wurtemburg criss-crossing this area, one might be hard-pressed to think of the "elevated ground on Sandy Hill" as the "field" or "meadow" that the articles mention. It was the "unoccupied ground" west of the Rifle Range that was better described as "field" or "meadow."

The *Ottawa Daily Citizen* observes that "A fine stretch of ground … has been secured in the vicinity of the Rifle Range by the kindness of Mr. Charles Magee" (21 April 1891, p. 1). The phrase "in the vicinity of the Rifle Range" could refer to either the land at the eastern end of the Besserer estate or the vacant land at the eastern end of the By estate. Perhaps this phrase "in the vicinity of" was the *Ottawa Daily Citizen*'s way of referring to the two areas of the golf ground stretching from the "large portion of unoccupied ground to the west of the then Rideau Rifle Range," on the one hand, to the "the elevated ground on Sandy Hill," on the other.

In the spring of 1892, when Ottawa Golf Club Secretary Alexander Simpson sent the newspapers a review of the Club's progress in 1891, he mentioned the following: "the club have been enabled to erect

a commodious clubhouse … in a suitable locality, the site being kindly donated by Mr. C. Magee; they have also secured the right to use several large enclosures in the immediate vicinity, and the Links are now in good order" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4).

Figure 22 Henry Newell Bate, circa 1890.

This communication by Simpson is notable as the only one in which certain land used by the Ottawa Golf Club – "several large enclosures" – is not said to have been provided by Charles Magee. And the reference to these "enclosures" comes right after an acknowledgement of generosity by Magee with regard to the donation of a lot for the building of a clubhouse. It may be that the "several large enclosures" that Simpson mentions refer to the "elevated ground on Sandy Hill" and that the right to use them had been secured not from Charles Magee, but from the principal landowner in this area of the former Besserer estate: Henry Newell Bate.

It seems likely that Secretary Simpson indicated to the newspapers that the Ottawa Golf Club had secured a fine stretch of land in two distinct locations, each of them in close proximity to the Rifle Range, but that the newspapers conveyed their own vague sense of the geography in question to their readers.

These newspapers' items in April of 1891 about the location of the golf course were probably not written by the Club Secretary or by any other representative of the Club. They likely represent each newspaper's distillation of what it thought worth printing from the information that it had received from the Club. From 1891 to 1895, one can see by comparing articles in the *Ottawa Journal* and the *Ottawa Daily Citizen* that often each newspaper received the same information from the Club and that each newspaper then wrote news items in distinctly different ways – both in terms of the information included and excluded, and also in terms of the vocabulary used.

For decades, the two newspapers maintained this practice of writing up in their own way the news releases they received from all sorts of organizations.

The newspaper writers probably had no clear idea of how large a golf course might be, let alone where its beginning and end in Sandy Hill might be. Remember that almost no one in Ottawa knew anything

about golf in April of 1891 except for the dozen or so among Renwick's converts who were promoting the new golf club that month. Even at the end of the Club's third season, for instance, the *Ottawa Daily Citizen* writer observed that "Golf is a game that probably very few people in Ottawa know much about, except those who play it" (7 October 1893, p. 5). And even in 1893, of the 90 or so members of the Ottawa Golf Club, considerably less than half of them actually played the game. Most were social members who supported the idea of a golf club and attended Friday afternoon teas at the clubhouse put on by the lady members. And so, at the beginning of the second season we find an appeal to the Club's large number of non-playing members: "Being most anxious to secure an additional number of playing members who will take an active interest in the club, the committee hope that the present members will not only play themselves during the coming season, but will induce others to interest themselves in the game" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4). Newspaper writers were not the only ones with only a vague notion of the size and location of the golf course: more than half the members of the Club may have had no clear idea of these things.

And so, vagueness about the location of the golf course would be a continual feature of newspaper references to it from 1891 to 1895.

In 1893, for instance, the *Ottawa Daily Citizen* locates the golf course by two wildly different descriptions. In the fall, discussing the interprovincial match between Quebec and Ontario played on the "Ottawa links," the writer explains that the golf course is located "near Hurdman's bridge" (6 October 1893, p. 7). He was way off!

In May, we read that "The ground is very picturesquely situated on the rifle range off Theodore Street" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 27 May 1893, p. 2). What to make of this description? Well, by 1893 the golf ground was not "on the rifle range" itself, although it was adjacent to it both on its northern and on its western sides. And as Theodore Street did not then extend past today's Marlborough Avenue, the area meant by the phrase "off Theodore Street" is a mystery, for it might comprise anything within a 270-degree sweep from the end of that street in 1893 – including both parts of the golf course that Irwin describes.

It seems that many Ottawa residents casually referred to the whole area of undeveloped land between the existing houses in Sandy Hill and the Rideau River as "the rifle range."

It should perhaps be no surprise, then, when we learn from the *Montreal Daily Herald*'s report of an important golf competition in Ottawa in 1893 that the golf course had actually been given a nickname:

“The first inter-provincial golf match to be played in Ottawa came off today at ‘The Range’” (7 October 1893, p. 5).

“The Range “!

Elevated Ground on Sandy Hill

To understand the *Ottawa Journal*'s reference to land "back of the rifle range" and "in rear of the rifle range," we have to know how the writer conceives the rifle range to be oriented. What part of the range constitutes its front, and what part constitutes its back?

The photograph below shows a shooting contest in progress on the rifle range in the 1890s.

Figure 23 The Dominion Government of Canada Rifle Range, also known as the Rideau Rifle Range, circa 1890. The boardwalk along which pedestrians moved down the range was presumably a means of coping with the wet conditions in the early part of the spring. Spectators stand at the base of the Rideau bluff at the northern end of the Rifle Range. The targets are about 600 yards away from the photographer standing atop the bluff at the southern end of the range.

The range was aligned on a north-south axis. The paper targets mounted on vertical stands were at the south end. The rifle shooters in the competition above seem to have been stationed near the middle, where smoke rising after the firing of their guns can be seen right of the boardwalk. Spectators gathered at the north end at the base of the Rideau bluff. To the east was the Rideau River. To the west was vacant land similar to the land on which the range seen above was laid out.

Is it possible that the writers of the newspaper items above thought of the Rideau-River side of the Rifle Range as its front and the opposite side where people walk along a boardwalk as its back? Perhaps they thought of the Rifle Range as "fronting" the Rideau River. That is the only way they could have referred to the vacant land west of the Rifle Range as back of it or in rear of it.

It seems to me, however, that people must have thought of the area where the spectators were located as back of the range or in rear of it. This idea is supported by the *Ottawa Journal*'s description of this area with regard to the erection of tents here in connection with a rifle-shooting competition in August of 1890: "Last year [1890] the various official marquees were placed on the south side of Theodore St., on top of the hill, **back of the 600-yard ranges**" (28 August 1891, p. 4, emphasis added).

The 600-yard range shooting area is shown in the photograph below.

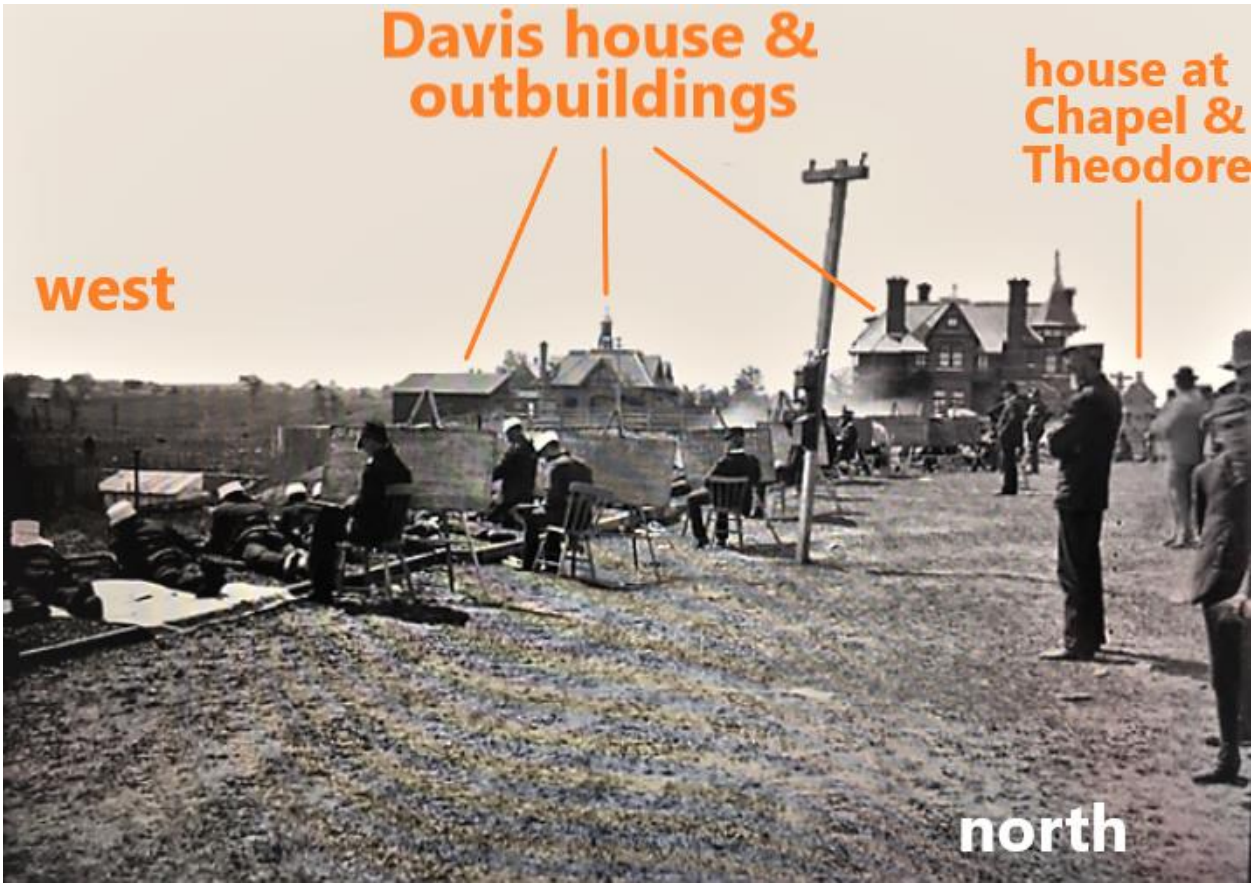


Figure 24 Photograph from Old Ottawa and Bytown Pics Facebook page (accessed by Paul Murray on 15 May 2021 [email to author, 16 May 2021]). The W.H. Davis house was the last house on Theodore Street. The next to last house at Chapel Street is visible in the background. This photograph was taken before June of 1895, when the electric railway loop extended along Theodore to Charlotte Street was opened. The spectators stand slightly east of where Charlotte would join Theodore.

As rifles became accurate over longer distances, shooting bays were set further and further back from the targets until they were actually set up at the top of the Rideau bluff, as shown above.

The photograph above shows in the background the house and outbuildings of William H. Davis at 404 Theodore Street. This house was built at the eastern endpoint of Theodore Street at that time. Visible behind it is the next-to-last house on Theodore at the corner of Chapel Street and Theodore. Between these two houses were vacant lots along the south side of Theodore.

Spectators in the photograph stand north of the Rifle Range on the land where Theodore Street would soon be extended to form a junction with Charlotte Street. Behind them is the land “back of” or “in rear of” the Rifle Range where the two newspaper items from April of 1891 locate the golf course.

The same shooting area is seen from the opposite point of view in the photograph below.

Figure 26 "DRA [Dominion Rifle Association] Last Shot, Rideau Rifle Range, 1897” Bytown Museum, P2539.

The poles behind the spectators support the wires for the electric streetcars turning the corner at the junction of Charlotte Street and Theodore Street, an extension of the streetcar line opened in June of 1895.

Behind the spectators is the area of “elevated ground on Sandy Hill” where Irwin says “five or six” holes were laid out.

Golf Club versus City

Apart from the observations in 1891 about the golf ground being "back of" or "in rear of" the Rifle Range, and apart from an observation in 1893 that "The local club's grounds are on the Rideau bluff," explicit reference to the golf holes laid out on what Irwin calls the "elevated ground" of Sandy Hill occurs during a controversy that erupted about the Charlotte Street extension of the electric railway in the spring of 1895 (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 October 1893, p. 5).

About to host the first national golf championships during the first week of June 1895, the Ottawa Golf Club was surprised and shocked to learn of construction work that the city was about to undertake in an area across which golf holes were routed.

The Ottawa Golf Club had initially scheduled the championships for the second-last week of May. In the face of complaints by some potential entrants that their golf games would not be in championship shape in May, and as a consequence of regrets sent by some of the best golfers that their schedule would not allow them to travel to Ottawa in May, the Club decided to delay the championship by two weeks.

In 1895, however, Ottawa city council had a contract with the Electric Street Railway Company "for additions to the lines to be in working order and operation before June 1st," including "one line on Theodore Street to the rifle ranges" (*Ottawa Journal*, 2 February 1895, p. 1). Part of the plan was to develop a loop from Rideau Street down Nicholas Street to Theodore Street, then along Theodore "to Chapel Street or some street east of it, and thence to Rideau Street" (Ottawa Journal, 2 February 1895, p. 1). But the schedule for completion was moved back at some point during the winter or spring such that it was only toward the end of May that council approved a budget for grading Charlotte Street in preparation for laying the railway tracks from Rideau down Charlotte to Theodore.

The new timeline for this work on Charlotte seems to have surprised the Ottawa Golf Club. Members of its executive committee jumped on the matter in late May as soon as they learned of the construction schedule for the first week of June. The reporting makes it clear that their concern was not about traffic problems, but rather about interference in the playing of the dozens of matches on the course.

We read in the one newspaper that "The extension crosses the golf links and it was thought the work would interfere with the **play** in the tournament opening on Tuesday" (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 May 1895, p. 8, emphasis added). The other newspaper's report emphasized the same fear that the playing of the game would be compromised:

> *In view of the golf tournament to be held here on Tuesday of next week, members of the Ottawa club have been exceedingly perturbed over a* ***possible interference with play*** *by men engaged on the Charlotte Street extension of the electric railway. Charlotte Street crosses the links…. They represented that as eminent golfers from Canada and the United States would be here to participate in the tournament, it was rather important that* ***there should be no interference with the matches****. Mr. Surtees promised to see that all possible expedition should be exercised in order that the work of grading might be completed beyond the golf ground before the tournament starts. (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 29 May 1895, p. 5, emphasis added)*

It seems that a number of the golf holes laid out on the elevated ground of Sandy Hill were routed across Charlotte Street.

In the event, the championships concluded successfully, without any newspaper reports of interference from construction. Workers began to install the wires for the electric railway along Theodore Street on 7 June 1895, the day after the championships concluded, and the new loop was officially opened with the Mayor and Aldermen riding as passengers on 14 June 1895, and the *Ottawa Journal* published shortly afterwards a map of the city's electric railway routes as of the opening of the new extension that June.

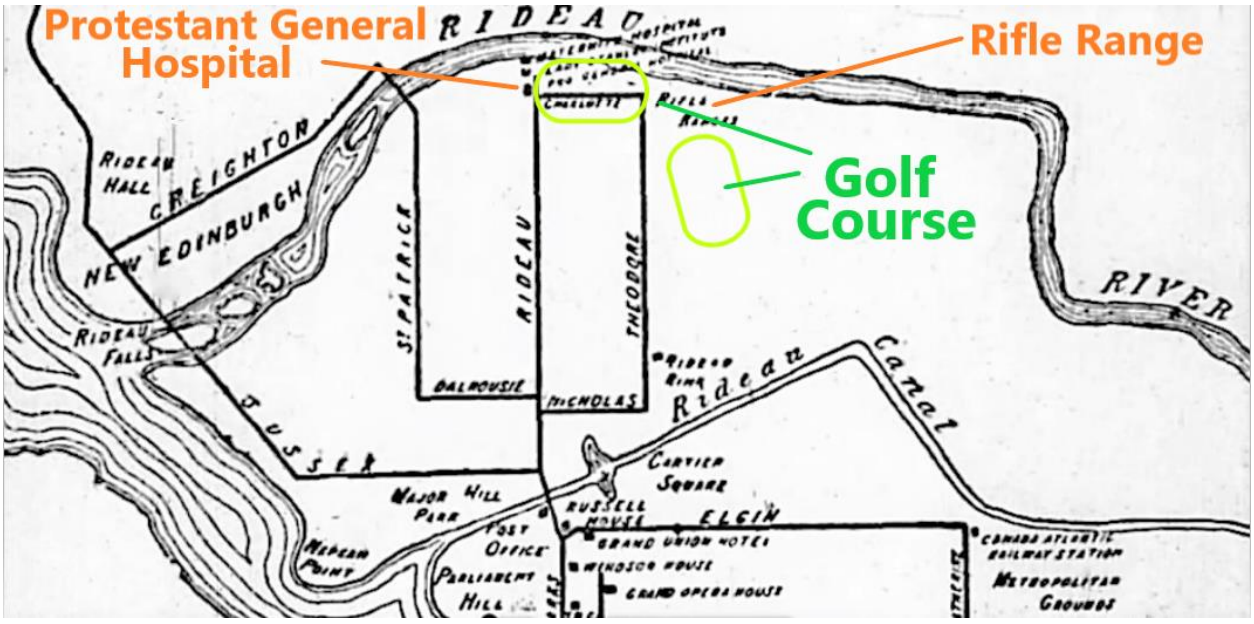


Figure 27 Ottawa Journal*, 22 June 1895, p. 1. The locations of the two areas of the golf course are added to the map.*

The *Ottawa Free Press* described the new route along Theodore to Charlotte as “picturesque”: and no wonder, for it passed through a beautiful golf course (20 June 1895)!

Unoccupied Ground West of the Rifle Range

The area that is perhaps better described as “field” or “meadow” was located west of the Rifle Range and southwest of the Davis house. The Ottawa correspondent of the *Montreal Star* refers to this area explicitly as “fields”: “The golf links are at the south-eastern corner of the city and extend over several fields running parallel to the Rifle Range, which separates it from the Rideau River” (28 April 1894, p. 2).

This is the vacant land where Irwin also says that five or six holes of the golf course were laid out – the area where secretary Alexander Simpson invited members to meet for instruction from Willie Davis: “The links are situated immediately west of the Rifle Range” (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 29 April 1891, p. 3).

The photograph below shows part of the “several fields” and “unoccupied ground” in question.

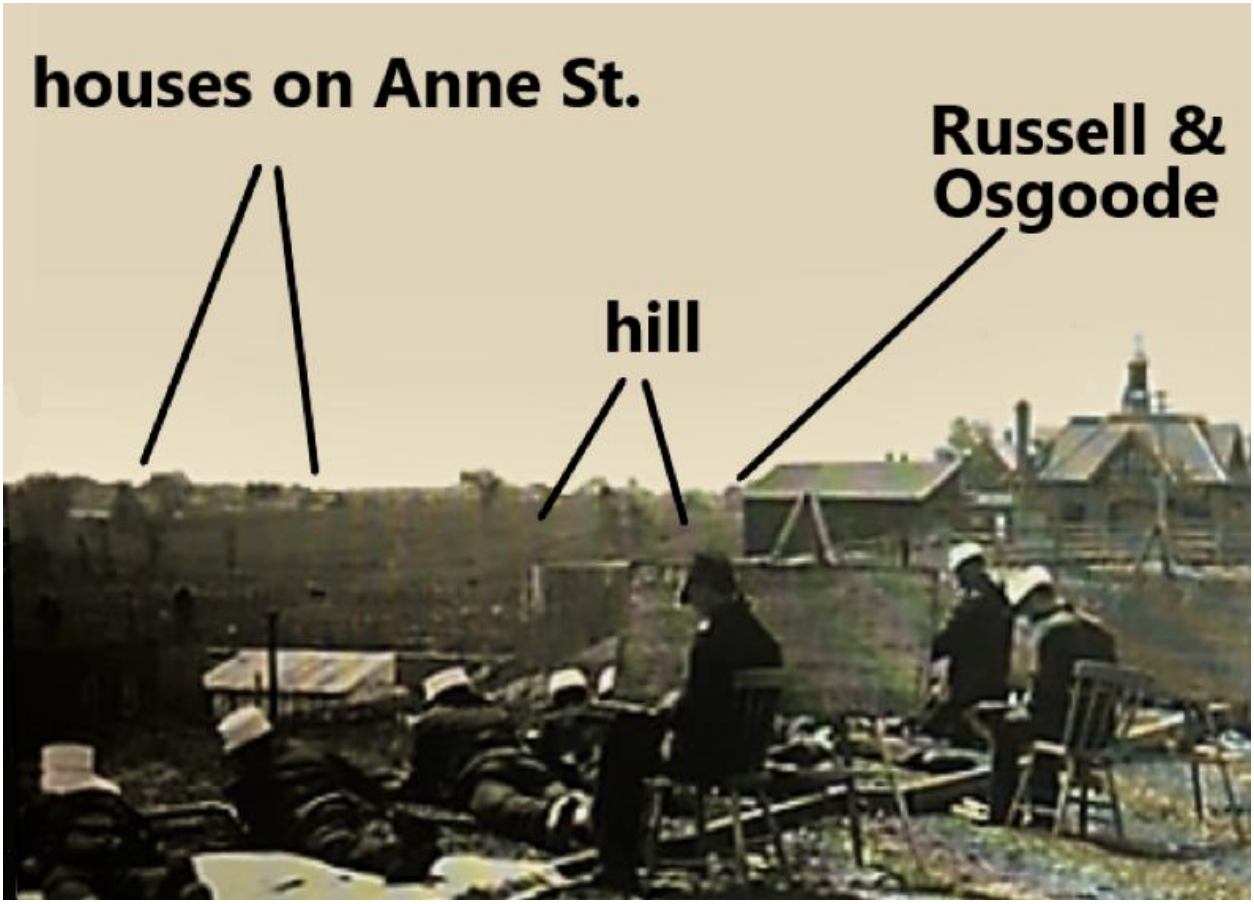


Figure 28 Enlarged detail from Old Ottawa and Bytown Pics Facebook page photograph seen above in Figure 24..

The “unoccupied ground” between Anne Street to the south and Osgoode Street to the north and between the Rifle Range to the east and the clubhouse located at the corner of Russell Avenue and

Osgoode Street to the west comprised approximately 30 to 40 acres of land cleared sufficiently for golf to be played over it.

When Simpson invited Club members to come out to the golf grounds, he was not directing them to the clubhouse, which had not yet been built, but rather to the field or meadow where Davis had laid out some five or six holes of the golf course. Note, however, that it was at the western end of this field or meadow that the clubhouse was built in the course of 1891.

