

The USGA's Architecture Archives: the world's first (and only) digital repository on golf-course architecture

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Golf clubs around the world have acquired a keen sense of pride and appreciation for their golf course and its architectural heritage. Never before have golfers demonstrated such profound admiration for the master craftsmen of the game and their enduring works of art. The indications are resounding. For one, golf-course restorations have proven to be one of the leading developments in golf-course architecture. During the past fifteen years, caretakers of countless classics have feverishly attempted to reclaim the strategic genius and hand-hewn patina of their original designs.

Digging up the past

To jumpstart the restoration process, club historians have been busily tracking down artefacts—especially architectural drawings, design plans and aerial photographs—and gathering evidence from other sources that

reveal how the original architect intended the course to look and play in the beginning. Sadly, too many of these Golden Age artisans never made suitable arrangements to ensure the legacy of their craft. As such, the exercise of archival research can truly feel like a national treasure hunt: leading researchers from clubhouse attics and local libraries to museum repositories across the country.

Many clubs have taken their research efforts to another level by publishing densely illustrative club history books in celebration of centennial anniversaries and other meaningful milestones. Sporting a bounty of vintage photographs, Oakmont and Charlotte Country Club, for example, have just printed hardcover editions honouring their first 100 years. The Olympic Club, meanwhile, has recently released a coffee-table-style epic chronicling its first 150 years.

Craig Ammerman, a former member of the USGA Executive Committee, maintains: 'The emergence of design evolution reports is also indicative of today's grassroots interest in the history of golf architecture'. These treatises meticulously trace the historical pedigree of a course's design features and, importantly, distinguish those that are authentic from those that had been added, altered or removed through the years. Ammerman further adds, 'Baltusrol and Yeamans Hall are among a growing number of golf clubs engaging in this type of intensive documentation and study'.

Today's appetite for historical materials on golf architecture even manifests itself on clubhouse walls, where golf clubs continue to hang black-and-white snapshots, dated newspaper accounts and other rare findings, to showcase the many virtues of their distinguished golf-course legacy.

OPPOSITE: A 1930 course-plan of Merion's East Course. (Courtesy of the USGA Museum; Source: Merion Golf Club archives.)

Magazines articles are yet another valuable resource that can yield illumination about the early masterpieces of the game. Based in Far Hills, New Jersey, the USGA Museum catalogues vast collections of golden oldies: *Golf Illustrated*; *Golfdom*; *American Golfer*; *National Greenkeeper*, to name a few. Recently, however, the USGA Museum has experienced a tremendous surge in interest for historic golf architecture materials beyond its magazine collections. Says Rand Jerris, the Managing Director of the USGA Museum:

We have found that golf-course architecture is the one topic about which we have received the largest number of inquiries. This is especially true during our annual championship season when there is widespread interest in those venues hosting our USGA championships.

Expanding the scope of these collections to include all material on golf-course architecture has, according to Jerris, ‘helped address a critical need for the USGA Museum and will provide an important service to our member

clubs. It will be one more way the USGA can take a leadership role in preserving the history of the game’.

Launching the website

In 2010, the USGA Museum officially launched the USGA Architecture Archive—the world’s first (and only) digital media bank on golf-course architecture—with hundreds of captivating assets from Oakmont, Pinehurst Number Two, Merion (East), Pine Needles and Chambers Bay.

Moving forward, the USGA Museum will request that host venues of all thirteen national championships contribute original material of historical significance each year to its Architecture Archives. Jerris has found the following items to be of most interest to researchers:

- historic and modern golf course photographs;
- historic and modern aerial photographs;
- original design plans, architectural drawings and documents;
- restoration and renovation drawings, plans and documents;
- historic and modern scorecards and

