



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016



This undated photo shows Fred Findlay, the youngest of the eight Findlay sons.

Well Played, Laddie

The Enviably Legacy of Fred Findlay

Now that the second Findlay Cup has been contested, let's take a look at Fred, the other Findlay. Or, as he was known within the family, **Frederick Augustus McPherson Findlay**.

The relevant issue in these parts is who designed Reading Country Club's golf course? **Alex Findlay** is the most accurate answer. But attributing the golf course to Alex alone does not tell the complete story and ignores Fred's contribution. A *Reading Eagle* article from October 22, 1922, states that Fred was on-site managing the construction. There is evidence that he had a strong hand in creating the golf course we play today.

At that time, Alex was one of the most renowned golf architects in the country. Even then, he was referred to as the "Father of American Golf". Alex was one of the most energetic golf promoters in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is credited with building America's first golf course in 1887 (according to some golf historians, Findlay's course was the first west of the Mississippi, not the first in the country), a six-hole layout in Nance County, Neb., 130 miles west of Omaha. In 1900, he arranged for **Harry Vardon**, the great British pro and the most renowned golfer of his day, to tour the United States. Vardon's exhibition matches, many played against Findlay, were covered extensively in the nation's newspapers. Findlay put golf on the front page.

Alex's vision. RCC's founders contracted with Alex to design and build the golf course. This was reported in the *Reading Eagle* more than once. Alex created the course; the holes that were built and the golf course today are his vision. The proof is in the October 22 article that includes Alex's hole-by-hole description of the golf course. Alex described the holes as they were under construction in 1922 and as they exist today with these exceptions: Number 10 was a short par 4. Today, it a par 3, the old fairway now serving as the practice range. Number 12 is shorter, the original tee abandoned in the mid-1980s when Gibraltar Road was rerouted. Findlay's number 17 was a par 4, with the tee opposite the lower end of the 16th green. It is today a par 5.

In the 1922 article, Alex offered advice on how to play the course. Except for the archaic club names—spoon, brassy, cleek, mashy, niblick and the like—Findlay's playing lesson stands the test of time.

But then, what about Fred?

Young Fred. Fred was born in 1872 in Montrose, Scotland, the youngest of eight boys. The Findlays also had two daughters. Father Findlay was a professional soldier so it is not surprising that Fred followed that path. Fred became an expert on the cornet and was promoted to the position of army bandmaster.

Following a 22-year military career, Fred settled in Montrose and turned to a career in golf and music. The local newspaper, *The Dundee Courier*, wrote frequently of his golf exploits and also carried news of band concerts he led. Here are a few examples.

The Dundee Courier, May 29, 1894

Fred Findlay, with a 4 handicap, was listed as one of 16 finalists in the Montrose Mercantile Cup.

Findlay Facts

On the high seas. Interestingly, Alex was born in 1866 (died 1942 in Philadelphia) on a ship in the North Sea. His father was in the British army and the Findlay family was being transported from Scotland to a new assignment. Source: Trenham Golf History, <http://trenhamgolffhistory.org/>

Half a league onward. Fred served in the British army with the bugler who had sounded the charge for the Light Brigade's ill-fated attack of Russian artillery at Balaklava during the Crimean War in 1854. The brigade bugler must have been quite aged compared to the young Findlay.

Following Fred. Noted golf course architect Ed Ault (1908-1989) was a Fred Findlay disciple, having trained for several seasons under Fred's guidance. Ault entered private practice as a course designer in 1946. Ault designed courses in nineteen states, most in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia and remolded courses in thirteen states and Canada, Puerto Rico, and Switzerland. His most notable local efforts include Toftrees Country Club (Pa.) and TPC at Avenel (Md.).



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016

Widower, but when?

One of the 1922 real estate documents describes Fred as a widower, indicating that his wife Georgina died in Scotland. Which she did but not until 1943 as revealed in this request from November 2011 on the site www.curiousfox.com.

I am looking for descendants of Georgina & James Brown who may be able to tell me more about the life of my Great Aunt Georgina (Brown) Findlay. Georgina Brown (b) 26 May, 1862, and her brother James Brown (b) 9 May, 1867. Father - William Brown, and mother, Isabella Brown (nee M.I. Findlay), Georgina Brown married Frederick A. McP. Findlay, District of Montrose, County of Forfar on 29 Nov. 1893, and died Forfar, 21 Jan. 1943. Georgina and Fred Findlay left Montrose for Melbourne, Australia, with their children, young Frederick (Freddy) and Ruth, hoping the climate would help young Freddy. My Great Uncle Fred Findlay took up the position of the professional for Metropolitan Golf Club in Melbourne. Young Freddy died at age 16 in Melbourne, and eventually Ruth and her mother Georgina took young Freddy's body back to Montrose where he is buried with his mother Georgina. Georgina (Brown) Findlay stayed in Scotland. My Great Uncle Fred Findlay then went to America to join his older brothers Alexander and David Findlay, well known in golf circles in U.S.A. where he, Fred, designed golf courses and he died in Virginia in 1966 aged 94.

