

# Merrickville Golf Courses

A vintage, sepia-toned photograph of a golf course. In the foreground, a crowd of people, including men in suits and hats and a woman in a red dress, are gathered. A tall, thin flagpole stands in the middle ground. The background shows a golf course with a crowd of spectators and a checkered flag on a stand.

**Donald J. Childs**

*Merrickville Golf Courses*

By Donald J. Childs

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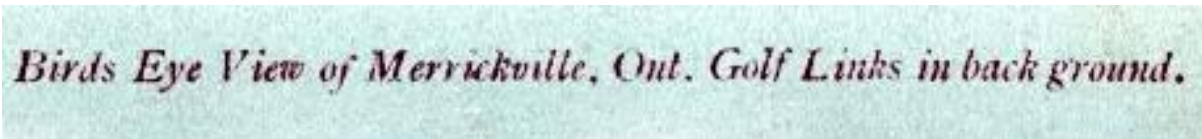
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## Preface

In Merrickville, where history once knew of no golf courses, it now knows of two.

One of them was mentioned in the caption of a postcard showing a “Birds Eye View” of the village in the early 1900s.



*Figure 1 Golf links mentioned in the caption on a postcard that shows below the caption a hand-painted photograph of Merrickville. The entire postcard itself will be shown in a section below.*

It turns out that there was an even earlier golf course than the one mentioned on the postcard above, and it was in an entirely different location.

The first “Golf Links” was laid out in the last decade the nineteenth century on the north side of the Rideau River; the other was laid out in the first decade of the twentieth century on the south side of the village.

Who knew?

## The 1890s Golf Fad

Those who established the first golf course in Merrickville were participating in the North American golf fad of the late 1800s. It began in the United States in the early 1890s. And then it spread to Canada.

Golf, mind you, had certainly become established in three Canadian cities almost a generation before it became established in the United States: almost twenty years before the fad began, golf clubs had been established in Montreal (1873), Quebec (1874), and Toronto (1876).



*Figure 2 Royal Montreal Golf Club, 1882.*

But when the popularity of golf spread south from Scotland into England in the early 1890s, resulting not just in the construction of many new golf courses on the links land of coastal England, but also in the construction for the first time of a large number of inland courses, interest in the game was aroused in the United States. The development of architectural strategies for designing golf courses on non-links land was the key, for North America had little accessible links land but a virtually limitless supply of inland real estate.

Reflecting on the astonishing speed with which the game of golf spread throughout the United States from 1893 to 1895, as what the San Francisco *Examiner* called “the fad of the hour” (30 June 1895, p. 32), the New York *Sun* observed:

*Golf is outstripping all the outdoor games just now in its rapid growth. It took years to fully acclimatize tennis, and, with the exception of baseball, which is a home product, the other fresh-air games and recreations have only become popular by slow degrees. But golf is advancing with seven-league strides, like Jack in the fairy tale, and will soon travel the continent over, from the Arctic line to the Mexican border, for the game is spreading through Canada as well as the United States. (Sun [New York], 8 March 1896, p. 9)*

This golf fad perhaps crossed into Ontario at Hamilton in the fall of 1894, at Cobourg in 1895 (where regular summer visitors from Rochester were among those interested in the formation of Cobourg’s first golf club that year), and at Cornwall and Port Hope in 1896. American resorts in the Thousand Islands also established golf courses at this time, attracting wealthy visitors from the eastern United States. The development of golf in these resorts was probably a spur for a number of Canadian communities along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River to establish their first golf clubs.

In Napanee, for instance, the present golf club was established in 1897 to play golf on the very land on which it still plays today. Picton first organized a golf club in October of 1897 (*Napanee Express*, 8 October 1897, p. 1). We read in the same month that “A golf club is to be organized in Smith’s Falls” (*Almonte Gazette*, 9 October 1897, p. 7). In Perth, although Captain Roderick Matheson had laid out a three-hole golf course on his farm in 1890 for the use of six or seven of his friends, it was only in October of 1897 that the *Almonte Gazette* observed that “Perth is to have a golf club” (29 October 1897).

Similarly, a few months later in the spring of 1898, to the confusion of local Orillia residents who had never heard of the game, a golf course was laid out on the town’s outskirts:

*The report that the C.P.R. was surveying a line into Orillia had a rather amusing origin. Some who saw the men placing the flags in laying out the golf links on the Dallas farm at once jumped to the conclusion that it was a C.P.R. survey party running a line, and immediately brought the good news to town. (Cited in the Barrie Examiner, 5 May 1898, p. 8)*

Like Orillia, Brockville was only a few months behind the curve: its first golf club was also organized in the spring of 1898 (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 April 1898, p. 6). And Carleton Place, known as “the junction town,” also became interested in the game in 1898, prompting the newspaper in the rival town of Almonte to mock its neighbour for its pretentiousness: “The junction town is putting on frills. It is to have a golf club” (*Almonte Gazette*, 2 September 1898, p. 8).

