



Harry S. Colt – The Natural Choice

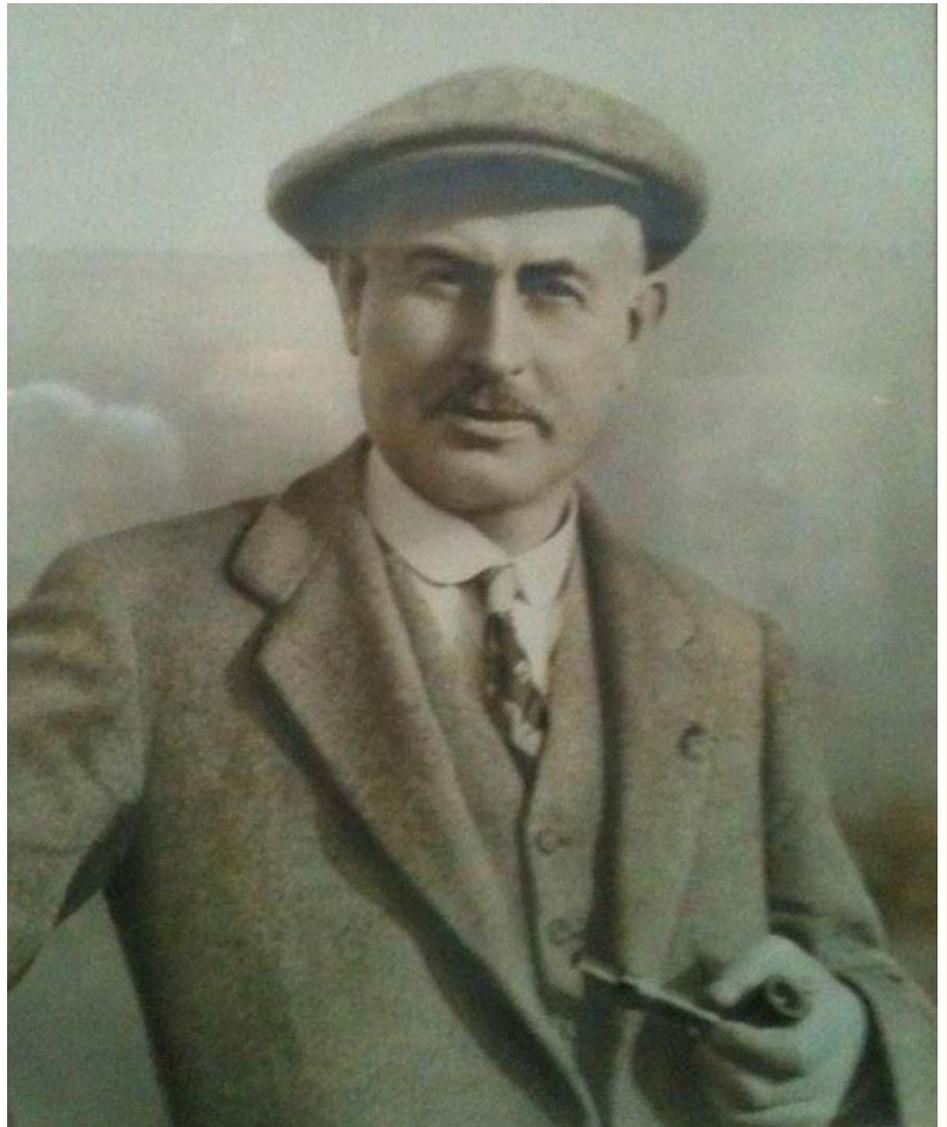
While copies of his hole-by-hole renderings are displayed proudly in the stately clubhouse at Hamilton Golf and Country Club, Harry Shapland Colt never saw his completed work at what would become one of North America's truly great country clubs.

The English golf course architect (1869-1951) first journeyed to Canada in March 1911 to design the course at The Toronto Golf Club and returned two years later to inspect it. Colt was back on the boat headed to Canada in April 1914 to visit the new site for Hamilton G&CC in Ancaster. It was a quick trip. He and his wife, Charlotte Laura, returned to England on May 18th aboard the *Megantic*, which sailed from Montreal.

Although Colt had started working as a partner in the Hastings Law Firm of Sayer & Colt in 1894, his passion was golf. He would soon start tinkering in course design, with his first solo effort at Rye Golf Club near the English Channel, where he became its Honorary Secretary in 1895.