No replies were posted.

The Dundee Courier, August 27, 1906

Montrose Player and Vardon Grip

Fred Findlay, an ex-champion of Montrose course, has adopted the Vardon grip, and gives promise of much better golf, owing to an injury to his hand frequently troubling him with the usual style of holding the clubs. On Saturday he played two rounds, his total being 75 and 74 respectively. *[The Vardon Grip is named for Harry Vardon, the same player Alex Findlay brought to America in 1900. Vardon did not invent the grip, but his success using it, also known as the overlapping grip, led many golfers to follow his lead.]*

His details were: Out, 38; In, 36—74. Findlay had particularly bad luck in this round, his ball, from a beautiful drive, going to the Wilderness and settling among the roots of whins, which cost him a back stroke, and at the Lineside hole his tee shot off his brassie got a nasty kick into the bunker, which necessitated a 5 for the hole. Otherwise, he would have equaled, if not beaten, the record of Mr. N.R. Balfour, with whom he was playing.

The details of the 75 round were: Out, 38; In, 37—75.

The Dundee Courier, May 17, 1909

Fred Findlay breaks Montrose Golf Course Record.

Fred Findlay, professional to the Royal Albert Golf Club, Montrose, broke the record for the Montrose Course on Saturday.

The feat was achieved with almost perfect golf. He played the greens with unerring judgment and his only faulty stroke—a pull into the rough—was his drive from the tee at the Girdie. This hole, which is par 4, cost him 5. The card returned read: Out, 35; In, 35—70.

Fred has been in great form of late and only the previous Saturday he equaled the record of 71. It will be interesting to watch his play in the professional championship, which takes place in July.

Then came this announcement on September 24, 1909.

Fred Findlay, Montrose, is Leaving for Australia

Fred Findlay, the professional at Montrose Royal Albert Golf Club, is leaving the country for Australia where he is to follow out his profession as a golfer. His resignation has been intimated to the Royal Albert Golf Club, and he vacates his position in a month's time.

Fred belongs to Montrose and learned to play the royal and ancient game at the seaside burgh. He has seen 22 years' service in the army, having been bandmaster of the F and K. He returned to Montrose several years ago, and was appointed professional about 18 month ago in succession to Charlie Burgess. He is one of the best golfers in town, and was champion in 1905 and 1907, while during this past year he created a record of 70 for the course, which, however, was made when playing a three-ball match, and was not officially recognized. Since then it has been equaled by T.R. Ferrie, Troon, who is official champion, and broken by J. Clark, unofficially with 69. Findlay is at the present conductor of Montrose Town Band.

Down under. Two reasons for Fred's move to the antipodes have been proffered. One is that the Findlay's went to Australia hoping that the mild climate would benefit their son, Freddie, who was believed to suffer from

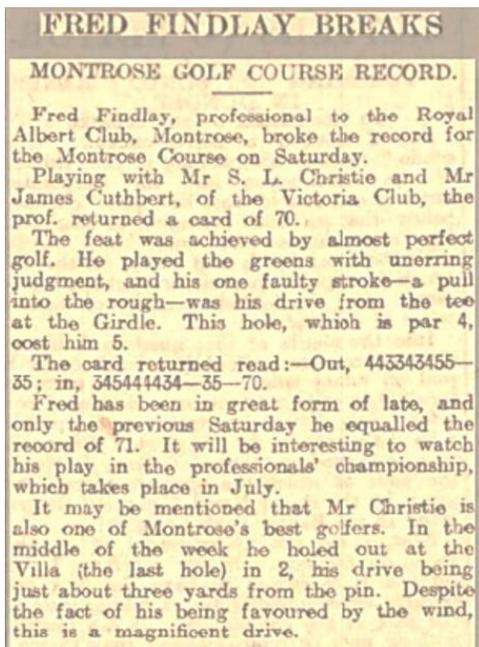


The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016



The Dundee Courier
May 17, 1909

tuberculosis. The second is that Fred was encouraged by the two Findlay brothers who were by 1909 established in Australia. James, the oldest Findlay brother, was a golf ball maker, and Albert (the fifth-oldest Findlay brother) was the professional at the Victoria Golf Club. No doubt both factored into Fred's decision. No doubt also that his brothers helped Fred secure employment as the professional at the Metropolitan Golf Club in Melbourne.