The Club itself published information about this process in the spring of 1892:

> *The committee of the Ottawa Golf Club, at the close of the first season's play, are desirous of bringing to the notice of the members and other gentlemen wishing to join the club, the following brief resume of what has been accomplished during the first year.*
>
> *Thanks to the generous response made to an appeal for subscriptions last spring, the club have been enabled to erect a commodious clubhouse, provided with dressing rooms, lockers, etc., in a suitable locality, the site being kindly donated by Mr. C. Magee; they have also secured the right to use several large enclosures in the immediate vicinity, and the Links are now in good order. (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4)*

As Paul Murray pointed out to me, the *Ottawa City Directory* of 1891 indicates that the clubhouse address was "w s Russell" (west side of Russell Avenue), 1 s Osgoode (one lot south of Osgoode Street) (email to the author, 10 May 2021). Similarly, confirming the information in the City Director, a newspaper advertisement from the fall of 1895 offers for sale "two new cottages on Russell Avenue, near the Golf House" (*Ottawa Journal*, 2 November 1895, p. 1).

Russell Avenue did not yet extend south beyond Osgoode Street, but it had been surveyed and was plotted out as a thoroughfare that would eventually be extended to join up with its southernmost portion near Anne Street (today's Mann Avenue).

The Directory indicates that there was just one building at the junction of Russell and Osgoode, and that was the Ottawa Golf Club on the west side. Between this clubhouse and the dozen or so houses at the junction of Russell and Anne was "pasture." And the clubhouse of the Ottawa Golf Club was the last building on Osgoode Street between Russell Avenue and the Rideau River.

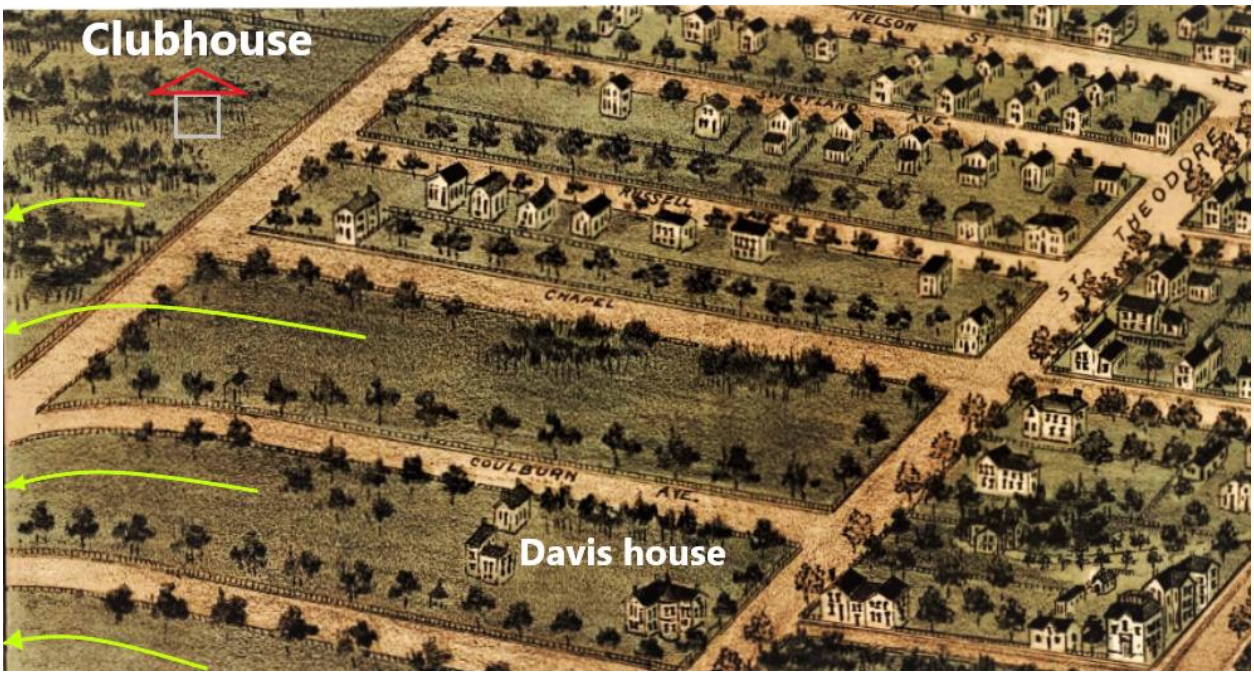


Figure 29 1895 panoramic map of Ottawa annotated to show location of clubhouse of the Ottawa Golf Club at Russell Avenue and Osgoode Street. Also marked on the map are lines indicating the hill sloping down to the meadow where golf was played. Note that the street marked "Goulburn Ave" on the map above is actually Blackburn Avenue.

The Club's reference to a links in good order on "large enclosures in the *immediate* vicinity" of the clubhouse is in accord with the 1904 newspaper article that says "This new club, formed in 1891, decided on a spot for the clubhouse overlooking the old Rideau rifle ranges on the west side. On the bow of a splendid hill, a comfortable … house was built" (*Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1904, p. 15, emphasis added).

If the hill was "splendid," the view was even more splendid:

> *The club house is situated at the top of a hill overlooking the links. It is a small house, but quite pretty, and the verandah in front is a favorite resort for the clubmen, especially on Sunday morning, when they go up to have a quiet smoke. It is delightfully cool and breezy, and the view of the green fields and winding river is a pleasant change from the dusty town. (*Montreal Star*, 28 April 1894, p. 2)*

The Theodore Divide

One can see from the map above of the electric railway loop around Rideau, Nicholas, Theodore, and Charlotte that Theodore Street bisected the two different sections of the golf course described by Irwin as hosting five or six holes each.

In fact, it was hard to find room between the houses along Theodore for golfers to have played their way from one set of golf holes to the other.

On the one hand, note in the photograph of the Davis house below that there was no space between the house and the Rifle Range in which a golf hole could have been laid out. The shooting bays from which the smoke of rifle fire rises (on the right side of the photograph) seem to be right beside the fence marking the eastern the edge of the Davis property.

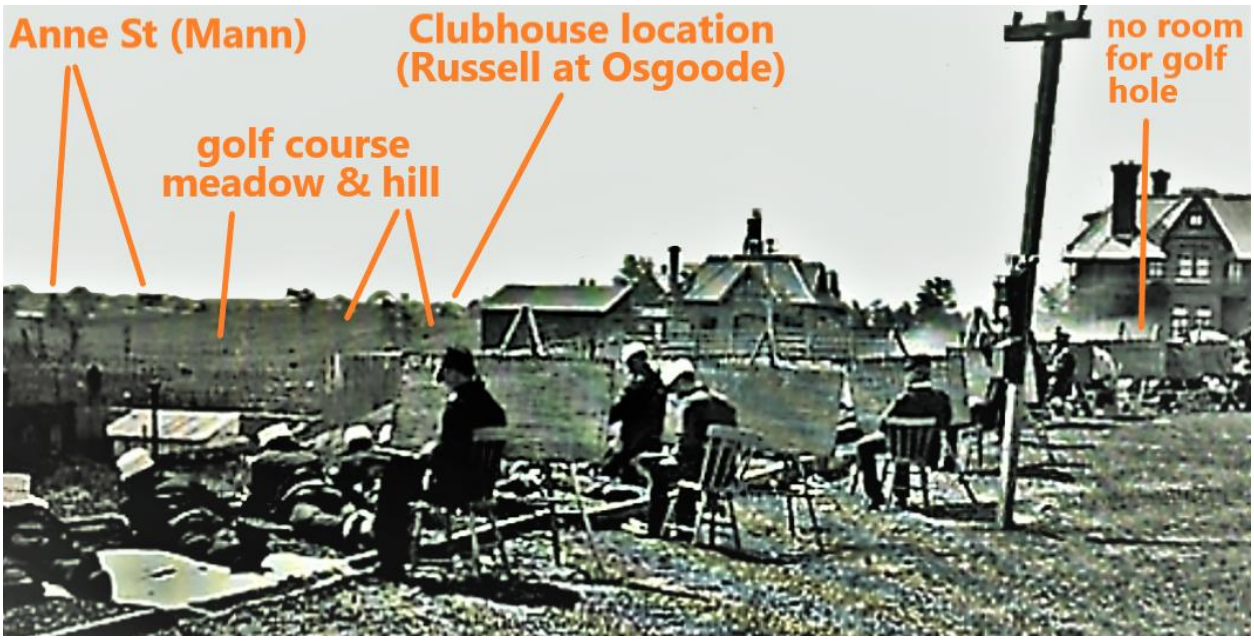


Figure 30 Enlarged detail from Old Ottawa and Bytown Pics Facebook photograph above.

One knows that no golf shots could have been played through the narrow space between the Davis house and the Rifle Range.

It is not clear that there is even space here for people to walk between the Rifle Range and the house.

The photograph below confirms that the rifle bays in which the soldiers lie firing their guns run right up to the fence of the Davis property. Although snow covers these bays (the photograph dates from March

of 1897, the last year during which the Rifle Range was used), the wooden border of the bays along the edge of the Rideau bluff can be seen clearly.

Figure 31 A view from the east of the W.H. Davis house at 404 Theodore Street in March of 1897. Ottawa HH: Item # 95 - Topley Series E @ LAC.

Note, however, that between the Davis house and the next house east of it at the corner of Chapel Avenue and Theodore Street was a vacant block extending from Theodore Street down to Osgoode Street, bounded on one side by Chapel Avenue and bounded on the other side by Blackburn Avenue (mislabelled “Goulburn Avenue” on the map below).

As can be seen in the image produced below from the 1895 panoramic map of Ottawa, a golf hole could have been routed through this vacant lot and thereby could have brought the golf course laid out on the unoccupied ground west of the Rifle Range right up to Theodore Street, which was part of the elevated ground in Sandy Hill, but one further notes from this map’s depiction of the area that any further routing of golf holes along Theodore Street was impossible, for on the north side of the street were four grand houses with large, fenced yards surrounding each of them.

Figure 32 Detail from the 1895 Ottawa panoramic map of Ottawa showing the Davis house, marked 1, and the house at Chapel, marked 2, that are visible in the photograph above. The panoramic map depicts all buildings as white, regardless of actual colour, and regardless of whether they were wood, brick, or stone. The street marked "Goulburn Ave" above is actually Blackburn.

The four houses on the north side of Theodore Street can be seen in the photographs below.

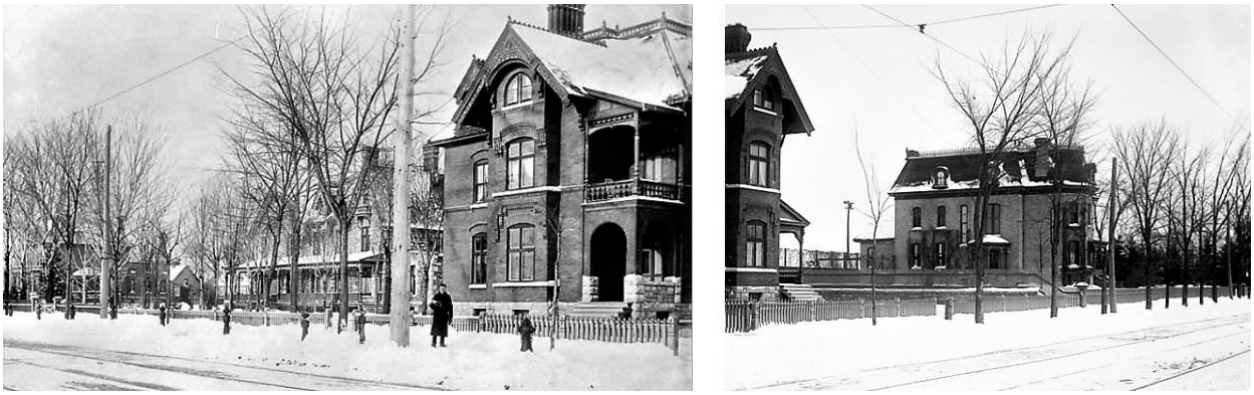


Figure 33 Photographs of houses along the north side of Theodore Street in March of 1897. In the centre of the photograph on the right, we see the house of John Mather at 450 Theodore, near the corner of Cobourg and Theodore, across the street from the W.H. Davis house. By the early 1900s, there would be three more houses to the right (east) of it. The house partially visible on the left side of this photograph is next to the one shown on the right side of the photograph on the left, and left (west) of the latter can be seen two more houses along Theodore Street. These houses were all built or at least under construction by 1893.

It seems that between the two separate areas where Irwin says golf holes were laid out for the Ottawa Golf Club, connection was made not by contiguous golf holes but rather by a short walk along Theodore Street to the vacant lots north of the 600-yard Rifle Range shooting bays.

And there were times during major military rifle-shooting competitions when even a pedestrian route from the one section of the golf course to the other was effectively closed off by a proliferation of tents.

Walker seems to have picked up stories of this sort in 1960: “Here all the famous Canadian riflemen used to shoot, and at the annual meets a tented section utilized the area between Wilbrod and Laurier [Theodore]. It seemed hopeless to accommodate golf with rifle-shooting on the same terrain. But the government was co-operative and permitted the use of the ranges for golf between rifle meets” (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 May 1960, p. 32).

Note the size and location of the virtual city of tents erected in August of 1891 to house not just the 450 competitors expected at that year’s District Rifle Association meet, but also the Association’s officials, an elaborate infrastructure of telephone and telegraph systems, dining halls, barber shops, a caterer, armorers, and so on:

> *The arrangements for the Dominion Rifle Association matches are going on rapidly and everything will be in readiness for the big shoot tomorrow.*
>
> *Wednesday morning a large force of men were put to work erecting tents and early yesterday morning when **The Journal** reporter visited the ranges the scene in the bright sunlight was pretty indeed. Over half of the canvas was up.*
>
> *This year, as in 1889, the Association has secured the use of Mr. Gerald Bate’s field [Gerald Bate, son of Henry Newell Bate, lived at 455 Wilbrod] on the north side of Theodore St., next to Mr. John Mather’s house [at 458 Theodore]. Last year the various official marquees were placed on the south side of Theodore St., on top of the hill, back of the 600-yard ranges. Mr. Bate’s field is about 2 acres square.*
>
> *Along the front of it, facing Theodore St. and the range, will be, in eight large tents, the secretary’s statistical and treasurer’s offices, the armorer’s quarters, the telephone and telegraph and competitors general purpose quarters. Immediately back of the secretary’s office will be the “stores” marquee, and back of this the president’s private tent, the executive council marquee and the dining tent. In the rear of the dining tent, on Mr. Mather’s field, will be the camp caterer’s kitchen, culinary arrangements, and the barber shop. The executive council business marquee is situated just behind the treasurer’s quarters and opposite the stores tent, and*

around and behind this are some 35 general purpose marquees for the various corps. These, with the militia stores tent, fill the space enclosed by the fence around Mr. Bate's lot.

*Outside of the east fence and between the bank of the Rideau River will be 100 bell tents for the competitors' night quarters. Also in this space are "reception" marquees, where the 6th Fusiliers, Victoria Rifles, Queen's Own, C.G.F.G. and the 43rd Batt. Will do the swell thing by their friends. There will also be bell sleeping tents for the competitors in Mr. Mather's field west of Mr. Bate's. (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 August 1891, p. 4)*

A depiction of the tents and marques set up for an earlier instance of this sort of competition at the Rideau Rifle Range is visible in the 1876 Bird's-Eye-View map of Ottawa seen below.

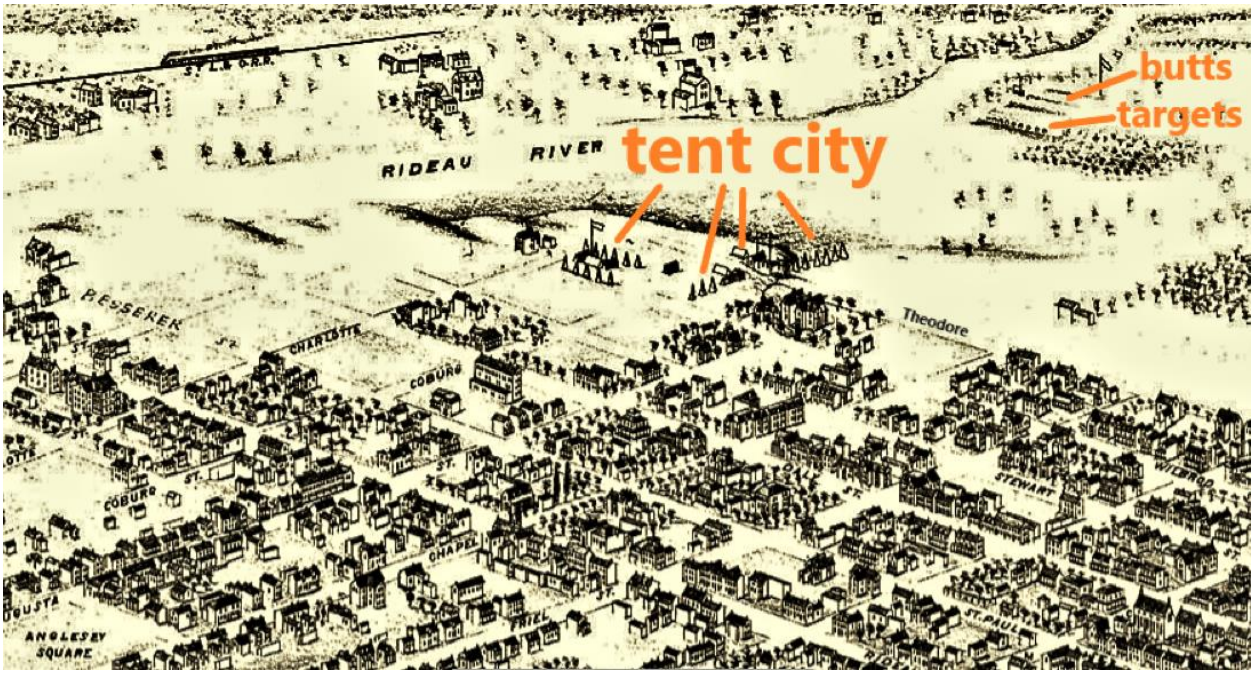


Figure 34 Enlarged detail from 1876 Bird's-Eye-View map of Ottawa.

Note that by 1892, the tents stretching north of Theodore Street even went beyond Wilbrod Street: "extending north, as far as Stewart Street, is a large number of marquees and tents, forming on the hill there the main camp of the competition" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 27 August 1892, p. 8).

As the annual meeting of the Dominion Rifle Association became bigger and bigger, with more and more competitors coming from across Canada, the prize-table of the Dominion Rifle Association became enormous.

Figure 35 Montreal Star*, 7 September 1896, p. 3.*

There were more prizes both because the types of guns fired in competition proliferated and because shooting skills were tested at an increasing variety of distances (especially as the power of rifles to shoot accurately over long distances increased – which also meant that the shooting bays of the Rifle Range extended further and further north on the elevated ground of Sandy Hill).

The annual Dominion Rifle Association meeting was such a massive production that it seems that at least two or three of the golf holes laid out on the part of the golf course laid out on the elevated ground of Sandy Hill must have been used as part of the tent city:

> *The first view of the camp of the Dominion Rifle Association s it is situated on the Rideau Ranges informs the visitor that it is no small affair …. Your correspondent is writing this in the handsome marquee of the Victoria Rifles, of Montreal …. The marquee opens out to the south, giving a clear view of the line of targets, which stretch about 450 feet across the plain below – for it must be remembered that the camp is pitched on a hill, fully 40 feet above the level of the plateau on which most of the firing is done. Beyond the top of the targets, you get a lovely view of the country, while the Rideau River trickles in the sunshine on the left. The view extends for miles over the country, and it is safe to say that very few prettier scenes can be found in Canada….*

The camp is well decorated with flowers, which are temporarily planted for the week by the city florists. Sitting, as I am at present, in a handsomely furnished apartment under canvas, with palms on all sides, bouquets in profusion and the entrance banked up with the choicest flowers, not to mention a skilful attendant, who dispenses the drinks of the season, it is not difficult to pass the time at the D.R.A. meeting. The street cars pass through the camp, practically, and are most convenient.

To the east of the quarters of the Victoria Rifles are the equally handsome quarters of the 5th Royal Scots and the 6th Fusiliers, both of Montreal, flanked by the marquee of the Foot Guards.

All this that I have described is on the east side of the trolley tracks, and behind it are situated the tents of the competitors, many of whom stay here in preference to the hotels of the city. On the east side of the road is the business part of the meeting, which centres in the large marquees of the secretary, the treasurer, the statistical officer, the quartermaster, the armourer ….

A nicely-furnished tent [is] labelled Minister of Militia, Nova Scotia, … while the sides of the quadrangle are lined with large marquees of the different competing associations or corps.

Beginning on the left we see Prince Edward Island …. Next comes New Brunswick …. [and] a group under cover of the Nova Scotia marquee ….

*Then comes the much-appreciated "Competitors' dining and refreshment room, where the grass seems considerably to be worn. (*Winnipeg Tribune*, 5 September 1895, p. 5)*

One can well imagine that when the tent poles were removed, as well as the temporary poles for electrical wires and telegraph wires, and when the temporary flowers were dug up, the worn grass of tent city was the least of the problems faced by golfers resuming play over this part of the golf course.

An illustration depicting the intermingling of soldiers, spectators, and dogs in this tent city during the Dominion Rifle Association's big shooting competition of 1896 shows how busy the area became at the end of August and beginning of September each year.

Figure 36 Montreal Star*, 7 September 1896, p. 3).*

Yet there were also other times in the year when infantry regiments were camped in this area as part of their regular deployments in Ottawa. We read in 1893, for instance, that "No. 2 Co. of the G.G.F.G. [Governor General's Foot Guards] broke up their camp at the Rideau Rifle Range yesterday morning" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 June 1893, p. 8).

Making one's way across Theodore Street from one part of the golf course to the other part would have been an odd experience for golfers at any of these times – if, that is, the government even allowed golf to be played at such times.

We learn in the spring of 1895 that there were indeed dangers associated with the Rifle Range: "The Rideau Rifle Range, where the annual matches of the Dominion Rifle Association are fired, has been adjudged dangerous to public safety and closed" (*Montreal Star*, 23 May 1895, p. 8). The problem was the ricocheting of bullets from the ground near the targets. And so, representatives of the City of Ottawa, loathe to lose the economic advantages of hosting the annual Dominion Rifle Association meet,

successfully persuaded the federal government that the range should be re-opened after a simple solution: “namely that the ground immediately in front and rear of the targets be ploughed up to prevent the bullets rebounding or ricocheting” (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 28 May 1895, p. 5).

