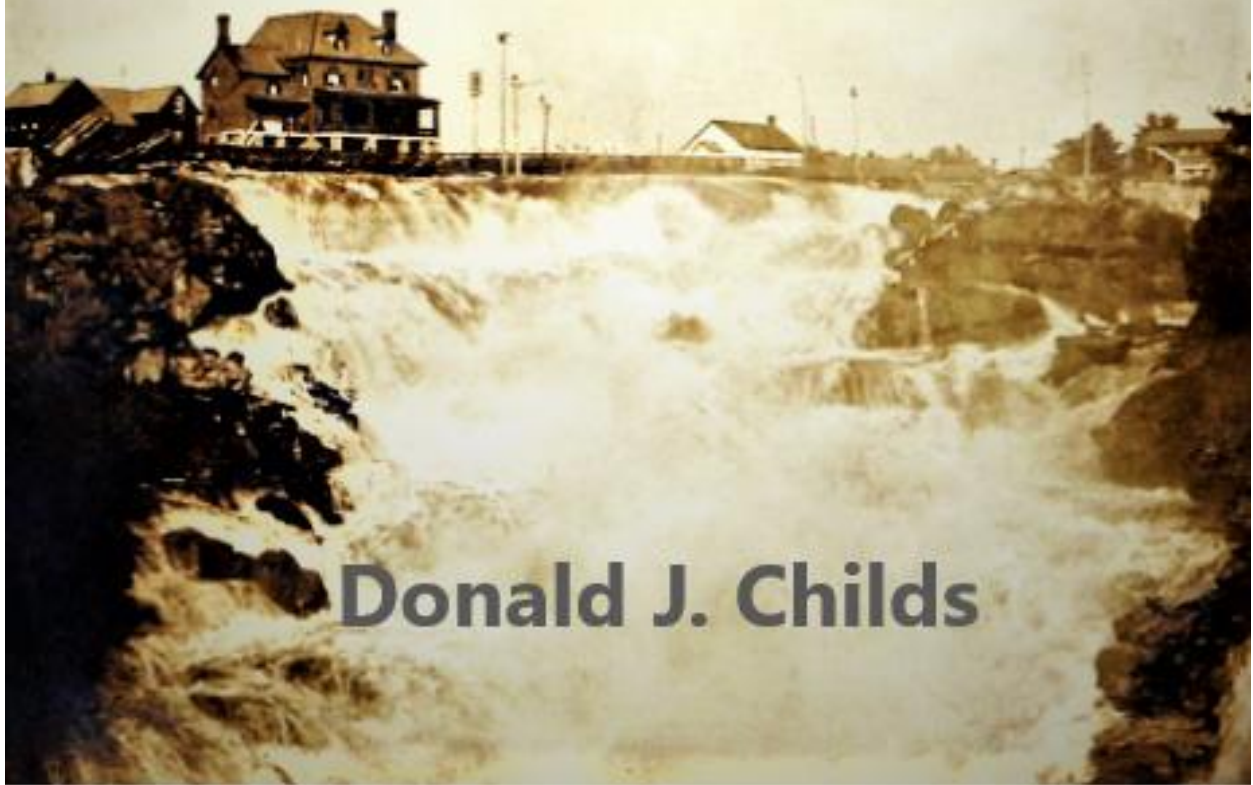


# **Buckingham Golf Club (1904-1905)**



**Donald J. Childs**

# Buckingham Golf Club (1904-1905)

By Donald J. Childs

In the fall of 1904, John ("Jack") Henry Oke, golf professional of the Ottawa Golf Club since the spring, and the winner in the summer of the first Canadian Open golf championship, laid out a golf course for the Buckingham Golf Club of Quebec (*Ottawa Citizen*, 10 May 1905, p. 8).



Figure 1 John Henry ("Jack") Oke, 1880-1950. *Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1904, p. 15.

