

*Dear Mr. Tufts,  
Dear Donald*

*Donald Ross's remarkable correspondence with Leonard and Richard Tufts*

BY BILL CASE • PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE TUFTS ARCHIVES



n the 12th of May, 1924, an agitated Donald Ross fired off an astonishing letter to the man to whom he reported in discharging his myriad managerial duties at Pinehurst Country Club: Leonard Tufts, the undisputed boss of Pinehurst, Inc. Tufts, a hands-on employer in every respect,

had written Ross on May 10th advising him that two of Ross's employees and fellow Scots, Messrs. Wilson and Innes, had, according to reports made to Tufts, been "unpleasant to guests." Tufts implored Ross to discharge them.

Having already spent nearly twenty years in harness discharging the affairs of Pinehurst, Inc., Ross and Tufts were hidebound by abiding friendship and mutual respect. While Ross was normally deferential and painstaking in responding to Tufts' unending array of concerns and brainstormings, he considered the order to jettison the two men to be entirely unwarranted. Bristling with indignation, Ross rose to the defense of Wilson and Innes and pointedly refused to fire them. He vouched that they possessed "the highest character," and that he had already made verbal agreements with both to return. Ross firmly stated that "unless I have knowledge of some good reason for their not being engaged, in fairness to them and myself, I cannot break my word."

Perhaps it would have been prudent for Donald Ross to end the letter right there. But his dander was up. Thus, the following paragraph of the letter contained a bombshell that surely caused Leonard Tufts' jaw to drop. Ross wrote:

"To relieve the Pinehurst guests of the embarrassment of having to be greeted by gentlemen of the type of Mr. Wilson and Mr. Innes, the simplest way would be for you to engage another man to take my place as manager. My business in golf architecture keeps growing and ought to have all my attention, so I feel it is now time for me to be relieved of this work. A new directing mind may be helpful to the Club and anything that will add to its success will give me the greatest possible pleasure."

Ross had been a Pinehurst mainstay since 1900 when James Tufts — soda fountain mogul, founder of the resort, and Leonard's father — brought Ross to the Sandhills. James Tufts died shortly after Ross's arrival. In 1905, Leonard Tufts took control of his father's holdings in Pinehurst. Since James Tufts had retained ownership of virtually all of the real estate, enterprises, and services in the new resort town, Leonard inherited what amounted to his own personal fiefdom.

Was Ross's offer to resign a reckless move on his part? Probably not. As the unquestioned superstar in the Pinehurst galaxy, Ross realized his association with the resort brought it immense prestige and recognition. He presumably calculated that Tufts would not readily accept his resignation and would beseech the architect to stay. Moreover, the closing valediction of Ross's letter indicates that he was neither shutting any doors nor holding any personal acrimony toward Tufts: "Assuring you of my deepest regards for yourself and everything concerning Pinehurst."

Thankfully for all concerned, this fracas did not result in Ross's departure. Presumably, Tufts and Ross met and smoothed over any ruffled feathers. Ross stayed at Pinehurst in his managerial role almost until his death in 1948, surviving Tufts by three years. Messrs. Wilson and Innes, thanks to Ross's unwavering support, weathered this imbroglio and continued in the employment of Pinehurst, Inc. for years thereafter.

This letter is just one in a storehouse of correspondence authored or received by the mighty Pinehurst, Inc. triumvirate of Donald Ross, Leonard Tufts and son Richard Tufts that is housed at Pinehurst's Tufts Archives. Most were penned in the resort's opulent heyday decade following the incorporation of the Tufts' labyrinth of holdings under the name Pinehurst, Inc. in 1920.

Ross's correspondence demonstrates a hands-on and effective approach to problem-solving. He is invariably timely, responsive and complete in responding to Tufts' various concerns. While often expressing warmth and an avuncular concern for people in the greater Pinehurst family, Ross (in his private correspondence, at least) did not hesitate to criticize those he viewed as falling short in character or ability.

The candor, bordering on intemperance, with which Donald Ross at times expressed himself in his private correspondence may explain why he ordered his secretary to destroy his papers upon his death. But fortunately for those of us interested in more closely examining what made Ross tick, he did not retrieve his original posted correspondence sent to and received by Leonard and Richard Tufts and other associates.

