



The French Lick Hotel

Ross' Enduring Legacy At French Lick

By Neal Kotlarek



The French Lick Hotel Lobby

Two names appear on all lists of America's greatest golf architects: Donald Ross and Pete Dye. The master works of both designers are generally recognized as among the top 50 courses in the country.

While the design styles of this dynamic pair contrast greatly, Ross and Dye do share some fascinating history together. When Dye was stationed in the army at Fort Bragg, N.C., in the 1940s, he regularly played golf at nearby Pinehurst No. 2, among Ross' best works.

Over that time, Dye got to know Ross, who lived in Pinehurst and had built both that course and the Fort Bragg course where Dye served as superintendent. While Dye didn't begin his golf course design career until his mid-30s, Pete followed Ross's lead as a prolific designer, with over 200 courses credited to Dye Designs, which incorporates five family members.

When Ross died in 1948, he left behind an extraordinary legacy of over 400 courses, including the aforementioned Pinehurst layout, Seminole Golf Club in Florida, and the South Course at Oakland Hills Country Club in Michigan. The list of elite Dye courses includes TPC Sawgrass in Florida, Whistling Straits in Wisconsin, and Teeth of the Dog at Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic.

Dye's career in golf came full circle in 1995 when the American Society of Golf Course Architects bestowed upon Dye the coveted Donald Ross Award. Which, amazingly enough, is scheduled to be presented to Pete's wife Alice in May.

The work of these two remarkable men intertwines at French Lick Resort in southern Indiana. Named 2017 Course of the Year in February by the National Golf Course Owners Association, the Pete Dye Course rests on dramatically hilly land that was home to the resort's



Walter Hagen



1924 PGA

longtime owner – and long-ago chairman of the Democratic National Committee – Thomas Taggart. Drenched in history, the Donald Ross Course resides on 60 acres of rugged landscape that takes golfers on a journey back to American golf's origins. Host to the 1924 PGA Championship as well as to LPGA tournaments and Senior PGA events, the layout has been perennially ranked among the state's top courses and in 2005 - 2006 was lovingly restored to its original look and feel.

The Donald Ross Course will steal at least part of the golf spotlight away from its counterpart this year as the resort celebrates the layout's 100th anniversary. Following the construction of the Tom



