



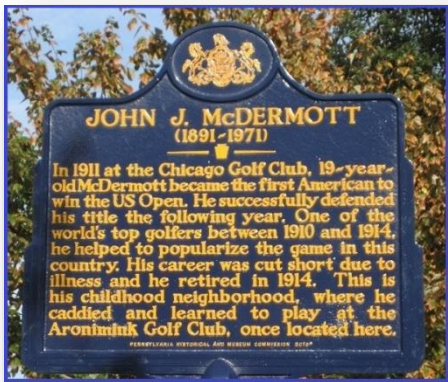
The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County

Number 19 • September 18, 2015



Johnny McDermott, 1911 and 1912 U.S. Open winner, poses with the trophy. A Pennsylvania state historical marker was dedicated in his honor on October 9, 2014. The McDermott marker is one of only two honoring the game of golf. The other recognizes Foxburg Golf Course, Clarion County, as the country's oldest continuously operated golf course, having opened in 1897.



Celebrating Young Johnny

Johnny McDermott was the first American-born U.S. Open champion, winning in 1911 at the Chicago Golf Club and at age 19 the youngest, a distinction he still holds. In 1912 he defended his title successfully at the Country Club of Buffalo. Having lost the 1910 U.S. Open in a playoff, McDermott was within one stroke of winning the Open three straight years. Only five others have won back-to-back U.S. Opens, with **Curtis Strange** the most recent in 1988-89.

18 + 1 = The Tradition

The Front 9

This weekend marks the third playing of The Tradition, a two-day partners tournament that celebrates Reading Country Club's storied place in Berks County golf. The team of **Casey Blankenbiller** and **Joe Staub** won the first two events. Can they threepeat?

With The Tradition at hand, let's take a quick tour of RCC's front and back 9's.

Hole 1: Today's starting hole was yesterday's finishing hole. This makes sense because the stone building at the club entrance from Rte. 422, a short walk from the current 1st green, served as the clubhouse until 1931. When the current clubhouse was dedicated with a week of gala celebration in May 1931, the course was re-routed.

Hole 2: Johnny McDermott was an inconspicuous spectator at the third round of the Reading Open, played at RCC in July 1949. McDermott, a Philadelphia native, was the first American-born player to win the U.S. Open, capturing the 1911 and 1912 titles. His streak was stopped in 1913 by Frances Ouimet. You may have seen the movie.

Hole 3: The tee was rebuilt and angled to the left in 2013 in an effort to help prevent tee shots from hitting cars on Rte. 422.

Hole 4: Alex Findley designed the fourth hole as a 265-yard par 4. The tee would have been behind the current tee by about 60 yards. Bishop's Grist Mill stood in the area of the present-day 4th and 8th holes and the 5th and 7th green. The mill was in operation by 1760 and was shut down in the early years of the 20th century. **George Washington** didn't sleep there, but the mill did supply flour for the General's Continental Army.

Hole 5: A looming tree made playing to the green from the right side a daunting challenge. Gravity intervened in 2013 when the tree toppled, probably weakened from taking one too many hits from errant golf balls. Either that or it just got old. The right side is now not a bad way to go.

Hole 6: There was once a tee at the top of the hill along Shelbourne Road, a feature not designed by Findlay, and a sand trap at the bottom of the ridge in front of the green, a Findlay feature. In October 1935, famed golf architect **A.W. Tillinghast** visited RCC and made recommendations for improving the 6th green.

Hole 7: The creek that bisects the fairway was re-routed in the 1980s when **Meme Filippini** owned RCC. The most feasible explanation for messing with Mother Nature is that golfers playing the 7th had difficulty hitting their tee ball over the old creek position; they were forced to hit a lay-up, leaving a shot of 200 yards to the green. The re-positioned creek provides more fairway and a shorter second shot. **Alex Findlay** probably would not approve, because he designed the 7th as a par 5. But then Findlay built the golf course in the era of hickory-shafted clubs and balls that did not carry nearly as far as today's computer-designed wonders.

Hole 8: A gem of a par 3. Here's **Alex Findlay's** advice for success on 8: "A nicely placed tee shot will land on a rare (sic) putting green, and with the orthodox allowance of two putts, one should experience little difficulty in scoring a par 3." Were it ever so simple.