Fred began his career in golf course architecture in Australia. According to an article by Steve Doorey and Michael Steret published in *Through the Green*, the magazine of the British Golf Collectors Society (September 2013), he laid out a seven-hole course in Healesville, Victoria, in 1911 that was abandoned in 1919 and he designed a course Ararat, Victoria, in 1914 that no longer exists. Fred's third Australian course, also in Healesville, was a 9-hole layout that has undergone significant change. It is now one of four courses owned by the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria.

Personal tragedy. Fred's personal life took a turn down under. Freddie died in 1912 at age 16. The child was buried in Australia, but at some point the body was disinterred and returned to Scotland where he was laid to rest under the auld sod. Fred's wife, Georgina, accompanied the body. She never returned to Australia or to Fred.

Fred's remaining child, daughter Ruth, married an American, Raymond Loving, in Australia. The Doorey and Steret article states that Ruth and Ben, as he was known because his middle name was Franklin, moved to the United States in 1924, prompting Fred's move to the states. We know, however, that Fred, at age 51, left Australia after 13 years in April 1922. He eventually settled in Virginia where Fred and Ben were partners in a golf course design business. Ben's son, Buddy, eventually joined the firm and worked closely with Fred

But first, there was Reading.

Sail away. Fred sailed from Sydney, New South Wales, on April 6, 1922, bound for San Francisco aboard the steamer *S.S. Tahiti*. The Tahiti's manifest dated April 6, 1922, lists Frederick Findlay among the passengers. Fred was described thusly:

Occupation—golf player
Nationality—Australian
Race or people—Scotch
Last permanent residence—Melbourne
Name and address of the nearest relative or friend in the country from whence he came—Friend: Mr. White, Noble Park, Melbourne
Status—married
Age—50

Another Findlay brother, David (the seventh-oldest Findlay brother), lived in California where he was a golf professional. There is no record of Fred and David visiting and if they did, it was a short reunion. Fred arrived in San Francisco on May 1 and by October, he was at work in Exeter Township supervising the golf course construction at Reading Country Club. The October 22 *Reading Eagle* article refers to Fred as "the Australian architect." An understandable error giving his previous posting.

This is from a two-page *Reading Eagle* article of October 20, 1922, reporting on progress at the new Reading Country Country Club.

A.H. Findlay was the golf architect. He also laid out the Berkshire Country Club. Fred Findlay, the Australian architect, assisted in the laying out of



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016



The Dundee Courier
September 24, 1909

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.

Here is more Fred news, this from the *Eagle*, March 16, 1923.

Mr. Findlay is the father of American golf and planned the 18-hole golf course for the club, the laying out of which his brother, Fred Findlay, has supervised.

From the same article:

Mr. Morris (Joseph F. Morris, club vice president) presented Fred Findlay, who planned and constructed the course at the new club.

Who dunnit? So, who should be credited as RCC's architect? Without question, the course reflects Alex's vision, as reported in the October 22 *Reading Eagle*. The question, then, is how much of the finished product reflects Fred's style? **Brian Aherns**, course superintendent and a partner in A&M Golf, believes the back 9 is Fred's creation following Alex's plan. He said there are noticeable differences in the two 9s. For example, the front 9 features more mounding, a trademark of an Alex Findlay design.

Further evidence of Fred's influence over RCC is the fact that he established a residence in Exeter Township. Record on file with the Berks County Recorder of Deeds show that Fred paid \$16,850 for two properties totaling about 1.5 acres on Philadelphia Pike in Exeter Township in November and December 1922. The documents in show Fred's name as Frederick A. McP. Findlay and Frederick A. McPherson Findlay.

A township right-of-way map filed on September 29, 1927, shows Fred Findlay as the owner of property on Philadelphia Pike (Rte. 422) across from RCC in the area where the Wawa convenience store is located. Fred's property was about where the building stands. The corner lot was owned by Morris Ziegler and the lot on the west side of Fred was owned by Edwin Hafer.

Further, the township map shows a store and gas station across the road from Fred's property that may have been the business described in the *Reading Eagle*, July 10, 1923, in the "News of Loraine" column: "Fred Findlay, proprietor of the auto service station, is contemplating disposing of the property and spending his time in layout out golf links."

That he did.

Yes, Virginia. Findlay moved to Virginia where a census record of April 10, 1930, shows Fred, age 58, and wife Reba, age 29, residing in Richmond. Fred's occupation is described as Golf Architect in the golf course business. The document reports that he is a native of Scotland and came to the United States in 1923, which is in error. The census report lists no other residents in the Findlay household.

Fred's philosophy. Fred described his golf course design philosophy frequently. The Harrisonburg (Virginia) *Daily News Record*, June 25, 1925, reported on progress at a 9-hole golf course Fred was building on an 80-acre site. The article states that Mr. Findlay was visiting the construction site, taking time off from supervising work in Reading, Pa. This, of course, was Reading Country Club.

