



Lambton Golf & Country Club

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A Celebration of our Past & Present

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Willie Dunn Jr. staked out Lambton's initial layout for both the championship and nine-hole courses.

Lambton's Architects Laid Out

The modern game of golf has come a long way since its popularity began to spread into Canada and the United States at the turn of the 20th Century.

Golf course architecture was not an exact science when Albert Austin incorporated Lambton Golf and Country Club on July 16, 1902. As his wealth as president of the Dominion Bank, Consumer's Gas and the Canada Northwest Land Company increased, so did Albert's passion for golf. When the Club's Founder and President decided to create Lambton, there were fewer than 20 golf courses in Canada and only a handful of clubs in the Toronto area. The course and clubhouse had its Grand Opening on June 13, 1903.

Austin had some experience building a golf course, having laid out what was described as the "makeshift" 18-hole Spadina Golf Club on his estate, at Spadina House, in 1901 for family and friends to play. At

Lambton, he was looking to develop a championship layout, worthy of being considered among the top courses in the country.

Prior to the Golden Age of Golf Course Architecture (1900 to 1930), Scottish golf pros turned "architect" would typically stake out the tee boxes, greens, and hazards before leaving the next day for the next job, and the actual construction of the course was left to those who knew little about the game or the characteristics that make a great golf course. These courses lacked personality, but they did provide a place for people to learn and play the game.

The most famous architects, who developed their talents during the "Golden Age" – C.B MacDonald, A.W. Tillinghast, Donald Ross, Harry Colt, Alister MacKenzie, George C. Thomas and Seth Raynor, were just getting started or were not in the picture yet.

There's no record in the Club's history of how Albert Austin connected with Willie Dunn Jr., but Club records confirm that he provided the Club with a layout of an 18-hole course, as well as a nine-hole short course for women. In their 1988 book, "The Golf Course" authors, Geoffrey Cornish, and Ron Whitten, note that Dunn did the initial layout for the South Course at the original Dixie site for Royal Montreal Golf Club in 1900. Harry Colt updated the layout in 1913 and Royal Montreal moved to its current location in 1959 and the course disappeared. Perhaps Austin, who was well connected, learned of Dunn's work at Canada's oldest golf course (1873) and invited him to Lambton.

Along came Will Dunn Jr. who finished second in the first official playing of the US Open in 1895, finished T3 in 1897 and seventh in 1898 – an impressive resume. His family name no doubt carried some weight. He was born in London, England

of Scottish descent, another feather in his cap, in about 1864 and grew up in a golfing family. As a teen he worked for his father, Willie Dunn Senior, a noted greenskeeper and professional, making golf clubs – a skill he continued when he finally moved to the United States in 1896. He settled at Ardsley Country Club in New York, a course he designed, where he taught the game, made clubs and other things, and played some professional golf. One of Willie's first American patents (though it appears to have been applied for, but never finally granted) was his "indestructible driver." Its head was a wood block encased in an aluminum shell, the wood being exposed at the face and on top! Junior's older brother, Tom Dunn became a prolific golf course designer building courses all over the UK, France, and the Netherlands, but he died in 1902. He was a noted ball maker for the Royal Family of England. The younger Dunn is credited with designing and/or renovating no more than 20 courses in Canada and the United States. Of note, he played a role in designing several holes at Shinnecock Hills GC in Long Island, New York in 1894 and perhaps more interestingly, Shinnecock also had a nine-hole course for women at the time – something that Lambton built as well. Willie also laid out a private nine-hole course for John D. Rockefeller on his

Tarrytown Estate in New York. It certainly doesn't appear that golf course design was Willie's main focus in golf. He operated a retail golf shop in New York City in the late 1890s with his nephew John Duncan Dunn. He moved to California in the 1920s where he continued to focus on designing golf equipment and then back to London, England in the 1940s where he died in 1952.

Willie Dunn Jr. came and went in the summer of 1902, leaving the construction and finer details of the golf course to George S. Lyon – captain at Lambton for 23 years. Author Scott Burk, notes in his book "Toronto's Lost Golf Courses" that "After Dunn left, Lyon guided the process with the help from American golf course architect Tom Bendelow. The Board members had toured golf clubs of the American Northeast, including New York, and brought back the latest ideas on designing courses." It should be noted that the Haskell – the first rubber-cored ball – was introduced in 1902. The game of golf and golf course design were about to undergo a significant transformation as a result of the increased distance balls would travel. Head Golf Professional, Percy Barrett arrived from England in 1903 and would have had a say in course improvements during his tenure at the Club, so would others. Lambton historian, Hugh Saunders, says that Dunn's original design called for a 650-yard hole, it

would have been the longest in the world at the time, but it was never built. Early scorecards indicate that several holes designed by Dunn were changed as the build continued on the back nine. The second hole was not built as laid out and the ninth was constructed quite differently from Dunn's design and that resulted in changes to several of the remaining holes. The presence of the Black Creek further impacted development and construction of the course.

Over the course of the past 120 years many of the great names in golf course architecture have added to Dunn's original routing. Club records confirm that golf course architect Tom Bendelow, who was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, visited the course at least twice in 1903 and made several recommendations that were acted upon. Of note, he accompanied Harry Vardon on his 1900 American tour. Tom played in several of the events with Vardon and caddied for him in the 1900 US Open. Vardon's connection with Percy Barrett, Lambton's Head Professional, may have led to the connection with Lambton. Bendelow is said to have staked out or designed up to 600 courses in Canada and the United States starting in 1894, but there doesn't appear to be a definitive list.

Saunders notes, that Lyon had little design experience at the time, so bringing in someone, even late in the building phase, for some advice made sense. There's a note in the Club's history that A.W. Tillinghast played in an event at Lambton in 1906, but no mention if he made any suggestions that were acted upon. In another club publication, it's written that Harry Colt, who visited Canada in 1911, 1913 and 1914, may have had some input, but there is no record in any Board minutes.

What we do know is that between World War I and World War II Donald Ross and then Stanley Thompson made substantial and numerous changes throughout the golf course. They were followed by Robbie Robinson, who restored the golf course after Hurricane Hazel struck in October 1954. Robinson remained on as the Club's consulting golf course architect until his death in 1989 at the age of 81.

During that time, Willie Lamb, the head golf pro at Lambton for 30 years, was enticed to come out of retirement in 1966 to consult on a major program to improve and enlarge several greens that were felt to be sub-par.

Graham Cooke was handed the torch in 1991 and advised the Club until the mid 2000s. He was followed by Rees Jones and his team in 2007 and the company continues to work with Lambton today.



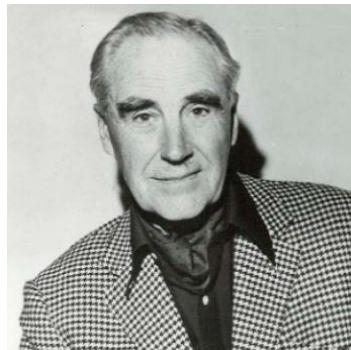
Tom Bendelow



Donald Ross



Stanley Thompson



Robbie Robinson



Graham Cooke



Founded 1902