Although in 1903 the publisher and editor of the *Almonte Gazette*, James McLeod, would himself become vice-president of the Almonte Golf Club, which was first organized in 1902, and although he would thereafter boost the game in the pages of his newspaper and even hector readers into joining the club, he mocks Carleton Place for succumbing to a fad in 1898 in an attempt to dress up “the junction town.”

The *Arnprior Chronicle* cast an equally ironic eye on the matter: “Instead of going in for golf, the greatest fad of the day, Arnprior has reverted to lawn tennis. And Almonte comes along and gives us a drubbing for it” (cited in the *Almonte Gazette*, 6 July 1900, p. 3). But the *Chronicle* spoke too soon: Arnprior had its own golf links less than a year later (*Ottawa Citizen*, 1 June 1901, p. 10). And we read in 1904 that both sports are still flourishing three years afterwards: “Arnprior athletics are limited to golf and tennis this season” (*Almonte Gazette*, 17 June 1904, p. 1).

Golf courses became so ubiquitous at summer hotels and resorts that jokes began to be published for the sake of those who sanely resisted the fad:

*“You are having a remarkably successful season, Mr. Whicks,” said Atterbury.*

*“Yes,” replied Mr. Whicks. “I advertised this place as the only hotel in the mountains that had no golf-links, and we have had nine applications for every room in the house.” (Almonte Gazette, 15 September 1899, p. 1)*

For those sceptical of the game’s attractions, the faddists themselves frequently became the object of mockery: “The golf walk is the very latest. It is described as a loose-jointed stride. Flapping arms, a ‘poked’ neck and head and a queer flat chested carriage are its leading characteristics. You are nobody, of course, unless you have it” (*Northern Ontario Observer* [Port Perry], 16 August 1900, p. 1). Cartoonists did the same:

*RESULT OF A FAD*

## *Golf Is Everywhere*

### *Now the Game of the Moment*

*As golf is just now the game of the moment, having shouldered tennis to the back seat, the artists have turned their attention toward picturing and caricaturing the types to be met with on the green golf field. There is no denying a man's character is cruelly displayed by his actions on the golf links and the numerous remarkable attitudes people strike are a cause for amusement to lookers-on. Here are some of the positions witnessed at a recent golf game.*



*Figure 3 Crawford Avalanche (Grayling, Michigan), 21 October 1897, p. 3.*



Moreover, since golf was associated with the well-off classes, there was sometimes a sneer in a newspaper's deprecation of those who succumbed to the fad. The writer of the "society news" column in the *Chicago Chronicle*, for instance, lamented in 1897 that "Golf really still is the chief industry" of some of the city's most prestigious country clubs: "In fact, if golf were not beyond the reach of the masses, because of the amount of territory over which it is played, the [upper] classes would soon tire of it. As it is, it will probably be two or three years before the society editor is called upon to chronicle the passing of the golf fad" (13 June 1897, p. 32).

Yet the golf fad also penetrated the awareness of downtown working-class kids in a big city such as St. Louis:

*The golf fad has cropped out in "The Patch" around the neighbourhood of Seventeenth and O'Fallon streets. The game may not be played as scientifically as it is at the Country Club or at the Fair Grounds, but the participants manage to get as much, if not more, fun out of it as do their more fashionable rivals.*

*The equipment consists of an old umbrella handle for a club, a top or base ball instead of the regulation rubber golf ball, and a number of empty tin cans. The cans are laid on their sides along the curb with their open ends out, and serve their purpose just about as well as the regulation holes. The players range in age anywhere from 7 to 15 years. They are getting to be quite expert, and the cats and dogs in the vicinity are becoming painfully aware of the deadliness of their aim.*

*The game is rather interesting to a spectator until a badly aimed shot of one of the youthful enthusiasts happens to hit him, when he immediately comes to the conclusion that the police ought to suppress the fun. (Globe-Democrat [St. Louis], 18 May 1898, p. 10*

By 1897, the golf fad that began sweeping through the United States several years before was sweeping through small-town Ontario.

And so not only would Merrickville not resist the fad; the bustling Rideau Canal village would actually put on frills before any of its neighbours did!

## The First Golf Course

In fact, golf was being played in Merrickville by the spring of 1897.

Josiah Newman writes in the *Official Golf Guide*, published at the beginning of 1899, that in Merrickville, a “nine-hole course was first laid out in June, 1897” (New York, 1899, p. 316).