Given how large was the area on the “elevated ground on Sandy Hill” that was taken over as part of certain shooting competitions on the Rideau Rifle Range, one can see how Ottawa residents might have come to think of the Rifle Range as comprising not just the swampy area below the Rideau bluff, but also a good deal of the land at the end of Theodore Street, extending north along Cobourg and Charlotte Streets as far as Stewart Street.

Furthermore, one can see how people could have spoken of the golf course as having been laid out on the Rifle Range, and how the golf course itself could even have come to be called “The Range.”

Nine Holes: 3 in the Meadow, 5 on Elevated Ground, 1 in Between

Nine holes of the Sandy Hill golf course were described in various newspapers during the 1893 season.

This nine-hole course ran from a first tee at the clubhouse, which had been built on a high point of land near the junction of Osgoode Avenue and Russell Street, to a green on the flat land across the road from the Protestant Hospital on Rideau Street.

The *Montreal Star* published a description of the Ottawa Golf Club's golf course on 2 May 1893: "The links are near the rifle range and form a nine-hole course. The longest run is about 360 yards and the shortest 180, while the whole course is some 2300 yards" (p. 5).

Similarly, sometime during the 1893 season, club member E.C. Grant wrote for *Collier's Once a Week* an article called "Golf in Ottawa", which appeared in the issue of 30 September 1893. He observed:

> *The ground is admirably situated for golf, there being plenty of space, and quite enough hazards in the shape of fences, ditches, hills, sand bunkers, etc. There are only nine holes, which are played over twice, but nearly every variety of ground to be found. The longest hole is three hundred and sixty yards and the shortest, one hundred and seventy-five yards, while the whole course is about twenty-four hundred yards. (*Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 [30 September 1893], p. 5).*

And so, we know that the golf course was between 2,300 and 2,400 yards in length. When played around twice to produce an eighteen-hole score, the length of the course would have been, at most, 4,800 yards.

Both the *Collier's* and the *Montreal Star* articles describe the golf course and the disposition of its hazards more or less hole-by-hole. Furthermore, Grant also commissioned for his *Collier's* article detailed sketches of the first, fourth, seventh, and ninth holes.

Hole #1

According to the *Montreal Star*, "For the first, one has to tee immediately in front of the club house. A low swampy rocky piece of ground has to be covered, extending about 150 yards, and woe to the luckless wight who gets into it. If this is successfully carried, the player finds himself within about 30 yards of the hole. And with good ground before him" (2 May 1893, p. 5). An article in the same

newspaper later in the year similarly observes that “A start is made from a high hill and before reaching the first hole a very bad swamp has to be navigated” (7 October 1893, p. 9). Grant describes the hole in similar terms: “The first teeing ground is near the clubhouse, and the course to the first hole is from the top of a very steep hill over a tract of about one hundred and fifty yards of swampy ground, which, if cleared, leaves the player about sixty yards of nice green (i.e., fairway] to finish the hole in” p. 5). The various accounts disagree only as to whether the hole was 180 or 210 yards long.

Figure 37 The view from the first tee of the Ottawa Golf Club's Sandy Hill course. Visible in the distance is the Rideau River, (which I have coloured blue) along the eastern edge of the Dominion Rifle Range. Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 (30 September 1893, p. 4).*

A good golfer would have been expected to take four strokes to complete this hole. Note that Charles Blair Macdonald, who won the 1895 International Championship in Niagara-on-the-Lake (as well as the U.S. Amateur Championship later the same year), won the long drive competition at this tournament: “The driving competition for distance and accuracy, between flags 40 feet apart, was won by Charles B. Macdonald, who drove 179 yards 1 foot 6 inches, being the best of only three trials. T.M. Harley [1895 Canadian amateur champion] was close up with 176 yards” (*Gazette* [Montreal], 6 September 1895, p. 5).

Note that their drives would have carried only about 160 to 170 yards through the air.

Hole #2

Grant says, “The next hole is over a stretch of rough common of about two hundred and eighty yards covered with long, thick weeds, with the exception of a strip about thirty feet [wide] of cleared space extending from the teeing ground to the hole, and which makes it extremely difficult should the player wander from the direct line” (p. 5). The writer of the *Montreal Star* article must have been a straight driver: “The second hole is about 280 yards. The ground is rough but presents no other peculiar difficulties” (p. 5).

Hole #3

According to the *Montreal Star*, “The third hole is over ground of the same [i.e., ‘rough’] character, about 200 yards distance” (p. 5).

Grant, however, had encountered other hazards on this hole: “Then comes another two hundred yards of common, very much similar to the last one, only that it contains two or three mudholes, which are most disastrous to the unfortunate” (p. 5).

Of course, on a 200-yard hole, skilled players might have occasionally scored 3 (or even 2).

Note, however, that although in the fall of 1893 the club’s new golf professional, Alfred Ricketts, would set a course record of 83 strokes for two rounds of the Sandy Hill course, he made scores of 8 and 6 on the third hole in two circuits of the course in May of 1893 in a match against Kingston’s great amateur Thomas Harley, who would win the first Canadian amateur championship on this course in June of 1895 (*Montreal Star*, 25 May 1893, p. 3).

Ricketts averaged a score of 5.75 on a 200-yard hole! The hazard of rough ground pitted with mud-holes must have been extremely penal.

And note Grant’s observation about the distances obtained by the drive of 1893: “if successfully hit, the ball can be sent a distance of two hundred yards, though from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and fifty is a good average drive” (p. 4). To achieve the carry distance required over the rough ground and mud-pits of the third hole might have required a perfect drive, anything less falling into the penal hazards.

Figure 38 A.Z. Palmer, circa 1900.

Incidentally, the first recorded hole-in-one in Ottawa was made on this hole in 1894: "in playing on the Ottawa Links against the Kingston Club on the 2nd of June [1894], Mr. A.Z. Palmer, of the Ottawa Club, made the third hole, 193 yards, in one" (*Golf* [London], vol 8 no 202 [26 June 1894], p. 350).

As the word "birdie" would not be introduced to golf until the first decade of the next century, and the words "eagle" and "albatross" a while after that, is it worthwhile asking whether Palmer scored eagle or albatross?

We catch a glimpse in the photograph below of the meadow where the first three holes (and the tee for the fourth hole) of the Sandy Hill golf course were laid out.

Figure 39 Holes 1 to 3 were laid out in the meadow seen in the background of this circa-1895 photograph of a shooting competition at the Rifle Range. The buildings of Davis house mark the end of Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue East) at that time. The photographer stands at the future junction of Theodore and Charlotte. I draw on the photograph the approximate locations of the first three holes, and the 4th tee. The 1st tee was on the high hill where the clubhouse was built at Russell and Osgoode. The 4th tee was in the meadow at the base of the hill to be climbed up to vacant lots along Theodore.

Hole # 4

The *Montreal Star* observes: “The fourth hole is across rough ground, about 350 yards from the tee. This presents several obstacles, including two fences, a rough road, and a high, steep hill. If the top is not reached, the player finds himself in difficulties, but when the top is attained, he has only about 180 yards to the hole over very easy ground” (p. 5).

The *Collier’s* article provides a view of the fearsome tee-shot facing golfers on this hole.

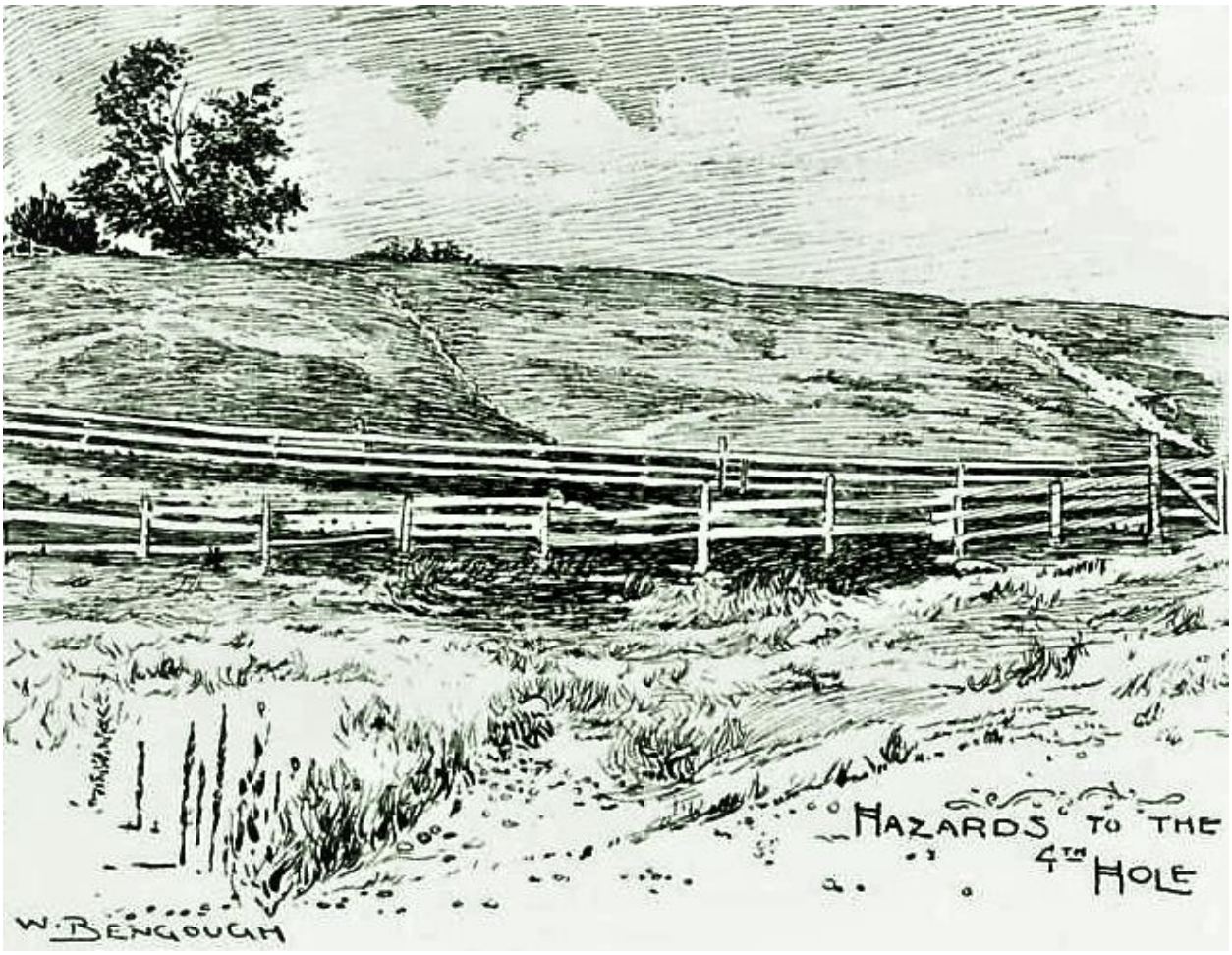


Figure 40 Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 [30 September 1893], p. 4.*

Grant speaks with wisdom born of experience about the potential difficulties encountered on this hole:

> *The fourth hole may be either one of the easiest or most difficult of all. The teeing ground is at the base of a very steep hill, with two fences and a ditch between, and with a successful drive one ought to do the hole in three or four strokes as, once over the hill, it is nice clean common; but woe betide the one whose ball strikes the fences or goes only half way up the hill, where it*

is sure to roll down, as it is one continuation of swamp and long weeds, and will run one's average beyond redemption should he not play with the utmost precision and coolness. (p. 5)

Hole # 5

The fourth hole brought golfers up to Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue East) through the vacant lot between the Davis house and the next house along Theodore at Chapel Street, and because a number of houses had been built along the north side of Theodore Street as far east as Cobourg Street, golfers had to walk a good distance from the fourth green to the fifth tee, where the really difficult part of the course began: "This [fourth] hole finished, we cross over about five hundred yards and into the 'cuss-word' country, as the next four holes are a succession of sand bunkers, some of them being eight and ten feet in depth, with steep banks that make the player wish that a lacrosse stick could be included in his outfit" (p. 5).

Strangely, however, given the many occasions for "cuss-words" that Grant must have had on the next four holes, he does not describe them individually.

But the *Montreal Star* does.

Of the fifth hole, we read: "The fifth hole crosses a heavy sand bunker immediately in front of the hole, which is on a tongue of land surrounded by sand bunkers, which requires straight driving. A pulled or sliced ball will land the player in the sand and send his score to pieces. If the bunkers are once carried, it is an easy hole to make" (p. 5).

From the golfer's point of view, Sandy Hill clearly lived up to the "sandy" part of its name.

The length of the fifth hole is not given in the *Montreal Star* article, but if we subtract from the 2300-yard total that is indicated the 1970 yards of the 8 holes whose yardages are given, we derive a yardage for the fifth hole of 330.

Hole #6

According to the *Star*, "The sixth hole is Hades: bunker after bunker for some 300 yards, gullies, long grass, roads, sidewalks, etc., making very careful play necessary" (p. 5).

Note that in the 1890s, there was no free relief from a road or a sidewalk. Perhaps because they were in place before the laying out of the golf course and had not been specifically constructed to serve as

artificial impediments, they were regarded as “natural” hazards. One had to play the ball as one found it on road or sidewalk – or wedged between them!

Willie Davis had utilized the same sorts of hazards at Shinnecock Hills (Long Island, New York), where he laid out its initial golf course of twelve holes less than three months after he laid out his twelve holes in Ottawa. As the U.S.G.A. explains in “The Evolution of Shinnecock Hills Golf Course,” both the twelve Willie Davis holes and the six holes that were added in the mid-1890s by Willie Dunn, Jr, reflected the standard design philosophy of the day:

> *The Davis/Dunn course … reflected the architecture then prevalent on late Victorian English inland courses. The course’s mostly straight holes were traversed by cross hazards in the form of “cop” bunkers, ravines, ditches, roads, rail lines or other obstacles.*
>
> *Following Victorian design tenets, such hazards were placed so that players were required to hit over them and for that reason they were often called “carry” hazards. They could be quite severe, on the rationale that the worst miss – the dreaded topped shot – deserved the most severe punishment.*
>
> *(https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/history/the-evolution-of-the-shinnecock-hills-golf-course.html)*

It is no surprise, then, that in 1895, when reviewing the best golf courses in the New York and New Jersey area for *Scribner’s Magazine*, golf writer Henry Howland noted on these links hazards of precisely the sort that Davis had utilized at Shinnecock and at Ottawa four years before: the St Andrews course, “at Yonkers on the Hudson …., is an inland course of stone-wall hazards [and] rocky pastures”; the hazards at the Tuxedo Club include “hills, stone walls, railroad embankments lined with blast-furnace slag, … brook, boulders, and road”; “at the Essex Country Club of Manchester-by-the-Sea,” “the hazards are nearly all ***natural***, consisting of fences, barns, roadways …” (May 1895, vol XVII no 5, pp. 531-33, emphasis added).

Roads, stone walls, fences, barns, and railroads were all treated as “natural” hazards!

And so, on Ottawa’s sixth hole, if you could not hit over “bunker after bunker …, gullies, long grass, roads, sidewalks,” and so on, you were in Hades, and – according to the architectural theory of the day – you deserved to be so.

In May of 1893, Ricketts and Harley averaged 6 on this fearsome hole.

Hole #7

An article in the *Montreal Star* published in October of 1893 informs us that "near the finish [of the Ottawa links] is a sand hill that puzzles the most scientific players" (7 October 1893, p. 9).

This sand hill was an oblong geographical formation that rose several storeys above the surrounding land and ran on a southwest to northeast direction through the area bounded by Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue East), Cobourg Street, Besserer Avenue, and the cliffs at the edge of the Rideau River, as can be seen below on the 1888 Contour Map of Ottawa.

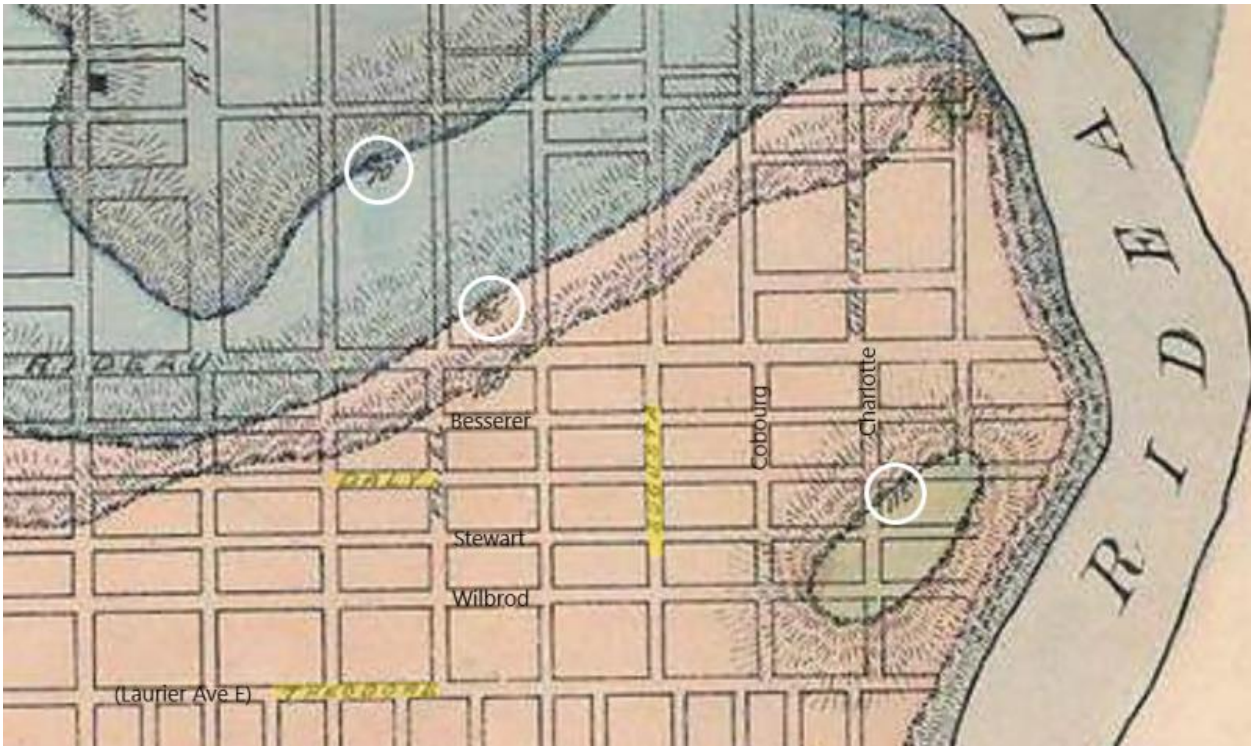


Figure 41 An enlarged and annotated detail from the 1888 Contour Map of Ottawa.

Note on this map that green marks the highest land; pink, the next highest; and blue, the lowest. And note the three numbers indicating of the elevation of the land shown in this part of Ottawa: I have marked with white circles the elevation points that are 75, 85, and 115 feet above the lowest sill of the Rideau Locks. Much of the area between Rideau Street and Theodore Street (today's Laurier Avenue East) is just above 85 feet of elevation, whereas a large part of the sand hill between Theodore, Cobourg, and Rideau rises above 115 feet of elevation.

The sand hill marked on this map was high!

This part of the Ottawa Golf Club's links lives up to the word "hill" in the neighbourhood's name, Sandy Hill, for the sixth and seventh holes seem to have been routed over this hilly land that perplexed golfers. The *Montreal Star* tells us that "The seventh hole is back over the same ground [as the sixth] for about 360 yards, only there are more bunkers and pitfalls" (p. 5).

There are even "more bunkers and pitfalls" than found on Hades!

What was the seventh hole called – "Hades, *the sequel*"? "Hades, *forever*"?

Grant noted that although at this part of the golf course one found oneself in Hades, it was also a place where heavenly breezes blew: "Though the courses [i.e., the holes] over the sand bunkers are most difficult, a great thing in their favor is that they are situated on a high piece of land overlooking the river, from which there is nearly always a pleasant breeze blowing, which is seldom strong enough to interfere with the direction of the ball" (p. 5).

Grant commissioned a sketch of the view from the hilltop (seen below).

Figure 42 Looking north from the 7th tee on the elevated sand hill in Sandy Hill. The Rideau River is shaded blue. The Protestant General Hospital on Rideau Street (today's Wallis House apartment building) is shaded brown. The 9th green was across the street from the hospital. Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 (30 September 1893, p. 4).*

We see above both the relaxing view of the Rideau River as seen from the teeing ground of the seventh hole and also the more intimidating view in the foreground of the fearsome eight- to ten-foot-deep

bunkers that had to be carried to reach the fairway. (One can also see some of the buildings along Rideau Street.)

Since the seventh hole was said to go "back over the same ground" as the sixth hole, the former may well have paralleled the route of the latter over the notorious sand hill that constituted the club's "cuss country."

As the longest hole on the course (sixty yards longer than "Hades"), perhaps it is not surprising to learn that the lowest of the four scores made on the hole in May of 1893 by Ricketts and Harley was 6.

Hole #8

According to the Montreal *Star*: "The eighth is a short hole, about 175 yards, the only obstacles being a road and a fence" (p. 5).

Given that the best score made on this hole by either Ricketts or Harley was 6 (as was the case on the seventh hole, which was twice as long as the eighth), one presumes that the road and the fence on the eighth hole constituted significant hazards.

Hole #9

The *Star* says, "The ninth hole is easy at 175 yards" (p. 5).

Yet, Ricketts and Harley averaged 4.75 strokes on this "easy" hole.

Once again, however, perhaps through the experience of what troubles can arise from errant shots on this hole, Grant adds an important detail to the *Star*'s otherwise similar description of the hole: "The ninth course [i.e., hole] is an easy one of one hundred and seventy-five yards, with a steep hill near the hole which warns the too eager player to put restraint upon his motive power" (p. 5).

Oh, for the days when a savvy caddie would warn us to "put restraint upon our motive power"!

The sketch below shows the ninth green of the Sandy Hill course, which was "the finishing point … near the Protestant General Hospital" (*Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1894, p. 15). Note that the caddie on the left side of the green holds a disk fixed to a stick, the device used in the 1890s to mark the location of the hole for golfers playing approach shots: "In each hole is placed a white disk, about six inches square, on a pointed stick about eighteen inches long, and which the caddy boy removes and replaces again after the hole is played" (Grant, p. 4)

Figure 43 The ninth green. Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 (30 September 1893), p. 4.*

The person who drew the above sketch seems to be looking from east to west. Out of view to the right is Rideau Street and the Protestant General Hospital (on the far side of Rideau Street). In the background of the sketch is seen the block of houses built many years before on the far (west) side of Charlotte Street between Rideau and Besserer. The fence that can be seen in the background had presumably been built along Charlotte.

