

DCPC, Seth Raynor, Club History, and Architecture

Seth Raynor

Seth Raynor was an engineer on Long Island when he was first employed by Charles Blair MacDonald to help lay out the National Golf Links Of America in 1908. *“When employing him to survey our Sebonac Neck property (the site of NGLA), I was impressed with his dependability and seriousness...he scarcely new the difference between a golf ball and a tennis ball when we first met...”* – C.B. Macdonald.

Raynor stayed on for years during the building of National and became key in orchestrating the planning and construction of the golf course. The concept with NGLA was to take the great golf holes of England, Scotland, and even one from France and bring them to America. Golf courses until then in America had lacked the strategy and staying power of golf holes in Europe. After the successes of NGLA, Piping Rock, The Creek Club, Lido and many other MacDonald courses, C.B. MacDonald was in very high demand. Because of this demand, in 1914 Raynor set out designing his own courses with principles that Macdonald and NGLA had taught him.

He turned out to be the anti-Macdonald in some ways, he would try to come in on budget, and tended to be frugal man whose designs in the field embellished on the natural paths already out there. He would work with clubs to achieve what they wanted rather than imposing his will on them, like C.B. had.

Ironically Raynor never played golf until his fourth course was built. He felt that he did not want his designs to deteriorate to his level of play. In addition, he felt *“the golfer should learn to play the ideal links and that the ideal links should not come down to the playing ability of the lesser skilled player.”*

Raynor has designed great courses such as Yale, Fisher’s Island, Chicago, Shoreacres, Camargo, and Yeamans Hall - all employing the same techniques and strategy that C.B. MacDonald taught him. He has 13 courses in the top 100 (and more being added annually as they get restored and his popularity grows) a testament to the charm, challenge, and beauty of his golf holes. Although his courses are on the shorter side (6200 yards vs. 7200 yards today), the holes defend themselves very well at the green. No other designer incorporates bunkers and green surfaces together so well as to make a misstep into a green very treacherous. Although greens are big, being on the wrong portion of the green can lead to an easy three putt and being too aggressive to get to the right portion of the green can lead to being funneled right off the green.

Raynor never went overseas to see the original holes he was copying, he followed what Macdonald had taught him until his untimely death in 1926. Raynor clung to the belief that the classic and traditional ideas would never to out of style.

George Bahto, The Evangelist of Golf: *“ If any observation can be made on the differences between a Macdonald and Raynor course, it would be that their tendencies mirrored their personalities. Many of Raynor’s interpretations of the Redan, Alps, or Cape were more understated, with a smoother less defiant appearance. Macdonald’s work, like the man himself, tended to be more theatrical, often intimidating players with brooding hazards, leering back as if to dare the golfer.”* Raynor’s style was a perfect fit to match a set of new holes with the existing Ross holes at Dedham.

Macdonald in Scotland’s Gift- Golf: *“ When it came to accurate surveying, contours, plastic relief models of the land, draining, piping water in quantity over the entire course, wells and pumps, and in many instances clearing land of forests, eradicating stones, finally resulting in preparing*

the course for seeding, he had no peer." Indeed, Raynor was known for his drainage skills and the ability to tame difficult land- no wonder he was such a good choice for Dedham.

DCPC History

Dedham Country and Polo Club started out in 1902 as the nine hole Norfolk Country Club on the land where the "inner 8" now sits. Donald Ross laid out a nine hole renovation in 1915. Ross stated in a 1923 letter to his office *"the first nine holes they had was laid out by myself on very restricted land and a shortage of money, but it worked out very well indeed."*

In 1920 the club went through a major transition with the course and the clubhouse. First, the clubhouse, after a fire, was moved to its current location. Herbert Fowler, who's Eastward Ho! and Cruden Bay layouts are highly regarded, was hired to lay out the new ten holes on the acquired Stewart farm across Westfield Street. Because of money issues it seems, progress was slow, and Fowler's involvement waned. Ross again in the same letter, *"When Herbert Fowler, the would be architect came over to America the club was better able to build a real course and instead of giving me a chance they hired him and it was published in all the Boston papers that Fowler was the world's greatest expert. His worked proved to be an absolute failure, not only at Dedham, but also every other job where he worked. Now they want me to pick up where he left off... I have more work on my than I can well take care of and it is much more interesting and satisfactory, and if I did the Dedham work it would mean a sacrifice on my part which I am not willing to make."* Then, in 1923 Seth Raynor was hired to design 10 holes (to pick up where Fowler left off) and make design changes on the current nine holes.

