



# *Dear Mr. Ross, Dear Richard*

*Part two of an extraordinary correspondence*

BY BILL CASE • PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE TUFTS ARCHIVES

*Editor's note: We continue our two-part series on the correspondence between Donald Ross and father and son Leonard and Richard Tufts. The extraordinary collection of letters, housed at the Tufts Archives, offers a deeply personal insight into the planning and day-to-day running of Pinehurst, Inc., as well as into the characters of the trio of men who were responsible for so much of what we know Pinehurst to be today.*

*This month we follow the fortunes of Pinehurst, Inc., through the good times and into the financial difficulties of the Great Depression. We witness the advent of a new era as Leonard Tufts hands over the reins to his capable, popular son Richard and we read how Richard Tufts continues his father's legacy with Donald Ross a constant, unwavering colleague and support.*

## Grass Greens

Leonard Tufts continually exhorted Ross to find a way to install grass greens at Pinehurst. Ross dutifully conducted numerous experiments in an effort to find a strain that would thrive in the Sandhills. On January 9, 1922, Ross told Tufts he was treating “the lawn at Holly Inn as a putting green using various mixtures of fertilizer etc.” However, he cautioned Tufts not to get his hopes up:

“I do not believe it is possible to grow grass in this climate of such quality as is required on a putting green during the months of January, February, and March. There must be growth strong enough to resist the wear that it is subjected to day after day, and that is where the difficulty is going to be. However, we will try it out.”

The Tufts Archives contain reports of such experiments by Ross throughout the '20s- none of which resulted in a viable solution to the grass-greens conundrum.

But the exasperated Leonard Tufts refused to take “no” for an answer. While convalescing from illness in New Hampshire, he posted a hand-written letter to Ross in March 1929 that repackaged his oft-repeated inquiry:

“Lying here in bed I think of more fool schemes than you could shake a stick at. I am more or less puzzled over the question of why good putting greens are possible at Augusta [Country Club – not Augusta National] and not here. There isn't much difference in the temperatures but, of course, their soil is better and I presume their climate is less dry.”

Having designed that course, Ross was very familiar with the greens at Augusta Country Club. Moreover, he continued to serve the club on an advisory basis. He responded:

“My experience in Augusta on grass

greens the past two years confirms my opinion that the two reasons why they can get grass greens so much easier than we can get here are – a warmer climate and a great deal more moisture in the air. [Moreover] on the Forest Hills course at Augusta they object to players starting before ten o'clock if there was frost on the previous night. Of course such regulations would never work here.”

Ross' message also cautioned that the expense of maintaining Augusta's grass greens amounted to twice the cost of keeping the sand greens of Pinehurst in playable condition. But Ross assured Tufts, “I will be glad to try another experiment in line with your ideas and I have some of my own which I will also try out although I am not hopeful of either of them being a success.” But his continued experimentation ultimately bore fruit when in 1931, Ross and his greenkeeper Frank Maples found a strain of Bermuda grass hardy enough to withstand winter and heavy resort play traffic. The No. 2 course sported new grass putting surfaces when the club hosted the 1936 PGA Championship.

## Commentaries On Golf

Given his eminence in the game, Ross was often asked for his views on various issues relating to golf. He opined on such matters as the stymie in 1922 (retain it but modify it so that two feet be allowed between hole and ball and ball and ball); the allowance of steel shafts in 1923 (yes); and mandating a standard ball (yes). Ross recommended a “floater” ball which he felt would “control the distance absolutely on the long hitter, [but] would not take a yard

from the distance of the average players who really are the supporters of golf.” Ninety-two years later the argument over limiting the distance of the golf ball still rages.

Ross also made periodic pilgrimages back to Scotland and inspected the country's golf courses during his holidays. In September 1928, he proclaimed to Richard Tufts the superiority of golf in the United States:

“I formed the opinion from observation and experience that we have very little to learn from them [the U.K.] in any branch of the golf business . . . In golf architecture the work which is being done in the United States is, in my judgment, quite the equal and superior to their best although we have to contend with difficulties they never dream of.”

From the vantage point of 2015, it is difficult to imagine that in the late '20s there was a death struggle in the marketplace between the old-line wooden-shaft club makers and the upstart steel club manufacturers. A wooden club company promoter lobbied Richard Tufts for the purpose of urging the superiority of hickory shafts in 1928. Ever the traditionalist, Tufts reassured the worried businessman that “I have never felt that they [steel shafts] compared with wooden shafts and have never used steel in any of my clubs.”