Mr. Findlay plans to use the Australian method for laying out the Harrisonburg course. This calls for the use of every natural feature. He



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016

Shoots His Age

Charlottesville, Va. (AP)—Rare indeed is the golfer over 80 who shoots his age, but Fred Findlay of Charlottesville does it often. Findlay, noted golf course designer, recently posted an 84 and an 85. He is nearing his 86th birthday and frequently plays the Farmington course which he designed.

October 5, 1957



March 13, 1966

will breathe enough of the Scotch atmosphere into the lay-out to make anyone know that a typical Scot supervised the construction.

“As years go by,” he said, “visitors will tell you Harrisonburg people that a real Scot laid out your course—and did himself proud. When I get through, they won’t be able to mistake that atmosphere. A Scot cannot help putting some of the old country into his work here.”

“There will be nothing artificial about the course, nature herself having provided amply for all hazards and other details.

“The course will have real Scotch and Australian features and one that will stand the test of time—I cannot afford to risk my reputation by building one otherwise.”

Now an 18-hile layout known as Spotswood Country Club, the extent of Findlay’s work that remains is unknown.

An article from the July 27 *Daily News Record* provides these comments from Fred.

“None of the fairways are at right angles nor are any fairways too close, making the course extremely safe.

“When driven, the ball will have little roll, requiring the distance to be negotiated by the carry in the air. The fairways are so laid out that the ball will not roll after landing.”

Here’s an article from *The Post-Herald*, Beckley, W.V., May 31, 1929, on another Fred Findlay course under construction.

The services of Mr. Fred Findlay, a noted golf architect, who has built and had under construction some of the best golf course in Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and resorts in other states, have been enlisted and retained to construct this course for the Black Knight Country Club. After viewing the contour maps and going over the grounds he asserted one of the sportiest nine-hole courses in the country could be constructed on the acreage available, the natural contour, with its rolls and hollows, afforded some of the best natural advantages that could be found for golf course purposes, many of which would necessarily have to be build up artificially on lands elsewhere. The work on the course to date has progressed to such an extent that a mental picture of the finished course can be readily obtained.

Experienced golfers and several professionals who have gone over the layout have asserted that Mr. Findlay will fulfill his expectations and give the members of the Black Knight Country club the most attractive nine-hole course in this part of the country.

In 2011, the club, having fallen on hard times and with declining membership, was sold to Jim Justice, owner of The Greenbrier resort in West Virginia, for \$1 million. Justice said he had far too many fond memories of Black Knight to watch it succumb. The purchase included the clubhouse and restaurant, pool, tennis courts, the Fred Findlay designed 9-hole golf course and approximately 60 acres.

Fred was the subject of an article in *The Daily Progress*, Charlottesville, Va., May 26, 2011, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Kenridge Invitational golf tournament at Farmington Country Club, considered Fred’s finest work, created



The Golf Chronicles

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



Number 41 • May 15, 2016

Acknowledgements:

Beverly Abelino, great granddaughter of James Findlay, Fred's brother, for sharing her family scrapbook with us.

Richard Tweedle, RACV Corporate Solicitor, for sharing his research notes on Healesville golf course with us.

Neil Crafter gave us extracts from *The Architects of Golf by Cornish & Whitten* (1993). This was important in sorting out courses designed by Fred alone, those in partnership with Ben Lewing, those in partnership with his grandson Buddy Lewing and those designed independently by Buddy.



Fred & Freddie at Metropolitan Golf Club
THE LONG GAME | SEPTEMBER 2014

This photo of Fred Findlay and his son Freddie appeared in *The Long Game*, the newsletter of the Golf Society of Australia, September 2014. Freddie died at age 16, Fred at 94.

from a 1,000-acre wilderness in 1928. Fred had moved to Charlottesville and it was there that he died on March 13, 1966, at age 94. Fred remained active in his later years. An Associated Press article from October 5, 1957, reported that the 85-year-old Findlay shot rounds of 84 and 85 at Farmington.

The most amazing thing about Findlay's golf course architecture is that he never used a blueprint, did it right out of his imagination.

He once said, "I just walk over the site for a couple of days and study nature's own work. Nature herself gives me most of my ideas."

Once he was allowed to retire, Findlay enjoyed nature to its fullest as a hunter, fisherman, golfer and painter.

He could shoot his age from the time he reached 70 until 91, passing away at the age of 94 in 1966.

All the while, he complained about the game of golf advancing so rapidly in terms of technology.

"Trouble with the game today," he said back in the 1960s, "is that the boys use too many clubs. They spoil themselves with too much equipment. Why, lad, I can take this seven iron here and make it do the work of three. I only carry nine clubs and then I feel I've got too many."

In the end, he did what few hoped for and what most of us aspire to. He had no regrets.

"Aye, laddie," the old Scotsman said. "If I had my life to live again, I wouldna' change one day. The world owes me na'thing."