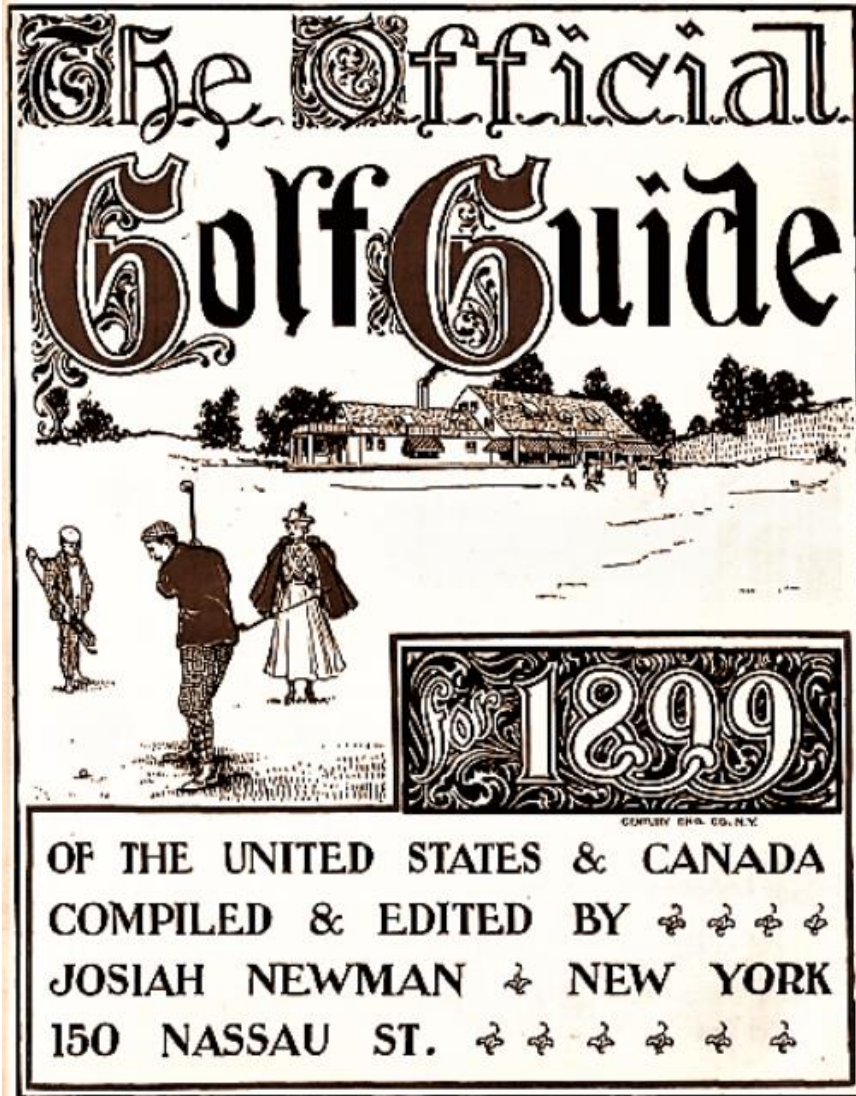


Figure 4 Official Golf Guide, ed. Josiah Newman (New York 1899).

How the news of Merrickville’s golf course had reached New York is not clear. The *Golf Guide* makes no reference at all to contemporaneous Eastern Ontario golf courses at Napanee or Perth, for instance, so its editor had obviously not undertaken any comprehensive survey of golf in Ontario.

Yet, somehow, editor Newman had learned certain details concerning the layout: “The course is short but affords good practice” (p. 316).

He means by his phrase “affords good practice” that the golf course provided a sufficient number of hazards

to stimulate the development of the golf skills necessary for golfers to play across them as required in “good practice” of the game.

It is likely that at least one of the promoters of golf in Merrickville had learned the game elsewhere and kept in touch with developments in the game via a subscription to one of the early New York golf publications, such that when editor Newman announced he was gathering information for the initial publication of his *Golf Guide* in 1899, our Merrickville golf enthusiast was able to send a letter to him about golf in Merrickville.

## Building a Golf Course in 1897

Note that to lay out a golf course in 1897 did not take long, and it could be accomplished with local resources.

No earth was moved during the building of such a course, either to contour a fairway or to build up a green or a tee-box.

A farmer's pastureland was generally chosen for a golf course in the 1890s because the land had been cleared and had well-established pasture grass growing on it – grass that only needed to be cut regularly in order to produce a decent fairway surface from which to play a golf shot.

The teeing ground might simply be a rectangular area of turf marked out by chalk lines. A slight incline of the ground in the direction of play might be found (or even built) to create a slight brace for the foot placed on the side of the line of play.

Whether in a hollow, on a hog's back, or on a flat area of the field, putting greens were made to be level. Rakes and shovels might be used to fill in minor depressions or to shave off little rises in order to produce a flat surface. The preference in those days was not for an undulating or wavy surface, but rather for a level surface that would minimize the break of putts made across it.



*Figure 5 A scyther of the greens at the Ottawa Golf Club, circa 1904.*

The green comprised the same grass as found throughout the rest of the field, but it was cut shorter than the fairway grass, and it was usually cut in the shape of a square, with sides of perhaps 20 to 30 feet. It might be mowed with a mechanical hand mower, or a golf club might hire a person to scythe the greens each morning.

The putting green would be compacted to produce a relatively smooth putting surface on which the bounce of a rolling ball would be minimized. Compacting would be achieved in one of three ways: by rolling the entire putting surface with a heavy barrel-shaped cylinder on a horizontal axis attached to a handle (designed to be pulled by two men), by thoroughly soaking the putting surface with water, then

placing planks over it, and finally pounding the planks with a heavy object, or simply by pounding every square foot of the putting surface with a heavy-handed instrument with a flat square bottom.