We have many of the same replica holes here at DCPC as these other great clubs such as the redan, reverse redan, alps, punchbowl, knoll, eden, short, biarritz, the bottle hole and more. In fact, a strong argument could be made that we have the best and most identifiable holes of any of his designs. This course also has neat touch in that these traditional holes have been made more subtle to match the existing nine. Efforts are on their way to restore greens and fairways back to their original size and to remove trees that impact the design and strategy of the hole. Hopefully, as we uncover what Raynor intended in his design and the accompanying strategy, the course will be seen a little differently, leading to more enjoyment for the members and their guests.

Hole by Hole Analysis

The '**Redan**', (the third hole at Dedham and a Reverse Redan at 17) described by CB Macdonald: "Take a narrow tableland, tilt it a little from right to left, dig a deep bunker on the front side, approach it diagonally, and you have a Redan." At National, hole #4 falls over five feet from front to rear. Redans are usually around 190 yards (a formidable distance in the early days of golf) with numerous strategic options depending on wind direction and course conditions: Fly it to the green if you are able, lay-up and chip on hoping to make three, hit a running shot at the banked area fronting the green or even play left of the Redan bunker hoping for a better approach angle. Behind the green are usually deep sand pits to catch aggressive play. National's 4th and Piping Rock's 3rd are the most outstanding examples of this they built. The 17th at Dedham could be one of the finest reverse redan's in the world with some tree pruning to allow for a shaped shot and a bunker restoration. The Redan strategy is used by nearly all architects - even as the green complex on par-4 holes. Redan traces its origin to the 15th at North Berwick where Davie Strath first built the hole while revising and formalizing the course. Sir David Baird, a former British Guards officer and a member at North Berwick, remarked that the escarpment Strath used at the 15th hole reminded him of the fortification he had stormed in Crimea 20 years before - the hole was immediately christened the 'Redan'.

The '**Cape**' hole (such as the fourth at Dedham), according to Macdonald, was first labeled that when he built the 14th at NGLA. Most people think it is the angle of the tee-ball play that makes it a 'Cape hole' - not true. The word 'cape' refers to a body of land jutting into a body of water,

forming a small peninsula. Macdonald 14th 'Cape' green originally jutted into the bay, but was subsequently moved in the late 1920s to the left further onto shore and surrounded it with sand. He simulated the water by surrounding the green with bunkers. He and Raynor built more capes this way than using actual water. With the flat bottom bunkers around the base, and the steep slopes of a cape green fill pad, greens completed this way look as if they are jutting out into space.

Cape holes are meant to have an ideal shot into the green from one side of the fairway or the other. For the 4th it would be the left side that opens the green up for the approach shot (currently where the fescue and fairway bunker is). The 14th at Fishers Island, for example, requires the tee-ball to flirt close to the edge of a hazard rather than successfully attempt a carry. Even greens that jut out into midair on the edge of a precipice can be considered 'Cape-style greens' - the second green at Yale was called just that in an early verbal description.