Pete Dye #10



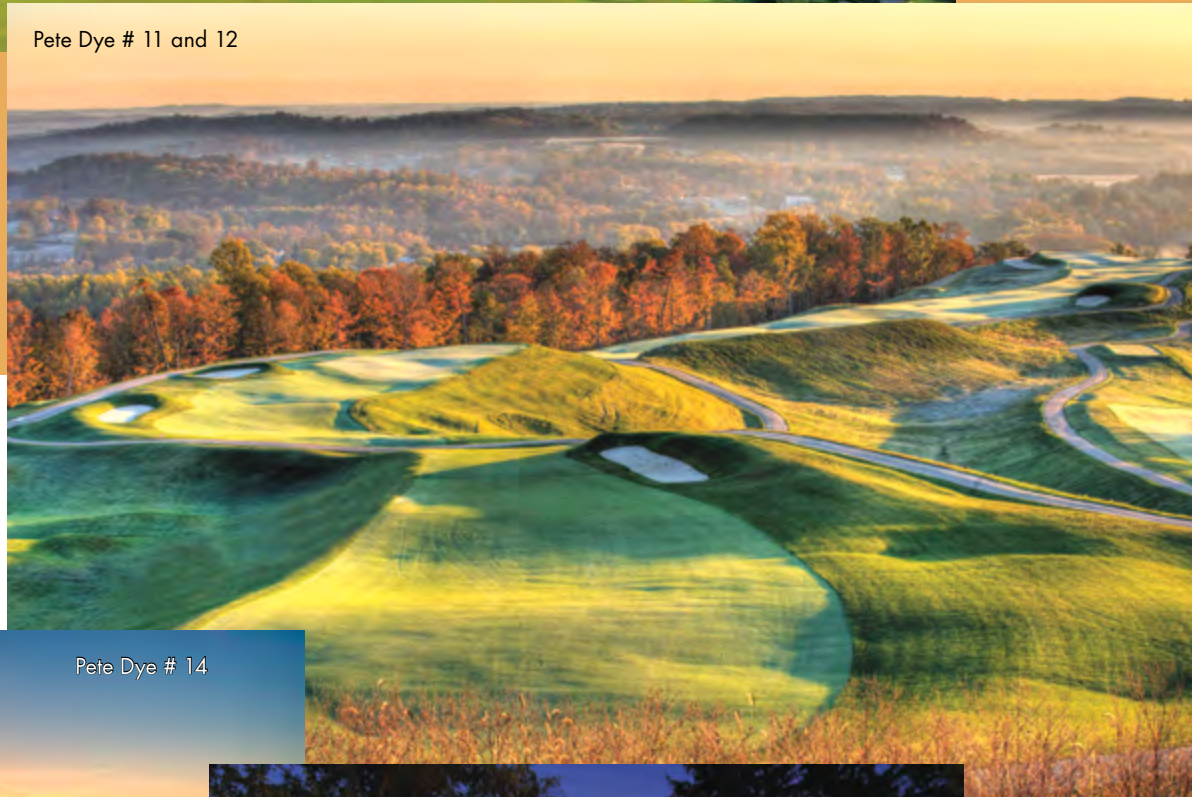
West Baden Atrium



Pete Dye # 9 and Clubhouse



Pete Dye # 9



Pete Dye # 11 and 12



Pete Dye # 14



West Baden

Bendelow-designed Valley Golf Links in 1910, resort owner Taggart made a series of visits to Pinehurst Resort to consider the possibilities of constructing a second, grander course which could host a national championship. Upon his return to Indiana, Taggart purchased a piece of rolling property three miles from downtown French Lick and invited Ross to visit the site.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. None other than the great Walter Hagen went on to win that 1924 PGA by downing Englishman Jim Barnes on the final hole of a 36-hole match. His earnings for the victory were \$6,830. The course hosted both the 1959 and 1960 LPGA Championships which were won by legends Betsy Rawls and Mickey Wright, respectively. Not incidentally, in 1957 a young insurance salesman a few years displaced from military service named Pete Dye captured the Midwest Amateur on the Hills Course.

Over the past century, the Ross Course has hosted dozens of celebrities drawn here by both the golf experience and the elegant resort. Among those guests were Chick Evans, Gene Sarazen and crooner Bing Crosby. Future Basketball Hall of Famer and French Lick native Larry Bird worked at the golf course as a youngster.

If Ross were to visit the course today, he would undoubtedly be delighted to see his work kept essentially intact through 10 decades of golf technology advances. Indeed, a \$5 million restoration effort completed in 2006 was performed using archived photos and maps to ensure that the course's original look and spirit were captured. Wide fairways allow golfers to swing from the heels off most tees, yet strategically placed bunkers, fescue grasses, and elevated greens, some over 6,000 square feet, make the course challenging for all levels of players.

"Golfers come off the Donald Ross Course telling us how much they enjoyed themselves," said Dave Harner, director of golf at the resort. "The goal of the restoration project was to



Donald Ross Course



Donald Ross Course



Donald Ross Course



Donald Ross Course



Sinclair's Restaurant

present this traditional golf course the way Ross originally intended. Last year, one national golf magazine ranked the Pete Dye Course and the Donald Ross Course as the best two public layouts in the state. They are very different from one another, but they both deliver exceptional experiences."

Special events and amenities have been planned to provide golfers an experience worthy of the 100th anniversary of the Donald Ross Course. Staff will wear traditional attire of plus-fours and argyle knee socks throughout the season. On July 7-9, a new Symetra Tour 54-hole event will be held on the course with a winner's payout of \$30,000. Also throughout the year, every guest who finishes play on the Ross Course receives a Moon Pie—a delicious southern confection introduced to the world – of no small coincidence – way back in 1917.

Poetically, the past meets the present at French Lick Resort July 10-12 when the aforementioned Pete Dye Course hosts the inaugural Senior LPGA Championship presented by Old National Bank. The 54-hole event will feature a collection of past LPGA Hall-of-Fame players, current tour members, and major champions over the age of 45. Golf Channel will televise.

The Dye Course the ladies will attempt to conquer is, in a single word, breathtaking. Built through and around the hilltops of the Hoosier National Forest, the course can stretch to a robust 8,102 yards from the back tees but plays to a modest 6,115 yards from the white tees and 5,151 yards from the reds. Mammoth bunkers, undulating greens and elevated fairways create drama and challenge from Nos. 1 to 18. Harner stated that golfers are always amazed at the size, scale and topography of the property.

