



The Golf Chronicles

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



Alexander H. Findlay, in an undated photo. The dog's name is unknown.

The Architect's Voice

Rare is the opportunity to hear from the golf course architect whose design was completed in the 1920s. But we have just that opportunity by examining a newspaper account of Reading Country Club's construction. The architect's comments on golf course construction are preserved in the *Reading Eagle*, October 22, 1922.

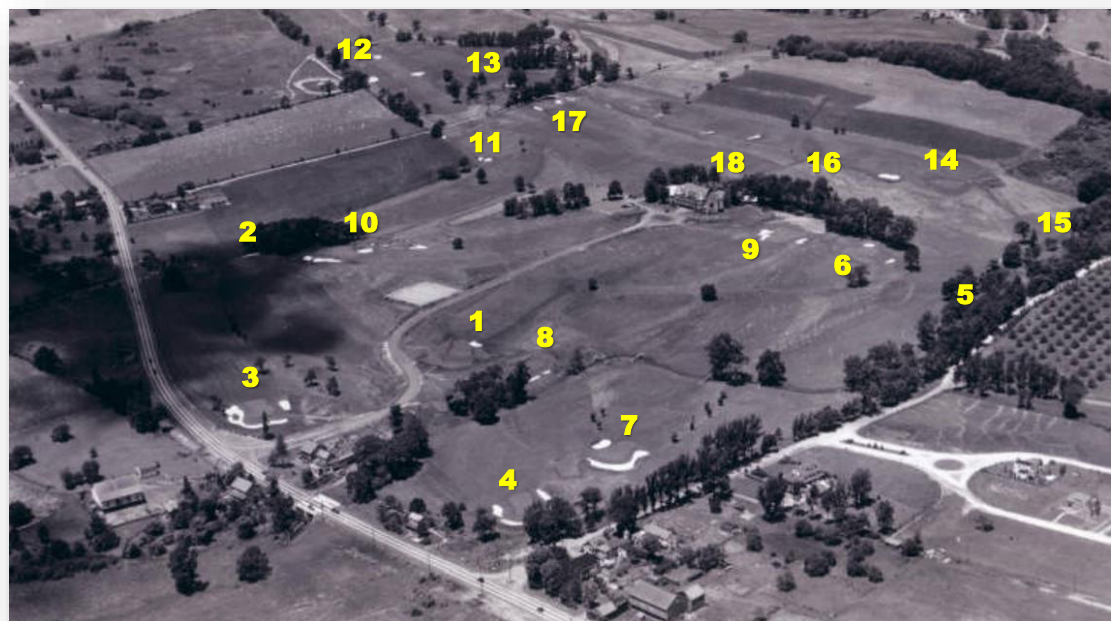
The architect is Alexander H. Findlay, who even in 1923 was considered 'the father of American golf'. The article provides insight into the thinking that drove the design of the golf course. A transcript of his commentary follows.

The article is Reading Country Club's Rosetta Stone. The story includes Findlay's hole-by-hole description and his advice on how to play the golf course. There have been changes to the course Findlay describes. He designed the 4th hole as a short par 4 (it is now a par 3) and designed the 445-yard 7th hole, a par 4 today, as a par 5. Findlay's 10th hole was a par 4 (par 3 today) and his 17th hole a par 4 (today a par 5). Findlay's 12th hole was a 430-yarder that was played as both a par 4 and 5. The hole is now a 360-yard par 4, the tee having been moved forward when Gibraltar Road was re-routed in the 1980s.

The changes made over the years take nothing away from the Scotsman's design. The course plays pretty much as he described in 1922. Reading Country Club was a challenge in the era of hickory-shafted brassies, mashies and niblicks and soft-cover, rubber core balls. [Editor's note: The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland, golf's governing body, approved metal shafts in 1929.] The golf course remains a challenge in today's age of over-sized, exotic-metal clubs and computer-designed balls. Alex Findlay's genius stands the test of time.

The newspaper article from which Findlay's description is taken exists on microfilm. Parts of the film are of poor quality and words are unreadable. The editor thanks George and Gloria Meiser, Berks County's foremost historians, for finding an original copy of the article and preserving Alex Findlay's words 90 years on. The Meisers have completed the first 23 volumes of *The Passing Scene*, a comprehensive history of Reading and Berks County.

This aerial view from 1931 shows the golf course as described by Alex Findlay in 1922, with the numbers correspond to the greens. The golf course has changed very little in 90 years.