Twelve Holes

Although we find only nine holes described in 1893, Irwin suggested that there had been as many as twelve holes laid out in 1891. So, how many holes had Willie Davis actually designed?

There is indirect evidence that the Club initially planned to lay out an 18-hole golf course, for the day after the club's first executive committee was elected, the newspaper reported the following news from that meeting:

> *A very fine stretch of ground, which will give a round of 18 holes, has been secured in the vicinity of the Rifle Range by the kindness of Mr. Charles Magee, and arrangements will be made for laying out the course and obtaining the necessary clubs and balls.*
>
> *The services of an expert golf player will be secured, and it is expected that in the course of a couple of weeks all will be in readiness for practice games. (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 21 April 1891, p. 1).*

Willie Davis had not yet visited Ottawa, and so he had not yet been able to determine how many holes could be laid out on the land that the club had secured. The Club's apparent aspiration for an eighteen-hole course, then, may simply have reflected the ignorance of Ottawa people new to the game about just how much space a proper eighteen-hole layout would require.

Later reports indicate that the Club had secured about 50 acres of land for its sandy Hill golf course.

In 1904, for instance, one read: "the beginners in Ottawa golf had … about 50 acres of splendid country to go over from the tee off on top of the hill to the finishing point, which at that time was up near the Protestant General Hospital, but which is now all built over" (*Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1904, p. 15). Similarly, in 1917 one read something similar in an essay by Ralph Reville, the editor of *Canadian Golfer*, who visited Ottawa in the spring of that year to report on the history of golf in the nation's capital: "About 50 acres of fine rolling land was secured overlooking the old Rideau rifle ranges on the west side and here a course was laid out with the first tee on the top of the hill and the last green near the Protestant General Hospital" (*Canadian Golfer* [June 1917], vol 3 no 2, p. 88).

Figure 44 Late 1890s photograph of the Protestant General Hospital taken from near the junction of Charlotte Street and Rideau Street. Photograph by William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada, PA-009200.png

It turns out that in the 1890s, 50 acres of land was thought to be more than enough area for a nine-hole course:

> *To the uninitiated the game appears to consist of knocking a gutta percha ball about a 40-acre lot. The expert golfer knows that there is more to the pastime than this. Much skill and a great deal of physical vigour and endurance are required. There are many reasons why golf may never become a game for the people. The gutta percha ball and the sticks wherewith to knock it may be within reach of the amateur of moderate means, but the 40-acre lot is more difficult to secure. (*Ottawa Journal*, 3 August 1904, p. 6)*

Members of the executive committee perhaps thought that they would be able to have nine holes laid out in each area of the land they had acquired. In fact, the Club may have imagined that it would have a front nine in one area and a back nine in the other.

It turns out that although the golf course proper would consist of just nine holes, a report from the *Montreal Herald* just four weeks after the course had been laid out makes clear that Davis actually designed twelve holes:

> *The links have now been carefully laid out and make up a course of nine holes out and nine holes in, covering a stretch of ground near the rifle range of about a mile. [Note that the Montreal writer does not recognize that the nine holes "out" are the same as the nine holes "in."]*
>
> *A novice link, consisting of three holes, has also been formed, where learners can receive their tuition in the noble game.*
>
> *The club had the assistance of Professor Davis, of the Royal Montreal Golf Club, for a week in laying out the links and teaching the uninitiated in the easily understood mysteries of golf. (*Montreal Herald*, 25 May 1891, p. 2)*

When Davis made clear to Irwin, Pierce, and Thorburn that at most he could lay out five or six holes in each area, what would their reaction have been?

Recall that Hugh Renwick's golf course at the Lanark Golf Club had twelve holes when he was in Ottawa regaling his new friends with tales of his own club in Scotland. Would Irwin, Pierce, and Thorburn have called to mind Renwick's course and decided that if a 12-hole course was good enough for him, it would be good enough for them?

Note also that on Long Island just a few months later, the very next course that Willie Davis laid out also had 12 holes. Had Davis's strategy at Shinnecock Hills been informed by his experience in sandy Hill less than three months before?

Whole Length and Hole Length

In 1909, playing the Ottawa Golf Club's 6,200-yard eighteen-hole championship course on Aylmer Road, Irwin recalled that "The [first] course was but a short one, the greens small" (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 December 1909, p. 17).

Yet in 1891, the Sandy Hill golf course was b y no means regarded as a short one.

From the 1890s to the early 1900s, an average nine-hole layout was often between 1,600 and 2,000 yards. The nine-hole course of the Albany Golf Club (for which Alfred Ricketts left the Ottawa Golf Club in 1896) was laid out in 1893 at a length of 2,030 yards. In 1902, a course laid out by Royal Montreal golf professional James Black for the Almonte Golf Club was about 1,600 yards long. The Almonte Golf Club's 1907 course laid out by Ottawa Golf Club golf professional George Sargent was about 1,700 yards long.

What of championship golf courses?

In 1896, the fourteen-hole golf course of the Quebec Golf Club had an eighteen-hole playing length of about 4,700 yards, and the eighteen-hole playing length of the nine-hole Dixie course laid out by Royal Montreal in the fall of 1896 had a playing length of about 4,900 yards. The eighteen-hole layout of the Country Club of Rochester that Alfred Ricketts laid out for the 1898 championship of the Central New York Golf League was 4,400 yards long. Similarly, the 1896 U.S. Open was played on a Shinnecock Hills layout that was also about 4,400 yards long. In 1891, then, the 4,600 to 4,800-yard eighteen-hole playing length of the Sandy Hill course was of championship standard.

And the lengths of the individual holes – from 175 yards to 350 yards – were typical.

At Saint John, New Brunswick, in the mid-1890s, "The original course was a five-hole layout with the longest hole being 200 yards" (https://www.riversidecountryclub.ca/news/a-brief-history-of-the-riverside-country-club).

And when Ricketts laid out the Ottawa Golf Club's new Chelsea Links course in September of 1895, no hole was longer than 364 yards, and ten of them were between 153 and 268 yards, even though Ricketts had more than twice the land with which to work than Davis had: "1, Barn, 268 yards; 2, Chelsea, 325 yards; 3, Elm Tree, 364 yards; 4, Mound, 153 yards; 5, Horse Shoe, 226 yards; 6, Swamp, 203 yards; 7, Railway, 253 yards; 8, Lake, 246 yards; 9, Base Ball, 252 yards; 10, 236 yards; 11, Plateau, 172 yards; 12, 320 yards; 13, Home, 153 yards" (*Golf* [April 1898], vol 2 no 4, p. 13).

In the mid-1890s, the lengths of holes at the championship golf courses of the Quebec Golf Club, the Royal Montreal Golf Club, and the Toronto Golf Club were generally similar to those at Ottawa.

Playing Time

It did not take long to complete a circuit of the nine-hole Sandy Hill golf course, as we can see from an account of the match between teams from Ontario and Quebec in October of 1893 “On the Ottawa grounds … said to be the most ‘sporting’ on the Dominion”:

> *The first inter-provincial golf match to be played in Ottawa came off to-day at “The Range” …. At a few minutes before eleven o’clock, Col. Irwin, president of the Ottawa Club, started the first players away, and exactly one hour afterwards Mr. A.W. Smith, of the Ontario team, returned with a lead to his credit of eight holes (*Montreal Daily Herald*, 7 October 1893, p. 5).*

Winning eight of the first nine holes of his match, Andrew Whyte Smith, universally acknowledged as the best amateur golfer in Canada (and co-holder with Alfred Ricketts of the Ottawa course record – 83), was obviously playing so well that his opponent may have conceded holes before all shots had been played, but it is also worth noting that the round of golf ended at the ninth green located in front of the Protestant General Hospital, necessitating a walk from this point back through the streets of Sandy Hill to the clubhouse at Russell and Osgoode: and so, in “exactly one hour,” the golfers had not only played nine holes, but also spent at least ten minutes walking about one kilometer (or 5/8 of a mile) back to the clubhouse!

"Play Was Commenced in May"?

Before Willie Davis came to Ottawa, it seems that representatives of the Ottawa Golf Club had already consulted with him in some way (perhaps between the adjournment of the April 13th meeting and its resumption on April 20th) and therefore had an idea of when their new golf course would be ready for play: "The services of an expert golf player will be secured, and it is expected that in the course of a couple of weeks all will be in readiness for practice games" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 21 April 1891, p. 1).

This prediction was absolutely correct, for Simpson later reported that "Play was commenced in May and continued without intermission until the first week of December" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 April 1892, p. 4).

How was it possible to build a golf course and open it for play within a few weeks?

Note that in 1891 not much earth was moved during the building of a golf course in Canada or the United States. Generally, it was not necessary to shape a fairway or to build up a tee or green. People intending to start a golf club and build a golf course were generally told that they should secure as their golf property a field or meadow where few modifications of the landscape would be required.

A field or meadow was often chosen for a golf course because the land had been cleared and had well-established pasture grass growing on it – grass that only needed to be cut regularly in order to produce a decent fairway surface from which to play a golf shot.

The teeing ground might simply be an area of level grass, perhaps elevated very slightly with sod dug up from turf nearby. It might be graded to have a very slight incline upward from back to front to give the golfer's forward foot a chance to brace a bit against this gentle incline during the swing.

Figure 45 Mold for sand tee.

More usually, the teeing ground was a slightly built-up area of sand arranged in a rectangular shape. The surface was levelled, and beside it was placed a box or barrel containing more sand.

This sand would be wetted at the beginning of the day or a container of water would be kept by the tee for wetting the sand. A hollow conical implement was used to scoop out the wet sand and compact it, such that a cone of sand could then be dumped onto the ground, retaining its conical shape.

The golf ball was placed on this tee of sand.

Such was the standard way of teeing up the golf ball for a drive until the end of the 1920s, when the wooden tee peg gained popularity.

An example of such a teeing ground with the sand box on a stand located beside the tee can be seen in the photograph below of a woman driving off from a tee box at the Poonahmalee Golf Course in Smith Falls in the early 1900s.

Figure 46 Photograph from the Foster Family Albums, Smith Falls, Ontario.

The Poonahmalee Golf Club was a small-town operation with a relatively small number of members, but even the largest, most affluent clubs had the same sort of sand teeing grounds. There is very little to distinguish the tee box seen above from the one seen below in a photograph from the late 1890s of the 18th tee at the golf course of the Baltimore Country Club, which had just hosted the 1899 U.S. Open golf championship.

Figure 47 The 18th tee of the Baltimore Country Club's golf course. Golf (October 1899), vol 5 no 4.

Putting greens were also located on a level area of the golf course turf. They were not built up above the level of the fairway.

Instead, rakes and shovels might be used to fill in minor depressions or to scrape the top off little rises in order to produce a flat, level surface that would minimize the break of putts made on its surface. The green comprised grass cut shorter than the fairway grass, and it was usually cut in the shape of a square, with sides perhaps 30 feet in length.

The putting green would be compacted in one of three ways: by rolling the entire putting surface with a heavy barrel-shaped cylinder on a horizontal axis; by thoroughly soaking the putting surface with water, then placing planks over it, and finally pounding the planks with a heavy object; or simply by pounding every square foot of the putting surface with a heavy-handled instrument with a flat square bottom, as in the photograph below.

Figure 48 A late nineteenth-century greenkeeper flattens the surface of a green by pounding it. Michael J. Hurdzan, Golf Greens: History, Design, and Construction *(Wiley, 2004], chapter 1.*

On a green built in the 1890s, the marker of the hole into which the ball was putted was not a formal flagstick such as we use today. Sometimes it was a pole with a piece of bunting attached to it, but more often it was a pole with a plate fixed to the top of it (as seen on the green of the ninth hole of the Sandy Hill golf course in Figure 43 above).

The plate on the pole might indicate the number of the golf hole being played, as is the case in the photograph above, or it might have no number on it at all.

In the photograph below of the 18th green at the Toronto Golf Club, we see a typical example of the 1890s style of green construction that would have been used on the 12 greens laid out in Sandy Hill. One can see that that the camera lens has difficulty distinguishing between the putting green and the fair green (or fairway). Were caddies and fellow competitors not standing to the side and watching a player putting, while his caddie holds a pole with bunting attached to the top of it, one might not be able to detect a putting green here at all.

Figure 49 The last green at the Toronto Golf Club, late 1890s. Official Golf Guide 1899*, p. 319.*

In 1891, then, for a golf course to have been laid out and brought into play within a matter of a few weeks was not surprising.

Sandy Hill Hazards

At the end of the Club's second season in 1892, Irwin's friend and fellow founding Club member, Secretary-Treasurer Alexander Simpson, informed David Scott Duncan, the editor of the British publication known as the *Golfing Annual*, that the Ottawa Golf Club existed. Apparently, Simpson had not at that time sent along information about the Club or its course. And so, the *Golfing Annual 1892-93*, which came out in June of 1903, merely lists the name of the Ottawa Golf Club without any details about it, beyond the name of the Secretary: "Hon. Secretary – A. Simpson, Ontario Bank, Ottawa" (p. 287).

By the time of *Golfing Annual*'s next publication in May of 1894, however, Simpson had written to the editor with particulars about the golf course, among them being the observation that "The green has at present only nine holes" (p. 351). Note that in the 1890s a golf course was often called "the green" – for it was seen as comprising, on the one hand, "fair greens" (today called fairways), and, on the other hand, "putting greens."

Since Simpson provides *Golfing Annual* with scores for various 1893 Club competitions right to the end of the 1893 season, his letter to the editor of the *Golfing Annual* must have been sent between the end of 1893 and the beginning of 1894, when the publication came out.

More interesting are Simpson's other descriptions of the golf course: "The green has at present only nine holes, and is intersected by sand bunkers, roads, fences, and patches of rough ground" (p. 351). In a second letter to the editor, written sometime between the end of the 1894 season and the beginning of the 1895 season, he revises this description in interesting ways: "The course of nine holes is an exceedingly difficult one, being intersected in all directions by heavy bunkers, hills, roads, and rough ground" (p. 400).

Interestingly, "fences" disappear from Simpson's later description of "the green." Were they merely taken out of the description, or were they removed from the grounds?

Also interesting is that "rough ground" has been emphasized a bit more, as it is promoted from mere "patches" to one of the things by which the golf course is "intersected in all directions."

Similarly, reference to "sand bunkers" is replaced by reference to seemingly more fearsome "heavy bunkers," which are found in all directions. An 1898 article in *Golf* suggested that the Sandy Hill links

ultimately “proved unsatisfactory, owing to the strong growth of grass and the excessive number of sand bunkers” (vol 2 no 5 [May 1898], p. 24).

The “sand bunkers” to which Simpson’s refers seem to have been especially prominent on the elevated ground of Sandy Hill, for an article in the *Ottawa Journal* in 1913 recalls that this area was particularly suitable for golf because of “good sand bunkers being found in the ends of Daly Avenue and the other intersecting streets” (17 January 1913, p. 6).

Simpson also refers to these “intersecting streets.” The emphasis in the later description that the course is “intersected **in all directions**” by roads may be an acknowledgement that roads like Theodore Street and Russell Avenue that did not extend across the golf course in 1891 were being extended further and further during the five years that the golf course existed in Sandy Hill (emphasis added).

In 1894, for instance, we know that Russell Avenue was being extended south of Osgoode and that the Club therefore had to move its clubhouse:

> *Mr. C. Magee had very kindly given the club a lot in close proximity to their club house. It was proposed to move the club house on to this and enlarge it at a cost of about $300. This was necessary owing to the increase in the membership and also to the fact that the present club house was on a public thoroughfare which would have to be opened up shortly…. It was decided to leave the proposed improvements to the committee who will add two rooms 12 feet by 16 feet to the present quarters. This will give a committee room and a reading and smoking room. (*Ottawa Journal*, 4 April 1894, p. 7)*

The clubhouse was literally lifted up and set down on a new lot, with additional rooms built onto it:

> *Improving the Golf House*
>
> *The improvements to the new golf club house are now about completed. A new wing has been added and the entire structure moved off the street line on to a lot given the club by Mr. C. Magee.*
>
> *The club now have ample accommodation and have put in a fine bath and washroom.*

> *A handsome flagpole has been erected and the ladies intend presenting the club with a handsome flag. (*Ottawa Journal*, 30 April 1894, p. 5)*

The same year that the Golf Club moved its clubhouse out of the way of "the street line," we learn that other of its land was also due for development.

At the end of the 1894 cricket season, during which the Sandy Hill Cricket Club had "decided to play on the grounds of the Golf Club" (for permission to do so, it publicly thanked the Golf Club), it was reported that "the present grounds used by the [cricket] club are likely to be wanted for building purposes" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 1 May 1894, p. 5, and *Ottawa Journal*, 14 September 1894, p. 5).

Again, then, it seems that at least part of the land that Magee had loaned the Ottawa Golf Club for its links (the part that the Golf Club had in turn loaned the Cricket Club in 1894) was soon to be a site of construction.

Perhaps Simpson's emphasis on a layout that roads "intersected in all directions" implicitly – and ominously – acknowledges a new reality brought by infrastructure developments in the two areas of Sandy Hill where the course was laid out.

The most important of Simpson's revisions in his later description of the golf course, however, is the reference to "hills" by which the golf course is "intersected in all directions."

It seems that architect Willie Davis had availed himself of the hills from which Sandy Hill gets its name to build elevation changes, side-hill lies, and a variety of bounces into his golf course. His face must have "lighted up" when he saw the Rideau bluff: on the one hand was the meadow-rimming hill in the lands of the old By estate; on the other hand were hills rolling along the eastern edge of the old Besserer estate where the elevated ground on Sandy Hill reached the banks of the Rideau River near the Cummings Bridge.

There were also other hills in this area, as we know from a description of the site for tents during the big shooting competition of 1892: "extending north, as far as Stewart Street, is a large number of marquees and tents, forming on the hill there the main camp of the competition" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 27 August 1892, p. 8). Similarly, we read in 1895 that "Major Mason, of the 13th," had raised his tent east of the street-car tracks on Charlotte Street "in the customary place on the north side [of the tent city], close to the sand bank" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 5 September 1895, p. 5). Presumably such hills and sand banks

were later levelled-out when construction of the big homes in this area was undertaken in the late 1890s and early 1900s.

The first tee of the 1891 golf course was apparently located on the From the top of the hill, one presumably drove into the meadow below.

The hilltop where the clubhouse was located at the intersection of Russell and Osgoode was apparently a substantial one: after the Ottawa Golf Club moved to its Chelsea Links, the clubhouse was sold to a tobogganing club: "Some Sandy Hill boys have purchased the Ottawa Golf Club House and intend using it for a club house this winter. They are arranging to have a toboggan slide …. The club bears the name of the Stadacona Club" (*Ottawa Journal*, 5 October 1896, p. 8).

The most pronounced hill to be found in the unoccupied ground west of the Rideau Rifle Range can be seen in the image below. One drove from the fourth tee up this hill.

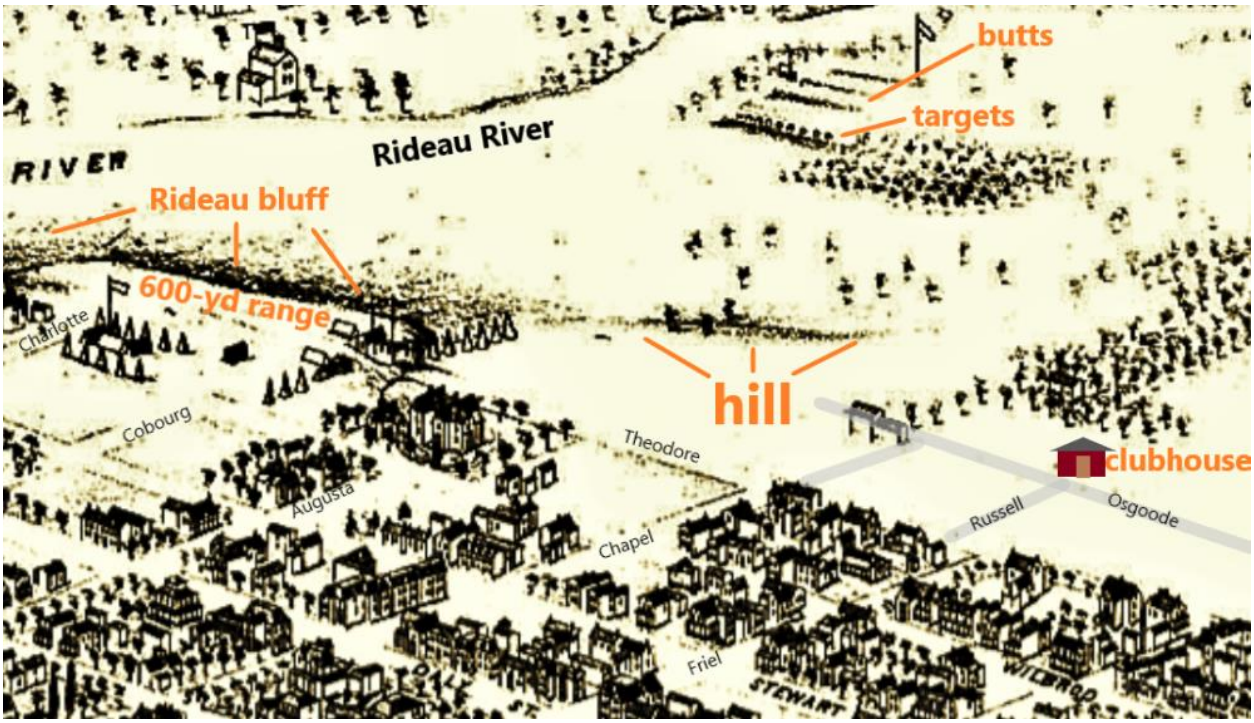


Figure 50 Enlarged, annotated detail from the 1876 Bird's-Eye-View map of Ottawa.

The newspaper reporter's description of the golf course emphasizes the importance of elevation changes of this sort in the playing of the course: "Golf may be played on any solid land, but that on which hills and hollows abound is preferable. The local club's grounds are on the Rideau bluff, and are about the best in Canada, because of the extra science they call for to 'hole the ball'" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 October 1893, p. 5).

I take this reference to the Rideau bluff to be a general reference to the whole area through which the geological formation in question runs.