"When you see the course on TV or here in person, it's hard to imagine that this particular piece of land is in Indiana," said Harner. "Most people associate the state with flat terrain and lots of cornfields.

continued on page 30

Down Memory Lane

Imagine a year with no U.S. Open, no PGA, and not even a thought of a British Open being played.

That was golf life during both world wars in the last century, when the major golf associations pushed aside their regular programs in favor of winning the war. With little tournament play, something more important took its place: golf fund-raisers.

Three men made them a hit, and took golf into the charity realm that has set it apart from all other sports. Two were the great amateurs Chick Evans and Bobby Jones.

Evans, the pride of Edgewater Golf Club, was the “double crown” champion, having won the U.S. Open and the U.S. Amateur in 1916. He played Canadian champion George Lyon in a 1916 fund-raiser in Canada, that country already in the war, and thought the idea had potential. The beneficiary would be the American Red Cross.

Jones was the prodigy from East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, a 15-year-old who had won the Southern Amateur, was the talk of the game, aside from Evans, for making it to the quarterfinals of the same U.S. Amateur at Merion that Chick had captured. They began to team up, each bringing a partner for best-ball matches. For Jones, it was often 18-year-old Perry Adair, another East Lake product, and they were sometimes joined by a third Atlantan, Alexa Sterling.

The exhibition at Flossmoor Country Club on June 17, 1917 showed the potential of their star power. Jones paired with Hinsdale’s Bob Gardner, the 1915 U.S. Amateur champion, against Jones and Adair, and a gallery of 2,500 – believed to be the largest in the 25-year history of golf in Chicago – poured in to watch the local heroes tee it up with Jones and Adair. Chick and Bob won the match, but nobody lost, for at least \$1,000 was raised for the Red Cross.

Flossmoor member Charles Thompson was impressed, and thought, as did Evans, that more could be done. Thompson was the president of the Western Golf Association, and pushed the WGA to organize a Red Cross series in 1918. Some \$5,000 was raised in one day at Beverly, and up and up the numbers went, right up to the \$35,000 raised at Lake Shore one magical afternoon.

Evans played in 48 of the WGA-connected exhibitions that summer, and was responsible for raising more than 80 percent of the \$302,713.50 the WGA turned over to the Red Cross in 1918. Charity and golf were thus paired together forever.

– Tim Cronin



These badges were auctioned for hundreds of dollars, the money going to the American Red Cross, for a Red Cross Match at Beverly Country Club in 1918. (Beverly Country Club)

Ross' Enduring Legacy

continued from page 25

This course is high on a ridge line and plays along areas that allow you to see for 20 or 30 miles. It’s very hilly. If you hit it off the fairway, you’re going to have a very awkward shot back.”

Colin Montgomerie, who won the Senior PGA Championship on the Pete Dye Course in 2015, called it “one of the iconic golf courses in America.” Truth is that the Pete Dye Course must be played to be believed. When Dye originally walked the proposed site for the layout, he concluded that the terrain was too rugged and the slopes were too severe to build 18 holes on the land. Not long after making the declaration, Dye returned to the property with a topographical map of the area and preliminary drawings sketched on a paper napkin. He said he would build a course on the property “whether they want me to or not.”

The resulting course showcases dramatic holes from start to finish. Its features include three man-made lakes, panoramic vistas that stretch for 40 miles in the distance, “volcano” bunkers, and dramatic elevation changes across the property.

The 534-yard No. 7 begins from an elevated tee and calls for a drive launched over wild grasses and between mounding on the right side of the landing area and trees and heavy rough on the left side. Succeed on that shot and you are still left with a second shot avoiding sand bunkers on both sides of the fairway to set up an approach to a small green surrounded by mounds, rough and an intriguing assortment of sand bunkers on the right side of the green.

The 383-yard No. 15 features wild grasses in front of the tee, a long bowling lane-like sand bunker stretching along the entire left side of the fairway, huge directional sand bunkers on the right side of the landing area, and a fairway with more drama than a Donald Trump press conference. A punch-bowl green features a bail-out area on the right side along with a pair of evil sand bunkers protecting the left side.

