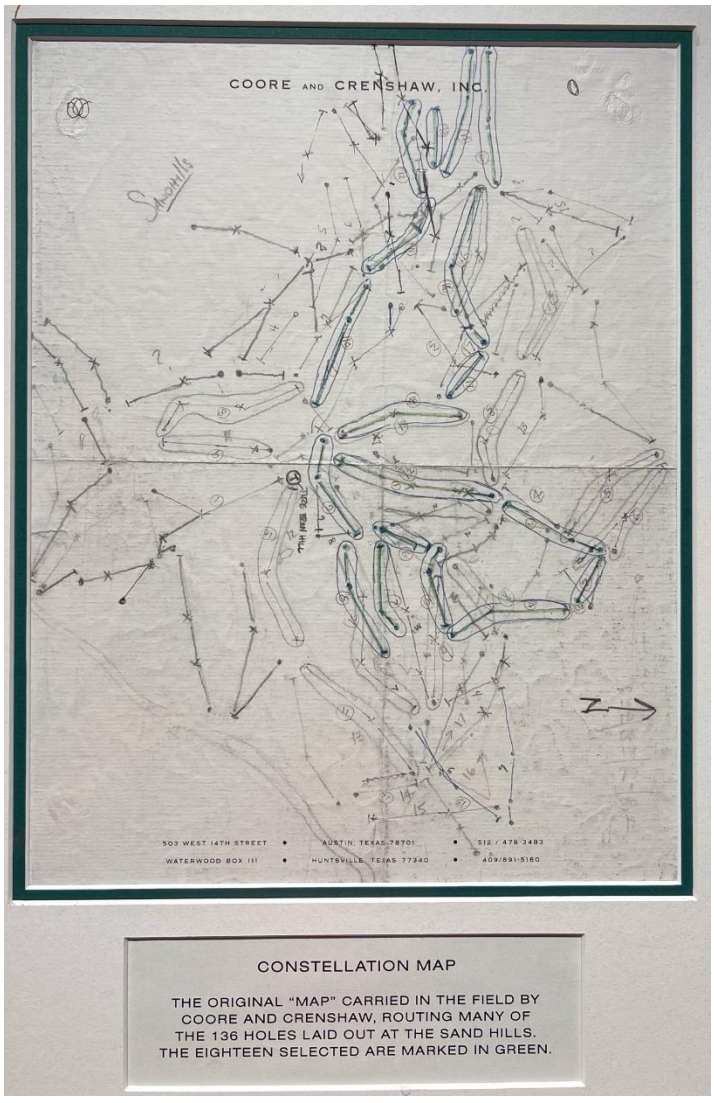
CCF Historical and Architectural Series
Volume 18
By Geoffrey L. Manton

"Nobody puts Baby in a corner."

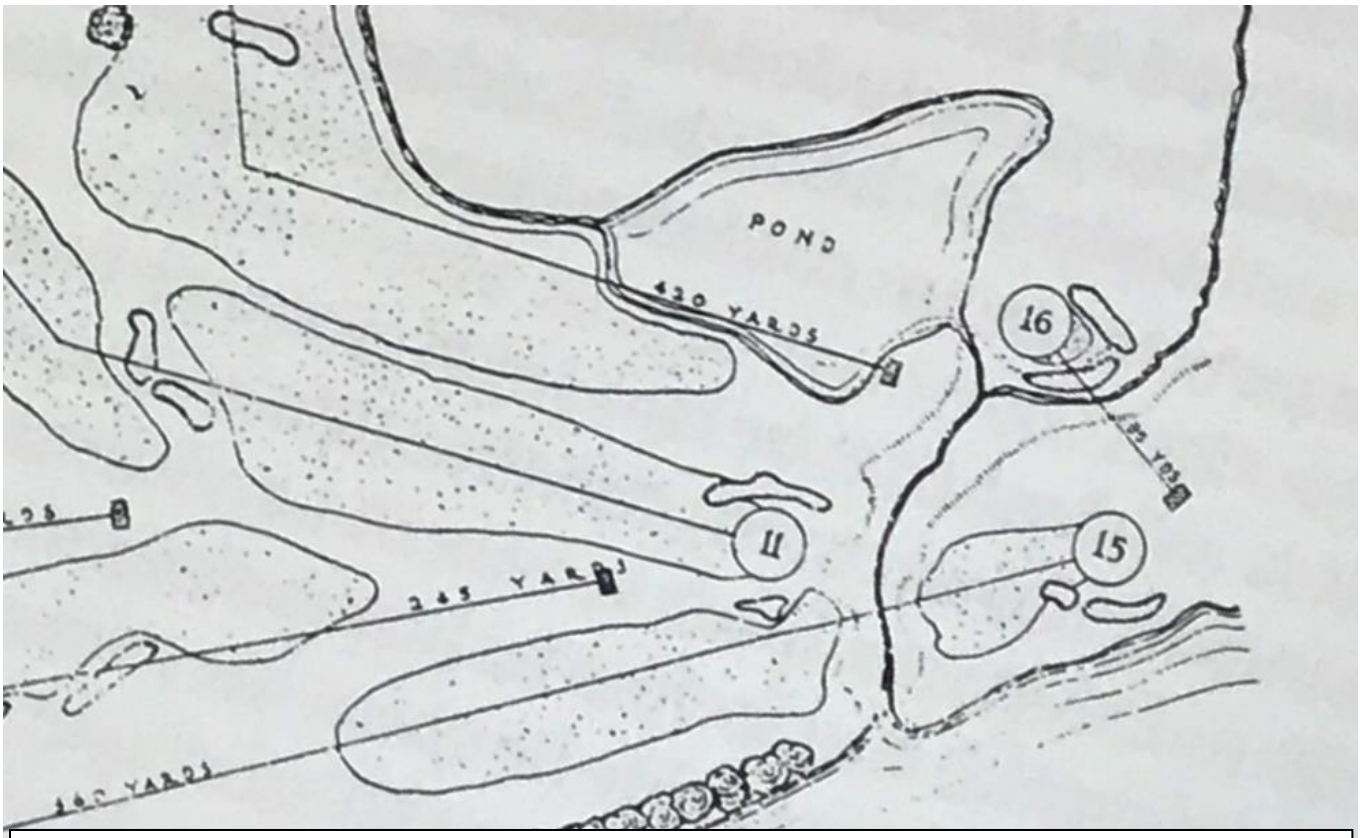
This famous line from the climactic scene in the 1987 box office hit Dirty Dancing may not seem to have anything to do with golf course architecture, however, when examining the intricacies of routing a golf course, Johnny Castle's line epitomizes how certain situations can allow one to show off their talents.