Hole 9: In the early 19th century, an iron ore mine operated in the area of the present-day 9th hole.



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Sam Snead set the RCC course record of 63 in the first round of the 1949 Reading Open. The record still stands. Alas, he missed a four-foot birdie putt on the tournament's final hole to finish second to **Cary Middlecoff** by a stroke.

Major Championships

The 1939 Berks Amateur Championship played at RCC featured a final 18-hole match between **Lefty Faber** and **Johnny Markel**, with Faber winning 1-up. Markel, the defending champion, is still the youngest Berks Am winner at age 16 in 1938.

Byron Nelson, who was in his last year as RCC pro, served as walking referee for the match. Earlier that year, Nelson won the U.S. Open on the Spring Mill course at Philadelphia Country Club. A September 5 *Reading Eagle* article reports that Nelson led a sizeable gallery following the players. There is no indication that he was called upon to make any rulings.

Lord Byron also won the 1937 Masters during his tenure at RCC.

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The Back 9

Hole 10: **Alex Findlay** designed the hole as a 295-yard par 4. One of the original tees can be seen under the large tree near the fountain. The practice range takes up the former fairway. There were also clay tennis courts to the left of the original 10th fairway, about 200 yards down the driveway. The hole was changed to a par 3 in the 1980's to accommodate additional parking and the range.

Hole 11: Eleven was designed as golfers play it today. But in the early 1950s, the hole was changed so it played as a dog-leg right, with the fairway in the area that is now the medical building and the nursing home. In those years, the current 11th fairway was the practice range.

Hole 12: Findlay designed 12 as a 430-yard par 4, although it was played as a par 5 in the 1930s. The old tee can be found between the 11th green and the 18th tee. The tee was moved in the 1980's when Gibraltar Road was re-routed.

Hole 13: The RCC riding stables were located on land behind the tee. Although not owned by the RCC, several club members, including **Leroy Oudinot** the 1968 club champion, stabled horses there. The stables were abandoned in the 1980s. There were two houses on the grounds, one occupied by the greenskeeper, one by the riding academy director. Tragedy struck in 1951 when **Leroy Boyer**, the greenskeeper, was found dead by his own hand at the stable.

Hole 14: According to **Pete Trenham**, former Director of Golf at RCC and historian for the Philadelphia Section of the PGA, there are slot machines buried in the vicinity of the 14th tee. The slots were enjoyed by members for amusement purposes only. When **Henry Clay Poe**, the golf professional, got word of an impending raid, he removed the machines and had them buried.

Hole 15: In the 1956 Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur Championship at RCC, **Maureen Riley** faced **Mrs. John Dyson** in the 36-hole final. Ms. Riley hit her tee shot to 10 feet on number 15, the 35th hole of the match, while Mrs. Dyson was in the fringe left of the green. She sculled her chip shot. As it raced across the green, she yelled, "Hit the pin!" It did and the ball stopped a foot from the hole. Miss Riley two-putted for a par 3. Inexplicably, Mrs. Dyson missed her 12-inch par putt. The match was square going to the last.

Hole 16: **Mrs. Dyson** won the 1956 Women's State Am championship 1-up with a par 4 on the 36th (18th) hole, today's 16th hole. The current 16th hole was also the 18th during the 1953 Ryder Cup Challenge Matches played at RCC. The matches featured the U.S. Ryder Cup team against a team of PGA professionals.

Hole 17: **Alex Findlay** designed 17 as a 400-yard par 4 played from today's red and gold tee. The par 5 tee was added after 1953.

Hole 18: **Sam Snead** faced a 10-foot birdie putt to shoot a record 63 in the first round of the 1949 Reading Open, played on July 7. He made it. Four days later, the Slammer fretted over a four-footer for birdie to tie **Cary Middlecoff** and force a playoff. He missed. Middlecoff won with rounds of 67-68-65-66—266, 14 under par. Her earned \$2,600 from the \$15,000 purse.

Hole 19: Players in the 2015 Tradition won't have access to the 19th hole because of the clubhouse renovations. When the facility reopens in November, it will reclaim its place as one of Berks County's jewels for golf and dining.

Now, that's tradition!