On the one hand, the bluff extends eastward from its steepest point where the 600-yard range shooting bays were located at the end of Theodore Street to the gentler section of the less dramatically sloped hill that rolls from northeast to southwest across the meadow of unoccupied ground to the west of the Rifle Range (as seen in the image above).

On the other hand, the bluff also extends northward from the 600-yard range shooting bays through a sequence of hills that seem to ripple like waves on the elevated ground of Sandy Hill at the extreme eastern end of the old Besserer estate (as seen in the image below).

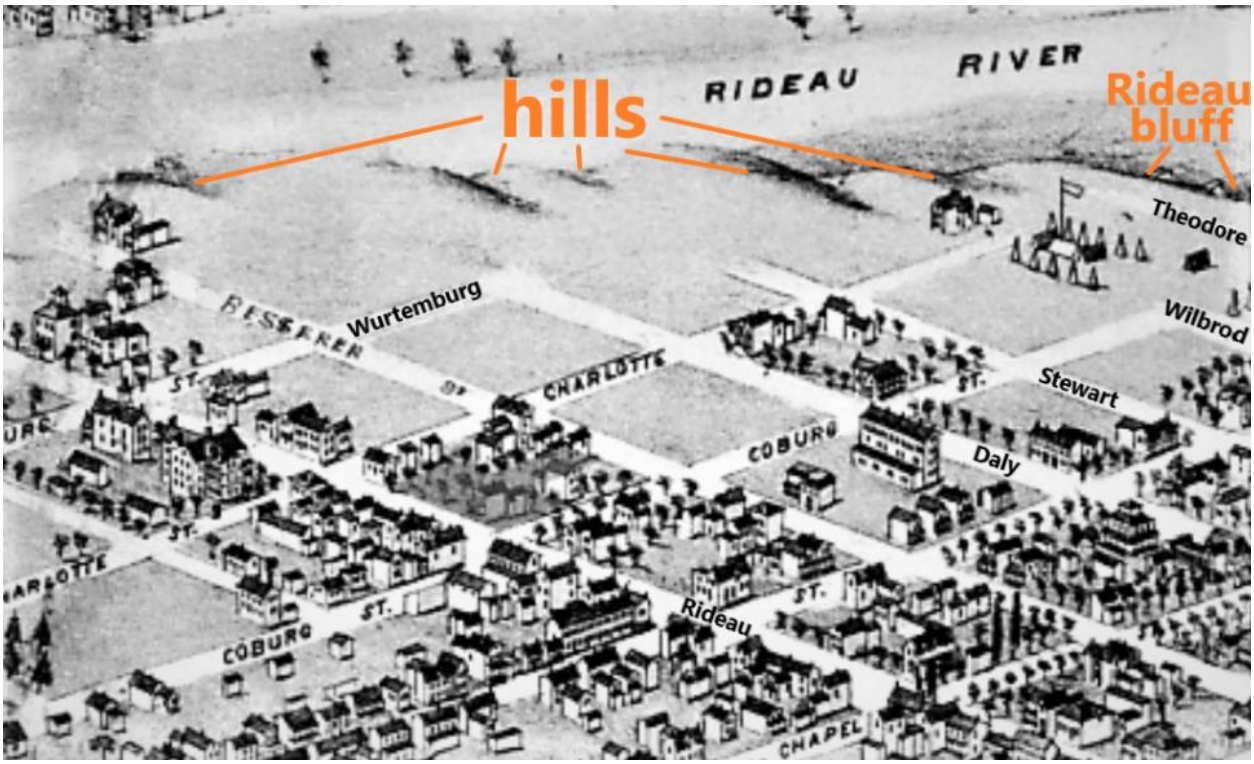


Figure 51 Enlarged, annotated detail from the 1876 Bird's-Eye-View map of Ottawa.

The newspaper reporter's reference to the "extra science" called for "to hole the ball" on the "Rideau bluff" would seem to be an acknowledgement of the calculations that golfers must make to reach their target in the face of elevation changes, on the one hand, and the calculation that golfers must make regarding the bouncing of their golf balls along the slopes of hills between tee and green, on the other.

An article about the location of the Sandy Hill Cricket Club's pitch below the golf course confirms the importance of actual hills of Sandy Hill in the routing of the golf course: "The new [cricket] grounds are

in the hollow at the foot of the sand hill over which the golf club play" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 September 1894, p. 5). The *Montreal Gazette* referred to this area as the "new grounds near the golf links at Rideau ranges" (3 April 1895, p. 8). A later *Gazette* article was more specific: "The Rideau Cricket Club opened their new grounds and pavilion, which are contiguous to the golf links and the rifle range" (19 August 1985, p. 6).

Again, I take this reference to the "sand hill over which the golf club play" to refer not just to the area that Irwin calls the "elevated ground," but also to the more gently rolling part of the Rideau bluff that curls across the meadow west of the Rifle Range. Davis seems to have required golfers to play over hills as often as possible.

The one writer's reference to "hills and hollows" and the other writer's reference to a "hollow at the foot of the sand hill over which the golf club play" calls attention to another feature of the golf course not mentioned by Simpson: hollows.

On the one hand, there were presumably hollows between some of the promontories that were part of the bluff along the Rideau River on the "elevated ground."

On the other hand, note that the land where both the Rideau Rifle Range and five or six holes of the Ottawa Golf Club's links were laid out was prone to flooding in the spring. The Rideau River for several hundred yards above the Cummings Bridge (that was built at Cummings Island) was the shallowest part of the river, and here the river's banks were very low, especially along the side of the Rideau Rifle Range.

Figure 52 Cumming's Bridge and the home of Andrew W. Fleck at 500 Wilbrod Avenue are visible in the background of this 1904 photograph of construction work on Strathcona Park. The land is hardly above the level of the river. Henry Newell Bate funded this work to drain the swampy land of the Rifle Range to enable the building of Strathcona Park. Also visible in the photograph is the steep part of the Rideau bluff at the eastern end of the elevated ground on Sandy Hill.

Paul Murray informs me that he interviewed an old-time resident of Sandy Hill about the floods in this area: "he recalled for me a conversation he had as a boy with a (then) elderly resident of the area as they were standing just west of the rifle range.... [T]he old man spoke about the times years earlier

when the Rideau River would flood in the spring and spill inland…. [A]pparently the flood waters would follow paths (contours?) inland and even form pools.... One year the receding water left behind large pieces of ice which took some time to melt" (email to the author, 15 May 2021).

These paths that the water followed into the meadow would have functioned as hollows of a sort for golf holes laid along them or across them.

And we also recall Grant's account of hazards on the third hole: 'two or three mudholes, which are most disastrous to the unfortunate" (*Collier's Once a Week*, vol 11 no 45 [30 September 1893], p. 5). These mudholes may well have been residue of the spring flooding.

Information about this spring flooding is consistent with the city's concern when the Rideau Rifle Range was abandoned in 1897 and considered as a site for development as a park: "The old rifle range … will not be bought until it is ascertained how much it will cost to keep the water out in the spring" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 1 September 1898, p. 5).

Certainly wet conditions were reported for three springs in a row from 1893 to 1895: "Owing to the wet state of the ground the scores were high at the golf competition on Saturday" *(Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 8 May 1893, p. 5); "The weekly handicap [competition] attracted about 20 enthusiasts on Saturday but the wet links rendered low scoring impossible" (*Ottawa Journal*, 9 April 1894, p. 8); "There was a good turnout of golfers on Saturday, but owing to the wet grounds the scores ran very high" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 April 1895, p. 5).

So both the five or six holes laid out on the elevated ground on Sandy Hill and the five or six holes laid out on the unoccupied ground west of the Rifle Range seem to have had sufficient hills and hollows and "mudholes" to have required the application of "science" – calculations of carry distance and trajectory in the face of elevation changes, calculation of bounces on pronounced slopes, and calculation of adjustments of stance and swing when standing on the sides of hills.

Note that there were likely hazards of another sort on the unoccupied ground west of the Rifle Range: cows, and what cows leave in their wake.

Recall that the Sandy Hill Cricket Club moved at the end of the 1894 season from one pitch near the golf grounds to another supplied by Magee that was also near the golf grounds: "The new [cricket] grounds are in the hollow at the foot of the sand hill over which the golf club play" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14

September 1894, p. 5). It turns out that the cricketers, now named the Rideau Cricket Club, shared this land not just with golfers but also with cows:

> *Although the Rideaus played a match here with Almonte on the 5th July, it was only on Saturday [17th August] that the ground was in anything like suitable shape for good cricket…. J. Turton (Pro. [of the Ottawa Cricket Club]), who levelled and turfed a thousand square yards last fall, is to be congratulated on having succeeded in turning out such a capital wicket…. Considering that up to last week numerous cows have shown preference for pasturing on the ground, the cricket was very good. (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 19 August 1895, p. 7)*

Cows were regularly pastured in the fields paralleling the Rideau Rifle Range, and, as they are wont to do, occasionally escaped their enclosures to wander further afield in search of greener grass on the other side of the fence: "STRAYED – Into the pasture of the Rideau Rifle Range, Sandy Hill, a red mooly cow. Owner can have same by paying expenses" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 3 December 1891, p. 1).

Cows were known to pick up a golf ball on golf courses in those days, either to swallow it or to spit it out later some distance from where it had originally come to rest. And the hazard of a cowpat needs no elaboration. Perhaps the many cows pasturing on the unoccupied ground west of the Rifle Range were among the things that had once led the Ottawa Golf Club to consider developing its own rules for golf: certain interactions with the bovines might not have been covered in Irwin's rule book.

The Ladies' Course

Women were invited to join the Club as playing members at the beginning of 1892: "It was decided at the annual meeting [of the Ottawa Golf Club] to admit lady players on payment of a nominal fee" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 22 April 1892, p. 4). In fact, we find that by April, "A ladies' course has already been laid out" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 22 April 1892, p. 4).

Does this mean that a nine-hole course was newly laid out for ladies?

In the late 1800s, a so-called "ladies' course" might have been a putting course only. In 1868, the ladies' club of "Westward Ho!" (now called Royal North Devon Golf Club) developed a ladies' course where women were allowed to use just one club: a putter. The same thing was done at Musselburgh Golf Links in 1872. Around the same time, a similar ladies' club was established at St. Andrews, where play was confined to a huge green called the Himalayas on which women played a round of either nine holes or eighteen holes with a putter.

Figure 53 Ladies play a tournament on the "Himalayas" putting course at St. Andrews in 1894 under the watchful eye of Old Tom Morris (white-bearded figure centre, holding pipe to mouth).

I suspect that "the ladies' course" at the Ottawa Golf Club was a renaming of the three holes laid out by Willie Davis in 1891 as a beginners' course.

Mind you, nine-hole competitive matches were played on this ladies' course: "The tea and ladies' golf match yesterday drew together a large number of the elite of Ottawa society…. The ladies match for the St. Aubyn prize was keenly contested and was won by Mrs. J. Travers Lewis with a good score of 58. The round was nine holes over the ladies' course" (*Ottawa Journal*, 27 May 1893, p. 1). Perhaps women went round the three holes laid out by Willie Davis three times, or perhaps the three holes were divided into nine short holes for the women. Such a course would have been appropriate for the approach and putting contests of which we read: "The ladies of the Golf Club give their last tea of the season this afternoon. An approach and put competition will take place" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 14 June 1895, p. 5).

But the women certainly also played on the proper nine-hole championship course. Although the ladies' faced restrictions in their use of the Club's new thirteen-hole Chelsea Links in 1896 – "the ladies use nine holes on the men's course for play and have four afternoons in the week and every morning, with the exception of Saturday, set apart for them" (*Official Golf Guide 1899*, p. 318) – they faced no restrictions in Sandy Hill: "The links are open to ladies every day" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 13 May 1893, p. 5).

Women members of the Ottawa Golf club who were not competitive golfers tended to play their golf at "teas" held bi-weekly on Friday afternoons: "The tea given by the Golf Club was in every way successful…. There were a number of ladies and gentlemen present who had just come to the tea, but the links were dotted with players, the men in their smart red coats. Much interest was taken in the play" (*Ottawa Journal*, 25 May 1895, p. 1).

Figure 54 Detail from a painting shown on the Royal Ottawa Golf Club website of red-coated players on the Chelsea Links in the late 1890s. Women seem to wear red capes.

For important club events in Ottawa, men wore scarlet red coats, as men also did in Quebec, Montreal, and Toronto (following the fashion of the golf clubs around London, England), and all were impressed by the spectacle they made. From "a large marquee placed in front of the club house … from where an excellent view of the links could be had," the view of red coats was splendid: "The view from the club house is very delightful, especially when the links are dotted with red coats" (*Ottawa Journal*, 8 June 1895 and 27 April 1895, p. 5). The painting seen to the left depicting play on the

Ottawa Golf Club's Chelsea Links in the late 1890s shows men wearing the red coats in question, and it also appears to show women golfers wearing red golf capes or overcoats.

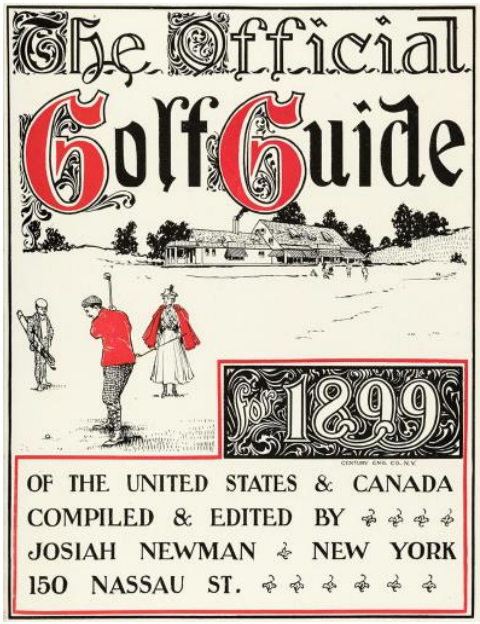


Figure 55 The Official Golf Guide for 1899, ed. Josiah Newman (New York: privately printed, 1899)

A version of the same scene – a man playing golf in his red coat and a woman playing golf with her red cape – is illustrated on the cover of *The Official Golf Guide for 1899* published in New York.

From the verandah of the hilltop clubhouse at Russell and Osgood, the splendid view of the Sandy Hill golf course populated by people dressed in red was regularly noted in the newspapers. The striking contrast of the red clothing with the green grass made the golfers in the far distance appear as red dots: "the links were well dotted with players, the men in their smart red coats"; "the links are dotted with red coats every fine afternoon" (*Ottawa Journal*, 25 May 1895, p. 1, and 28 October 1895, p. 5).

Figure 56 Gowns advertised for golf, tennis, and garden activities. Ottawa Journal*, 18 August 1894, p. 6. Good luck swinging a club or racket with a waist constricted as above!*

Although the painting above shows women wearing red capes or overcoats on the Chelsea Links to which the Club moved in the spring of 1896, the staple of women's sporting wear in the 1890s was a full-length dress, ostensibly fashioned for particular sports.

The dresses seen in the advertisement shown to the left were recommended for golf, tennis, and garden activities (*Ottawa Journal*, 18 August 1894, p. 6).

There were occasionally mixed foursome matches at the Ottawa Golf Club, with men and women paired together: "At the golf grounds Tuesday mixed foursomes were played, a prize to be given to the lady winner" (*Ottawa Journal*, 17 May 1894, p. 4). These event seem to have been designed to introduce women to the game, for each woman played with an experienced male golfer, but the events were not always a success: "Owing to the want

of knowledge on the part of some of the players, of the customs of the game, it has been suggested that the match be played over again" (*Ottawa Journal*, 17 May 1894, p. 4).

Figure 57 An illustration with the title "Ladies Playing Golf," Ottawa Journal, *3 August 1894, p. 6.*

Many of the women who enjoyed playing golf were not interested in playing competitive golf, and many such women seem to have preferred an atmosphere on the golf course less beholden to a strict attention to the rules that led some of the men to complain that some of the women demonstrated a "want of knowledge … of the customs of the game":

> *The morning is the favorite time for the ladies to play; then they have the links pretty much to themselves. They can make bad shots and try again to their heart's content.*
>
> *Several ladies here play rather well, but the greater number are only beginners, and the caretaker [golf professional Alfred Ricketts], who knows all the intricacies of the game, is often called upon for lessons.*

> *It looks so easy and yet it is so hard and so provoking when one swings the club wildly in the air and the ball is never touched. Men can swear – and they do swear dreadfully, I am told …. – but women don't swear, so it is rather trying for them.*
>
> *But even if one plays very badly, it is delicious to be out in the fields these lovely spring mornings with some healthful exercise to keep one warm, and there is lots of exercise about golf, as anyone who plays it for the first time will know to their sorrow the next day. (*Montreal Star*, 28 April 1894, p. 2)*

Note, by the way, the difference between the ladies of the golf club who played golf between 1892 and 1894 and those who played as part of the Ladies' Golf Club as of 1895: "The ladies of Ottawa who are interested in golf have formed themselves into a club. A meeting was held at the club house one day this week, at which officers were elected. Mrs. Irwin was elected president and Mrs. Travers Lewis captain" (*Ottawa Journal*, 27 April 1895, p. 5).

Rules Made to be Kept

When the neophytes in the mixed foursomes competition of 1894 were implicitly reprimanded for "the want of knowledge on the part of some of the players … of the customs of the game," there may have been more to the story than met the newspaper reader's eye (*Ottawa Journal*, 17 May 1894, p. 4).

It seems that some of the customs at the Ottawa Golf Club may have changed in the spring of 1894. And by "customs," what is meant is "rules."

Recall that when Irwin died in 1928, the fact that back in the 1890s he had "obtained a set of rules for golf" was recalled as one of the things that "grew the Royal Ottawa Golf Club" (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 March 1928, p. 13). It turns out that for the three seasons from 1891 to 1893, there was at least occasional discussion at the Club as to whether it would adopt the rules of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, or whether it would go its own way – under certain special rules of the not-yet-royal and not-yet-ancient Golf Club of Ottawa.

The question was finally put to rest at the first meeting of 1894: "Some discussion took place on the rules, but it was decided that the old country rules could not be improved upon. It was decided to adhere in future to the exact rules of golf" (*Ottawa Journal*, 4 April 1894, p. 7).

Perhaps the players chastised in May of 1894 for lacking knowledge of the "customs of the game" had merely been playing the game according to certain of the "customs" that had prevailed at the Ottawa Golf Club until April of 1894!

Rules Made to be Broken

There was a game of golf played in Sandy Hill in the spring of 1893 that was the beginning of a rebellion. But it is not precisely clear what the rebellion comprehended.

A letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Daily Citizen* in the spring of 1893 outlined a problematic situation in Sandy Hill that was occurring on Sundays: "A resident of Theodore Street writes complaining that a number of men assemble in a field in his neighbourhood and play golf on Sunday" (10 May 1893, p. 8).

The letter writer was concerned about a game being played on Sunday.

In Canada, the Lord's Day Observance Act enforced respect for Sunday (or the Sabbath), by forbidding, among other things, playing games with a ball or playing any noisy game. The Sabbath Observance Association, many Christian ministers, and a good number of ordinary devout Christians were vigilant in this matter.

Presumably the Ottawa letter writer was one of these people.

When the New York *Sun* introduced its readers to golf in the spring of 1892 by means of a long essay about the history of golf in Scotland, complete with accounts of the heroic exploits of its greatest figures, the newspaper included the following observation:

> *The question of Sunday playing is one which causes much agitation and the desire to indulge in it has caused many a private links to be established.*
>
> *Golf is the thin end of the wedge on this Sabbitarian question.*
>
> *The existence of the Sandwich links [in Southern England] is almost entirely due to Sunday golf, ardent players who were busy all the week flying to what was a mere desert where they could play unseen. (3 April 1892, p. 17).*

Across Canada and the United States in the mid-1890s, police officers began to charge the rare golfers who played golf on Sundays in defiance of laws like the Lord's Day Observance Act. Sunday Golfers were charged and found guilty in Massachusetts in September of 1894. Two months later, police raided the Brookline Country Club near Boston to prevent its golfers from playing on Sunday. Police in New Jersey did the same thing at the Meadow Brook Golf Club in May of 1895. In the same month, charges were laid against four Sunday golfers at the Toronto Golf Club:

Sunday Golf

Toronto, May 28. – A.W. Smith, V.F. Cronin, J.F. Edgar and F. Carter, charged with playing golf on Sunday, were before Justice of the Peace Richardson at Little York last evening.

*They claimed they had a perfect right to play the game any day they pleased, and to decide this point the case was enlarged till next Saturday. They … will fight they case. (*Ottawa Journal*, 29 May 1895, p. 1)*

Alas, they fought the law, and the law won (the fine, per player, was $5 – the price of a set of golf clubs – and court costs).

Well, the law won initially, but by the end of the year, the Sunday golfers won a reversal of the verdict in an appeals court. But with Sunday golf spreading in England, Scotland, the United States, and Canada, there was much more to be said on this controversy in the following years: golfers, courts, preachers, and politicians would all have their say, and their day in court.

So just what had happened in Ottawa in the spring of 1893, almost two years to the day before four golfers in Toronto tested the law forbidding golf on Sundays?

Who were these men, and were they trying to fire the first shot in the Sunday golf war?

Were they members of the Ottawa Golf Club, men busy during the week who were unhappy that golf was unavailable to them for half of their weekend?

Were these men trespassers on the Ottawa Golf Club links – men who knew and loved the game but who had neither the social standing nor the income to make club membership available to them?

Or were these men not trespassers on the Club's property at all, but rather a poor man's version of Hugh Renwick and his buddies – perhaps working-class Scottish immigrants who gathered in other Sandy Hill fields on their one day off, drove a few stakes in the ground, and struck balls at them in sequence?

Were they rebels with a cause – or two?

Was the golf they played in the fields of sandy Hill not just an implicit declaration of the need to play on Sundays, but also an implicit declaration of a need in the community for municipal golf facilities?

If Ottawa's golfing miscreants had ever been apprehended and charged with failure to obey the Lord's Day Observance Act, they would have had a friend in the editor of the *Ottawa Journal*, it seems, who wrote as follows about the conviction of the Toronto Golf Club members in May of 1895: "seriously, there seems a large-sized screw loose somewhere when such a conviction is possible" (6 June 1895, p. 4).

Hear, hear!

Two more decades would pass, however, before there was newspaper support for the idea of a municipal golf course in the national capital.

Ottawa's Best Amateur Golfer of the 1890s

The person who sent the reports on the Sandy Hill golf course to *Golfing Annual* was Alexander Simpson. The original Secretary-Treasurer of the Ottawa Golf Club, and later its President, Simpson was undoubtedly Ottawa's best amateur golfer in the 1890s and perhaps the Club member most knowledgeable about the game of golf.