The '**Short**' or 5th hole, is a fairly generic par-3 common to many courses in the British Isles long before Macdonald began his quest for the better holes in Europe. The 'Short' specifically tests the skills of the short-iron game. Macdonald always felt there was room for improvement in a golf hole, so he (and later Raynor) surrounded his versions of this genre' with a sea of sand - elevating the green to make the target more dramatic and intimidating. These Shorts were nearly always built as a squarish looking green with a larger surrounding enclosure of sand bunkering. The bunkering details would then be developed during the construction phase. Short hole putting surfaces were generally much wider than deep, containing strong undulations befitting a shorter hole. A horseshoe feature with the open end facing the tee or a rounded dished depression were mainstays of design. The green features seem to be missing here at Dedham, mostly because it looks like Raynor added bunkering to the (then par 3 third) hole, while not touching the green. Their finest examples can be found at the 6th at National, 3rd at Yeamans Hall, and 10th at Chicago Golf Club (where two depressions are separated by a ridge). The origin of the Macdonald/Raynor Short was the 5th at Brancaster. He favored this particular version over the 8th at St. Andrews because the tee-box was higher and afforded a clearer view of the green. Shorts were generally constructed 135 to 145 yards long but often clubs incorrectly added back tees in a pointless effort to gain yardage on the scorecard.

'**Raynor Prize Dog-Leg**' was first introduced at Lido as the 6th hole and the replica at DCPC is also the our 6th. The Raynor Prize Dog-Leg was an adaptation of the third place entry, and was such an effective design Seth used it as the most difficult par-4 on his courses. Charlie Banks followed suit. The basic strategy of the hole is a dog-leg off the tee that played to echelon bunkers. If the heroic (longer) carry was successful, the golfer was rewarded with an opportunity to carry yet another hazard to the green. However, if the second hazard could not be carried, the player was forced to lay up, leaving a long third shot to a par-4 (normally in the 440-yard range - imagine that play in the 1920's). At DCPC we have mounds where Lido had bunkers, but that offers a visual challenge it its own right. The sixth hole currently plays as the conservative option for everyone, because the tree planting to the right has taken away the heroic two shot option. The two shot option at the 6th was originally very difficult being semi blind and approaching the green from the heavily bunkered right side with a long club.

The seventh here is a '**Knoll**' hole. The Knoll hole was first built at Piping Rock's 13th hole. The original is the 4th hole at Scotsraig GC near St. Andrews. The design is presented as a short par-4 between 310 and 340 yards. At its best, the Knoll genre is played to an elevated green - a much higher version of the 'Short's' plateau. If original, the putting surface should include a single plateau covering the back third of the putting surface. The green was usually only moderately bunkered if at all. Do not go over the back - at Piping Rock - the drop-off is near 20-feet. The

version at Yale, which very closely resembles DCPC's 7th, is a 376 yard 14th, where the tee-ball can be banked off hills to the left but the green is quite moderate with no bunkering.

Our '**Maiden**' hole is the 8th green. This design is based on many natural plateau greens in the British Isles. Usually the hole is a par 4 that is one of the longest on the course. It seems that we have one of the early versions that has a funnel that will take an aggressive shot and funnel it through the green to a bunker behind (we currently have a grass walkway there that leads to a swamp).

The aerial from 1938 also shows a very square green with a continuous bunker on two sides, starting front left and going around the back to the back right. It looks like the current last fairway bunker on the left does not come into the fairway as much as the original fairway bunker and the best angle to come into the green is just over that bunker.

This hole demands a lot of control. Imagine having a mid iron (back in the day it would be a long iron) into a fast hard green, trying to get to the correct plateau and avoiding the funnel in the middle of the green. Imagine the control required from a bunker to get your "sandie" by placing the bunker shot on the correct portion of the green. Being on the wrong part of the green presents is huge misfortune because making two putts extremely difficult. The stroke or half stroke for being on the wrong part of the green is a real hazard with a penalty equal to being in a bunker.

Good examples of the Maiden: Country Club of Charleston's 7th, Fishers Island's 11th green, and the 11th at Yeamans Hall. Dedham's green is the best of the bunch.

Our ninth is an '**Alps**' hole. The original Alps hole is the 17th at Prestwick Golf Club in Ayrshire, Scotland. At Prestwick a huge dune fronts the green obscuring the golfer's view leading to a blind approach shot and a hidden cross bunker sits between the dune and the green ready to catch any shots that are short. This set up is very similar to DCPC's 9th hole.