When he came to Ottawa at the end of March in 1904, Oke was fresh off an apprenticeship in England under five-time Open Championship winner J.H. Taylor, and fresh off a 29<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the 1903 Open Championship himself, and his first job in his first appointment as head pro was to oversee construction work at the Ottawa Golf Club: "The draining, clearing and improvement of a full 18-hole course ... was ... put through"; "A full course of eighteen holes has been laid out and the ground is in perfect order, much of it having been done under the supervision of Mr. John Oke, the club professional" (*Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1904, p. 15).

In no time, it seemed, playing conditions were astonishing: "the links are in splendid shape, far better than was some months ago thought possible they could be this year, and better than were the old Chelsea links at their best" (*Ottawa Journal*, 19 July 1904, p. 2).

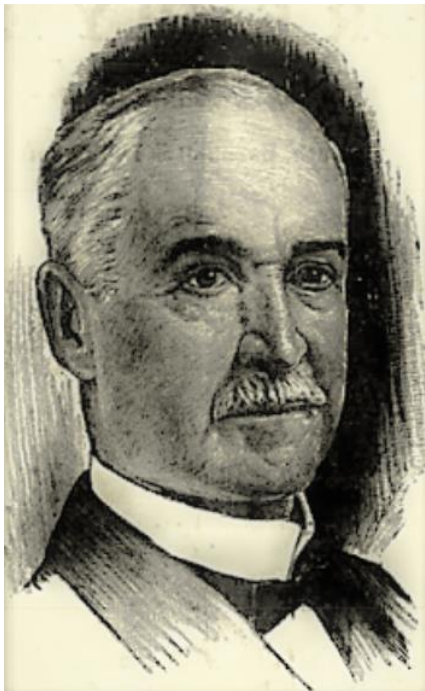
It was apparently all due to Oke's "ability as to arranging links" (*Ottawa Journal*, 10 September 1904, p. 15).

The golf course of the Buckingham Golf Club seems to have been a nine-hole links laid out near the pulp mill of James MacLaren, whose sons developed the golf course and the golf club. Since the 1860s, MacLaren had been a great lumber baron who owned vast tracts of forest along the Lièvre River. He harvested these trees and floated them down the river for milling at his factories on the Lièvre not far from the centre of Buckingham, but on the west side of the river. Here he also built his grand residence called Pinehurst.



*Figure 1 Pinehurst, home of Lames Maclaren, Buckingham, Quebec.*

After the death of James Maclaren in 1892, the James Maclaren Company was run by his sons Alexander (1860 - 1939) and Albert (1870 - 1940).



*Figure 2 Alexander Maclaren (1860-1939), Ottawa Citizen, 1 November 1939, p. 4.*

Although Alexander's passion was for horse-breeding and racing (he had a half-mile track on his farm), cattle-breeding (his milking Shorthorns won 14 blue ribbons at the International Livestock Exhibition in Chicago in 1932), and yachting (his yacht "The Maple Leaf" was the only Canadian entry to qualify for the 1906 International Trans-Pacific yacht race from San Francisco to Honolulu), it was through his generosity that the golf course was laid out on his estate.

The Maclaren family (whose name is sometimes spelled McLaren) built three large brick houses along George Street on the west side of the Lièvre River, across an expanse of open ground from their mill on the western shore of the Lièvre River. Although Pinehurst was the first great house built here, the most magnificent house by far was that of Alexander Maclaren.

Called “Neralcam Hall” – the name “MaClaren” spelled backwards – it was described as “nestling among the trees on the outskirts of Buckingham” (*Ottawa Journal*, 12 July 1939, p. 3). Neralcam can be seen in the photograph below, as it appears looking at the front of the house from the south.



Figure 3 Neralcam Hall as seen on an early- twentieth-century postcard.

The house was built on high land on the west side of the Lièvre River to afford a view of the river and the company’s mills. Nicknamed “The Castle,” it was famous for its fourteen fireplaces and a ballroom.



Figure 4 “Auchterarder,” the home of Albert McLaren. Postcard early twentieth century.

By comparison to Neralcam, Albert McLaren’s house “Auchterarder” must have seemed like a cottage. Yet it was also shown on a postcard.