While bunkering, fairway lines, and green contours add color to a golf course, the tee and greens sites are the foundation of what lies on the canvas. However, it is the routing – the interconnection of all those tees and greens into a compilation of 18 sublimely integrated golf holes - that is the genius that is required to create not just a functional golf course, but one that maximizes all the attributes of the land over which the golf is to be played. In fact, the most famous architects are more revered for their skill in routing a golf course over a piece of property than any other aspect of their design. When Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw were presented with thousands of acres to work with in the Nebraska Sand Hills, they identified 136 potential golf holes. Yet, it was their ability to select the "right" 18 of those holes that created the magic one experiences while journeying from the 1st tee to the 18th green at Sand Hills Golf Club *(ranked #6 in the USA by Golf Magazine)*. Conversely, when presented with the limitations of a site, ingenuity is required to overcome any confines and produce a seamless and elegant routing. In his book, Getting to 18, celebrated architect Tom Doak explains the how and why



of the routings of his first 18 golf courses, including details behind the decision making involved in some of his biggest challenges. As Doak and any other architect will affirm, maximizing the corner of a piece of property can often be a daunting task. So, one can only wonder what Devereux Emmet might have considered when evaluating the tiny Southwestern corner of The Country Club of Farmington's property for its 18-hole route.

When routing into the corner section of a golf site, an architect must be sure to perform the task such that the next hole can exit the space in a seamless fashion while maximizing any pre-existing features. Often, the result is a green complex at the corner and a nearby tee box for the subsequent hole heading off in a perpendicular or about-face direction. Rather than entering and directly exiting the notched-out section of land at the southwestern edge of CCF's parcel, Emmet shoe-horned in a dainty 95-yard par 3 between the Farmington River and a small pond whilst traversing a winding tributary creek. In doing so, whether serendipitous or premeditated, Devereux Emmet employed one of architecture's fundamental techniques, *compression and release*, made famous by Emmet's contemporary, Frank Lloyd Wright.



Zoomed in view of the southwestern corner of Devereux Emmet's 1921 18-hole routing diagram for The Country Club of Farmington. Depicted greens 11, 15 and 16 are now holes 7, 11, and 12, respectively.

Our 12th hole, which was the 16th on Emmet's 1921 routing, originally had a much different aesthetic than what exists today. Centered along

the left half of what currently exists, this green was once elongated from front to back, stretching from what is now a cart path to the very edge of the pond. Set at a slight angle to the tee, reaching the front of the green required only a short pitch over a fronting trench bunker. The putting surface's rear was also guarded by a bunker that must be carried as well as by a strip of rear bunkers which formed a beach leading into the pond. Given the topography, and short length of the hole, it is quite possible that the front section of this green was "false" leaving weakly played strokes to tumble into the trench. The 12th hole existed in this form until the summer of 1955 when successive mid-August hurricanes, Connie, and Diane, flooded the Farmington River Valley such that Waterville Road and Farmington Avenue were impassable. Submerged under 20 feet of water and then covered in silt and debris once the water receded, the lower portion of the golf course was closed until September 1956. During the repairs, the 12th green was rebuilt to its current state, a form that is remarkably like, including its bisecting internal ridge, the par 3 4th hole at Wee Burn Country Club in Darien, Connecticut, another Devereux Emmet creation.