Usually the tee shot has to negotiate a diagonal bunker fronting the tee, in our case we have a diagonal stream. At NGLA the hole plays to the right as an easier avenue for the shorter hitters, but this cannot be the case here because of the danger the stream running along the right side presents. A play to the left at NGLA risks going into a bunker or into the native areas. The same is true of our Alps hole. All that being said, it looks like ours plays more like the original- the direct path is the best path to the green, trying to find a level spot from which to hit the second shot.

DCPC's 9th, at 331 yards, plays shorter than its counter part at National Golf Links of America (the 3rd plays to 420 yards), Prestwick's 391 yards, Yale's 406 yard 12th, and the 4th at Fisher's Island. A key to the second shot on the Alps hole is the length needed coupled with height to get over the mound (yes, the mound is that big) and a short run to keep it on the green. Due to the lack of length, this is an element missing here at DCPC.

The Alps bunker, the hidden cross bunker that fronts the green, is an element that all Alps holes share. Sadly, many courses, not realizing what they have, have filled in their cross bunkers. Old aerial photos of DCPC show that the Alps bunker on nine used to be long and as wide as the green. Today, that bunker has been considerably compromised.

The final characteristic that all Alps holes share is a ridge or spine running through the putting surface. This ridge makes the placement of the second shot very important to keep the number of putts to a minimum. This is why course management that includes local knowledge (and a peak from the seventh green to the ninth green) is important to playing our Alps hole. These old courses were originally designed for match play, and this type of course management is required to play the ninth. In fact, there could be a strong case that a regulation sized flagstick could be used on the ninth to place even more of a premium on course management and gamesmanship.

Seth Raynor built an Alps on most courses, but they were generally identified as having 'Alps bunkering' - meaning some cross-bunkering in front of the green. Instead of a blind approach over a 'mountain,' Raynor customarily positioned his Alps renditions just over the crest of a rising fairway - then cross-bunkering the green complex. Sadly, many clubs covered in the cross bunker because they did not understand the origin and concept. It turns out DCPC's Alps, no matter how small, is one of the most unique and true versions because of the great topography that exists here.

Berard Darwin in 1910:

“The ‘Alps’, is one of the finest holes anywhere, and the finest blind hole in golf. The drive must be straight and true down in a valley between two hills, and then comes the second, over a vast grassy hill, beyond which we know there is a bunker both deep and wide. The ball may clear the hill and yet meet with a dreadful fate, but there is glorious compensation in the fact that if we do clear the chasm we could be near the hole and may possibly putting for a three... Old Willie Park wrecked his chances at yet another [British Open] Championship in 1861, owing to a daring attempt to cross the Alps in two, which brought his ball into one of the worst hazards of the green, and cost him three strokes... Truly the ‘Alps’ is a hole with great history.”

The 10th hole or '**Long**' is the fitting name for the longest par 5 on the golf course, based on the 14th hole at St. Andrews. The representation at DCPC most closely resembles the Long hole at The Lido Club, right down to the mounding on the left and right of the landing area, and with the stream here somewhat representative of the cross bunkering that existed. From the original tee (the forward-most white tee) the large hill on the left of the fairway had to be negotiated to get a good kick forward, or the kick would be to the right into a bunker complex. From there the decision was to lay up short of the stream or to go for it. The back tee keeps this option available for the long hitters who can hit the ball 250 yards, and the addition of the new tee will allow that option for the moderate length players.

The 11th hole green complex is so similar to Yale's 7th that we have named this the '**Valley**' hole. This hole is pretty non-descript as far as identifying features other than a drive into a valley and a shot up to a green perched on naturally high ground. Originally the green was much squarer and came close to the front edge of the slope while the right bunker wrapped around the back of the green. A drive staying to the left was not only the shorter route to the green, but it offered the best angle.