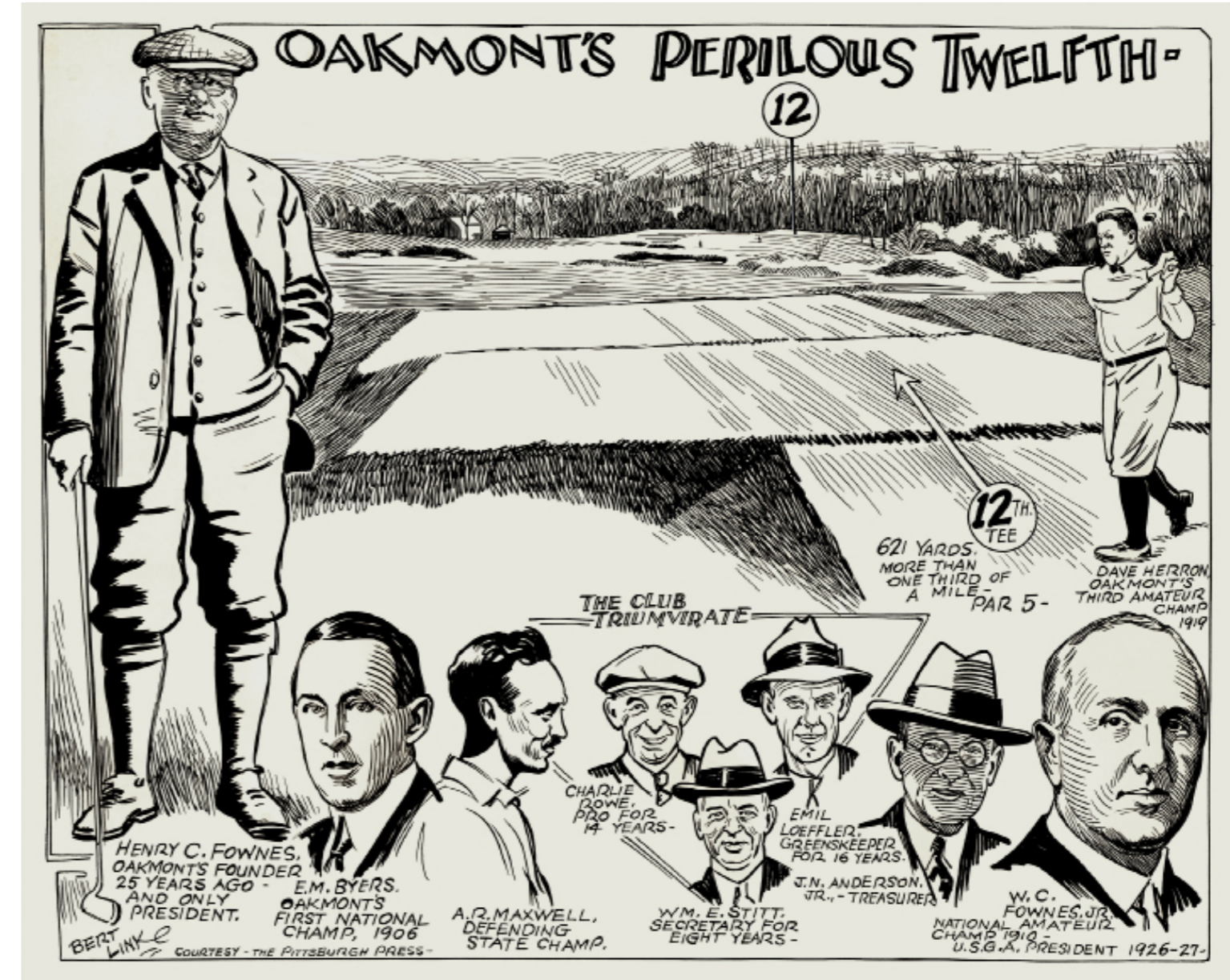
yardage books;

- historic and modern videos and films;
- design evolution reports and published club histories; and
- newspaper and magazine articles and course brochures.

In addition to championship venues, the USGA Museum hopes to expand its digital collections by working with all USGA member clubs. The goal of the Architecture Archive is to include resources from as many clubs as possible, thereby retaining digital images of their assets as a permanent resource for researchers, club members and interested golfers.

And, if your club is not on the USGA’s immediate wish list, the USGA Architecture Archive webpage has been equipped with an Add to Archive setting, where anyone can manually upload historic digital files directly to the USGA museum. This will be a convenient, user-friendly feature for the public at large. In an open-arm gesture, the USGA Museum welcomes and encourages all golf clubs to contribute.

Today, golf enthusiasts can access the USGA Museum’s expanding digital portfolios on golf



Published in a 1927 edition of the *Pittsburgh Press*, this caricature depicts Oakmont Golf Club’s long twelfth hole, with a coterie of its important golf figures—including HC and WC Fownes. (Courtesy of the USGA Museum; Source: Oakmont Country Club.)



An early postcard of the eleventh hole at Pine Needles, circa 1927. (Courtesy of the USGA Museum; Source: Kelley Miller.)

architecture over the internet from their offices or homes. Eventually, the USGA envisages hyper-linking the museum’s digital database on golf architecture with other golf collections throughout the world. In this manner, it will create a central website repository for all relevant golf-course architecture material. Yes, virtually a ‘one-stop’ shop!

Says Tom Paul, a member of the USGA Museum Committee and a pioneer of this initiative: ‘Naturally, we would like to be one of

the first places anyone would start looking. We also hope it will bring a broadening audience to the USGA Museum’s innovative website’.

Developing a digital database

The Architecture Archive Work Group (a devoted coterie of the USGA Museum Committee) usually initiates the outreach process by sending a brief letter of introduction to key decision makers of each target club. Typically, this is directed to the chairperson on the

greens committee, the club’s historian or its general manager. Ultimately, three determinations must be made: Do clubs have historical materials that help reveal the architectural evolution of their golf course? Have these historical materials been digitised? If so, are they willing for these materials to become visible online through the USGA Museum’s website for students and researchers of the game?

