

Chapter 3

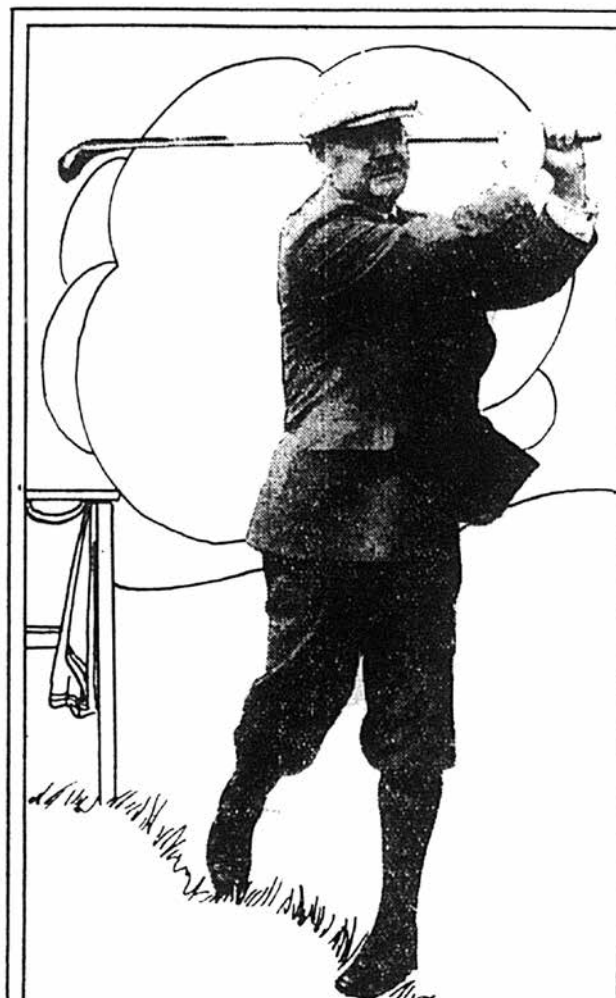
THE GREAT MAN ARRIVES

It is fair to assume that by the time the industrialist and the course architect drove past the turreted edifice marking the rear entrance to the Elks' new country home, they had already bonded. John W. Kaufman and Donald Ross possessed traits and experiences that each man would have admired in the other. Both exhibited a capacity for risk taking—Kaufman by virtue of his gutsy and hugely successful acquisition of quarrying operations, and Ross by forsaking his comfortable position as the Tom Morris-trained golf professional at Dornoch, Scotland, and emigrating to the United States in 1899 to seek his fortune. Both derived their living from the land—John W. extracted stone from it; Ross reshaped it. Neither rested on his laurels after initial business success. Ross capitalized on the favorable reviews he received for his work on the Pinehurst courses for James Tufts by expanding his design activities up and down the eastern seaboard. Kaufman parlayed his Marble Cliff Quarries success into an empire by purchasing more mines and other vertically integrated operations.

Mr. Ross enjoyed traveling and would have appreciated Kaufman's wanderlust. The Columbus native frequently toured what was still the "Wild West," eventually writing a remarkable book about his extended western camping trip with five fellow Elks in 1925. Both Ross and Kaufman were amiable enough, but after the obligatory pleasantries, it would have been their mutual mindset to attend to the business at hand.

Kaufman would have marveled at Ross's often-overlooked skill as a golfer. He was one of the game's most accomplished players from 1900 to 1910.

Will Lay Out Elks' Golf Course



Donald Ross's arrival at The Elks was trumpeted by the *Ohio State Journal*. From the *Ohio State Journal*, April 27, 1922.

During that span, Ross won the Massachusetts Open twice and the prestigious North and South Open (played at his home of Pinehurst) three times. He recorded five top-ten finishes in the U.S. Open (the same number as Greg Norman). One of the few players compiling a better record during this stretch was Donald's brother Alex Ross, a six-time champion at the Massachusetts Open as well as the North and South. Alex is best remembered for winning the 1907

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U.S. Open at the Philadelphia Cricket Club with a tally of 302—10 better than his big brother Donald, who finished tenth. In 1910, Donald made a sentimental visit to his ancestral home, during which he made a surprising run in the Open Championship at St. Andrews. He finished a strong T8 behind winner and fellow outstanding UK golf architect James Braid. Thereafter, Ross began phasing out of competitive golf to concentrate full time on his course design work.



Stenograph of Donald Ross, a top-flight player, in action. *Library of Congress.*

During the next decade, Ross cemented his reputation as golf's preeminent designer with architectural triumphs at Oakland Hills, Scioto, Plainfield and Inverness. At the time he arrived in Columbus in April 1922 to start work on the Elks' property, Ross was in the midst of the most productive period of his long career, as he designed twenty-four new courses in 1922. He was particularly busy that season in central Ohio. In addition to commencing the Elks project and finalizing Aladdin, Ross was also designing Delaware Country Club (aka Odovene Country Club) and Springfield. He would be retained to lay out the Granville Golf Course in 1923.