The latter method, used on tees and greens alike, is illustrated in the photograph below.



*Figure 6 A late nineteenth-century golf groundsman (greenkeeper) flattens the surface of a tee or green by pounding it. Michael J. Hurdzan, *Golf Greens: History, Design, and Construction* [Wiley, 2004], chapter 1).*

In the early 1900s, the construction of a golf course by these methods could be completed in several weeks from start to finish. Play on the course would then commence immediately.

And as for the routing of the golf holes?

Rudimentary do-it-yourself advice was just becoming available in North America by the mid-1890s. In his 1895 book *Golf: A Handbook for Beginners*, James Dwight provides a chapter called “Laying Out Links,” yet it comprises just seven sentences:

*It should be understood that links vary greatly in length as well as in the character of the ground. There is no definite distance between the holes. If you possibly can, get*

*some competent person to lay out the course for you. It is hardly likely that a beginner can take all advantage of the different natural hazards, etc. The distance between the holes must vary according as open places occur with some hazard in front. As to distance, an average of 300 yards makes a good long course. Some of the holes should be 400 to 450 yards apart, and one short hole of 100 to 120 yards. (p. 41).*

There you have it. Now go and build it!

In 1897, the Wright & Ditson sporting goods company published a *Guide to Golf in America*, which included a longer section on how to lay out a golf course

*The game may ... be played on any fields affording requisite room and turf that can be kept in condition to afford reasonably good lies between the holes.... It is not possible or desirable that the distances between the teeing-grounds and holes should everywhere be the same.... Holes should not be too much alike .... The distances and hazards should be as varied as possible. The putting-greens may be sometimes on the flat turf, sometimes on the top of a ridge or knoll, or even on the side of a gently sloping hill. The first drive from the tee should be sometimes from the crest of a low hill, and sometimes on the flat; and the hazard to be surpassed (for there should be always some hazard or bunker to trap a poorly played drive) should be sometimes near the teeing-ground and sometimes at nearly a full drive's distance from it....*

*Selecting a convenient place for the first teeing-ground, not too far from the club house, and having determined from the general "lay of the land" the direction in which the first hole is to be, walk in that direction and seek a convenient stretch of level turf which may be used as the putting-green, at least 250 yards from the tee, for the first hole should not be a short one. See that a full drive will be rewarded with a tolerably good lie. Having placed a stake in the centre of the spot selected for the first green, consider where is the most favorable spot for the next teeing-ground to be placed....*

*Do not be afraid of hazards. A good sporting hole may be often made in the most unpromising place if a good drive can place the ball where a good lie can be obtained for a second shot....*

*Returning to the second teeing-ground, we continue as before, weighing considerations of distances, difficulty of ground, favorable spots for putting-greens and position of hazards, and driving our little stake that marks the position of the future putting-greens as we go along, constantly bearing in mind that we must return to a point somewhere near where we started, and arriving at the last hole but one choose our last teeing-ground, so that we may return to the home green in such a way as not to endanger the lives of members who may be watching the game from the clubhouse veranda or grounds, and at the same time not make the hole too easy, for the last hole should be a difficult one.*

*Now we may go over the whole course again and see if it cannot be improved by shifting this hole or that teeing-ground a little. If it cannot be so improved we may return home and give our orders for the construction of such holes, teeing-grounds and bunkers as we have described. (pp. 29-35)*

If the people who laid out the Merrickville golf course in 1897 had happened upon these early North American books on golf, they must have thought Wright & Ditson's advice was encyclopedic compared to that in Dwight's book.

The key objective in laying out every golf hole in 1897, whether it was 100 yards long or 500 yards long, was create a line of play on each hole that would require golfers to propel a golf ball through the air over an otherwise impassable barrier ("for there should be always some hazard or bunker to trap a poorly played drive"). The golfer who could not raise the ball off the ground was to be penalized by hazards from which the ball might well be inextricable.

This architectural practice was known as penal design theory.

It had no sympathy for the beginner or the inveterate duffer.

## Location

We have a good indication of the location of the first Merrickville golf course: it was “On the Canadian Pacific Railroad, a quarter of a mile from Merrickville depot” (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316).



Figure 7 Merrickville Train Station, early 1900s.

In 1897, to build a golf course near train tracks was par for the course, so to speak. On the one hand, people from other communities near the CPR line could easily travel to the golf course. Golfers from Smith’s Falls, for instance, took the train to Merrickville to play golf on the links. On the other hand, the railway tracks could be used as a golf hazard, especially if the golf course land was otherwise relatively featureless.

In the 1890s, golf holes were regularly arranged to cross railway tracks in order to test a golfer’s ability to hit the golf ball through the air. Golf holes were also regularly arranged parallel to train tracks to test the golfer’s ability to keep the ball from veering sideways onto such inhospitable terrain: one had to play the ball as it was found on the rocks of the tracks’ bed, on the railway ties, against the rails, and so on.