In his role as Pinehurst Country Club's general manager, Ross exchanged correspondence with Leonard, and later Richard, on a wide range of issues. Mindful that he was the employee in the relationship, Ross politely began his letters to Leonard Tufts with the salutation "Dear Mr. Tufts." Tufts invariably opened with "Dear Donald." Tufts comes across in the correspondence as a confident vision-

*Pinehurst Country Club staff 1940s*

*Back row: Jack Williams, caddie master; Bert Nichols, professional; Frank Cosgrove, bar; Purvis Feree, professional; Don Currie, starter; Alex Innis, office; Abe Mitchell; John S. Gibbon, Jr.; Harold Callaway, professional*

*Front row: Mrs. Frank Cosgrove; Willie Wilson, office; Eric Nelson, club manager and secretary to Mr. Ross; Donald J. Ross; Frank Maples, green superintendent; Dorothy Pierce, manager grill; Madeline Foley (Johnson), secretary.*



ary developer, chock-full of big ideas and at times necessarily absorbed with controlling the purse strings.

While Ross's correspondence with Leonard and Richard Tufts tells us much about the personalities of all three men, it also provides valuable insight into management decisions made not only at Pinehurst but also Mid Pines, Pine Needles and Knollwood in this critical period of golf history. Coursing through the letters is a mutual recognition that Ross and the Tuftses were well-positioned to profit from the newfound desire of Americans for increased outdoor leisure time. In relating to Tufts his thoughts regarding the proposed contents of a Knollwood marketing booklet, Ross remarked in June, 1921:

"The booklet should play strong on 'Outdoor Recreation' which is becoming more and more a part of American life. It is really amazing the rapid growth of country clubs each year. I have already laid out nine new eighteen-hole courses and I have many more applications which I was not able to consider for lack of time, all of which goes to prove that catering to the American love of outdoor life is becoming a leading and important business."

### *Only the Best People*

Both Ross and Tufts deemed it indispensable to lure the cream of society to Pinehurst and to keep them coming back. On August 27, 1925, Ross sensed that the Florida land boom had enhanced Pinehurst's ability to attract upper crust guests. He advised Tufts:

"At the present time all hotels [in Florida] are crowded with land speculators. Thousands of the best people will not be able to procure accommodations and it will undoubtedly react very seriously on the real estate situation . . . Many who ordinarily go to Florida will stop off and spend the winter where accommodations are more favorable from every standpoint . . . Pinehurst's pure air, pure food, pure water, and wholesome living conditions should be a stronger drawing card this year than ever before."

It was difficult for Tufts to resist the income that convention business brought to the hotel during the leaner winter months. But honored guests of long standing complained. Consequently, the decision was made to end convention solicitation. In his May 21, 1927 message to Tufts, Ross applauded the move:

"With reference to the curtailment of conventions held during the winter season at Pinehurst, I think you have made a very wise move. Last winter I heard so many complaints from our very best people and I am quite sure that many of those conventions were lowering the tone of the hotel. I will take pains to inform our old friends of the change in policy in regard to conventions."

Always mindful of appeasing the "best people," both of the Pinehurst kingpins were on the lookout to stiffarm the ill-mannered who had the temerity to apply for membership in the clubs they controlled. On February 28, 1922, Tufts confided to Ross that would-be members were concerned that one such undesirable applicant would be accepted for membership at Mid Pines, "and a number are not joining for fear he will." Ross assured Leonard that things were under control:

"With reference to [the applicant] becoming a member at Mid Pines Country



*Donald Ross and caddie*

Club, [he] has many fine points, but is a rather loud, vulgar chap and certainly should never be considered as a member at Mid Pines. I will do all I can to let prospective members know that we do not want men of that kind."

A guest's misbehavior called for finely tuned judgment and discretion — qualities that Ross and the two Tuftses possessed in abundance. In March of 1922, Ross and Leonard Tufts considered how they should deal with the erstwhile priest who was caught red-handed cheating in one of the club's golf events. Leonard decided that the club would not formally discipline the priest, but in the future: "notify the person who is to be tried, so to speak, and give him an opportunity

to defend himself, and we should surely have letters, or, better, affidavits from the people who have accused a person of irregularities."