Two of the three houses on the McLaren estate – Neralcam Hall and Pinehurst – appear in the photograph below; the golf course was said to have been laid out on the grounds of the McLaren estate – a short walk from the centre of Buckingham (*Ottawa Citizen*, 13 May

1905, p. 8).



Figure 6 James MacLaren Company mills, Neralcam House, Pinehurst, and a portion of possible golf grounds.

Neralcam's grounds (outlined below in white) stretched south on either side of George Street.

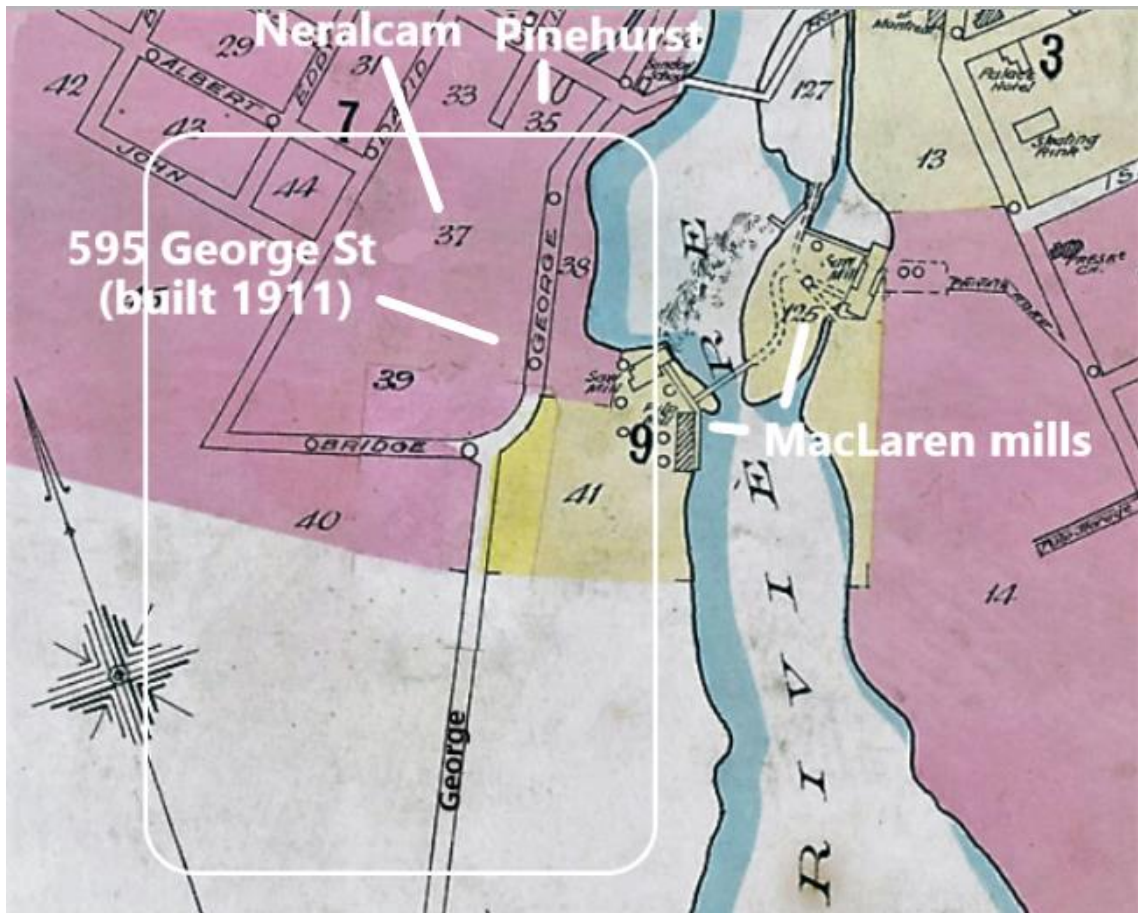


Figure 7 Buckingham map of 1916 showing part of the estate of Alexander MacLaren, stretching south of Neralcam Hall along George Street. The likely golf course grounds are marked by a rectangular white line.