## Caddies

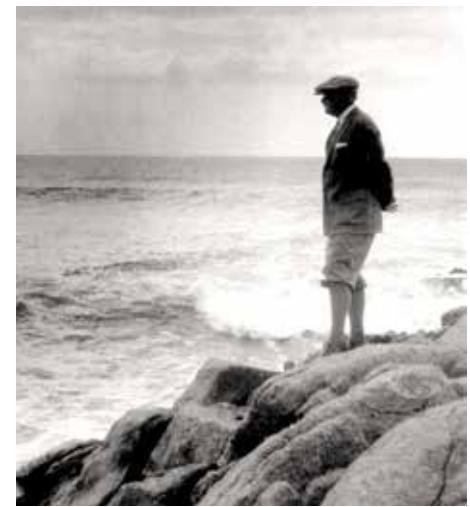
Having an adequate supply of caddies for golfers was a front-and-center issue for Ross. To combat 1924's shortage of loopers, Ross advised Leonard Tufts that, “I think an increase in rates [of 25 cents] is justified and it would undoubtedly help us in getting more of them, which, after all, is our aim.” Ross also considered it vital to make good food available for the young men. He reflected to Richard Tufts on September 6, 1928, that, “whether we make a profit or not the fact that the boys get good food at reasonable prices is a very important factor in bringing the boys here, and it is absolutely necessary that we should have them.”

In an era when the Sabbath was particularly sacrosanct, the employment of caddies on Sundays was a touchy subject. On November 27, 1922, Leonard Tufts resignedly advised Ross:

“I learn that caddies are being employed on Sundays and I suppose we must put a stop to this in some way.”

In 1926, the Board of Governors skirted the issue by allowing caddies out on Sunday afternoon, but Tufts reminded Ross that “there should be no caddies Sunday mornings.”

Ross worked with the principal of the Negro School in Taylortown to employ school-age boys “in the afternoons, provided he [the principal] sent them to us marked with a tag in such a manner as would prove to us they had put in their full time at school.” Facing a caddie shortage in 1927, Ross considered asking the principal to find schoolgirls to caddie. Ross suggested that the girls could caddie for women and the club could place “a colored matron” in their charge. Apparently the employment of female caddies did not come to pass during Ross's time.





## An Added Nine Holes

The lack of golf knowledge and etiquette exhibited by Pinehurst, Inc.'s, employees when allowed to play the courses exasperated Ross:

"I have to employ a special policeman to regulate them as well as employ special laborers to repair the damage they do to greens, bunkers, etc. Four or more play with one set of clubs, and they do not know a thing about courtesy or the rules of golf."

Consequently, it was decided to lay out a nine-hole course for employee use alone. But Leonard Tufts sensed a problem identifying it as such. Adjacent property owners apparently did not appreciate being located next to an "employee course." So when Tufts advised Ross on March 20, 1928, that employees could play the new nine for \$5 annually, he craftily added this instruction:

"But we won't call it an employees' course — it will be just an added nine holes on which the people of Pinehurst can play as much or as little as they like."

## As Welcome As The Flowers In Spring

While Leonard Tufts and Donald Ross experienced occasional conflicts, they remained loyal and close friends throughout their long relationship. As such, their letters turned downright chatty now and then. Tufts missed Ross' companionship when they were apart. Tufts' July 21, 1925, letter from his home in New Hampshire to Ross, summering at his cottage at Little Compton, Rhode Island, pleads:

"Can't you and Lillian and Mrs. Ross and her son, hop on the train on receipt of this letter and come up and visit with me? I am all alone in this big house and don't expect anybody here until the first of spring . . . so I can tell you that you will be as welcome as the flowers in spring . . . Do wire me on receipt of this that you are coming."

Tufts suffered various illnesses during the '20s. When his health finally improved, Ross expressed his delight. "It seems like old times," he remarked in correspondence dated December 12, 1928. "You have just got to be careful a little longer and not get too proud of yourself."

Ross also regaled Tufts with news from his travels. While laying out a private course for Henry Ford, Ross availed himself of the opportunity of conferring with the automobile magnate. On May 11, 1923, he gushed to Tufts that Ford:

". . . is a different type of man from almost any other I have met. He opened up pretty freely to me, and I have a cordial invitation to stay at his house, and I will accept some time. I would like to know him better. He surely likes peculiar angles, and I already know he has a mind of his own. He would be hopeless as a President — and it's entirely outside his line of endeavor. He is too

frank to be a politician. He is a plain democratic man and wealth has not turned his head."

Ross displayed consideration toward Tufts and his wife. While experimenting with *Poa bulbosa* seed in 1926, Ross graciously jotted a note to his boss saying, "I will send you a few bulbs.

It makes a very pretty winter plant for the house if sown in pots. Mrs. Tufts might like to try it." In March 1928, Tufts decided to build a set of Windsor chairs. Needing wood for spindles, it occurred to him "that you [Ross] must

have a whole lot of broken golf club shafts that come into the shop that you throw away and if you throw a couple of dozen in a heap sometime I will come over and get them."