Charles Banks, Raynor's protégé describing Yale's Valley, *“This hole reminds me of Indian Summer. It is a pleasant, inviting and a trifle lazy. The fairway is a natural lane...the approach to the green is a rounded knoll and the green winds to the right on top of the knoll. There is a wide bunker to the right of the green. Play on this hole is better if made to the left hugging the trees so as to get a better entry to the green...”*

The '**Eden**' hole or Dedham's 12th, is fashioned after the 11th at St. Andrews (or High Hole-In), whose severely sloping back-to-front putting surface remains one of the most fearsome in golf. Original Macdonald/Raynor/Banks versions usually present teardrop shaped greens, falling in a yardage range between 160 to 175 yards. Aesthetically, their Eden holes have some of the most picturesque greenside bunkering on the course. Pinched in front by a representation of 'Strath's' pot bunker on the right and 'Hill' bunker on the left, Macdonald always installed an 'Eden' bunker behind the green representing the shoreline of the Eden River behind St. Andrews' 11th green. Strath's bunker, of course, is named for the great Davie Strath and his many unsuccessful bouts with this pit. Greenside left we find Hill bunker, so called because its cape creates a downhill slope in the putting surface. Most renditions include a 'Shelley' (or 'Cockleshell') bunker short right of the green. There is a strong consensus that the 11th at Fishers Island framed by Long Island Sound in the background, may be as good as it gets. Macdonald felt there should be an intimidating hazard fronting the Eden hole because at the turn of the century golfers sometimes

played short of the hole (even using putters) and chipped on to avoid disaster. Currently, Dedham's Eden is missing a good deal of its identifying bunkering and the formidable hazard in front of the green has been filled in.

The '**Punchbowl**' 13th is basic - another generic hole from the early days of golf when many greens were positioned in natural hollows so as to conserve as much moisture as possible. This led to many courses in the British Isles having at least one (they must not have ice damage to deal with). These succeeded due to the fact that they were built on a sand base. Many a punchbowl green have been bulldozed because of drainage and disease problems associated with moving such greens inland to tighter soils.

It seems where ever the topography allowed, Raynor or MacDonald would put a punchbowl type green in. They had many Punchbowl/Alps combinations (there is an argument that the 9th is one of these - an Alps hole with a Punchbowl green). Another Alps/Punchbowl combination that many of you would be familiar with is the 4th at Fisher's Island.

The 13th here at DCPC is a classic Punchbowl that has many features in common with the Punchbowl 16th at National Golf Links. The drive at NGLA is important because you could end up in a 20' hollow on either side of the fairway, at DCPC the hollow is just to the left. The fairway bunkers on the 13th hole are not original and the one on the right along with the maple trees erase the advantage of going to the right side. The original fairway extended all the way to the road, giving the strategic player who could put his ball up there a look at the putting surface for his approach shot.

The 13th green here used to be amazing. It started at the front left rough area, went through the existing bunker (the old bunker was set further from the green), across the top of the approach (where the fairway starts to shrink down), along the top of the right hand ridge, and along the back ridge (the back bunker wasn't there), and came back along the left ridge back to the front corner. Everyone thinks this will make the green easier, but there are so many obstacles in the green, being in the wrong spot can be a penalty, never mind the monster long putts that will be possible. Overly aggressive shots can be funneled through the green to the right and sit against the back, having to contend with putting over the spine (a Raynor/Macdonald feature with many greens of this type) in order to get the ball out. As we expand this green (given the introduction of non original bunkers it won't be back to the original dimensions) many of these features will become apparent.

The 14th at Dedham, the '**Biarritz**' hole, is the longest of the par-3s. Its background stems from the 'Chasm' hole (#3) at the original Willie Dunn course at Biarritz - famous at the time as a luxurious international spa. Located along the northern coast of France, the 'Chasm' hole was played from an 80-foot high cliff over the Bay of Biscay to a 50-foot cliff beyond. The water carry was nearly 170 yards. The story goes that while visiting the spa, William Vanderbilt and two close friends (sportsmen but non golfers) asked for a demonstration of the game by Dunn. Out to the Chasm hole they went and Willie laid a few balls down and hit them to the green "220 yards away." An enthralled Vanderbilt remarked, "this was better than skeet shooting" and asked Dunn to come to America to help build a course in New York. Dunn accepted the invitation, expanding the Shinnecock Hills course to a full 18-holes. Ironically, a Biarritz was never built at National - probably the only 18-hole course Macdonald and Raynor designed without one. After National, he and Raynor built the first version at Piping Rock's the 9th hole. There are three versions of a Biarritz. The one we have here is a simple single green variety. At Westhampton Country Club the 17th hole was thought to be a one-of-a-kind Biarritz where their single green version was originally framed, front and two sides, by a huge horseshoe bunker facing the green rather than the typical strip bunkers that normally run down both sides of the green and the approach area. DCPC's used to be the same way. The second type, was in total, with the green and the approach area (often planted and mowed as putting surface), between 225 and 245 feet long and separated by a deep swale. Architects of the day often referred to it as 'Macdonald's Folly' for the

