

# CCF Historical and Architectural Series Volume 13

By Geoffrey L. Manton

## *Lasting Impressions.*

What's your take-away when playing a golf course for the first time or even the 100<sup>th</sup> time? Sometimes playing conditions or a captivating view leave an indelible mark. However, often it's a particular golf hole or grouping of holes that's most memorable. In fact, as described in the book, The Rating Game, by Jonathan Cummings, golf course raters use the concept of the "memorability" of golf holes as one of the key criteria in ranking golf courses for magazines such as Golfweek. At The Country Club of Farmington, the 14<sup>th</sup> hole is often cited by members and guests as being one of the most memorable.

With a saddle shaped green set behind a large mound and fairway running hard against out-of-bounds along Route 10, hole 14 creates a stage unlike any other in the Farmington Valley. The strategic



concept of this hole is simple: in order to have an open view of the putting surface on one's second shot, a drive far down the right side of the fairway is required, challenging the out-of-bounds. Conversely, a more conservative tee shot played either short or left will result in an approach played blind over the mound. This type of golf hole is not unusual on the seaside links of the British Isles where golf holes are carved among and around sandy dunes.

It's certainly safe to say that Devereux Emmet drew inspiration from his jaunts in the U.K. when he designed CCF's #14. However, since Emmet was well versed in the template model of designing golf holes as popularized by C.B. MacDonald, it could be suggested that our 14<sup>th</sup> hole is modeled after the Leven template. In the words of George Bahto, who chronicled MacDonald in his biopic The Evangelist of Golf, "Leven is a short par 4, usually 330 to 360 yards. Fairway bunker or waste area challenges golfer to make a heroic carry for an open approach to the green. Less courageous line from the tee leaves golfer with a semi-blind approach over a high bunker or sand hill to the short side of the green." Sound familiar?

The original Leven hole hails back to the 7<sup>th</sup> hole on what was once Innerleven Links, an 18 hole golf course on linksland between the towns of **Leven** and Lundin Links along Scotland's southern Fife coast. (This hole still exists today but became part of a different course when the towns each divided the original 18.) A burn runs diagonally across the fairway on the original "Leven" creating the strategic element that must be challenged to open the view of the green. As is true of all template designs, there can be variations. At CCF, rather than a burn, the hazard is Route 10 and its stroke and distance penalty inflicts a heavier punishment.

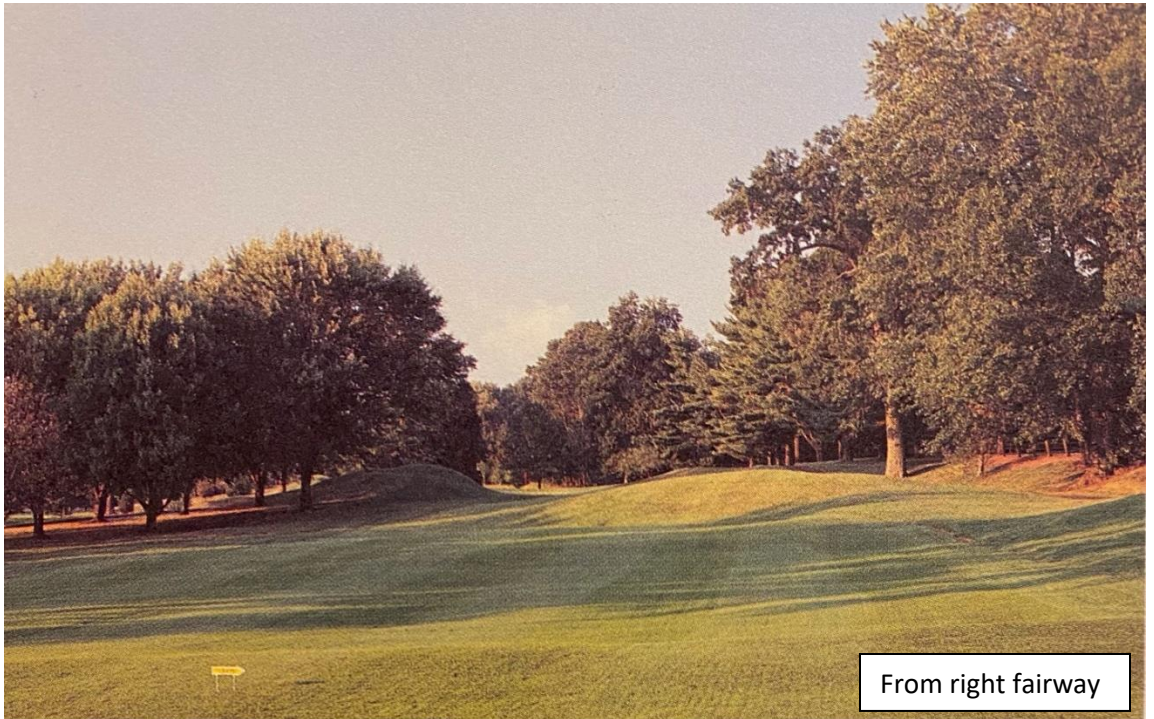
### **Notable "Leven" Templates**

- 12<sup>th</sup> at Fox Chapel GC, Pittsburgh, PA – *Seth Raynor*
- 17<sup>th</sup> at National Golf Links of America, Southampton, NY – *C.B. MacDonald*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> at Shoreacres GC, Chicago, IL – *Seth Raynor*
- 13<sup>th</sup> at Old MacDonald, Bandon, OR – *Tom Doak*

The 16<sup>th</sup> hole at Lundin Links, the original "Leven" hole, with arrows demonstrating various options to reach the green. Like CCF's 14<sup>th</sup> hole, an aggressive play far down the right will result in a clear view of the green.