Alex Simpson was born in Bowmanville, Ontario, in 1857, the son of Senator John Simpson.

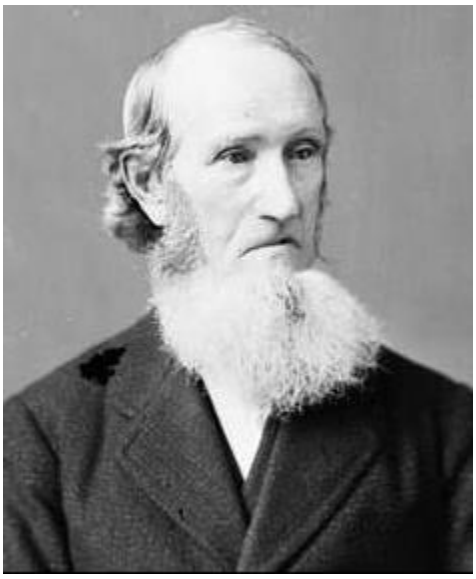


Figure 58 Senator Joun Simpson, Bowmanville, circa 1870.

His father John Simpson was born in Rothes, Scotland, in 1812 and came to Upper Canada in 1815 with his parents. The Simpson family settled in Brockville. But John Simpson moved to Darlington (today's Bowmanville), where he worked as a clerk in Charles Bowman's general store and mill (the town would be named after Bowman). Simpson eventually became Bowman's partner and took over the business (in partnership with his brother-in-law) after Bowman's death in 1848.

He entered the banking business at this time, managing the Darlington branch of the Bank of Montreal. In 1857, the year of son Alexander's birth, John Simpson was one of the founders of the Ontario Bank and was named its president. He also served on local township and district councils before being elected to the Ontario legislature in the mid-1850s, where he served for ten years as a Liberal before being named to the Senate after Canada's Confederation. He served as a Senator until his death in 1885 in Bowmanville, where Simpson Avenue is named after him.

Although his brother went to university and became a lawyer, Alexander Simpson went to work for the Ontario Bank at the age of 16 right out of the Bowmanville public school system. He worked his way up in the management of the bank through the traditional route from teller to accountant to assistant manager, and then he was appointed manager of the Ottawa branch of the Ontario Bank in 1882 when he was 25 years old. Three years before, he had married Annie Legge of Montreal and with her had a son named John.

Simpson was a keen athlete and sportsmen. By the early 1890s, however, he was making the transition from player to manager. He became the president of the Ottawa Bankers' Hockey League in 1894 and was re-elected to the post in 1895. He became president of the Sandy Hill Cricket Club in 1894. He also managed his own trotting horse, "Little Hector," who was a regular winner at Ottawa Trotting Club meets throughout the 1890s.

Golf came at the right time in this period of transition from sporting activity to management, allowing Simpson both to extend his career as a competitive sportsman and to deploy usefully his administrative skills as secretary of the Ottawa Golf Club. When the Ottawa Golf Club was made the host of the interprovincial golf competition between Ontario and Quebec in October of 1893, for instance, Simpson was toasted at the banquet after the matches: "Simpson … was given credit for having the match played in Ottawa, he having worked hard in the interests of the game" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 October 1893, p. 6).

Apart from the Club's professional Alfred Ricketts, Simpson was Ottawa's best golfer. When the Ottawa Golf Club left for its Chelsea Links, Simpson held the amateur course record for the course: 40 (three strokes off Rickett's professional record of 37). Over 18-hole rounds of golf on the Sandy Hill links, Simpson often shot in the 80s, and no other member of the Club could do that. As the *Ottawa Citizen* later noted, "He was club champion for a number of years, playing a consistent game of low scores for those days" (11 January 1932, p. 2).

Simpson also had a distinguished interprovincial, national and international golfing career.

Most notably, in the first Canadian national amateur championship (held in Ottawa in June of 1895), Simpson placed second to recent Scottish immigrant and distinguished golfer, Thomas M. Harley, of the Kingston Golf Club. In the 36-hole match-play final, Simpson lost by a score of 7 and 5.

Ironically, however, several days before this, Simpson beat Harley by five holes in their match on the first day of the competition in a contest between the Ottawa Golf Club and the Kingston Golf Club, and in the amateur handicap competition on the second day of the competition (which Simpson won, receiving a $75 prize), Simpson's 18-hole gross score was more than ten strokes better than that of Harley, whom the *Ottawa Journal* nonetheless averred was "probably the best amateur player in the country" (6 June 1895, p. 3). The tournament committee judged Harley to be a scratch player, whereas Simpson was accorded a handicap of 3.

Figure 59 Thomas M. Harley, posing with the Aberdeen Cup (awarded for his victory in the 1895 Canadian amateur championship). The Golf Book of East Lothian*, ed. John Kerr (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1896), p. 249.*

Simpson may well have beaten Harley as often as he lost to him in their matches in the mid-1890s (after which Harley left Kingston to become a golf professional in New Jersey), but he lost to Harley in the match that counted in Canadian golf history.

Simpson was not up against a typical Canadian amateur of the day, mind you, for Harleyu had become an accomplished golfer in Scotland before coming to Canada, so.

Born in Limekilns, Fife, Scotland, in 1855, Harley was apprenticed as joiner to a founding member and the captain of the Luffness Golf Club, which was very much a golf club for working men. From 1875 to 1880, Harley won the Hope Medal Challenge four times – a stroke-play competition against all comers in East Lothian, Scotland, an exceptionally strong centre of Scottish golf.

Harley's golfing skills were regarded as so exceptional that his working-class status was no impediment to his becoming the favorite golfing companion of the region's aristocrats, including the Earl of Wemyss, the Earl of Warwick, Lord Elcho, and Lord Moncrieff.

When he came to Canada, however, Harley had left golf behind him. He worked as a carpenter and stevedore at the docks of the Royal Military College in Kingston. But then Kingston re-organized its golf club in the spring of 1891, and Harley's proficiency at the game again earned him the attention of the elite members of the local golf world who ran the Kingston Golf Club: the officers of the Royal Military College and the professors of Queen's University.

Shortly after his victory over Simpson, Harley was persuaded to move to the United States as the golf professional of the North Jersey Golf Club in New Jersey. He played in professional tournaments in both the United States and Scotland, and then settled down in New Jersey to work as a golf instructor for the next decade. But he returned to his work as a carpenter in Paterson, New Jersey, in the early 1920s.

Then he returned to Scotland in the late 1920s, and returned to golf, as well, being made an Honorary Life Member of the Kilspindle Golf Club, for whom he had played years before. He died in 1943.

At the first national championship tournament in Ottawa that Harley won, "Col. Irwin and A. Simpson were appointed chairman and secretary," respectively, of "'The Canadian Golf Association' … an organization formed by delegates from Montreal, Toronto, Kingston and Ottawa Golf Clubs" (*Weekly British Whig* [Kingston], 10 June 1895, p. 5). Simpson was therefore the first secretary of the organization that became the Royal Canadian Golf Association.

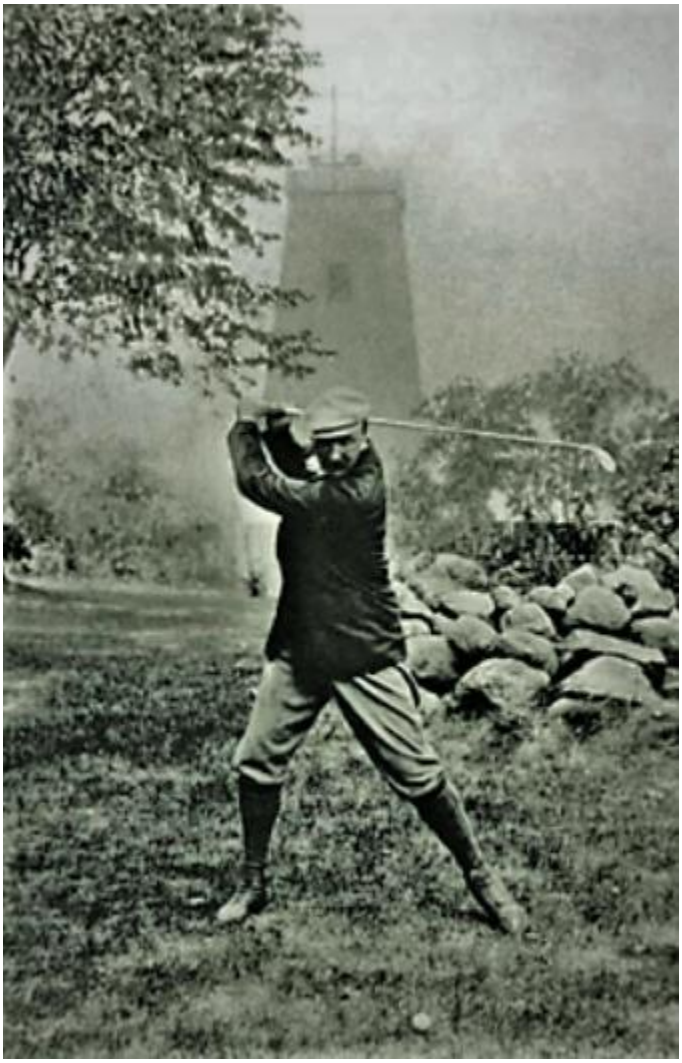


Figure 60 Charles Blair Macdonald, circa 1895.

Perhaps the greatest opponent Simpson ever faced, however, was Charles Blair Macdonald at the Niagara-on-the-Lake international Golf championship in September of 1895, where Simpson, Harley, Macdonald, and A.W. Smith were the four men classified as scratch players among the more than two dozen amateur competitors.

Harley was beaten in the early rounds, but Simpson reached the semifinals, where he lost to Macdonald by a score of 7 and 5. Macdonald won the Niagara International Championship and then went on to win the U.S. Amateur championship just four weeks later. (Despite his very distinguished career in amateur golf, however, Macdonald was ultimately admitted to the World Golf Hall of Fame not as a golfer but rather as a golf architect.)

Simpson rallied after his hard loss to Macdonald and won the play-off for third place in the tournament, proudly displaying his bronze medal on his return to Ottawa.

No one was ever ashamed of having lost to C.B. Macdonald.

And Macdonald was impressed by Simpson, implicitly ranking him among the top four amateur golfers in Canada. Several weeks after the Niagara tournament had concluded, he wrote that "The Canadians were well represented, notably by A.W. Smith of Toronto, whom Canada universally concedes is their best player, T.M. Harley of Kingston, who won the championship of Canada at Ottawa, in June, A. Simpson of Ottawa, and Charles Hunter of Toronto, all good golfers" (*Golf*, vol 2 no 1 [November 1895], p. 7).

Simpson maintained his membership in the Ottawa Golf Club as it moved from Sandy Hill to its Chelsea Links and then to its Aylmer Road site.

He left Ottawa for only two years, after the Ontario Bank merged with the Bank of Montreal in 1906. In 1907 he moved to Toronto to manage a Bank of Montreal branch there. Upon his return to Ottawa in 1909 on a pension from the Bank of Montreal, he was named manager of the Ottawa Clearing House and served as such until his retirement in 1930. Also in 1909, "He was asked by the lumbermen of the district to become secretary-treasurer of the Ottawa River Forest Protective Association" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 11 January 1932, p. 2). Simpson was also named to the Board of Governors of St. Luke's Hospital.

Alexander Simpson died in January of 1932 in his 74th year, after two years of general decline:

> *Men prominent in banking, financial and club circles of the Capital were present yesterday at the funeral of Alexander Simpson … which was held from the home of his niece … to All Saints' Anglican Church.*
>
> *The church was well filled with mourners, who represented practically every Ottawa bank, the Clearing House, leading financial corporations, the Royal Ottawa Golf Club, of which Mr. Simpson was a prominent member, and the Rideau Club. In addition, there were many parishioners of the church, in which Mr. Simpson was people's warden for many years….*
>
> *A profusion of floral tributes from personal friends, business acquaintances and various organizations gave silent testimony to the high regard and affection in which Mr. Simpson was held by everyone. These included offerings from the president and members of the Royal Ottawa Golf Club. (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 January 1932, p. 3)*

That representatives of the Royal Ottawa Golf Club, along with its floral tributes to Simpson, were prominent at the funeral service in All Saints' Church on Daly Avenue was one of those moments when

history does not so much repeat itself as rhyme: for Alexander Simpson lived on Daly Avenue when Hugh Renwick, the patron saint of Ottawa golf, visited his sister on Daly Avenue and, as the Pied Piper of the royal and ancient game, drew Daly Avenue residents like Simpson and Dr. John Thorburn out of their homes to follow him to his makeshift links in the fields of Sandy Hill in March of 1891.

Alexander Simpson had played golf regularly until he was 60 years old when, amazing to say for one whose life had been so well-organized during so many even busier years, “Business responsibilities forced him to give up the royal and ancient game” (*Ottawa Citizen*, 11 January 1932, p. 2).

Sandy Hill's Last Architect: Alfred Ricketts

The last man with his hands on the Ottawa Golf Club's Sandy Hill course, literally, was the Club's golf professional from 1893 to 1895, Alfred H. Ricketts.

After Ricketts' first year at the Club, President Irwin "spoke very kindly of the professional Ricketts," affirming that he "was a good ground man" (*Ottawa Journal*, 4 April 1894, p. 7). That is, he was a good greenkeeper.

Confidence in Ricketts' abilities as greenkeeper only became stronger, it seems, for the Club announced ambitious plans for its course in 1895: "various changes and improvements have been decided on, an assistant to the professional has been engaged, and every effort will be made to have the green the finest in America" (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 April 1895, p. 7). The assistant professional in question is never identified in the Ottawa newspapers (it was probably Joseph Baizana, who was identified in Ottawa City directories and golf publications from 1896 to 1899 as the Club's "caretaker" and "greenkeeper"), but it is a sign that the golf club was flourishing that Ricketts was allowed to take on an apprentice and plan improvements for the golf course.

Twenty-two years later, club members told Ralph Reville that "the first professional in Ottawa, Alfred Ricketts, an Englishman of considerable note in golfing circles, gave much careful attention to the course and did much to lay the foundation of Ottawa golf" (*Canadian Golfer*, vol 3 no 2 [June 1917], p. 88). Yet little is known of this golf pioneer who was, after Montreal's Willie Davis, one of the first golf professionals to come to North America. So, this essay on Ottawa's first golf course concludes with a chapter on its first greenkeeper and last architect.

When Ricketts left Ottawa at the end of the 1895 season, he became the golf professional, greenkeeper, and golf course re-designer at the Albany Country Club in the spring of 1896. The photograph below from the end of the nineteenth century shows the way he kept the golf course at Albany: in the immediate foreground appears to be a putting surface (with no flag evident in the portion we can see); to the left of this part of the putting surface appear two small, shallow sand traps; in the background, immediately in front of four trees ranged across the back of a level, grassy area seems to be a tee box, with a light-coloured sand barrel or box at its side (golfers used a scoop of sand from these containers to build a cone of sand as a teeing platform for the golf ball, as wooden tee pegs would not come into fashion until the late 1920s).

Figure 61 Albany Country Club, as seen in Golf, vol 6 no 6 (June 1900), p. 383.

Perhaps we see above an example of how Ricketts tried to keep the Ottawa golf course.

If the changes that we saw above in Alexander Simpson's descriptions of the Sandy Hill golf course – changes emphasizing "heavy bunkers" in place of his reference to "sand bunkers," and adding a reference to "hills" "in every direction" – reflect actual changes in the nature of the bunkers and the routing of the holes, then the person responsible for any such remodelling was Ricketts.

As Ricketts would be engaged to lay out the Ottawa Golf Club's new golf course north of Hull in September of 1895, it seems likely that his handling of the Sandy Hill course had given the Club confidence that he was the man for that job.

Born Alfred Henry Ricketts in England in February of 1869, he was described by the *Ottawa Free Press* as "a professional from Wimbledon," the town of his birth, about 10 miles south-west of London, England (cited in the *Montreal Star*, 2 May 1893, p. 5).

His mother Letitia was 34 when he was born; his father George, a carter by trade, was 39. The family had a large enough home to take lodgers – even a family of three at one point. Alfred had two older siblings, Francis (born 1864) and Martha (born 1867), and three younger siblings, Harry (born 1872),

Walter (born 1874), and Edward (born 1875). By 1881, although 17-year-old brother Francis was working with his father as a carter, 12-year-old Alfred was working as an errand boy. By 1891, his younger brothers were general labourers living at home, but Alfred had left home.

When Ricketts arrived in Ottawa on March 20th of 1893, about a month after his 24th birthday, he was presumably fresh off an apprenticeship at one of the two golf clubs that played on the golf course laid out on the Wimbledon Common in the 1860s (this was the third oldest golf course in England). By the time of the 1891 England and Wales census, when he no longer lived in the family home, Alfred Ricketts may have been living at this golf course.

The Ottawa Golf Club had the hiring of a professional in mind as of the end of the 1892 season: "The Ottawa Golf Club is engaging a professional for next year and it is more than likely they will be able to put some strong players in the field" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 1 November 1892, p. 5). Had the Club already made contact with Ricketts by the fall of 1892?

It is clear that what the Ottawa Golf club wanted most from its first golf professional was effective instruction in how to play the new game: "A. Ricketts, the professional engaged by the Ottawa Golf Club, has arrived here for the season. Under his tuition it is expected that golf will boom" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 21 March 1893, p. 4).

Figure 62 College Avenue at Laurier Avenue East (formerly Theodore), early twentieth century.

Immediately upon his arrival in Ottawa, Ricketts sought living quarters in Sandy Hill, not far from the golf course. He chose lodgings in the home of Frederick George Perrott, who lived with his wife and young children on College Avenue, just a few blocks from the clubhouse. (This street has since disappeared under the buildings of the University of Ottawa's main campus.)

Perrott, an Englishman born in 1856, was man a with many interests and an abundance of energy. He was at times a civil servant and a messenger at Alexander Simpson's Ontario Bank. In his spare time, he

also ran Perrott & Ashe, a catering company that also maintained a dining hall. The newspapers referred to him as "Fred Perrott, the well-known caterer" (*Ottawa Journal*, 2 Dec. 1893, p. 1).

Perhaps through his connection with Simpson, he had the contract to provide lunches and teas for special occasions at the Ottawa Golf Club, where he erected marquees for these events at the clubhouse and on the golf course: "Mr. Fred Perrott provided a splendid lunch for the golf players yesterday in a handsome marquee erected for the purpose" (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 October 1893, p. 8).

In whatever other spare time he had, Perrott served as the treasurer of the Sandy Hill Cricket Club, which was formed in the spring of 1894. Ricketts was a founding member of the club, and he was also – perhaps because of his expert knowledge of turf – one of three men appointed to a committee to "look after preparing a wicket" for "play near the golf grounds" (*Ottawa Journal*, 1 May 1894, p. 8; *Ottawa Journal*, 30 April 1891, p. 5).

Figure 63 Depiction of a cricketer batting in the match between Ricketts' Sandy Hill Cricket Club and a team of Ottawa Bankers. Ottawa Journal*, 13 August 1894, p. 5.*

The Sandy Hill Cricket Club (renamed the "Rideaus" in 1895) finished the 1894 season with four wins and four losses. The next year, Ricketts was described as one of the team's "best men" and served as "Captain" (*Montreal Daily Herald*, 13 May 1895, p. 2; 4 July 1895, p. 1). Perhaps his greatest personal achievement in the Club's first season coincided with the Club's greatest achievement: Ricketts bowled out the cricket professional of the Ottawa Cricket Club (along with two other batters before that), a feat that produced late in the summer of 1894 a surprise win by the Sandy Hill Cricket Club over the city's strongest cricket club. Ricketts made good scores as batter in 1895 against both the "Ottawas" and the Invictas (of Montreal) when his teammates could do nothing against superior bowling (*Gazette* [Montreal], 19 August 1895, p. 6; *Montreal Daily Herald*, 4 July 1895, p. 1).

Perrott and Ricketts were regularly selected for the starting lineup of the Club (of which Ottawa Golf Club members Alexander Simpson and A.Z. Palmer were president and vice-president, respectively, in 1894), and together, they played with the cricket team as far afield as Montreal, Perth, Almonte, Carleton Place, and Napanee.

Perrot and Ricketts seem to have been a dynamic duo in the promotion of the Club and the game:

> *The committee of the Sandy Hill Crickett Club are canvassing the members and friends of the club for subscriptions. They require about $125 to re-turf and fix up the new grounds on which they hope to have a first-class wicket next year. Messrs. Perrott and Ricketts are most energetic in their efforts for the club. (*Ottawa Journal*, 20 September 1894, p. 1).*

They were so successful so quickly with their subscription campaign that just two weeks later the Club was able to call for tenders for the work of constructing the new pitch. This achievement earned hearty applause at the Club's year-end banquet.

Ricketts and Perrot seem almost always to have been paired together in this way or that.

When the Sandy Hill Cricket club staged a "Married vs Single" match, Perrott headed the list of the former, and Ricketts headed the list of the latter (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 September 1894, p. 5).

At "the first annual dinner of the Sandy Hill Cricket Club, … the genial disposition of the members of that organization was clearly evidenced by the happy and hospitable manner in which they entertained their guests …. The time for toast making having arrived …. Messrs. Ricketts and Perrott responded to the health of the Sandy Hill Cricket Club, proposed in felicitous terms by Mr. Isbester" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 3 November 1894, p. 7). It was most unusual for two people to have been charged with responding to another person's toast: Ricketts and Perrott seem to have been a doubles act.

And the two of them seem to have been quite the party hounds, too. At "The most successful Cricket club dinner ever held in Ottawa … that of the Sandy Hill Club last night at the Bodega …. Mr. A. Ricketts sang the 'Scotch Brigade' and F. Perrott, 'Jacob Smidt' …." (*Ottawa Journal*, 3 November 1894, p. 1). It was no different in the Ancient Order of Foresters, of which he and Perrott were also members. In fact, at the end of 1894, Ricketts was elected Junior Woodward, one of the six officers of the Court Pioneer lodge of the A.O.F. in Ottawa (*Ottawa Journal*, 27 December 1894, p. 7). At the A.O.F.'s March dinner in 1895, of course, Ricketts and Perrott each sang a solo.

Alas, Perrott died young – he was just 49 years of age when he passed away in 1905.

Of course, Ricketts had not been brought to Ottawa to play cricket, but rather to do for the Ottawa Golf Club all the things that Davis had done for it during the last week of April in 1891: to teach members how to play the game, to build clubs, to look after the golf course, and to make and repair golf balls.