In 1897, Colt became a founding member of the Royal & Ancient Rules of Golf Committee. In 1901, he applied for the job of Secretary at the new Sunningdale Club outside London. It was from this base that he gradually developed his interest and ultimate career as a golf course architect, making him the first of that profession to have not previously been a professional golfer. Over his career Colt would play a role in the design of more than 300 courses worldwide—115 on his own.

When the "father of British golf course design" arrived in Toronto he was in his early 40s and firmly established as the world's first international designer of great golf courses. His views on architecture were set out in 1912 in a book co-edited by Sir George Riddell and Mar-



Harry S. Colt – The Natural Choice

tin H.F. Hutton. In introducing his thoughts on the subject of golf course design, Colt emphasized that, "it may be well to bear in mind that golf is primarily a pastime and not a penance, and that the player should have the chance of extracting from the game the maximum amount of pleasure with the minimum amount of discomfort,

as punishment for his evil ways. He will not obtain this pleasure unless you provide plenty of difficulties, but surely there is no need for vindictiveness."

The first architect to prepare tree-planting plans, Colt's design concept excluded holes more than 500 yards. A master of



CANADIAN
OPEN

the short hole, he disliked blind shots, but enjoyed creating illusions to deceive golfers. He was also among the first to take linksland golf and bring it inland, as he did with both the Toronto and Hamilton courses, where he employed horse and plow in construction.

In 2005, Bruce Critchley wrote in *Golf Course Architecture* that, "Colt saw it as his vocation to bring in angles and bends, slopes and undulations, the soft curves of nature. If he had one philosophy it was that his courses should blend in with their surroundings, be part of the landscape, not imposed upon it. He introduced the dogleg, not solely as a space-induced change of direction, but part of the many questions a golfer should be asked to measure his skill and retain his interest."

By the time Colt arrived at Hamilton in May 1914, he'd left Sunningdale and was fully engaged in golf course architecture. He later partnered with Hugh Alison, John Morrison and, for a few earlier years, Dr. Alister MacKenzie. Although Hamilton G&CC does not have a record of his initial thoughts on the land or the design of the course, Colt did place the plans in the capable hands of course superintendent John Sutherland, who supervised construction for the next two years.

The new course, a par-73 measuring 6,350 yards, opened informally on September 11, 1915, and the formal opening of the Club took place on June 1, 1916.

Today, Hamilton G&CC measures 6,966 yards from the tips and par has dropped to 70, reflecting the changes on holes No. 2, 11 and 18, which used to play as par-fives and now count as fours.

Club historian Les King believes Colt would have had to rely on photographs to have viewed his finished product. "I don't think he would ever have seen the

completed course at Ancaster through his own eyes," King notes. "But through the photographs of the 1919 US-Canada match and the 1919 Canadian Open, he would surely have 'seen' the course."

The club is currently working with the firm of MacKenzie & Ebert and consulting architect Martin Ebert, who created a Golf Course Masterplan in 2017.



Designs on Greatness

A roll call of some of Colt's finest works;

Alwoodley, Leeds, England (1907)
Burning Tree, Bethesda, MD (1924)
CC of Detroit, Grosse Pointe Farms, MI (1927)
Eden, St Andrews, Scotland (1913)
Falkenstein, Hamburg, Germany (1930)
Hamilton G&CC, Ancaster, ON (1916)
Knollwood, Lake Forest, IL (1923)
Le Touquet-Sea Course, Le Touquet, France (1930)
Milwaukee CC, Milwaukee, WI (1929)
Moor Park (West Course), Hertfordshire, England (1923)
Orchard Lake in Michigan
Royal Belfast
Royal County Down
Royal Dublin,
Royal Lytham & St. Annes
Royal Liverpool

Royal Portrush
Rye, Hastings, England (1895)
Pine Valley, Clementon, NJ (1914, 1918) (routing, plus holes 12-15)
Sea Island (Seaside Nine), St. Simons Island, GA (1928)
St. George's Hill, Surrey, England (1913)
Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, England (1908)
Sunningdale (New Course), Berkshire, England (1922)
Swinley Forest, England (1910)
Toronto GC, Toronto, ON (1912)
Wentworth, Surrey, England (1924)