Around at the Dye Course isn’t complete without a sandwich and a cold beverage on the patio of The Mansion. Once the home of former Indianapolis mayor Taggart, this stately manor has been fully restored and leads to an outside dining area that provides a spectacular view of the property from one of Indiana’s highest points.

While golf may be the centerpiece of the French Lick resort experience for our

readers, the namesake hotel which towers above the downtown area dazzles with its array of amenities and activities. One hundred and seventy-two years ago, Dr. William Bowles built an elegant hideaway for those seeking the miraculous healing powers of the area’s mineral waters. While the classic spa wing of the French Lick Springs Hotel, built in 1901, remains part of the complex, the hotel has undergone a remarkable renaissance over the past 10 years, and now offers four-star dining, swimming pools, a world-class spa, bike rentals, hiking trails, carriage rides, and even a 51,000 square-foot casino. The French Lick Springs Hotel’s counterpart is the stunning West Baden Springs Hotel.

Known to many as the “Eighth Wonder of the World,” the hotel was fashioned after one of Europe’s great mineral spas, Baden-Baden. When the original facility was destroyed by a fire in 1901, owner Lee W. Sinclair became determined to build the hotel of his dreams. He unveiled a design complete with a 200-ft. atrium and a fireplace that burned 14-foot logs.

That hotel had its ups and downs over the years and was closed in 1989 for safety reasons. In 1994, the Cook Group, a global medical device manufacturing company headquartered in Bloomington, Ind., bought the property for \$500,000 and proceeded to inject tens of millions of dollars into the hotel with a goal of restoring its grandeur. The end result exceeds all expectations. The hotel is today considered a national historic landmark and is perennially listed as the No. 1 hotel in Indiana by *U.S. News & World Report*. In total, the group spent in the neighborhood of \$450 million to preserve, restore and expand both hotels. Beyond the resurrection of two dated properties, the French Lick community benefited with 1,600 jobs.

In celebration of the Donald Ross Course 100th anniversary in 2017, French Lick Resort offers a limited edition package available from March 15 to April 30. The package includes a one-night stay at either resort hotel, two days of unlimited golf on The Donald Ross Course with cart, breakfast at Hagen’s Club House Restaurant, and a limited edition collectible gift, which by itself has a retail value of \$299. Package prices start at \$399 per person based on double occupancy. To get the entire Ross/Dye experience, the package can be upgraded to include The Pete Dye Course for an additional charge. Visit the resort’s website, www.frenchlick.com for reservations and more information.

When the Boys Play Through

continued from page 19

“Can I finish my game?” Gebhardi asked.

“Sure,” McGillen said. He knew Gebhardi couldn’t get away, not with his wife Louise on hand.

An impending arrest can affect one’s game. McGurn double-bogeyed the seventh hole, then made a 7-over-par 11 on the eighth hole – today’s sixth on the South Course – with the grabbing of a photographer by the shirt after a click of the shutter during a putt added for spice.

“You’ve busted up my game,” Gebhardi growled.

“Whose bright idea was this?” cracked Mrs. Machine Gun.

So around the final 10 holes went McGurn, McGillen, his officers, the tanned Louise, and a coterie of reporters, photographers, and regular gallery who had never seen such a spectacle. Leader and eventual winner Macdonald Smith played in comparative solitude that day.

Gebhardi finished with an 86, missed the cut by 14 strokes, and was off to the station for booking.

“Just put it down that I’m booked for carrying concealed ideas,” Gebhardi said before his escort from Olympia Fields.

Less than three years later, Gebhardi was dead, killed by three gunmen seven years and a day after the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.

Capone had several alibis for that sordid event, and one of them was created through golf. He was conveniently out of town, playing golf in Palm Island, Fla., on Feb. 14, 1929, and he had proof. Just in case, he’d called Cog-Hill Golf Club before leaving town and talked to a kid from the pro shop whom he’d met the year before in the parking lot. He needed four sets of clubs, bags, the works, delivered to the Kankakee station on the Illinois Central line the next morning.

Sixteen-year-old Joe Jemsek negotiated a price of \$110 a set, which included a golf glove and a dozen balls in each bag, then drove to Kankakee and made the delivery. Capone gave him a \$100 tip on top of the \$440.

Capone had an alibi. Jemsek had a story he’d tell for decades.

And Capone made sure never to win a hole with a nine. You never know.