Coming from Wimbledon, Ricketts will have been associated not just with the golf course on Wimbledon Common, where golf had been played since the 1860s, but also with the golf clubs to which this golf course played host: the London Scottish Golf Club and the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club.

Figure 64 Clubhouse of the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club. British Golf Links*, ed. Horace Hutchinson (London: J.S. Virtue & Co., 1897), p. 327.*

When Ricketts was at Wimbledon in the late 1880s and early 1890s, there were two golf clubs playing on the same golf course. Located in the more commodious red-brick clubhouse at one end of the course was the Royal Wimbledon Golf Club; located in the more spartan "Iron House" at the other end of the golf course was the London Scottish Golf Club.

Figure 65 Golfers and caddies pose in front of the" Irn House" of the London Scottish Golf Club, circa 1890. It is possible that Alfred Ricketts is in this photograph.

Nine holes went each way from clubhouse to clubhouse, the members of these clubs commencing play at the tee closest to their own clubhouse.

As the authority in charge of Wimbledon Common restricted the playing of golf to Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, so as to make the golf grounds available to the public for other forms of recreation for the majority of the week, the golf course was often full – especially on Saturdays, when as many as 250 hopeful golfers might line up in the morning quest of a tee time.

Each golf club had its own golf professional. Apparently one of them, "[David Murdoch] Patrick, who used to look after matters at the Wimbledon end, was more of a club-maker than player" (*Pall Mall Gazette* [London], 4 November 1896, p. 10). Originally from Leven Links in Leven, Scotland, Patrick replaced his brother Alexander at Wimbledon in 1891 (at a reduced salary and with the title of greenkeeper only, not professional). He also have laid out golf courses.

At the other end of the common, at the London Scottish Golf Club, the golf professional from the 1880s to 1900 was Peter Fernie, from St, Andrews.

Figure 66 Peter Fernie, 1896.

Like all golf professionals of the day, Fernie was a club-maker (in fact, he became so famed for his club-making skills that he was one of the three club-making judges at the International Golf Exhibition in St. Andrews in 1910), but he was also a serious competitive golfer. He was a regular competitor in Open Championships from 1880 to the late 1890s and a participant in professional tournaments and match-play contests that began to be staged in the London area in the 1890s.

Fernie was also an excellent instructor, such that when he became the golf professional at Ipswich in 1900, club directors attributed to his teaching skills the fact that member handicaps had to be lowered significantly within a few months of his arrival.

Ricketts might have apprenticed under Fernie, Alexander Patrick, or David Patrick. Moving through the stages of apprenticeship from caddie to club-maker and golf instructor, it is possible that over the years he worked with each of them.

The 18-hole golf course on the Wimbledon Common was described in the 1890s by Horace Hutchinson as "the healthiest, prettiest, and most natural course in the neighbourhood of London" (*British Golf Links*, ed. Horace Hutchinson [London: J.S. Virtue & Co., 1897], p. 327).

This golf course, where Ricketts would have learned his greenkeeping skills, was like the nine-hole Ottawa golf course in having no artificial hazards: not because the greenkeeping golf professionals were lackadaisical, but rather because neither golf course needed such things.

At Wimbledon, during the last year or two that Ricketts was there, we read that

> *The part of the common over which play takes place is high and interspersed with patches of gorse and undulating ground. The turf is gravelly and uneven, with patches of remarkably coarse, tough turf, but during the last year or two the course has improved considerably, and the putting greens are now about as good as it is possible to get them. (*The Annual Golf Guide*, 1891-92, ed. David Scott Duncan [London: Horace Cox, 1892], p. 221)*

An 1890s photograph of the fairway of the first hole at Wimbledon suggests that the land on which this hole and neighbouring holes were laid out may not have been much different from the fields parallel to the Rideau Rifle Range where five or six holes of the Ottawa golf course were laid out.

Figure 67 First hole of the golf course on Wimbledon Common. Enhanced and modified photograph from British Golf Links*, p. 329.*

When the grand houses went up behind the fenced-off lots along Theodore Street during the years Ricketts was at the Ottawa Golf Club, he may have been reminded of the grand houses behind the fences alongside the first fairway of his old golf course at Wimbledon.

It is interesting to note that also located on the Wimbledon Common (as of 1872) was the Wimbledon Ladies' Golf Club, for which the golf professionals maintained a ladies' course: "The course is one of nine holes … and is about 1200 yards in length" *(The Annual Golf Guide*, 1891-92, p. 222). Ricketts may well have learned from this ladies' course at Wimbledon how the three holes laid out at Ottawa in 1891 by Willie Davis as a beginner's course might be re-articulated as a ladies' course of about the same length.

The Wimbledon Common golf course had overseen by Tom Dunn from 1872 to 1882. In fact, he "extended … Wimbledon from a seven to an eighteen-hole course" (*Golfer's Guide for the United Kingdom*, ed. W. Dalrymple [Edinburgh: W.H. White & Co., 1895], p. 14). If Ricketts began caddying at Wimbledon around the age of 12 or 13 (as was common in those days), he may well have been given his first job by Dunn. Unlike caddies in Scotland, few Wimbledon caddies intended to make a future in the game, for golf courses were rare in London in those days. At Wimbledon, Horace Hutchinson observed, "Your caddy … may not necessarily be an expert; he may be a casual person, not engaged on more permanent work. In that case you have to find the ball for him, and to instruct him on the difference between a lofting iron and a niblick" (*British Golf Links*, p. 328). But those like Ricketts who were "engaged on more permanent work" at the golf course were quite different: "many of the caddies are very quick at learning, and a few have developed a good deal of skill and interest in the game" (*British Golf Links*, p. 328).

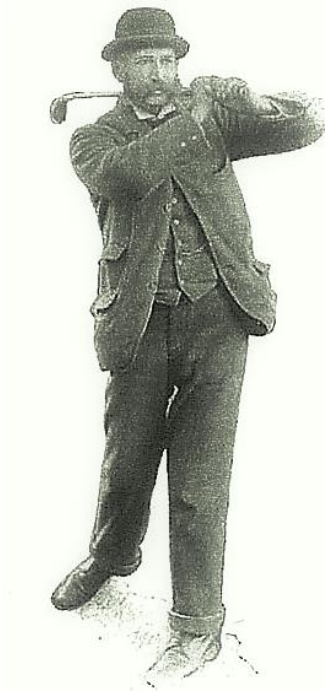


Figure 68 Tomm Dunn, 1890s.

Dunn returned to a golf club in the London area in 1889 and would soon become the most important golf architect of the next decade as he became the pioneer in developing design strategies for building inland golf courses on non-links land. Ricketts would not only have learned his golf on the Wimbledon course designed by Dunn, but he would also have been familiar with many of Dunn's courses built near Wimbledon between 1889 and 1893. And he would have learned from these courses the strategies by which Dunn became known as the father of penal golf course design.

Dunn's design signature was a sequence of cross bunkers on virtually every hole of a golf course: "Tom Dunn's courses were rudimentary given the lack of earth moving equipment available at that time. His standard design feature was to lay out a ditch or bunker on the near side of the green, often right across the course which had to be carried" (*Famous North Berwick Golfers* http://www.northberwick.org.uk/dunn.html).

He was not the only architect to use 30- to 40-yard-wide cross bunkers as hazards on parkland golf courses, but he "is believed to be the first to use *turf dikes* (dug up earth piled high to form a wall)" (Forrest L. Richardson and Mark K. Fine *Bunkers, Pits & Other Hazards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2006], p. 104). These ditches were dug from one side of the fairway to the other. On every hole, there would be an earth-walled ditch to be carried with the tee shot. On a par-four hole, there would be a second earth-walled ditch to be carried 30- to 40-yards from the green. On a par-five hole, there might be a third earth-walled ditch between the two kinds of ditches described above.

In each case, the soil from the ditch was piled-up high to make playing forward from the ditch very difficult, if not impossible. According to the theory behind this "penal design," a golfer who played a shot so poorly as to end up in a cross bunker was to be penalized the stroke it would take to blast the ball forward just a few yards or to play the ball sideways or backward a few yards simply to escape the bunker.

The photograph below shows the turf dike or earth-walled bunker built at Lakewood, New Jersey, in 1893 by Tom Dunn's apprentice and younger brother Willie Dunn, Jr.

Figure 69 The turf dike or earth-walled bunker built by Willie Dunn, Jr, at the Golf Club of Lakewood, New Jersey, in 1893. Two additional hazards of this sort can be made out in the background.

We know that this was the kind of cross-bunker that Ricketts used in the 1890s and early 1900s when laying out a golf course on land lacking natural hazards, for when the city of Rochester asked for his advice on re-designing its municipal golf course in 1901, we read that "Instructor Ricketts, of the Rochester Country Club, has promised to make a careful inspection of the course and give his opinion as to where it is advisable to **raise** bunkers" (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 5 April 1901, p. 13, emphasis added).

Although we would speak today of **digging** or **excavating** bunkers, one spoke of **raising** bunkers in the late 1890s and early 1900s because the Dunn family had established the raised bank of the earth dike as the defining feature of bunkers.

Golf historians suggest that the rudimentary cross-bunker hazards for which Tom Dunn became famous – and then infamous when they went out of fashion – were the simplest and most economical way for him to introduce hazards onto otherwise featureless land where he was asked to build the majority of his golf courses. Ricketts would presumably have been mindful of the cost-saving benefit of this bunkering strategy when he advised Rochester about how to go about improving its municipal golf course.

The Ottawa Golf Club's Sandy Hill golf course contained so many natural hazards – fences, roads, sand bunkers – that Ricketts may never have felt it necessary to dig a ditch of the Dunn sort during his time in charge of the course.

Since most of the roads and natural sand bunkers seem to have been located in the area of elevated ground on the old Besserer estate, however, it is possible that Ricketts built a few ditches as cross bunkers for the five or six golf holes located in the fields west of the Rifle Range on the old By estate. Recall the observation in the 1967 newspaper article cited above: "The bearded, knicker-sporting enthusiasts had to contend with such natural hazards as fences, **ditches**, sand traps and a swamp" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 27 June 1967, p. 25, emphasis added). The cross bunkers of the late 1890s and early 1900s were often called "ditches."

As the golf professional of the Ottawa Golf Club, Ricketts would of course have had other responsibilities in addition to greenkeeping, such as making golf clubs and selling golf balls.

When he was hired at the Country Club of Rochester in the late 1890s, for instance, Ricketts negotiated a contract according to which the Club would buy up to $500 worth of golf balls from him – perhaps there was a similar item in the contract he had secured from the Ottawa Golf Club (*Through Half a Century: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Country Club of Rochester* [Rochester: 1945], p. 12).

Another part of his job was to represent the Ottawa Golf Club in competition with the professional golfer or the best amateur player of the clubs with which the Ottawa members engaged in competition (golfers such as A.W. Smith of Toronto and Thomas Harley of Kingston). And the Club also hoped that he would represent it in major competitions in Canada and the United States, such as the professional tournament planned for Newark, New Jersey, in the summer of 1894:

> *On the 24th and 25th of August a professional tournament takes place in Newport, R.I.... The sum of $250 is offered in prizes and W. Campbell, ex-champion of England,*

> *W. [F.] Davis, W. Dunn and other experts will take part. A. Ricketts, the Ottawa professional, will also take in the matches. He is a good player and just now in fine shape. The club expect him to render a good account of himself. (*Ottawa Journal*, 3 August 1894, p. 5)*

Alas, Ricketts did not join the above-mentioned golf professionals in the tournament in question, and so missed the opportunity to be crowned the first professional champion of the United States – an honour that went to Willie Dunn, jr.

The Ottawa Golf Club seems to have supported Ricketts' ambition to play tournament golf. We learn indirectly of another 1894 tournament that Ricketts planned to enter: "Ricketts, the professional of the club, has had a disappointment by reason of the falling through of the New York tournament for professionals" (*Ottawa Journal*, 6 September 1894, p. 5). It is not clear what New York competition this newspaper item refers to, but the report continues: "Later in the season, some professional matches may be played in Ottawa" (*Ottawa Journal*, 6 September 1894, p. 5). The Ottawa Golf Club seems to have been ambitious to show off its golf professional, for it had also hoped to have a professional component in the first national championship tournament held at Ottawa in June of 1895, but those hopes were also disappointed.

Irwin played golf relatively often with Ricketts and spoke of him as "an excellent player" (*Ottawa Journal*, 4 April 1894, p. 7). He held the course record for an 18-hole score on the Sandy Hill links. And he would hold the professional scoring record at a number of other courses in the 1890s and early 1900s: Lake Champlain (at the Hotel Champlain Golf Club), Albany, and the Country Club of Rochester (where he lowered the record over the course of several years from 70 to 69, and then from 69 to 68). The members of the Albany Country Club described Ricketts as a "a corking good player" (*Golf* [April 1898], vol 2 no 4, p. 45).

At Ottawa, Ricketts also supervised tournament play as part of his duties, from various club competitions to the first interprovincial match between Quebec and Ontario held at the Club in October of 1893. At the end of his first season in Ottawa, he had made a good impression in this regard: "Mr. A. Ricketts is the club's professional and a good player and a courteous official he is" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 October 1893, p. 5).

As we know, Ricketts laid out the Ottawa Golf Club's Chelsea Links north of Hull in September of 1895, but he would not be present for the move to the new course in April of 1896.

By the end of the 1895 golf season, Ricketts knew that he would not be returning as the golf professional of the Ottawa Golf Club. Instead, he intended to go to the United States as soon as possible, so in November he placed an advertisement in a Boston journal called *The Golfer*, which was "devoted to the game of golf and the golfers of the United States of America" (*Golfer* [November 1895], vol. 2 no 1, p. 7).


WANTED.

A Situation as Greenkeeper and Professional by a thoroughly experienced man.

Address, "PROFESSIONAL."
84 College Ave., Ottawa, Can.

Figure 70 Golfer *(November 1895), vol. 2 no 1, p. 27.*

In the same month, the *Montreal Star* reported that "Alf Ricketts, professional of the Ottawa Golf Club, left this evening to accept a lucrative position in Buffalo. Ricketts is one of the best golf players in Canada, and he will be a loss to the Canadian golf circles" (8 November 1895, p. 3). But Ricketts did not go to Buffalo. Instead, in March of 1896, the *New York Times* reported that "The [Albany] Country Club has engaged M[r]. A. Ricketts, for the past three seasons the professional of the Ottawa Golf Club, for the season, from April 1 to Nov. 28" (15 March 1896, p. 21).

Ricketts flourished at the Albany Country Club, which allowed him to develop his career as a competitive professional golfer and as a designer of golf courses.

His first year at Albany was a busy one. In July, he played in the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills and performed well in his first major competition, as the *Ottawa Daily Citizen* noted:

> *GOLF*
>
> *Ricketts' Good Showing*

James Foulis, of the Chicago Golf Club, won the championship at the open matches of the United States Golf Association, at Shinnecock Hills. Foulis played phenomenal golf …. A. Ricketts, formerly of this city, took part in the contest and made a most creditable showing …. His score … being beaten by the champion by only 11. (22 July 1896, p. 3)

Figure 71 Lenox Cup.

The Albany Golf Club also encouraged him to play in the professional tournament at Niagara-on-the-Lake at the beginning of September in 1896 (although he would not, in fact, take part in it). And at the end of that month, he entered the professional tournament at the Lenox Links in Massachusetts, at which U.S. President William McKinley would present the trophy to the amateur winner of the Lenox Cup.

Before the amateur portion of the Lenox tournament, "The professionals … had a driving contest, which was won by Ricketts of the Albany club. Each drove four balls and the aggregate distances were added together. Rickett's score was 610 yards" (*Boston Evening Transcript*, 26 September 1896, p. 4). That the driving competition was won by four drives averaging 152.5 yards each shows how difficult it was to drive the gutta-percha golf ball of the day a long distance consistently and accurately.

And note that Ricketts' professional opponents were no slouches: they were the top players in America, including Willie Davis of Newport (who had laid out the Ottawa links in 1891), Willie Dunn, Jr., John Shippen (the African-American professional from Shinnecock Hills), Willie Campbell, Horace Rawlins (the 1895 U.S. Open champion), Willie Tucker (Dunn's nephew), and so on. To win the championship of this tournament was prestigious: "the first prize being $200" meant that the prize money was the equivalent of that which was awarded to the U.S. Open winner in July (*Boston Evening Transcript*, 26 September 1896, p. 4). Ricketts did well: "W. Tucker of St. Andrew's, Horace Rawlins of the Sacadaqua Club of Utica, W. Campbell of Myopia, and W. Rickett [sic] of Albany were tied for third place and divided the money" (*Sun* [New York], 28 September 1896, p. 9).

After his first design work as a golf architect for the Ottawa Golf Club, Ricketts went on to a notable career as a course designer in Vermont and New York. He began this part of his American career at Albany: called by the *New York Times* "the greens keeper of the Albany Country Club," he was also in

charge of remodelling it, for we read in the *Official Golf Guide 1899* that the golf course was "much improved by A. Ricketts," with about 300 yards added to its length (*New York Times*, 18 July 1897, p. 4, *Official Golf Guide 1899*, ed. Josiah Newman [New York, 1899], p. 205). In May of 1897, he laid out a nine-hole course in Bennington Centre, Vermont, for the Mount Anthony Club. Two months later in July, he laid out a nine-hole golf course in Lake Placid for the Roussement Golf Club.

Intriguingly, we read in January of 1898 that "A. Ricketts, of the Albany Golf club, is making a business tour of Canada" (Golf [January 1918], vol 2 no 1, p. 51). Was he looking for more golf-course design work? Was he perhaps looking for a new position as golf professional and greenkeeper? Did he want to leave Albany?

Note that before he left Ottawa at the end of the 1895 season, the *Ottawa Journal* reported: "Ricketts spent one week in Coburgh [*sic*; Cobourg] coaching the players there, but there is no truth in the rumor that he will stay there" (5 September 1895, p. 6). It is true that he did not stay at Cobourg, but neither did he stay in Ottawa. Ricketts's "business" trip to Cobourg late in the summer of 1895 may well have been a sign of his interest in a position elsewhere than Ottawa.

Whatever the case may be, after two years at Albany, Ricketts moved on – but not because Albany wanted to get rid of him:

> *Much to the regret of all the members of the club, A. Ricketts, the professional, leaves at the end of the month for Rochester, to take charge at the golf club there. Albany's loss is Rochester's gain, for in him they got one of the most painstaking and obliging men in the business. A clever instructor and a corking good player. (*Golf *[April 1898], vol 2 no 4, p. 45)*

His new job as of April of 1898 was at the Country Club of Rochester, which asked him to remodel its eighteen-hole layout that spring. He was hired as greenkeeper and golf professional. Ricketts' skills as greenkeeper and architect were no doubt applied at his new club, where a month after his arrival we learn that "The new links are rapidly being toned" *(Democrat and Chronicle [Rochester], 8 May 1898, p. 19).* The re-design was for the championship of the Central New York Golf League:

> *The course is, to some extent, rather new to everybody, it having been completed within a couple of weeks. The club has had other courses in the past, beginning with a nine-hole course, and last season being equipped with an eighteen-hole course – the*

> *full number – but that course was somewhat different from the one which has been prepared for the tournament. (*Democrat and Chronical *[Rochester], 30 June 1898, p. 12).*

Before the amateur tournament began, Ricketts set the course record of 74. None of the approximately 40 players in the tournament shot better than 82. (Ricketts lowered the course record to 70 in 1899, and then shot 69 in 1901 and 68 in 1902.)

Local northern New York newspapers regularly headlined Ricketts' play in the U.S. Open from 1896 to 1902, generally presenting him as a small-town golfer over-achieving on the national stage. He finished as high as sixth. He also played in exhibition matches in Albany and Rochester against top golf professionals. In Albany in the summer of 1897, for instance, he defeated Horace Rawlins (U.S. Open champion of 1895), with whom he would later be paired in the playing of the 1900 U.S. Open.

At Rochester, in the summer of 1898, he was scheduled to play a home and home match against the Toronto Golf Club professional, Arthur Smith, for a $50 prize, but one of those crazy stone fences that were built into the golf courses of those days literally got in the way:

> *The professional match between Arthur Smith, the expert of the Toronto Club, and Ricketts, of the Country Club, will commence at 4 o'clock, if held at all.*
>
> *Mr. Ricketts met with an accident while going over the course yesterday afternoon, slipping while crossing a stone wall and injuring his knee severely. It will not be known until today whether he will be in condition to play.*
>
> *If he is too lame, it is probable that a proposition will be made to the Toronto Club to send him over there several days ahead of the return match and give him time to familiarize himself with the Toronto course, the object being to play both matches as one with both purses hung up. (*Democrat and Chronicle *[Rochester], 8 July 1898, p. 12)*

It turns out that Ricketts was too injured to play the match.

But in the summer of 1901, Ricketts played well, but ultimately lost, against one of America's most famous golfers, Bernard Nicholls, who at that time held more course records in New England than any other person. He was celebrated as one of the longest drivers in the world – having notched a 315-yard drive on the Wollaston golf course in Massachusetts.

Figure 72 Bernard Nicholls, circa 1897.

Years before, Ricketts and Nicholls had tied for sixth at the U.S. Open in Chicago in 1897. When they played their match in 1901, Nicholls had become even more famous as the only man to beat English superstar Harry Vardon twice during the latter's virtually undefeated tour of the United States and Canada in 1900 (*Democrat and Chronicle* [Rochester], 26 June 1901, p. 14). The match was a close one: Ricketts shot 78 to Nicholls' 75.

Ricketts also continued his work as golf architect, and not just on the links of the Country Club of Rochester, but also on the city's municipal golf course.

The city owned a golf course called "Genesee Valley Park" that was in need of renovations in the spring of 1901, and when the superintendent of the park system was asked about planned improvements, he deferred to Ricketts' advice:

> *Superintendent Laney said that … improvement was under consideration and probably would be made before the playing season is in full swing. He wasn't prepared to say where the bunkers would be placed, as he wants to get expert advice before he locates them. Instructor Ricketts, of the Rochester Country Club, has promised to make a careful inspection of the course and give his opinion as to where it is advisable to raise bunkers. Mr. Ricketts, by the way, has spoken of the Genesee Valley Park course in terms of high praise. Those who rail at it, he said, simply show their ignorance in doing so. (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 5 April 1901, p. 13).*

Ricketts took these responsibilities seriously and recommended such a large number of changes for the Genesee Valley Park golf course that the comprehensive plan for improvements he submitted was still being discussed at the beginning of the 1903 golf season when the officers of the Club called a meeting to report "on what has been done and what it is proposed to do" (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 24 April 1903, p. 15).