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Number 3 • May 11, 2015

From the *Reading Eagle*, October 22, 1922, pages 10 and 11.

Alexander H. Findlay, who laid out the golf course, described the golf course as follows.

An 18-hole golf course has been laid out and when completed will compare favorably with any in the state. The land is quite undulating and abounds in natural hazards, is surrounded by huge trees and a swift running stream adds beauty to the course and many of the putting greens are placed in the most unique and sporty way.

Golfers meandering around in quest of golf land are usually eager to find brooks or rivers. The Reading Country Club was fortunate in securing the Esterly estate, with its numerous water hazards. The stream is crossed eight times. Every well placed shot will find its just rewards. The steam, of course, awaits the poorly played shots. The course is not too long, neither is it too short.

On a very long course the golfer may have to use his brassy at every hole except the short ones. If the wind blows strongly, the game is apt to become tiresome. The most of these holes are of the drive and iron-shot order. Holes between 285 and 385 yards, respectively, are quite prevalent, and a joy to play; the short holes are exceptionally sporty and nice to shoot at. There are no two holes alike. The long holes are easy and each in the right place. The soil is rich, which assures and abundant growth of grass. The watering system installed by the house of E.C. Worrell, engineer, Moorestown, N.J., Clarence E. Worrell, manager, has given entire satisfaction.

The Worrells have installed water systems at many points throughout the country and have eminently successful.

A.H. Findlay was the golf architect. He also laid out the Berkshire Country Club. Fred Findlay, the Australian architect, assisted in laying out of Reading Country Club and is now on the job supervising construction. What he does not know about the laying out of a golf hole or the royal and ancient game of golf is not worth learning, it is said.

The members of the club are an interesting lot of business men and have pushed the work along without the semblance of a hitch. Strange to relate, few thereof have been inoculated with the golf germ, but woe betide them next spring. It will be the same old, old story: "Why were we so late in starting?"

Lengths of the Holes

The lengths of the holes are as follows:

No 1, 385 yards – Slightly dog-legged, a good tee shot will land on a beautiful plateau, a nice iron shot should reach the green which is nicely contoured. Terraced on a rock ledge, deep trays for the slice and pulled shots are at each side. The fairway is wide; a pulled drive will reach the base of a huge gully; an easy 4, which is par, should be recorded.

No. 2, 365 yards – The tee is elevated in order to give the player a chance to see his ball sailing in the middle of a nice valley paralleling the Philadelphia Pike. A large mound will catch the topped or half-topped iron shot to the green, which is built up within close touch of a cluster of trees. No player should find any difficulty in registering a par 4 at this easy hole. There are numerous nicely placed sand traps near the green, not too difficult to play out of.



Antietam Creek, Findlay's "...swift running stream..." has challenged golfers since RCC opened in 1924. The 15th green sits just a few yards from the water. Findlay's description: Think it over! Trouble galore awaits the misplaced tee shot whereas a good shot will net anyone a par 3.



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No. 3, 330 yards – Calls for a well-placed drive up a slight incline. The second, an iron shot, should reach home. The putting green is very large and rolling, surrounded by grass and sand mounds. There are a few nice fruit trees at the sides, it is well elevated and one of the nicest holes to play. The first three holes are roomy and quite long enough; giving players a chance to limber up, at the same time minimizing congestion.

No. 4, 265 yards – The drive may effect the weak-hearted mentally, inasmuch as the shot must be placed between large trees, 50 feet apart and over a nice wide babbling brook; both hazards being at least 300 feet from the tee. A mashy pitch should be lobbed onto the green, where a 4 will be recorded. This is the easiest par on the links, providing the tee shot is hit. Birds will be made and also eagles. The drive reaches a flat and the pitch to a nicely trapped green by the “Old Mill Dam site.”

No. 5, 520 yards – The long hole calls for a drive, a brassy over the creek and a pitch onto a large terraced green over the wide part of the stream. A vista cut out of the woods shows the green surrounded by water. A long hitter may be tempted to reach home with a long second shot, but he won't be in a hurry to attempt it a second time. The mouth of the green is narrow and calls for an accurate pitch, a 5 should easily be registered, which is par.

No. 6, 160 yards – An iron shot over the stream and valley to the hill-top, large trees to right, deep trap in front and pits at each side of green. A well placed shot will reach the flag on the fly, a grand test of golf and a nice par 3.