Until recently, many of the ideals of the Leven design were lost at CCF. The large mound short of the green was once covered with trees and except for a highly lofted shot, the green could not be reached in regulation unless the tee shot was played to the right.



From right fairway

Furthermore, a mixture of trees, including willow and pin oak, lined the left side of the fairway which further forced play to the right, both off the tee and after an errant leftward shot. Having options is fundamental for strategic design and the options on CCF's 14<sup>th</sup> hole used to be few.



From right rough

Two views toward the 14th green, circa 1995. Note the mound short left of the green covered in trees, cloistering the approach. Not many recovery options there, unless you consider punching out from the trees as your version of fun.

Over the past 20 years, a tree management program and bunker (re)construction project has resurrected the Leven features on the 14<sup>th</sup> hole. This was further enhanced when Dusenberry Design implemented an aggressive fairway expansion (read: restoration) and Scott Ramsay created visual contrast by initiating a native program for the rough. The result is a golf hole that barely resembles itself from 2 years ago, let alone 2 decades ago, in both aesthetics and playability.



2 photographs taken from the foreground of 14 fairway, 50 weeks apart. Emmet's bold landforms that were once shrouded by trees are now in the limelight. The 5<sup>th</sup> green (far left) and 4<sup>th</sup> green (right-center) that were once obscured by foliage are now in clear view. Note the pin tucked behind the mound on 14 green (far right).

Some of the initial reactions to these changes have been claims of making the hole too easy. However, subsequent play would tell a different story. Tree removal and fairway expansion creates more options and highlights the virtue of width when approaching golf design. Wide corridors result in more angles for the playing of golf shots. While these new options can afford the player more recovery chances and heroic shots, there can also be undesirable consequences from poorly executed play.



Aerial view of the 14<sup>th</sup> hole, September 2020. Photo credit: Matt Dusenberry

The route to the green that follows the original intent of challenging out-of-bounds by playing far down the right side still exists at 14. However, if O.B. is guarded against by electing to play down the left side of the fairway, perhaps gaining an even shorter (albeit blind) approach shot, the bunkers there are no longer surrounded by rough and more easily collect bounding tee shots. It's true a tee shot left of the fairway bunker might find the small level area in the fairway, but more often the leftward cant of the fairway will kick that tee ball into the native rough. Increased options create the opportunity for reward just as they also build a platform for mistakes. As Alexander Pope famously wrote: "*To err is human,...*".

While not every golfer will be able to appreciate the nuances of golf course architecture when teeing it up, most will be able to recognize the sense of place that has resulted from the most recent improvements on this section of our golf course. When the row of silver maples and sycamore between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> holes were removed, long northward views were restored, including a glimpse of the 5<sup>th</sup> green which seems to float in the distance. The bold landforms that Devereux Emmet created 100 years ago have returned to centerstage.



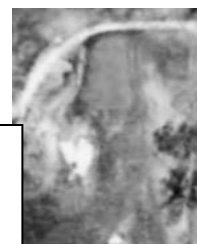
The newly revealed dueling 14<sup>th</sup> (foreground) and 4<sup>th</sup> (background) greens at CCF.

The removal of the sugar maple, oaks, and poplar between 4 and 14 has restored an intimate environment for these sister greens. Nestled between mounds that emulate dunes, the 14<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> greens seem perfectly situated in the landscape, as if they were always meant to be there, inviting an approaching golf shot. The fact that these greens reside so close to each other yet are separated by a ravine creates a unique and alluring bond. So dramatic are all these improvements that a participant in the recent CSGA Senior Amateur Championship, who happens to be Scottish, remarked about CCF: "you've created a little slice of Scotland!"

So, what's the most memorable hole for you at The Country Club of Farmington? What leaves you with a lasting impression? If it's not



the 14<sup>th</sup> "Leven" hole, would the restoration of the front left portion of that green change your opinion? After all, George Bahto further described C.B. MacDonald's Leven hole as having a green that is "usually a moderately undulating surface with least accessible cup placement behind the sandhill."



Enlarged aerial photograph of the 14<sup>th</sup> green in 1934. Note the shape of the green, including the front left portion which approaches the base of the mound. Converting this portion of our current green surround into putting surface would complete the Leven template by creating a dramatic pin location just behind the mound. Also notice how a sandy bunker used to reside on the top of the mound!

1892

***Postscript:*** A hearty thanks to the 73 members and our own Superintendent, Scott Ramsay, who have donated money to the 1892 Fund. None of these improvements would have been possible without their support. The future of our golf course is bright and continued contributions to this fund will help to secure our future. **Please consider investing in our golf course by making a monthly pledge to the 1892 Fund. The Green Committee recommends a \$50 monthly contribution, but any amount (greater or lesser) would be appreciated.**

**This issue and all previous volumes of the Historical and Architectural Series are posted on CCF's website. If you've enjoyed this article, check out the others, either for a first read or a refresher!**

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