Frankly, we’ve been surprised to learn the following: while most clubs are saturated with historical records and some have even developed their own ‘in-house’ libraries, far too many clubs have not yet started the digital conversion process. In these cases, the USGA Architecture Archive Work Group mentors clubs on the many compelling reasons to digitise its inventories. Craig Disher, a member of the USGA Museum Committee, describes it well:

Not only will digitisation preserve the look and feel of ageing documents, but it also allows clubs to share these assets on various platforms, like club websites and monthly bulletins. In the process, it will be a big bonus if we can inspire clubs



Historic postcard depicting the sand green at Pine Needles’ twelfth hole, circa 1927. (Courtesy of the USGA Museum; Source: Kelley Miller.)

to share their materials with the USGA Museum to help foster education and research.

To facilitate execution, the Architecture Archive Work Group provides clubs with a list of technical specifications called digital guidelines. Here, various criteria are prepared to assist clubs with scanning documents into a recognisable digital format for optimal online

presentation on the USGA website. While the preferred digital resolution should be 300 dpi (dots per inch) for each image, the USGA website accepts the following types of digital file-extensions: jpg; tiff; pdf; doc; and psd.

File sizes vary depending on the type of asset. For instance, file sizes are not required to be larger than one megabyte for photographs, since they usually don’t need to be enlarged for viewing performance. Yet, file sizes for aerial

photographs and blueprints—assets that need to be magnified for detailed examinations—should normally be larger than three megabytes. In this case, the website’s zoom function can offer much closer perspectives without losing considerable resolution. The downside, of course, is that loading times can drag out when negotiating larger files. Thus, the Architecture Archive Work Group attempts to balance the need for magnification versus speed,

The homepage features the USGA Museum logo at the top left, with a navigation bar below it containing the text "Golf Course Architecture Archive". To the right of the logo is a registration area with the text "Register | Forgot your password?" and input fields for "Username:" and "Password:". The main visual is a large photograph of a golf course with several sand traps and green fairways. At the bottom of this image is a dark banner with the text "EXPLORE THE WORLD'S ONLY DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE >".

A grid of three images: a technical blueprint of a golf course on the left, a photograph of a golf course with yellow flowers in the foreground in the middle, and a person's hands holding an open photo book on the right. Below the grid is a dark banner with the text "Login to browse blueprints, photos, documents and more".

An advertisement for the "USGA MUSEUM Photo Collection Store". It features a black and white photograph of two men in golf attire. A red banner at the bottom of the image contains the text "Buy museum-quality images from the USGA Photo Collection Store". A "Shop Now >" button is located at the bottom right of the advertisement.

on a case-by-case basis, when determining the proper file sizes for particular resources.

Next, the Architecture Archive Work Group prepares metadata spreadsheets for clubs to complete for each digital asset. In the words of John Mummert, Manager of Creative Services for the USGA, 'Metadata can be defined as the descriptive background information about a document. It is essentially the DNA make-up of an asset'.

Metadata enhances the experience of visitors to the USGA website; it does so by stocking its search engine with key tag words that help researchers identify a resource. Metadata helps catalogue an asset's various properties: file name; source; origin; creation date; course name; hole-number; and other meaningful descriptive information that enables it to be retrievable on the USGA website.

Indemnification notices are also remitted to all contributors. Here, clubs are asked to hold the USGA harmless from any copyright infringement claims that may arise from their submitted materials. And, while the USGA Museum cannot guarantee that proper use of copyright protected materials will always occur, steps have been taken to

deter illegal reproductions. Primarily, this occurs by displaying assets in a read-only format. Watermarking them with a large, partially transparent USGA Museum logo adds another degree of protection. As another security measure, all researchers must first enrol on the USGA Museum's website for identification purposes before they can gain entry.

To preview the USGA Museum's Architecture Archive and its expanding digital database on golf-course architecture, interested parties can register on the USGA Architecture Archive homepage. Once you have been assigned a user name and a password, via email, you can navigate through the golf-courses and their subfolders on a state-by-state basis. Alternatively, you may use the Advanced Search tool provided.

'It's an exciting time for historians of golf-course architecture with the arrival of the new USGA Architecture Archive', says Bob Crosby, a member of the USGA Museum Committee. 'The study of golf architecture has produced more discoveries about the history of the game than any other discipline in golf.' Chances are, more revelations will be forthcoming.

The book cover features the title "Yeamans Hall Club 1925-2003 Transition of the Golf Course Then and Now" at the top. Below the title is a photograph of a large, historic building surrounded by trees. At the bottom left is the Yeamans Hall Club logo (YHC) and at the bottom right is the text "By: James E. Yonce, III Jeffrey R. Fraim".

OPPOSITE: The home page of the USGA's architecture archive website is where researchers log-in to view historical golf material. (Courtesy of Dunlop White III.)

Co-authored by Jim Yonce and Jeff Fraim, this significant book outlines Yeamans Hall's architectural evolution between the period of 1925 and 2003. (Courtesy of the USGA Museum; Source: Jim Yonce and Jeff Fraim.)