No. 7, 445 yards – a good drive will land on a plateau within 30 yards of the stream, a clean brassy should reach the green, which is nicely placed in the meadow, elevated and surrounded by an array of shallow sand traps and mounds. This hole will help the long hitter to score a bird below par 5.

No. 8, 180 yards – A midiron shot, the creek rushes by at the foot of the green, which will catch topped tee shots. Trees will kill the pull, also hurt the slice. A nicely placed tee shot, however, 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.

Near the Club House

No. 9, 335 yards – A drive should be placed on a nice reach at the top of a huge hill, and a well played mashie pitch will reach the pin; this green is quite adjacent to the club house; hole is slightly dog-legged, with huge trees as a background, traps at sides, and in front of the green, a first-class hole and nice to look at from the tee. Par 4.

No. 10, 295 yards – Tee in front of club house, a nice drive and pitch hole with few obstacles in the way. The putting green is scientifically trapped and lies within close touch of a beautiful cluster of trees. Par 4.

No 11, 400 yards – An extreme dog-leg two shotter, a drive and full spoon or cleek shot will reach the pin; each shot must be placed with unerring accuracy in order to secure a par 4. The green is large, as all two full shot holes should be; nice mounds protect the corners and there are numerous traps all the way home.

No. 12, 430 yards – Over an old patch of pasture land and though an apple orchard, quite a wide fairway. The scratch or plus player should reach the pin nicely with a well-placed second or brassy shot. This is one of the most difficult par 4 holes on the course, but a joy to play.

No 13, 385 yards – A plain easy drive and a midiron will place one near to score par figures. The green nestles at the foot of very large trees, numerous fruit trees skirt the fairway boundary. One must play straight, as punishment awaits the wayward. Par 4.



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No. 14, 510 yards – Two screaming wood shots will reach foot of the green; a mashy niblick pitch is necessary in order to overcome the numerous difficulties surrounding the pin. The green is scooped out of the face of a large hill and faces the pitch; a very sporty hole to play but just about impossible to get home in 2, owing to the hog back fairway in front of the green; the third shot is one of the dog-leg order. This is one of the nicest long holes in the United States. Par 5.

No 15, 175 yards – The third and last of the one shot holes, the tee is at the top of a high hill, the green is over a stream. Numerous picturesque trees are at sides and back thereof, is well built up and quite undulating. The triumvirate of iron shot holes compare favorably with that of the famous Tavistock Country Club, Tavistock, N.J., and that is going some as Tavistock when two years older will be one of the finest tests of golf in this golfing country; in fact it is not yet two years old and a gem to play. Reading Country Club in a year or two will be likewise blest. Think it over! Trouble galore awaits the misplaced tee shot whereas a good shot will net anyone a par 3.

Beauty Unsurpassed

No. 16, 340 yards – A drive over the creek and a nice iron shot will land on the green, which is up a nice gradual sloping hill nicely trapped on all sides. If in match play, one wins by 3 and 2, one simply struts through the woods to the club house, which is less than 50 yards away from the green. The 16th is an easy par 4.

No 17, 420 yards – A fine two shotter, a delightful view is afforded one standing on the tee; the drive is down hill; a long straight brassy will reach home, which is open and wide, inviting a wood shot to the pin; the green is properly bunkered and calls for accurate golf. Par 4.

No. 18, 345 yards – Drive and an iron shot to the hole; the green is on an up-grade, located quite near trees and the club house, making a fine finish to this splendid course. The green is well trapped and mounded. Par 4.

The beauty of this course is unsurpassed. All the greens and pins are visible from the tee, there are no blind pitches and all face the shot. Players are ever eager to have the 9th and 18th holes at the club house. This we will have, plus the 6th and the 16th, which are within 50 yards of same.

No one can miss a shot at any one of the 18 holes and make amends; therefore, as a matter of fact, Reading Country Club links are first-class in every respect. It will be ready for play in early June at which time a full membership is practically assured.

Editor's note – The course Findlay describes would yield the following score card:

Outward 9

Par 4 4 4 4 5 3 5 3 4 – 36 (2985 yards)

Inward 9

Par 4 4 4 4 5 3 4 4 4 – 36 – 72 (3300 yards; 6285 yards total)

Here is today's scorecard:

Outward 9

Par 4 4 4 3 5 3 4 3 4 – 34 (2944 yards)

Inward 9

Par 3 4 4 4 5 3 4 5 4 – 36 – 70 (3218 yards; 6162 yards total – blue tees)