The current 12th hole at CCF [above] bears resemblance to the 4th at Wee Burn CC [below], including surface contours.

Deeply set on this recess of land at the southwest corner of our property, the 12th hole comprises the "compression" portion of the *compression and release* architectural technique. However, the squeeze begins on the hole prior. At 367 yards and nary an obstacle in view from the tee, the 11th hole appears befuddling to the first-time visitor when presented with its course handicap strength of 3. As the wide-open space presented on the tee deftly narrows as one approaches the green on the target line, so does the sense of confinement. Conservative plays off the tee benefit from the widest portion of the fairway. However, as the Farmington River creeps inward toward the green, so does the effective landing area, particularly once the fairway ends at the 100 yards plate and the land dives to the creek located 75 yards short of the green. With a slender pedestal green sporting downward sloping false right and left edges, the shortest approach shot on the 11th hole bodes the greatest chance of holding the putting surface. A missed green pin high on the 11th cues reveille for army golf.

The 11th hole at CCF is short but demanding. Playing conservatively off the tee affords plenty of width (green arrows), but one runs out of room quickly to the right (red line) with a more aggressive play that deviates too far off line (white arrow). Bailing out left off the tee (beyond yellow line) will result in approach shots that must navigate a large sycamore tree (yellow arrow). The bunkerless, slippery, slender green complex baits the aggressive tee shot.

Anyone who has played the hole knows what this means.

As the vise closes from 11 tee to 11 green, it holds its grip for the duration of the 12th hole. Then, as exiting this slip of property, the spring uncoils. The 1934 version of the 13th hole had its teeing ground along the pond's edge just north of the 12th green with tee shots played to present day 13th fairway. Back then, the 7th green resided at the site of our current 13th tee boxes. Sometime over the next decade and half, however, perhaps because the 13th hole was being played over land the club did not own, the 7th green was shifted to its current location and new 13th tees were built in its place. In either the current or former presentation, the *compression and release* principle hold true as one transitions from the compact 12th hole to the space that unfolds from the 13th tee outward.

Aerial views of the southwestern section of CCF in 1934 [above] and 2022 [below] visually depict the architectural concept of *compression and release*. The landscape and shots required narrow (red arrows) on hole 11. This landscape compression is maintained from 12 tee to green (yellow arrows) and is then released (green arrows) exiting from 13 tee to fairway and beyond. The second yellow arrow in the below image represents the walk to the 13th tee. Note the repositioning of the 7th green (white asterisk) from 1934 to present day as well as the lost distinctive Emmet bunkering at the bottom left of each image. For conceptual images of how those bunkers might be restored as created by Dusenberry Design, click here.

Just as compressed gas holds the potential energy to burst free from its containment, Frank Lloyd Wright manufactured that expanding urge by designing tight spaces (via low ceilings or narrow corridors) in advance of entering a room he wanted to feel more open and dramatic. By exploiting scale, Wright was able to create a sensual reaction for those moving through the spaces he designed. The Country Club of Farmington emulates this translative sensation in the unique southwestern portion of our property. The irony of feeling constricted when the bustle of a commercial plaza and Route 4 bridge lay just on the other side of the fence along the 12th hole accentuates the compressed sensation by the juxtaposition of conflicting spaces. The sense of freedom (or release) then becomes magnified when moving from confinement to the expanse that is revealed as the golf course opens out from the 13th tee.

Whether an unintended by-product or via conscious design, the compression and release phenomenon at CCF is the direct result of Devereux Emmet's 1921 routing. However, it is also a metaphor for what has occurred on the grounds at CCF (and countless other classic golf courses) over the past 100 years. Originally open and heathland in style, the golf course at The Country Club of Farmington was compressed into a series of constricted corridors during the mid-segment of its existence – the direct result of the tree planting that was ubiquitous in the second half of the 20th Century along with gradual alterations in mowing lines. However, this century's continued tree management program combined with the recent active expansion of fairways and putting surfaces has released the confinement, freeing open a space full of texture and topography for us all to enjoy.

POSTSCRIPT

Over the past 4 years I have enjoyed documenting the history of CCF's golf course with emphasis on the virtues of its architecture. From its origins to its alterations, the CCF Historical and Architectural Series of articles explores what has been and what could be. We have a marvelous golf course, designed by one of the masters of the Golden Age, expertly routed over varying topography, with features that are unlike any other golf course in our area. While Volume 18 culminates the series, I hope the story told carries on because, as more layers are pulled back, more discoveries will be displayed. In any event, as with Johnny and Baby, I've had the time of my life. -GLM