We read as follows in connection with this meeting: "Mr. Ricketts, the professional of the Country Club, has been invited to be present …. Material changes are to be made in the links, making them much more sporty. Nearly every hole … will be changed somewhat, additional hazards put in and, while preserving

the general layout of the links of last year, there will be practically a new links this season" (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 24 April 1903, p. 15).

Since Ricketts' plan called for "practically a news links," we can probably add the Genesee Valley Park's new golf course to the list of layouts designed by Ricketts.

Ricketts' support of Rochester's adventure in the development of a municipal golf course (still a rarity in the early 1900s) is notable. As the only golf professional in the city, it seems that it was up to Ricketts single-handedly to teach the average people of Rochester how to play the game:

> *The park players represent all grades of society. That is, about all classes of persons whose occupations permit them to give to the game the time that it requires are to be found among the players at the park…. Not a few of those who played at the park last summer have been taking instruction in the game during the winter. Mr. Ricketts has conducted a school while the links have been under snow, and it is to be expected that the number of players who are able to put up a game a little better than the average will be larger this year than last. (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 5 April 1901, p. 13).*

Ricketts opened the same golf school the next winter, but exceedingly high demand for instruction forced him to open it earlier than ever (as he explained in a letter to the editor of the *Democrat and Chronicle*):

> *Dear Sir:*
>
> *I take great pleasure in informing you that at the request of a number of my patrons of the past seasons, who were greatly benefited by the indoor instruction and the splendid winter exercise, that I will open my golf school on December 16, 1901, … one month earlier than formerly. I will again be prepared to give instruction in golf in all its branches. Thanking you for past favors, I am,*
>
> *Yours respectfully,*
>
> *A. Ricketts*
>
> *(*Democrat and Chronicle*, 14 December 1901, p. 19).*

It was as a golf instructor that Ricketts would establish his golf legacy. We recall that he was good with Ottawa's beginners: "Several ladies here play rather well, but the greater number are only beginners, and the caretaker, who knows all the intricacies of the game, is often called upon for lessons" (*Montreal Star*, 28 April 1894, p. 2).

But his greatest teaching talent turned out to be an ability to teach the game to the most talented of pupils and bring them along quickly. In his first year at the Ottawa Golf Club in 1893, for instance, Ricketts took a 13-year-old junior member named Rex Watters under his wing and turned him into an excellent golfer. Over the course of one year, "Master Rex" went from scores in the mid-120s to scores in the mid-90s – which were extremely good scores according to the standards of the day, placing him in the ranks of the top five or six players at Ottawa.

Watters was an all-round athlete, excelling at hockey in the winter and even joining Ricketts a few years later in the starting eleven of the Rideau Cricket Club. When the "Rideaus" travelled to Almonte to play the Almonte Cricket Club in the summer of 1895, even though they were playing before a highly partisan Almonte crowd of spectators, "young Rex Watters of the Rideaus made three phenomenal catches and received loud cheers" [*Ottawa Journal*, 24 June 1895, p. 6]).

By age 14, Watters was playing on the senior men's golf team in matches against the Kingston Golf Club and beginning to bring credit to his instructor.

At the Canadian championships in Ottawa in June of 1895, Watters' advanced abilities were noted by all when he finished second behind Simpson (and well ahead of Harley) in the handicap competition:

> *The surprise of the day was the fine play of Rex Watters. He is only a boy of 15 years of age and improving at the rate he is doing he will undoubtedly soon be the champion of Canada.*
>
> *He is a pupil of A. Ricketts, the Ottawa club professional, and his teacher is naturally gratified at the fine showing he made. (Ottawa Journal, 6 June 1895, p. 3).*

Yet because Watters was so young, the committee in charge of the championships did not allow him toplay in the match-play competition for the national amateur championship, in which Harley triumphed in the final over Simpson.

The next year, however, 16-year-old Watters exacted some measure of revenge for Alex Simpson's defeat at the hands of Thomas Harley: "The Kingston papers speak highly of the work of Mr. Rex Waters,

who was one of the members of the Ottawa Golf Club that visited Kingston on Saturday. Mr. Waters defeated T. Harley who is ex-amateur champion of Canada" (*Ottawa Journal*, 14 October 1896, p. 8).

Perhaps not surprisingly, in 1897, 17-year-old Watters duly won the championship of the Ottawa Golf Club on its new Chelsea Links, and of course he became a stalwart member of the Club's teams that met the Kingston Golf Club and the Royal Montreal Golf Club in regular competition.

At the Ottawa Golf Club, everyone had noticed how Ricketts had brought along young Rex Watters, and at Albany Ricketts was regarded as a "clever instructor," but at Rochester he was regarded as a genius, for he taught there one of the most talented golfers that the game has ever seen.

Figure 73 Walter Hagen, circa 1917.

Shortly after he arrived at the Country Club, Ricketts admitted to the grounds as a caddie a seven-year-old farm-boy who could not afford a membership at the Club, and over the next few years he turned him into a golfer. In fact, "with assistance from head professional Alfred Ricketts, [he] gradually improved his golf skill to the stage where he was an expert player by his mid-teens, and was then hired by the club to give lessons to club members and to work in the pro shop" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Hagen). In effect, the golf course became the boy's second home, and the head pro something of a surrogate father: he was "'brought up' in the pro shops of Alfred Ricketts and his successors" (*Through Half a Century: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Country Club of Rochester* [Rochester: 1945], p. 21).

This farm-boy was named Walter Hagen.

He would win five PGA championships, four British Opens, and two U.S. Opens, ultimately trailing only Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods in the total number of his professional major victories. And by means of his larger-than-life, swashbuckling persona as "Sir Walter," he was the golfer who more than any other made the possibility of earning a living as a touring golf professional possible.

Of course, Walter Hagen was installed in the World Golf Hall of Fame as one of the greatest golfers of all time.

Yet he never forgot his old mentor Alf Ricketts.

Ricketts' life had progressed from success to success, from his arrival in Ottawa in 1893 to his first five years as the golf professional at the Country Club of Rochester. Shortly after arriving in Rochester, he married Nettie Belle Coventry in December of 1899, and the couple lived comfortably with her grandparents in the village of Brighton, not far from the Country Club. Their son, Albert G. Ricketts, was born early in 1902. Things could hardly have been better for Alfred Ricketts at work or at home.

But then disasters struck – in both places.

In the fall of 1902, fire broke out at the Country Club of Rochester. The clubhouse and the locker building that contained Rickett's pro shop were totally destroyed. Attempts to save the buildings were heroic: as they fought the blaze within the clubhouse, firemen were nearly killed by a falling chimney.

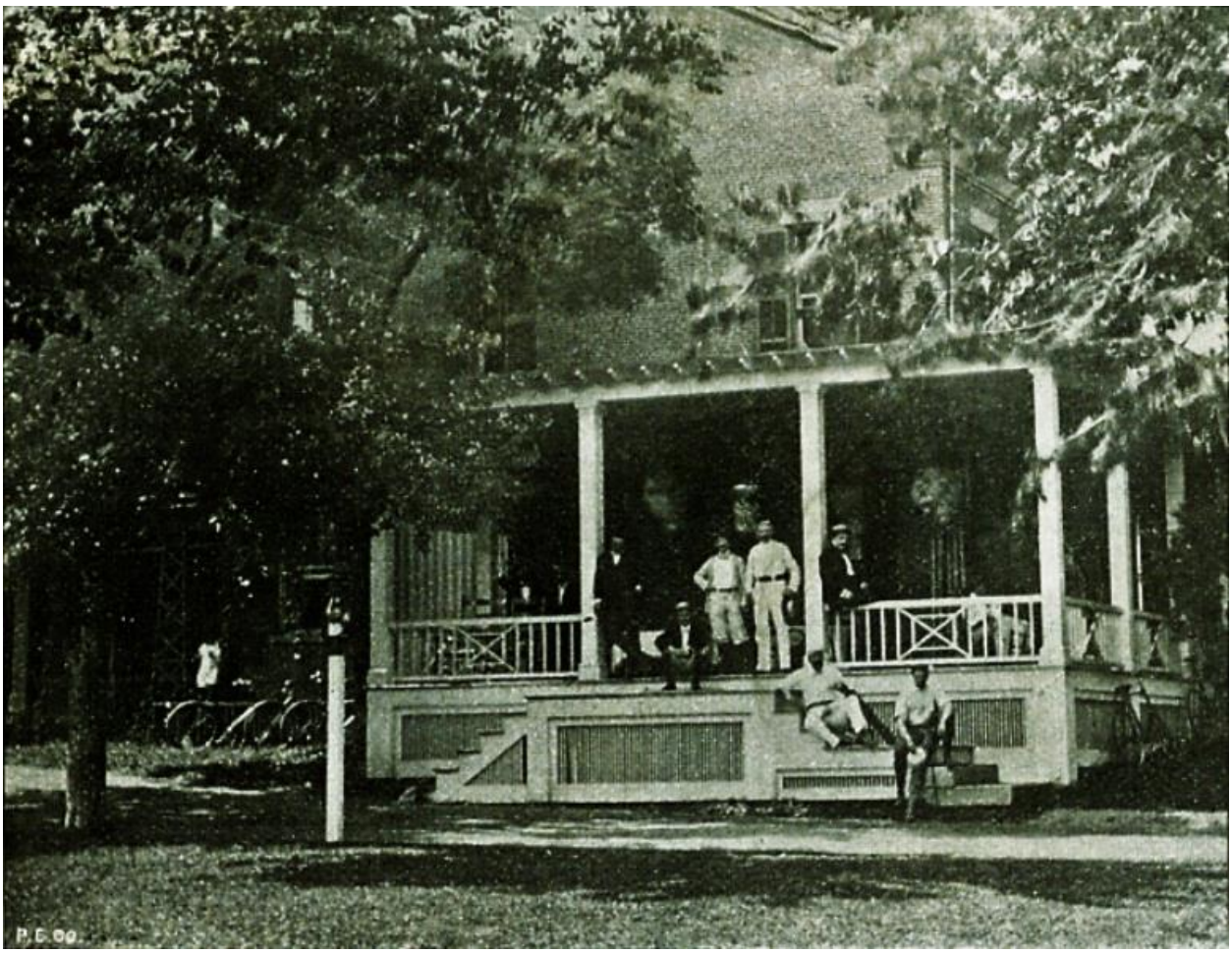


Figure 74 The original clubhouse of the Country Club of Rochester (circa 1896) which burned down in 1902. Post Express *[Rochester], 12 December 1896, p. 4.*

Ricketts was on the scene all night maintaining a vigil at the locker room:

> *In the locker room were the individual outfits of the members and it was estimated by Golf Instructor Ricketts that the property in there was worth between $5,000 and $6,000. There was no insurance on that property. His workshop, with a quantity of tools, also burned. While one side was blazing, he broke a window on the south side and, reaching in, saved a few things. (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 19 October 1902, p. 20)*

With the ruins of the old clubhouse still smoldering, the members of the Country Club of Rochester met three days after the fire and decided not just to carry on, but also to build a much grander clubhouse in the spring of 1903.

Figure 75 Country Club of Rochester shortly after its completion in 1903. It lasted until 1970.

Another decision they took at this meeting "was to re-engage Ricketts as professional and green-keeper" (*Through Half a Century: Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of the Country Club of Rochester* [Rochester: 1945], p. 17).

Ricketts, however, seems to have given up his position as the Club's golf professional for at least a year at this point – perhaps because of the tumultuous personal and professional upset caused by his wife's death. Nettie died within a year of their son's birth, as was announced in the *Ottawa Journal*:

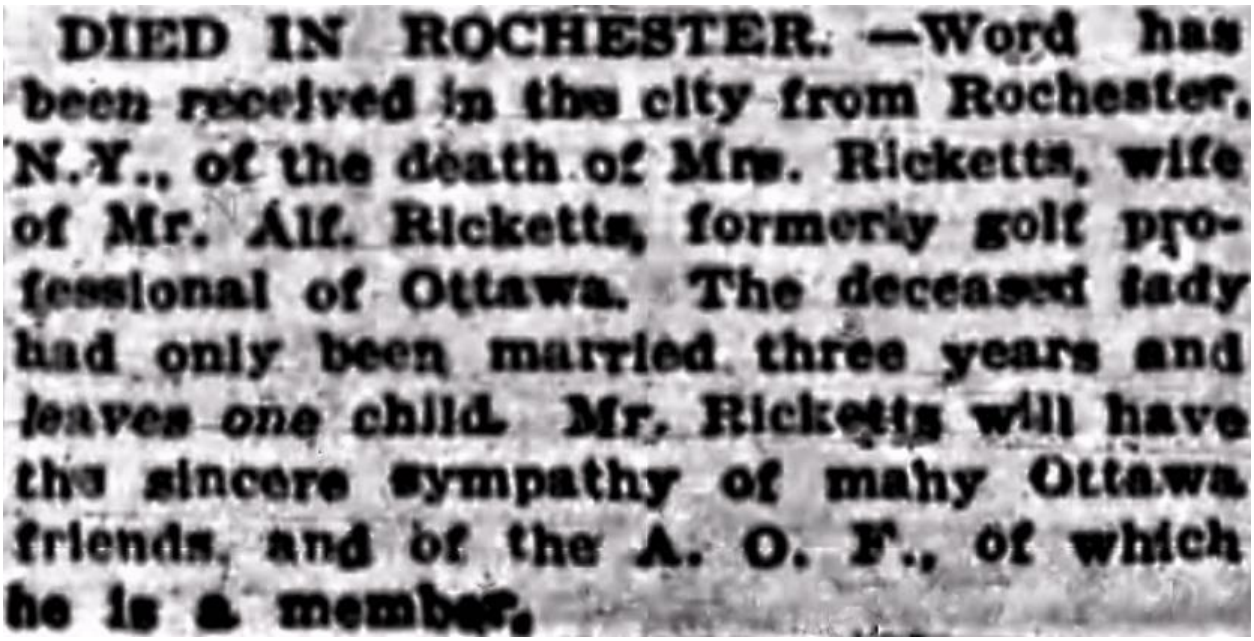

DIED IN ROCHESTER.—Word has been received in the city from Rochester, N.Y., of the death of Mrs. Ricketts, wife of Mr. Alf. Ricketts, formerly golf professional of Ottawa. The deceased lady had only been married three years and leaves one child. Mr. Ricketts will have the sincere sympathy of many Ottawa friends, and of the A. O. F., of which he is a member.

Figure 76 Ottawa Journal*, 16 March 1903, p. 10.*

Alf Ricketts had no doubt told this sad news to his old friend, fellow cricketer, and fraternal member of the Ancient Order of Foresters, Fred Perrott, who was probably the person who informed the *Ottawa Journal* of the news about Ricketts.

Alf Ricketts was left with a one-year-old child to raise on his own (he never re-married).

Ricketts had left the Country Club of Rochester "early in the summer" of 1903, being replaced in September of the same year by former U.S. Open champion Willie Smith. Smith was gone by the spring of 1904, and James Mackie of Glasgow was hired to replace him (he had apprenticed under Old Tom Morris at St Andrews) (*Democrat and Chronicle*, 19 March 1904, p. 15).

Whether Ricketts ever returned to his job as the head pro of the Country Club of Rochester is not clear, but he certainly maintained his association with the Genesee Valley Park golf course, continuing his strong support of municipal golf. His scoring feats at the Genesee Valley Park course were documented in the local newspapers down to 1906, after which Ricketts' name largely disappears from these newspapers.

After his marriage, Ricketts lost all contact with his family back in England. One of his sisters eventually tried to find him, placing advertisements randomly in North American newspapers, such as Winnipeg's *Free Press Prairie Farmer*: "Ricketts (Alfred), club maker, was last heard of at Brighton, New York, nine years ago. Sister Martha asks. (Mother and brother Ernest dead.)" (*Free Press Prairie Farmer* [Winnipeg], 31 March 1909, p. 3).

Figure 77 Donald Ross, circa 1913.

When Donald Ross spent two days at the Country Club in May of 1913 planning a new 18-hole golf course, one wonders whether Ricketts met him.

Ross played shots on a number of his projected holes and may well have consulted with present and past pros like Hagen and Ricketts before laying out the new course. He would have been interested to learn from them about playing conditions at the Rochester golf grounds – conditions regarding the climate during the golf season, the run of the ball during the summer months, the direction of the prevailing wind, and so on.

During the years of World War I (1914-19), Ricketts lived in rented rooms with his son, Albert G. Ricketts. Sadly, Albert died in 1921, at age 19, just after his graduation from high school.

Now in his early fifties, Ricketts maintained his love of golf. The census of 1920 reveals that he remained a golf instructor in Rochester: his profession is actually recorded as that of "Professor" of Golf, just as Willie Davis was so described in 1891.

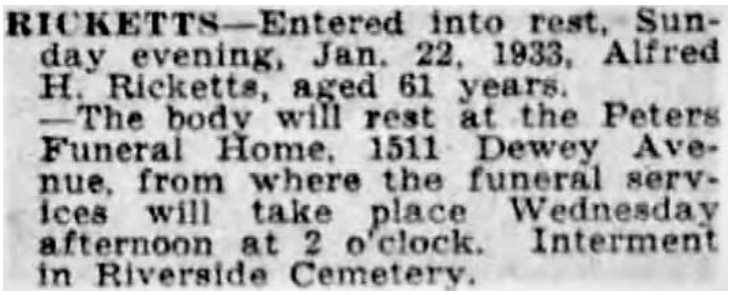
In a 1923 newspaper article that presented a retrospective on 30 years of golf history in Rochester, we learn that 25 years after his arrival in Rochester, Ricketts still maintained a connection with the Country Club: “Mr. Ricketts, who still resides in Brighton [now a suburb of Rochester], manufactured many of the first golf clubs used in Rochester. He remains an ardent golf fan and is always present at the bigger matches played in Rochester each year” (*Democrat and Chronicle* [Rochester], 28 October 1923, p. 38).

This newspaper article includes the only known image of Alfred Ricketts, seen below (in what may have been a sketch based on a photograph).

*Figure 78 "Alfred Ricketts Driving the Lane" (*Democrat and Chronicle *[Rochester], 28 October 1923, p. 38). Ricketts drives over the submerged road called "Lovers' Lane" at the Country Club of Rochester circa 1898.*

By the start of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, Ricketts had lost his professional connection to golf and was living alone in a boarding house.

To make ends meet, he had become a packer in a Rochester metal factory.



RICKETTS—Entered into rest, Sunday evening, Jan. 22, 1933, Alfred H. Ricketts, aged 61 years. —The body will rest at the Peters Funeral Home, 1511 Dewey Avenue, from where the funeral services will take place Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Interment in Riverside Cemetery.

Figure 79 Democrat and Chronicle*, 25 January 1933, p. 12.*

Alfred Ricketts died a short time later in January of 1933. Although the *Democrat and Chronicle* item announcing his funeral says that he was "aged 61 years," he was actually 63 years old. In fact, it was just a few days before his 64th birthday that he was buried in Rochester's Riverside Cemetery alongside his son.

And so, one of the first golf professionals to immigrate to North America in the 1890s died with no obituary, let alone an acknowledgement of his role as a true golf pioneer.

Conclusion

At the end of 1894, when the Sandy Hill Cricket Club lost to residential development the land loaned to it by the Ottawa Golf Club, Charles Magee was helpful as always in immediately finding another parcel of land at the base of the Rideau bluff that he was able to lease to the Cricket Club (now called the Rideau Cricket club) for five years.

Yet with all the good will in the world, Magee would not have been able to replace the golf course land that was being lost to house-building, thoroughfares and electric railway lines. There was no other land in Sandy Hill that could accommodate a golf course, especially now that Magee and his partners were beginning to sell lots on all the streets that had been surveyed on the easternmost end of the old By estate.

As we know, then, the Club moved to its Chelsea Links north of Hull in the spring of 1896.

With eyes wide open, it seems, the Ottawa Golf Club had from the beginning built its Sandy Hill links on land that Magee and Bate were holding onto only until the time for its development was ripe. They could afford to be generous with loans of such land to golfers and cricketers because, as everyone must have known, the duration of the loan would be short-term since the time for development was imminent.

Members of the Ottawa Golf Club would have known from the beginning that their Sandy Hill course had a limited lease on life.

And they cannot be blamed for not thinking of the long-term prospects of the Club and its course: after all, in 1891, whether the Ottawa Golf Club would succeed in popularizing golf was uncertain, so a long-term lease on the 50 acres of land where the golf course was laid out was probably not seen as advisable, let alone as necessary.

And so perhaps it is not surprising to learn in a gossipy Ottawa newspaper column called "*Entre Nous*" that there was a rumour as early as the spring of 1895 that the Club had already decided to move to Quebec:

> *A couple of years ago they [the men of the Ottawa Golf Club] were most anxious that ladies should join the club, they gave glowing accounts of the delights of the game,*

but now it is different, and the men want to have the links all to themselves somewhere in the wild country the other side of Hull.

They have the links already, I believe. (Ottawa Journal, 22 June 1895, p. 5).

The rumour that the Club would move was accurate – and Ricketts would in due course lay out a 13-hole golf course on the old Brigham farm along the Chelsea Road – but misogyny was not the reason for the move.

The story at the new golf club in Ottawa was the same as the story at venerable old clubs in Quebec, Montreal, and Toronto: an original golf course close to a growing city had to be abandoned for an area in the country more expansive and more affordable.

Afterword

I call this essay “Ottawa’s First Golf Course,” yet it turns out that Sandy Hill may have been the site of as many as four of Ottawa’s first golf courses – all of them laid out in its fields, meadows, and enclosures by 1893:

> the first, Hugh Renwick’s makeshift Rifle Range course laid out during his holiday visit to his sister in late March and early April of 1891;
>
> the second, and most important, the twelve holes laid out by Willie Davis at the end of April of 1891;
>
> the third, a “ladies’ course” established in April of 1892;
>
> and perhaps a fourth – a rogue course laid out by an anonymous band of law-breaking and trespassing golfers in May of 1893.

Curiously, however, there are no historical plaques in Sandy Hill to remind residents and visitors of the area’s golf history.

Figure 80 Gutta percha golf ball circa 1895.

One wonders whether Sandy Hill residents with a bent toward gardening ever dig up a black gutta-percha golf ball (devoid of the paint that had to be regularly applied to it, perhaps scored with lines but missing yet-to-be-invented dimples, and perhaps impressed with the name of golf professional Davis or Ricketts) and ask themselves what it is, and how on earth such a thing ever came to be buried in their earth.