### *"Reasonable Inducements"*

The Tufts Archives house a striking volume of correspondence in which the Pinehurst triumvirate debate whether to grant complimentary or discounted room, board and golf. Golf writers stood a fair chance of such a grant of largesse. When young Richard Tufts, ever mindful of building relationships across the world of golf, requested in January, 1926 that a writer from "Golfer's Magazine" and his party of visiting golfers not be charged, Ross responded by affirming his belief that "Pinehurst, Inc. will be more than repaid from the advertising that will come from their visit."

Another writer seeking complimentary room and golf was not so lucky. Leonard Tufts derisively penned Ross in February, 1926:

"Personally, I can't see how anyone that he was to induce to come to Pinehurst would be an especially desirable guest. In other words, if he recommended a place especially highly, I think most of our people would shy away from it."

Railroad personnel received special treatment. Ross alerted Richard Tufts on January 14, 1927, that twenty Pullman Company agents wanted the lowest possible hotel and golf rates for a four-day stay. "These men are in a position to do us some good and if we antagonize them they might do us some harm . . . I do not think it is advisable to make a practice of cutting rates unless there is good ground for it . . . In this case I think it would be a wise move."

### *The North and South Tournament*

The North and South Amateur tournaments presented similar dilemmas. How do you attract the best golfers without promising them special treatment? Leonard Tufts weighed in on the subject by stating that special rates should be afforded to "say the first half dozen men and the first half dozen women. Should we carry it further than that?" Ross concurred that since Pinehurst was "the outstanding golf resort, I think we are obliged to do everything we can to get the best players here and any reasonable inducement which we could offer them would be, I think, good business . . . The advertis-

ing we get out of them is very valuable.”

But Ross was less felicitous toward his brethren in the professional ranks. When, in March 1925, Richard Tufts suggested paying appearance fees for a few of the top pros to assure a standout field for the North and South Open, Ross, who had played for peanuts during his heyday, groused in response:

“All those good players are getting more temperamental than prima donnas, and if I don’t miss my guess it won’t be long before the clubs will be fed up with them.”

The archives also reveal ongoing dialogue regarding the optimum time to schedule Pinehurst’s North and South men’s and women’s amateur events as well as the North and South Open, which welcomed professional golfers. The scheduling involved a rather delicate balancing act as Leonard Tufts explained in his correspondence to Ross mailed February 3, 1926:

“The North and South is placed near as possible to the end of the season – to lengthen the season and to get publicity for the few remaining weeks that we are open.”

In March, 1927, Tufts appealed to Ross to move the holding of the events to even later dates. After ruminating on the subject, Ross reminded Tufts that moving the competitions “might interfere with the class of the entry . . . I can see the probability of a poor entry in each one.” Ross suggested the Board of Governors decide “what would work out best from the standpoint of a good entry combined with the interests of the hotels.”

From Tufts’ perspective, the purpose of all tournaments was threefold as he related to Ross in November, 1928: “first to induce people to come down here to play in them; second to entertain guests who are here; and third to get publicity in the northern papers.”

## *From Green Fees to Green Wood*

Most of us envision Donald Ross sitting in his home office on Midland Road, thinking great thoughts while masterfully designing the plethora of outstanding courses that define his legacy. Alas, like most of us mortals, Ross reported to a boss who could occasionally be a nag. For example, Leonard Tufts fired off this missive to Ross on January 10, 1923:

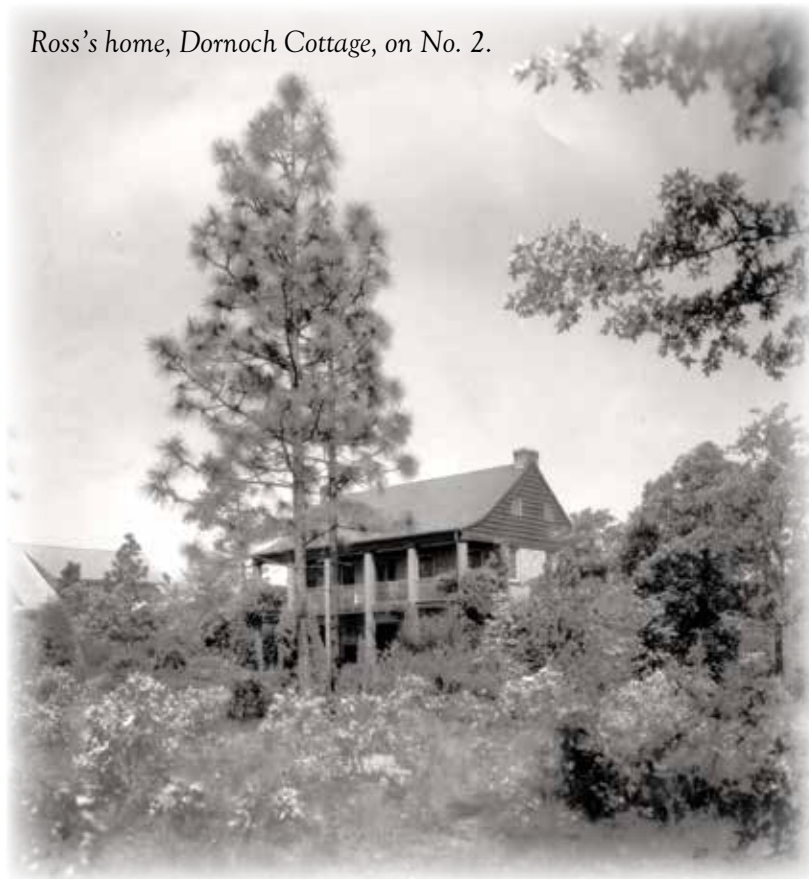
“I wish also you could fix up that parking space in front of the clubhouse. There is a rather disreputable stake, that is not even set up plumb, with “No Parking Here” and some other disreputable stake with a piece of cord hanging on it and it doesn’t look good.”



*No. 2. along Azalea Road*

Tufts became convinced that innumerable golfers were sneaking on the course. He did not like it and complained to Ross. On February 6, 1929, Ross sought to allay his boss’s suspicions, indicating that “it is almost impossible for anyone to escape without paying the green fees.”

*Ross’s home, Dornoch Cottage, on No. 2.*



In several letters, Ross defended his expenditures in maintaining the golf courses. A prime example is his January 9, 1929 memorandum to Tufts:

“There has been an increase in the maintenance cost due to many causes. We were obliged to do a great deal of ditching on the courses this summer which is all charged to maintenance. Each year we open the courses a little earlier, adding to the cost of maintenance. The grass tees cost a little more to maintain . . . Several of the greens washed out during the heavy summer rains and we were obliged to rebuild them. It also required two extra men to do the hand mowing around the greens.”

Given the hallowed place that Pinehurst No. 2 enjoys in American golf, it is indeed ironic that Leonard Tufts criticized its routing as observed by his stern message to Ross of December 1, 1925:

“The only thing I want to impress on you and the other stockholders is that the present layout of No. 2 course from a real estate standpoint is in my opinion a mistake. You have convinced me from your work at Sedgefield and Roaring Gap that since you laid out that No. 2 course you have learned a lot and that a new layout is essential before any more land is sold over there.”

[Fortunately for golf, only two holes of the original No. 2 course were ultimately changed – current holes four and five were not part of the original layout.]

Sometimes Tufts employed tongue-in-cheek humor to urge Ross to take action. Several letters indicate that Tufts was of the view that trees on the golf courses should be thinned out. He likewise thought there were an excessive number of black jack trees on Ross’s property adjoining the course:

“[this] suggestion is partially for the benefit of Pinehurst, Inc. and partially for the benefit of D.J. Ross and family . . . There is in the vicinity of the Donald J. Ross homestead a good many cords of black jacks which are much too close together . . . One of the bounties of the wood is that it burns fairly well even when it is green but much better after it has been out a few months.” PS

Next month, more letters from the Pinehurst Triumvirate.

*Bill Case has recently retired here from Columbus, Ohio, where he was an attorney. We look forward to the next installment of golf history epistolary.*