balls could not be carried into the green and a bounding shot was required that would run through the approach, disappear into the swale and hopefully reappear on the green. Charlie Banks built some of the better Biarritz holes at the Knoll, Forsgate and Tamarack. One of the most unique versions was the 8th at the great Lido course which was built parallel to the lapping waves of the Atlantic Ocean and usually played with a strong crosswind. It eventually washed away and shortened to about 180 yards, was still too difficult and finally ended up even shorter. Creek has a wonderful version that plays to an island and Fishers Island's 5th is a classic. There are too many great ones to detail, but Shoreacres, Yale, and Chicago Golf, should be seen if possible.

Macdonald was striving balance and the caliber of golf shot values on his set of par-3s. If at all possible he and Raynor would try to position the line of play to different points of the compass so if there was wind it would effect each hole differently. Looking at Dedham we get three of the four points on a compass.

Our 15th, the '**Road**' hole- what is there to say about the original except it has withstood the challenge of 150 years of golf? Since it was first built in 1842 when Allan Robertson formalized the Old Course, the Road Hole at St. Andrews remains the most fearsome test in championship golf. Most of Macdonald and Raynor's versions were designed as par fours holes. They rarely built the requisite bunker as deep as the original, but most were still a daunting task to negotiate. The Road hole is a representation of the 17th at St. Andrews, where the drive has to go over a hotel to get into the best location for your approach. This was often simulated by Raynor with bunkers, mounds, and sometime water. The reason for this premium on attack angle is because of the difficulty of the green front by an extremely penalizing pot bunker (very often removed or made less severe by memberships once Raynor left town). Behind the green at St. Andrews there is a road that is in play, no drop allowed (without penalty). Raynor would put a long bunker to the back right of the green to simulate this.

DCPC's green complex is set up now to look like a Redan, but old photos reveal a pot bunker in the front left corner of the green. Originally from the tee the golfer here is to challenge the right side of the landing area by driving the ball down the hill (the mound on the right is representative of the drive at St. Andrews over the hotel) on the right or laying up short to have an angle into the green that avoid the pot bunker. This angle is extremely important for the back hole locations as the green as it is designed to kick any overly aggressive shots into the surrounding bunkers. A play down the middle would have gotten a kick left (there was no fairway bunker) forcing the golfer to contend with the pot bunker in the front left.

The '**Bottle**' Hole is a modification of the original 12th hole at Sunningdale's Old Course, Berkshire, England. The original of this hole at DCPC offered an alternate fairway to the right, currently treed with various pines (a fate suffered by many Bottle holes), and bunkers on that slope before the trees. The shot from the alternate fairway offered a great view into the green. The lower fairway, currently the one in use, was a treacherous path with the cross bunkers, mound left blocking the view of the green and at least one bunker to the left of the green originally, the left side wasn't an easy shot.

With the collection of historical holes, and a few that could easily be adapted in the Raynor vein, DCPC is at a very exciting time in its history. It is very fitting that as we approach our 100th anniversary we finally have a timeless and noble direction for this club. Dedham will be alone in carrying the torch for history, strategy, and classic golf in Massachusetts, but nationwide courses like Yale, Fishers Island, Chicago Golf, and Yeamans Hall are restoring their golf courses to their roots and enjoying the recognition and playability that goes along with it.

Adapted and compiled from George Bahto's [The Evangelist of Golf-The Story of Charles Blair Macdonald](#), Geoffrey Cornish's [Classic Golf Hole Design](#), and several interviews with historians, superintendents, and golf course architects.