As time passed, the correspondence between Tufts and Ross became increasingly sentimental. Tufts praised Ross in this heartfelt message of June 22, 1932:

"You don't know how much I appreciate your letter of the 17th. It is certainly great to have associated with men like you who are always considerate and willing to get in and help."

Ross' letter to which Tufts responded marked the fleeting passage of time. Ross' daughter Lillian's graduation from college moved her father to remark:

"How these youngsters grow! Time passes rapidly; it seems like yesterday since I first saw Richard as a bonnie wee boy, and here he is now with a fine boy of his own about ready for school!"

## Dear Richard, Dear Mr. Ross

Indeed by then, Richard Tufts was steadily moving to the forefront of the Pinehurst, Inc., organization. Everyone liked and respected the friendly though taciturn Harvard grad and Navy veteran. In 1935, he would ascend to the position of president of Pinehurst, Inc., succeeding his father.

While a good and careful businessman, the thing Richard Tufts really excelled at was the fostering of relationships in the world of sport. A very good golfer, he became increasingly active in the United States Golf Association (USGA), becoming its national president in 1956. Tufts continued to cement his sterling reputation in the game by authoring *The Scottish Invasion* and *The Principles Behind the Rules of Golf*. In recognition of his contributions to amateur golf, Tufts received the signal honor of being named the non-playing captain of the 1963 Walker Cup team.

As might be expected given their age differences, Richard Tufts' correspondence accords deference and respect to the older man who had accomplished so much in Tufts' chosen sport. Tufts' letters commence with "Dear Mr. Ross" while Ross responds with "Dear Richard." From Richard Tufts' birth, Ross took an avuncular interest in his young friend's life, and the correspondence reflects this. When Tufts's wife sent a picture of the couple's young son Peter, Ross warmly wrote Tufts:

"I received the photograph of little Peter which Mrs. Tufts kindly sent me. It is great and I appreciate having it very much indeed. He is a handsome wee lad and my best wish is that he may have a long life of health and happiness."

Richard Tufts rarely took issue with Ross on business matters. The latter's recommendations on such matters as course maintenance, hiring of tennis pros, caddie policies, and personnel management were largely acceded to by Tufts. In October 1928, he wrote, "Father and I never think of anything in connection with golf here without thinking of you first as we know that you are responsible for our prominent position in the world of golf."



## *The Rest Of The World Has Followed Us*

The economic turmoil of the '30s resulted in Leonard Tufts' retreat from executive duties at Pinehurst, Inc., and Richard Tufts' corresponding ascendance to leadership. Leonard Tufts chafed some at being left out of the loop. From his home in New Hampshire, he wistfully registered this mild fatherly complaint to his son on August 10, 1934:

"My only criticism of you for the past year or two has been your failure to come to me with your problems. Perhaps it is due to your fear of interference . . . in such cases my forty years of experience would have helped you . . . The reason is probably due to not wishing to worry me."

Looking to impart advice regarding activities that Pinehurst, Inc., should be marketing to fight its way out of the dregs of financial distress, Leonard Tufts offered this follow-up advice to Richard on August 13:

"Read the newspapers and magazines and ask yourself on what is the accent being placed in the field of sports today? Is it not the horse?"

But Leonard Tufts was proud of what he and his own father, James, had achieved at Pinehurst. He reminded Richard in 1934:

"Remember your grandfather and I introduced to resorts sports . . . tournaments and contests of all kinds . . . The rest of the world has followed us."

Leonard Tufts lived to see the fortunes of Pinehurst, Inc., rebound under his son's astute leadership.

## *The Measure Of The Men*

While the bulk of Ross' correspondence contained in the Tufts Archives is with Richard and Leonard Tufts, there is a notable exception. On May 24, 1927, Ross congratulated young Ellis Maples (the son of Frank Maples, and much later the designer of Pinehurst No. 5) upon his graduation from high school. His note to the young man contained some excellent life advice. No one would gainsay the fact that Ross practiced what he preached:

"My experience is that if a man follows the golden rule, gives consideration to others, do[es] some good, however small every day of his life, acts as a gentleman under all circumstances, he cannot fail to make a success of his life, however humble our work may be."

It is no accident that Pinehurst became the country's golf mecca. Attention to detail, adherence to a well-defined business plan targeting the well-heeled, dedication to providing a quality experience, rigorous control of costs by requiring separate accountability in each division of Pinehurst, Inc.'s, operations, and loyal respect and fondness for each other stream through the letters of Donald Ross, Leonard Tufts, and Richard Tufts. It is their combined industry that made Pinehurst. To paraphrase words Donald Ross employed in describing satisfaction of his design of majestic Aronomick in Philadelphia, it is fair to say that these three wise men "built better than they knew." PS

*Having retired from the practice of law, Pinehurst resident Bill Case is enjoying his "second act" as a history writer.*