Neralcam Hall was torn down in 1943, but the house near it that Alexander MaLaren built for his son in 1911 still exists at 595 George Street, and it is marked on the map above and the map below.



Figure 8 Likely golf course grounds outlined by white circle. Likely sites of Neralcam Hall and James MaLaren Company's mills are also marked. Google Maps.

Outlined by a white line marked on the map above is the likely location of the golf course of the Buckingham Golf Club. The *Ottawa Journal* observed that “The links of the club by the Lièvre were laid out last year by Mr. Oke, on the McLaren estate, and are in a very desirable location” (10 May 1905, p. 2).



Figure 9 Albert McLaren, 1870-1940, *Montreal Gazette*, 13 December 1940, p. 17.

Alexander McLaren’s younger brother Albert was named president of the James McLaren Company in 1900, and he was also named the first president of the Buckingham Golf Club (*Ottawa Citizen*, 13 May 1905, p. 8).

On Monday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1905, Oke returned to Buckingham (*Ottawa Journal*, 13 May 1905, p. 7). He had come to inspect the golf course and to offer advice about how to get it ready for play, and he also stayed in town to instruct the new club members how to play golf (*Ottawa Citizen*, 10 May 1905, p. 8).

The Buckingham Golf Club had 30 members in the spring of 1905, and it was confident that it would shortly double that number (*Ottawa Citizen*, 13 May 1905, p. 8).

It was announced in May that the new golf club was seeking to play matches against other golf clubs (*Ottawa Citizen*, 13 May 1905, p. 8). And so we find that in June of 1905, the Ottawa Golf Club was the first to accept the challenge, sending several men to Buckingham to take on the new club’s best players. We read that “the match resulted in a tie,” but the story was headlined with a reference to a win by a Buckingham member: “Geo. Bryson Beat his Man” (*Ottawa Citizen*, 7 June 1905, p. 8).

There is one other reference to the Buckingham Golf Club – in June, the *Ottawa Journal*’s Buckingham correspondent writes that “Golf is all the rage just now” – but then the Buckingham Golf Club disappears from the Ottawa newspapers.

Perhaps the rage for golf died out, waning as quickly as it had waxed.

The first Buckingham Golf Club may have lasted for just the one season, playing just the one match against another club. If so, at least it retreated into history undefeated, not even the vast golfing resources at the disposal of the Ottawa Golf Club able to conquer it!

But the first members of the Buckingham Golf Club did not retreat into history. They carried on as golfers.

Its first (and only) president, Albert MacLaren, went on to become a member of the Ottawa Golf Club.

More interestingly, its first Vice-President, F.J. Hambly, became in the 1930s one of the directors of the revived Buckingham Golf Club re-organized in the spring of 1933 (and incorporated in 1935) to play golf on a course laid out on the Gorman farm (to the east of the Lièvre River).

Frederick J. Hambly was born in Plymouth, England, in 1878 and studied chemistry at the Royal College of Science. He came to Buckingham in 1898 to work for the newly founded Electric Reduction company. He became the head chemist, earning patents for the company, surviving an explosion in his laboratory in 1908, and eventually becoming president of the company, retiring in 1957 after 60 years of continuous employment at the company.

From the beginning of his time in Buckingham, Hambly became active in local sports and recreations, and became a friend of the MacLarens. Alexander MacLaren included Hambly in his fishing parties at his lodge on 31 Mile Lake. Hambly and Albert MacLaren long served as directors of the Buckingham Curling Club and were appointed Honorary First Vice-President and President, respectively, of the Buckingham Town League Hockey association for 1931-32.

Hambly became an internationally famous chemist, lecturing on everything from the role of the study of chemistry in Canada's education systems to the annual deposits of lunar dust on the earth's surface. But he remained devoted to Buckingham for the 62 years he lived in the town, even serving as Chairman of the Board of Health in the 1930s.

He died in 1960.

Today, however, the latest incarnation of the Buckingham Golf Club endures.