On these early golf courses, modern hazards such as sand traps and ponds were not manufactured. If there were ponds, creeks, ditches, gullies, or pre-existing areas of exposed sand, golf holes would be laid



out across them. Hazards tended to be natural. And “natural hazards” in 1897 included pre-existing features of the golf ground such as roads, stone fences, and train tracks.

In 1895, when reviewing the best golf courses in the New York and New Jersey area for *Scribner’s Magazine*, golf writer Henry Howland noted the hazards of the latter sort that prevailed on the top courses. At Shinnecock Hills, he observed, “The hazards are mainly ... some stretches of sand, a railroad embankment, and deep roads, that are tests of skill and temper”; St Andrews, “at Yonkers on the Hudson ...., is an inland course of stone-wall hazards [and] rocky pastures”; the hazards at the Tuxedo Club include “hills, stone walls, railroad embankments lined with blast-furnace slag, ... brook, boulders, and road”; “at the Essex County Club of Manchester-by-the-Sea,” “The hazards are nearly all natural, consisting of fences, barns, roadways ...” (May 1895, vol XVII no 5, pp. 531-33).

Closer to home, in 1896, when the Kingston Golf Club played a match against the Ottawa Golf Club on the latter’s new Chelsea Links in Hull, the *Daily British Whig* noted that “the grounds were interesting and picturesque and several novelties were presented to the Kingston team in the shape of walls and old houses over which they had to play” (26 May 1896, p. 4). The writer failed to mention the railway tracks, roads and fences on many holes, such as the 250-yard 8<sup>th</sup> hole, where, we read, a “railway, a road, and fences face [the] drive” (*Ottawa Citizen*, 26 September 1899, p. 6).

Note that the space needed for golf in the 1890s was not the same as the space that is required today. Nine-hole golf courses were laid out on 40 acres of land, or less.



Figure 8 A gutta-percha golf ball of the 1890s. Golfers painted the balls themselves (generally white or red) and had to do so regularly as the paint wore off after a few rounds.

On the one hand, an amateur golfer would not have been able to drive the golf ball of the 1890s much more than 200 yards, even with a perfect hit. In 1897, “The ball used in playing golf [was] made ... of well-seasoned gutta-percha, grooved or notched on the surface and painted white” (Gardener G. Smith, *Golf* [New York: Frederick A Stokes Co, 1908], pp. 11-12.). The dimples that would make golf balls fly farther would not be invented until 1908, and the “guttie” did not fly as far as the rubber-cored ball

invented in 1899 would. In 1897, a hole of 200-225 yards was regarded as a proper “four-shotter” (although today the par for a hole of this length would be three shots).

And so golf holes – and therefore golf courses – were not as long as they are today. In 1891, for instance, the first golf course laid out for the Ottawa Golf Club in Sandy Hill comprised nine holes adding up to about “a mile” – that is, 1,760 yards – making the average length of the holes 200 yards (*Montreal Herald*, 25 May 1891, p. 2). Today, a nine-hole golf course is almost twice as long. The first golf course of St. John, New Brunswick, comprised just five holes, and they also averaged 200 yards each (<https://www.riversidecountryclub.ca/news/a-brief-history-of-the-riverside-country-club>).

So any pastureland grazed by cattle or sheep, or even horses, on either side of the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks north of the town, and within a quarter mile of the depot, could have been the site of the golf course.

And as can be seen on the 1908 topographical map of the area shown below, there were a number of possible sites for a golf course within a quarter mile of the station.

