
THE WAY WE WERE : THE COLT COURSE : PART I

THE COURSE IN THE WEST : COLT AND ALISON , 1911 - 1940

(i) Leaving Norway and the Course in the East

In 1909 , the Toronto Golf Club was thirty three years on , located in Norway and minding its own pastoral , golfing business . Then , the City of Toronto annexed Norway .

Alarmed at the impacts of annexation , President Sweny appointed Messrs . Campbell and Masten , to imagine the club's future . Staying put dismissed , on May 12 , 1910 , the Board directed the committee to find new grounds .

On January 19 , 1911 , the membership approved the purchase of 267 acres in Etobicoke and the hiring of Harry Colt as course designer . In about 7 months , Campbell/Masten assembled the land , found Harry Colt and secured member approval . Astounding ? You bet !

(ii) Harry in Etobicoke , 1911 & 1913

Colt arrived in Etobicoke on March 26 , 1911 . He prepared detailed plans and staked out the Course in a matter of days - sailing home from New York on April 4 .

The course was built over the summer of 1911 and opened for play in September of 1912 . Colt oversaw none of it .

Colt faced some routing limitations . First , the northern property limit was the tree line in the right rough of the 3rd hole - suitably named " Boundary " . Second , the table land was riven by ravines , each with a stream or bog at the bottom .

Consider #4 . In 1911 , this was no bucolic hollow with a charming stream running through it . It was a mess . Colt sited the green - a forced carry away - on the narrow finger of table land that separates the mess in front from the depression behind .

Examination of Colt's drawing in the Trophy Room reveals the ways the 1911 routing differs from today :

- #5 tee was right of #4 green ;
- #6 green was near the washrooms ;
- #13 was a par 4 , green atop the hill ;
- #14 played at right angles to #13 , to the current green location .

Colt returned in 1913 , submitting a report dated May 12 , 1913 . Colt found the " - - landscape delightful - - " , but proposed bunker changes , new tees and other refinements . The routing was unchanged . The Board deferred action .

Colt designed Hamilton In 1914 . There is no record he visited TGC .

(iii) C . H . Alison in Etobicoke , 1920 & 1927

(a) 1920 Report

After a walkabout , Alison wrote a report dated October 10 (writing for Colt , Mackenzie and Alison) . He endorsed Colt's 1913 report and provided sketches for the following routing changes - all undertaken post visit :

- #6 , move the green to its current location ;
- #7 , relocate the tees ;
- #13 , extend the hole west to create a par 5 ;
- #14 , reorient the hole to parallel #13 .

Alison also recommended improvements for the 10th and 17th green complexes . Alison commented favourably on the Cumming designed short course , then under construction .

Alison returned to TGC on November 14 , 1920 . There is no record of his activities during that visit .

(b) 1927 Report

During the 1920s , various Green Committees developed ideas for course changes . A few were Board approved .

At a Board meeting May 31 , 1927 , the Board considered another visit by Alison - and shelved it . Nonetheless , Alison did visit and submitted a report dated July 5 , 1927 (writing for Colt & Alison) . Alison fielded some 21 suggestions from the committee and made 19 of his own .

Alison was blunt , saying the course was “ - - very deficient - - “ , “ - - - a playground for elderly businessmen - - - “ and , “ - - - definitely second class - - - “ . Four items addressed by Alison stand out .

Remove the reverse slope on #4 green , said the committee . Really ? “ Many clubs have spent a great deal of money in trying to make a green like this “ - said Alison .

The committee proposed moving the 10th green back into the hollow , now the pond . Said Alison , “ I do not see anything attractive in this proposal . “ This ZOMBIE proposal was revived 7 times before it finally died in 1965 .

On #13 , Alison opined , “ - - - it is the worst hole on the course , with the exception of the 18th . “ Apparently , the green had not been moved far enough west and needed to be more difficult to approach , except at short range . Thanks , C . H . !

For #18 , “ - - - worst on the course - - - “ , Alison advocated a tee in the ravine , left of the current tee . (Colt’s 1911 drawing shows a ravine tee) . Alison also proposed a new green , further back and less severely sloped in front .

Alison concluded his report , saying :

“ It is very natural that the older members should be apprehensive and conservative but they presumably do not wish that their club should die of senile decay , even if that death is a lingering one , and they may be encouraged by the thought that other clubs of equal standing have undergone a far more drastic cure , and have come through rejuvenated . “

There is no Board minute suggesting Alison’s report was discussed - though some minor course changes - perhaps Alison inspired - ensued (example , new left fairway bunker on #6) . A ravine tee at #18 ? Nope . An 18th green rebuild would wait .

In 1928 , the AGM approved a rebuild of the 5th and 9th greens , based on a Stanley Thompson design . When that work was completed is unclear .

The depression followed , restricting expenditures to necessities . One late 30s necessity was the construction of a Lake Ontario intake with a pipeline up Etobicoke Creek to the club's in creek reservoir . This was a prescient decision , creating a priceless asset !

Then came WW II .