Upon arrival, Ross and Kaufman met with the Elks' golf committee, composed of Harold Kaufman, Arthur Shannon and T.V. Taylor. Often when Ross staked a course, the clubhouse had yet to be built. In those cases, he would sometimes provide input as to where it should be located. Here, the country house was already in place. Ross saw immediately that its placement would be perfect relative to where he envisioned the routing for the starting and finishing holes for each of the nines. He spent the day walking the property, setting stakes here and there. By twilight, Mr. Ross had the tentative routing "well in mind." Better yet, he expressed delight with the scenic canvas with which he was working. "It's a beautiful spot, isn't it?" exclaimed the architect appreciatively to *Ohio State Journal* reporter E.H. Peniston in an interview late in the day.

The committee had wondered how Ross would deal with the deep, wooded ravine that divided the property. There might have been sentiment to locate a

GOLF IN COLUMBUS AT WYANDOT COUNTRY CLUB



Donald Ross, America's greatest golf course architect. *The Tufts Archives.*

green site or two in its valley to take full advantage of the terrain's natural beauty. But Ross rejected that idea because there was "so much wash there during the rainy seasons as to make good greens impracticable." Moreover, the ravine was, in his judgment, too wide in most places to be utilized. Thus, the ravine would be crossed only twice. However, Ross still found a way to take strategic advantage of the ravine, by using its heavily wooded slopes to shape sharp doglegs on several holes. In keeping with his philosophy of

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using the ground as he found it to the extent possible, Ross did not see the need to cut down many trees. The architect also observed that maintenance of the course would be enhanced by the presence of the woods because its “carpet of leaf mold will be a real benefit to the greens of the course...since it will furnish the best top dressing and make for the best of greens.” Ross knew what he was doing, as the well-conditioned greens would be a hallmark of the course throughout its existence. He promised that the Elks would have a “fine course” and a “good test of golf” with “well systematized trapping and raised greens,” an ever-present staple in Ross’s designs.

Ross was on site at The Elks from Thursday, April 27, until Monday, May 1. Watching Ross closely was greenkeeper Lawrence Huber, who would have the task of assisting the golf committee with the course’s construction. Years later, Huber told his son Jim how much he admired Ross’s attention to detail. Every stake was set with an eye for how the land would drain in that particular location. Ross’s tiling to eliminate moisture collection areas in the fairways impressed Lawrence as well. Appropriate drainage was something Huber was attuned to from his experience farming in Jackson County before moving to Columbus.



The third hole, a 179-yard par three. *Betty Huber collection.*

GOLF IN COLUMBUS AT WYANDOT COUNTRY CLUB

Ross boarded the train back to Pinehurst on Monday. Working from his cottage bordering the third hole of his beloved Pinehurst No. 2, he prepared the blueprints with dispatch and then promptly forwarded them to Harold Kaufman and the other committee members. Construction and seeding was underway by late spring. The course began to take shape late in the year, as photographs taken by Lawrence Huber demonstrate.

On the third hole, Ross fashioned what appears to have elements of a “Redan” hole (the term “Redan” is derived from a military fortification set at a V-shaped salient angle toward an expected attack). The green was well protected by a yawning bunker to the right and a heavy slope to the left, running diagonally with the right front portion of the green closest to the tee. The original Redan hole—the fifteenth at North Berwick, Scotland—was imitated by Charles Blair MacDonald and other early American golf architects. However, it should be noted that Ross is on record as not favoring Redan holes. In any event, it is clearly evident from this photograph that Ross was making good on his pledge to build raised and well-protected greens.



This photo of the picturesque fourteenth hole was taken by Lawrence Huber in the early days of construction. *Betty Huber collection.*

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If The Elks Country Club had designated a “signature hole,” it would have been the picturesque 137-yard, par-three fourteenth. Ross was not a fan of having an over-abundance of water holes. But if there were an attractive pond located on a property, he would often bring it into play on a short par three. The view from the hole’s elevated tee was glorious. A niblick shot cleanly hit would safely carry the intervening hazard. However, even in these early stages of construction, it is apparent that the shot had better be on the money, or disaster would loom. The fourteenth green was the sole exception to Ross’s initial preference not to locate a green in the ravine. The view was just too good to pass up.

By the spring of 1923, everything was on schedule. Once the seeding had taken hold, the course would be ready for play. Elks members waited impatiently through May for its opening. Finally, John W. decreed that the course’s opening day ceremony would take place on Saturday, June 16. Given the spectacular country home dedication two years before, there was rampant speculation as to what sort of show John W. would unveil this time. Would there be a match scheduled of top professionals? Would there be a tee shot hit off the number-one tee to commemorate the opening—and if so, who would do the honors?