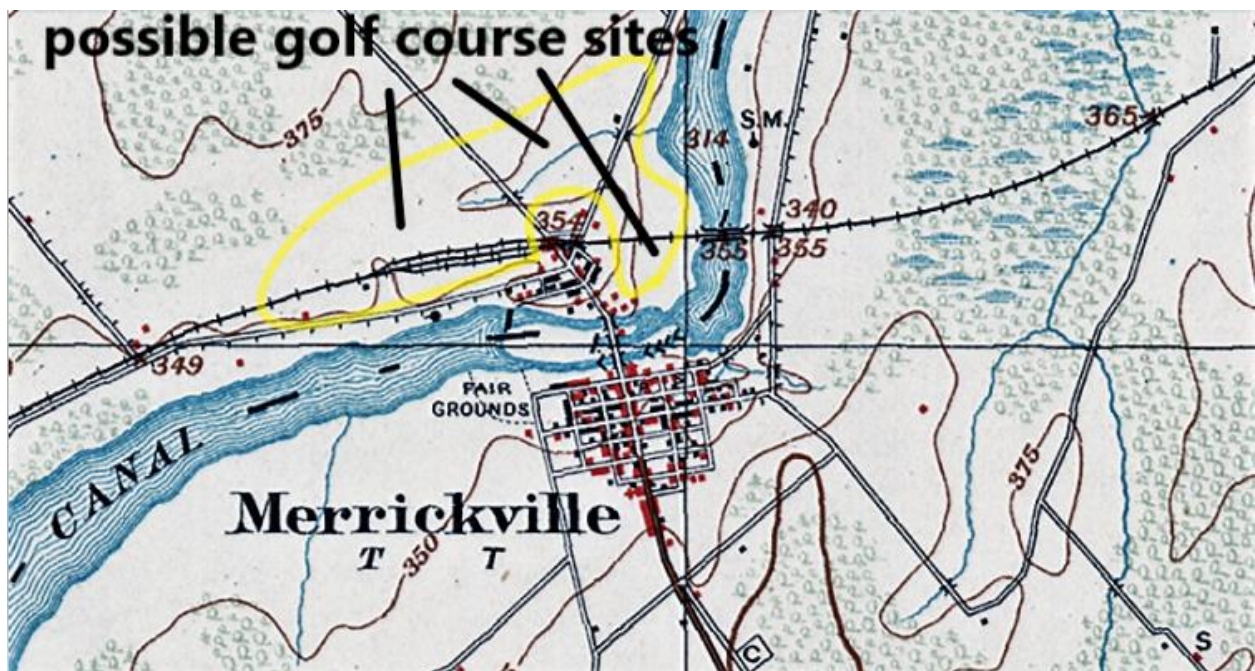
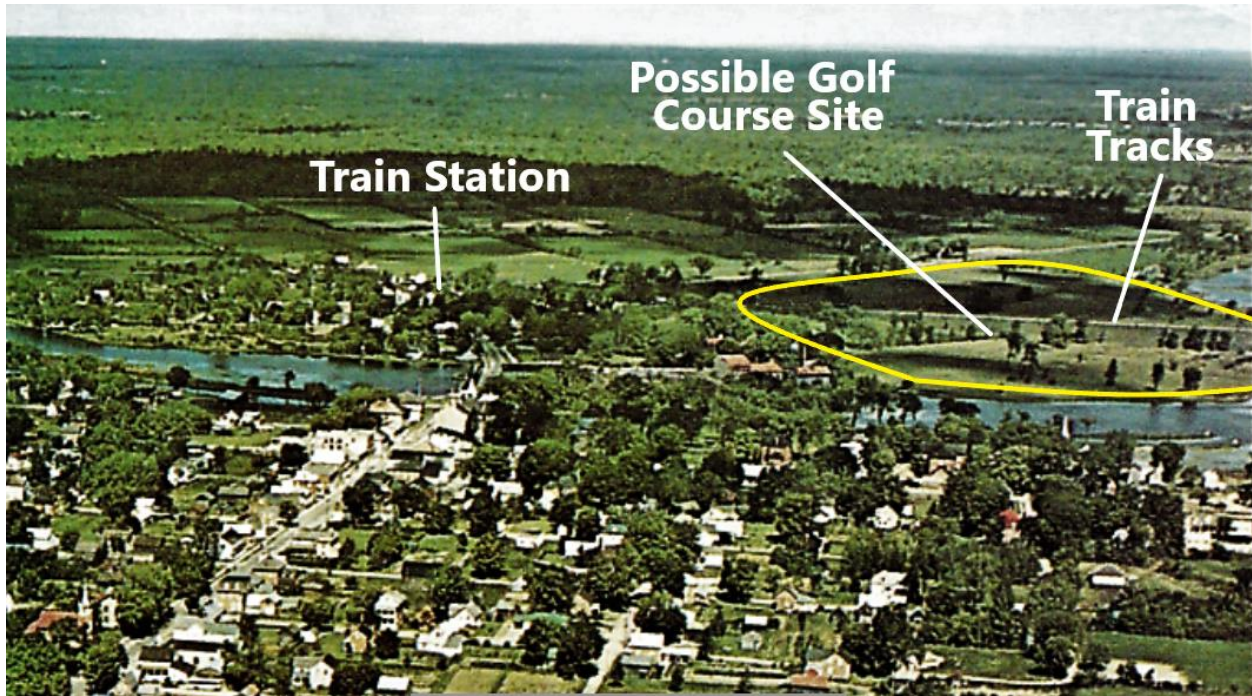


Figure 9 1908 topographical survey map. Survey Division, Department of Militia and Defense.

In an aerial photograph of the Merrickville area taken in the middle of the twentieth century (shown below), we can see one of the relatively treeless areas north of the village that is marked on the map above, and half a century later it still looks quite suitable as ground for a golf course.



*Figure 10 Annotated aerial photograph of Merrickville circa the middle of the twentieth century.*

Although there will be no signs of old greens, tees, or fairways to mark the location of the 1897 golf course, somewhere today under the surface of the ground of the old golf course there are gutta-percha golf balls waiting to be discovered as proof of where golf was first played in Merrickville.

## Four Men and a Course

As was the case in Perth, the laying out of the first golf course in Merrickville preceded the formation of an official golf club.

