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# HGCC Club History

*The Club's history is the subject of two publications, "A Hundred Years of Golf" (1993) and "The Hamilton Golf and Country Club 1894-2004. An Illustrated History" (1996). The following account and that on Colt the architect, draw on those sources.*

Hamilton Golf and Country Club's history dates back to October 24, 1894, when the newly formed, unincorporated Hamilton Golf Club held its opening match on a 12-hole, links-style course on grounds belonging to The Central Fair Agricultural and Industrial Company. The property was located at the corner of Barton and Ottawa Streets, adjoining the former Hamilton Jockey Club property in what is now Hamilton's industrial northeast.

Hamilton G&CC is one of the 10 founding clubs of the Royal Canadian Golf Association—today's Golf Canada. In the spring of 1896, the Club moved to a new nine hole course (later expanded to 18) that was laid out on a property known as Paradise Farm, located on the south side of Aberdeen Avenue in Hamilton, just below the escarpment. Although we have no record of who laid out the first nine holes, it was most likely founders Peter Crerar and J.J. Morrison, both Scots, who oversaw the work.

A clubhouse was built the following year. In October 1899, the lady members organized their own club as a section within The Hamilton Golf Club. By 1901, the Club had 40 lady and 65 gentlemen members.

**JOHN SUTHERLAND** - The Club hired its first greenskeeper, John Sutherland, on April 1, 1901. Sutherland came to the Aberdeen Avenue property from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, where he learned about turf care for lawn bowling and tennis courts. At the time, sheep grazed the fairways and there were wooden fences around the greens to protect the short grass. Sutherland started out with

a wheelbarrow, rake and a hoe and gradually the layout was expanded to 12 holes, then 15, and finally 18 by about 1904. It's interesting to note that in 1903 the Club received permission for the first time to create bunkers on the course as part of its lease. In 1907, the Club purchased the property.

The Hamilton Golf and Country Club Limited, today's Club, was incorporated in June 1906. A year later, it purchased the Paradise Farm for \$12,000 and then leased the golf course to the Hamilton Golf Club until 1912, at which time the two clubs amalgamated and the original Hamilton Golf Club ceased to exist.

**GRANGE FARM** - Rising property taxes and member dissatisfaction with the course prompted the Directors to begin a search for a new location late in 1912 with the assistance of Sutherland and George Cumming, the professional from The Toronto Golf Club. In January 1914, the Club purchased the 200-acre Grange Farm in Ancaster from Mrs. Margaret Bevan for \$40,000.

**HARRY COLT** of England was retained to lay out a new course on the Ancaster property. He had already designed a number of courses in the United Kingdom, including the new Eden course at St. Andrews, and had served as the architect for The Toronto Golf Club course in 1911-12.

Colt visited Ancaster in May 1914, and designed the course for a fee of 300 guineas (about \$1,533). The work of clearing the grounds and laying out the holes began immediately under the direction of course superintendent Sutherland, and seeding was completed by the fall. The planting of what would become many thousands of trees and shrubs also commenced. The total cost of the project over the years 1914-17, including that of the land, was \$108,000.

The course was opened for play for one month in late 1915 and the formal opening was held on June 1, 1916. The remodelled farmhouse served as the clubhouse until 1929, when the present one was opened by J.J. Morrison, one of the founders and early presidents of the original club and an Honorary Life Member.

"What you see today is not a lot different than Harry Colt saw in 1914," says Club historian Les King. "For the first few decades of the 20th Century, Hamilton was considered one of the best courses in North America." The Aberdeen Avenue course was sold by the Club in 1924 to the City of Hamilton for \$90,000 and was developed into the present municipal Chedoke Golf Club.

**THE GOLDEN YEARS** - The years 1919-39 were golden ones for Hamilton G&CC. In 1919, the Ancaster course hosted the 2nd International Matches between the leading amateur golfers of the United States and Canada, witnessing American stars as Chick Evans, Bobby Jones and Francis Ouimet competing against the likes of Canada's George Lyon, William McLuckie and Hamilton's own Fritz Martin.

**EARLY CANADIAN OPENS** - The Canadian Open was held the following week and the winner, Douglas Edgar from Atlanta, set a new course record of 66. This was to be eclipsed by Tommy Armour's 64 at the 1930 Open. The ladies' Canadian Open title was contested over the Ancaster course in 1922, 1924 and 1929, with Alexa Stirling, Glenna Collett and Helen Hicks, respectively, emerging victorious.