Although the golf course was laid out in June of 1897, the Merrickville Golf Club itself was only “organized in 1898” (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316). The “annual dues” were “\$1.50” (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316). The operating budget was therefore quite limited, for, as we learn from the *Golf Guide*, “The club is only small at present, consisting of about fifteen members” (p. 316).

One suspects that the club was allowed to use its golf grounds for free and that its \$22.50 budget was used not to pay rent, but rather to buy metal golf holes, flag poles, and bunting, as well as nine wooden boxes to supply sand for creating the little mounds of sand from which tee-shots were played (since the wooden tee peg would not become available until the late 1920s).

The “governors” of this golf club comprised four Merrickville men from four different walks of life, yet they were all typical of the kind of middle-class people who were members of early golf courses in small-town Ontario: one was a doctor; one was a banker; one was a businessman; one was a Christian minister.

They all had one thing in common, mind you: they were all devotees of the royal and ancient game.

And so, theirs was a reverend undertaking.

## President Aston: the Reverend Man from Musselburgh

The reverend undertaking of establishing a golf club in Merrickville was initially a Reverend's undertaking, for the ringleader of the enterprise and the first president of the Merrickville Golf Club was "Reverend E. Ashton" (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316).

The minister's last name was actually **Aston**.

And the Reverend Mr. Edward Aston had arrived in Ottawa in June of 1893 from Musselburgh, Scotland, home of one of that country's most famous golf courses – which is saying a lot of a golf course in Scotland. Between 1874 and 1889, this ancient nine-hole links had hosted six Open Championships.

Edward Aston was born in Eccleshill, near Bradford, Yorkshire, England, early in 1853. His father John was an eminent Independent Minister, a graduate of Airedale Congregational College located near Bradford. Congregationalism is a Calvinistic protestant church in which each congregation autonomously and independently runs its own affairs. Since the sixteenth century, Congregationalists had also been known as "Independents" because of their desire to be independent of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

We know that Edward would also experience the call to serve God, but he began his working career as what the England and Wales census of 1871 called a "Banker's Clerk," when he was just 17 or 18 years old. By the late 1870s, however, he had left the bank and enrolled in Airedale Congregational College. His father was still occasionally on its campus to perform marriages in the College Chapel.

By 1880, Edward was an "Independent Minister" himself, appointed minister to the Congregational chapel in Morpeth, Yorkshire. In the same year, he married Mary Shepard Mackinnon. The next year, their son John was born (the first of three boys and two girls born between 1881 and 1890).

Shortly after this, Aston took his ministry to Scotland, where he was appointed Congregational minister at Newburgh, a small town on the River Tay about 10 miles south-east of Perth. In 1885, while still serving in Newburgh, he applied to become a minister in Scotland's Evangelical Union of Churches and was accepted.

Five years later, Aston moved to Musselburgh, where he served in the early 1890s as one of the town's two Congregational ministers. Aston and his family lived in the part of the town called Levenhall, "at the east end of the Musselburgh Links," but his congregation met in a chapel located in the Musselburgh

Town Hall on the High Street (*The Golfing Annual*, 1891-92, ed. David Scott Duncan [London: Horace Cox, 1892]).

Consequently, on his way back and forth to work each day, Reverend Aston passed the Musselburgh golf course, for the town's High Street formed the boundary on one side of the ancient links and between Levenhall and the east end of the links was the 18-hole putting green that constituted the "ladies course" of the Musselburgh Ladies' Golf Club (*The Golfing Annual*, 1891-92, ed. David Scott Duncan [London: Horace Cox, 1892]).



*Figure 11 The Musselburgh golf course, most of which is still located within the town's racetrack, as it appears today, still bordered on the one side by the town's High Street.*

The High Street of Musselburgh, seen at the top right side of the photograph above, was not actually out of bounds: it was treated as part of the golf course.

And so golfers played shots back onto the golf course from this cobblestone street. In fact, the damage done to wooden clubs by striking these cobblestones led to the screwing of a brass plate onto the

bottom of the club to protect it: thus, the golf club called the “brassie” was born (it was similar to today’s three-wood).

Aston’s migration through Britain’s protestant church organizations was not over.

In 1893, he formally applied to the Assembly of the Church of Scotland for admission as a minister from a church founded on its declaration of independence from the Church of Scotland. But his application was refused in May of 1893 (*Glasgow Herald*, 22 May 1893, p. 3). Several fellow applicants had been accepted; several fellow applicants had been refused. No explanation for any of these decisions by the Standing Committee of the Church of Scotland was published.

Of course, Reverend Aston will have been disappointed by this decision. It did not take him long to strike out in a different direction, however, for shortly after this disappointment, he gathered up his family and sailed for Ottawa where he was accepted into the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

The welcome he received would determine whether he stayed and made Canada his home.

Newly arrived in Canada in June of 1893, Reverend Aston and his family stayed in Morewood, Ontario, with his friend Reverend R.L. Gloag (who would soon return to England). In Morewood, Reverend Aston assisted with the entertainment at the church picnic at the end of the month.