**C. E. ROBINSON** - In 1928, acting on earlier advice that it had received from Colt's partner, Hugh Alison, who had visited and advised on the layout in 1920,



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the Board purchased 119 acres located east of the 14th and 15th holes (now Nos. 5 and 6 of the South Course) for the sum of \$15,000. This land was planted with trees. Almost a half-century later, 75 acres were developed by the Club as its new East nine, with C.E. (Robbie) Robinson as the architect.

Construction on the new nine commenced during November 1973 and was completed in September 1974 at a cost of \$320,000. To accommodate the new nine, changes had to be made to the existing nine-hole short course and to the 15th and 16th holes of the old course. Club President Glen Chambers and "New Nine" Committee Chairman Jim Firth officially opened the East nine on August 2, 1975.

For playing purposes, the Club's 27 holes were designated as the West Nine (the original holes 1 to 9), the South Nine (the original holes 10 to 18) and the East Nine. They are played in three rotations, W-S, S-E and E-W. With the exception of the alterations made to the old 15th and 16th holes noted above, and changes in the locations of the greens on the 4th and 13th holes, the original course (now W-S) remains basically the same as that laid out by Colt.

The sale in 1984 of some 22 acres adjoining the East nine allowed the Club to both discharge the debt incurred in building the new nine and to fund a major renovation of the clubhouse and the installation of a new automated irrigation system on the course.

**WARREN SYE** - The 1990s witnessed several significant events. In 1991, Warren Sye, in winning the Ontario Men's Amateur Championship, set a new course record of 62 for the W-S course, breaking the old mark of 64 established by Armour in 1930 and tied by Jim Nelford in 1977. In 1994, the Club celebrated its Centennial with the publication of its history, One Hundred Years of Golf,

by Les King, and by hosting the Canadian Men's Amateur Championship for the sixth time.

**CHARLES COODY** - The Club was the venue in 1996 for the Du Maurier Championship, an event on the PGA Senior Tour in which Charles Coody triumphed. In winning the 1999 Club Championship, meanwhile, Matt Ion not only shattered the record for the three-round event with an 11-under-par total but also established a new record of 65 for the S-E course.

**BOB TWAY** - The next significant event was the Bell Canadian Open in 2003, won by Bob Tway in a playoff over Brad Faxon.

**JIM FURYK** - The Open returned in 2006, when Jim Furyk won by a single stroke. The modern-day course record of 63 was matched four times that week, with Jim Furyk, Justin Rose, Brett Quigley and Kevin Sutherland each sharing in the feat.

**SCOTT PIERCY** - In July 2012, Scott Piercy picked up his second PGA Tour victory with a 17-under par to defeat Robert Garrigus and William McGirt by a single stroke.

**CLUBHOUSE** - Renovations on the clubhouse began in April 2007. It was opened for partial occupancy in June 2008, before being completed in November 2008, with the grand opening celebration held on June 14th, 2009.

**PRACTICE AREAS & SHORT COURSE** - Most of the driving range nets and poles were brought down in an ice and wind storm in February 2008. The driving range was subsequently relocated to the range initially built to accommodate the 2003 Canadian Open. The teeing area of this ground, which no longer requires nets or poles, was expanded in conjunction with the clubhouse renovation.

In October 2009, Hamilton G&CC's shareholders voted in favour of relocating six short course holes to the site of the old

driving range. Construction of the six new Colt inspired holes commenced in November 2009 and was completed in time for a July 1, 2011 opening.

**RESEVOIR** - In September 2009, the Club received all necessary permits to begin construction on the water resources project, which included construction of a 20,000,000+ gallon reservoir to the right of No. 4 West. It also involved the re-routing of the stream channel of the tributary of Ancaster Creek in the vicinity of No. 3 East green and the adjacent irrigation pond. The water resources project was completed in late fall 2010.

**KEY STAFF** - The current Head Golf Professional is David Miller, who previously served as an assistant pro at the Club from 1991 to 1995. Mr. Miller is only the sixth person to hold this position since 1912. Nicol Thompson served from 1912 until his retirement in 1945. He was succeeded by Dick Borthwick, who retired in 1974. Ken Steeves held the reins from 1975 until his untimely passing in 1980. Gary Maue took over from 1981 to 1989, and Rob McDannold followed in the role from 1989 until 2007.

Golf Course Superintendent Rhod Trainor joined the Club in 1990 and will retire at the end of the 2019 season. The Chief Operating Officer, Peter Holt, was appointed to his current position in November 2015.

The Club currently has over 1,200 members, of whom nearly three quarters are golfing members.