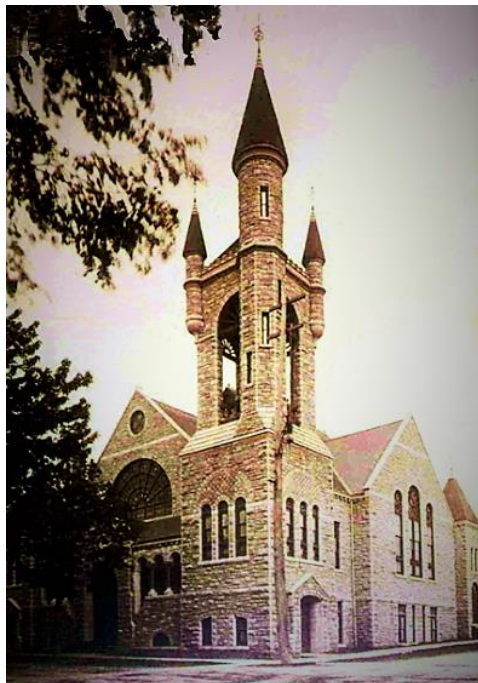


Figure 12 St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Sandy Hill, Ottawa, mid-twentieth century.

Early in July, however, he was appointed to supply for the minister at St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church in Ottawa who was away on his summer vacation. And so, Reverend Aston “preached at St. Paul’s for “six successive” Sundays (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 August 1893, p. 1; *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 August 1893, p. 8).

It was not a long walk from this church at the corner of Daly Avenue and Cumberland Street in Sandy Hill to the grounds at the eastern end of Daly Avenue where the Ottawa Golf Club had laid out its first links. As Aston had no doubt been introduced to golf while preaching in Scotland for ten years (many who met him in Ontario assumed he “was a native of Scotland,” so perhaps he had also acquired a Scottish accent as a consequence of his ministry there), he may well have

brought his golf clubs with him to Ottawa, especially if he was aware that a fellow Scot, Hugh Renwick, had recently helped local gentlemen found the Ottawa Golf Club in April of 1891 (*Kingston Daily News*, 31 December 1898, p. 4).

Did Aston play golf in Ottawa during the summer of 1893?

When the time for his departure from St. Paul's arrived at the end of the summer in 1893, Reverend Aston announced that he had been greatly "pleased with the Christian warmth of St. Paul's": "he had enjoyed his ministry in the church very much and hoped that he might again have the privilege of addressing them as it was his intention to reside in Canada" (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 August 1893, p. 1).

He had made a great impression by his preaching: "Mr. Aston has created a very favorable impression in the Capital, and as he intends to remain in Canada, no doubt those who have heard him will soon be afforded a gratification of their expressed wish to listen to the reverend gentleman again" (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 7 August 1893, p. 8).



Figure 13 Knox Presbyterian Church (opened 1861), Merrickville, mid-twentieth century.

And so, the Reverend Mr. Aston had quickly become a hot prospect. Would he answer the call of a local Presbyterian church?

If so, which one?

In August of 1893, Reverend Aston became a member of the Brockville Presbytery and accepted the call of Knox Presbyterian Church in Merrickville.

News that he was to receive a formal call from the Knox congregation to serve as minister in Merrickville leaked while he was preaching in Morewood:

*Rev. Aston and family, late of England, are the guests of Rev. L.R. Gloag, of this place [Morewood]. He occupied the pulpit of the Presbyterian church on Sunday last, and preached a most eloquent and instructive sermon.*



*We hear that he is about to locate in Merrickville as pastor of the Presbyterian church there. (Ottawa Daily Citizen, 31 August 1893, p. 7)*

When he left St. Paul's for Merrickville in September, however, Reverend Aston did leave the Ottawa church for long. Throughout the fall, he delivered a series of lectures at St. Paul's that were widely advertised and reviewed in the Ottawa newspapers.

One of the lectures was called "Mendelssohn – Life and Genius," and it was supported by "Illustrative music by Rev. E. Aston," as well as by others (*Ottawa Journal*, 21 November 1893, p. 7). In particular, "the Rev. Ed. Aston and Miss Sorley rendered in fine form a characteristic duet from the composer"; "The attendance was good and all present appeared to thoroughly enjoy the entertainment" (*Ottawa Journal*, 22 November 1893, p. 1)

As was the case in Ottawa, we find Reverend Aston celebrated during his term in Merrickville for his sermons and lectures. He preached at other Presbyterian churches throughout Eastern Ontario, from Kemptville to Morewood to Bishops Mills to Russell. At a meeting of the Brockville Presbytery in 1894 (he would become Moderator of the Brockville Presbytery by 1897), he was one of the ministers asked to speak at its conference regarding "different parts of church service": a "helpful" address was offered by "Rev. Mr. Aston on 'praise'" (*The Advance* [Kemptville, 13 September 1894, p. 4). He returned to Ottawa to preach at Bank Street Presbyterian Church (*Ottawa Journal*, 15 September 1894, p. 8). He went to Lindsay in 1897. In 1898, he was invited to Buckingham, Quebec, to conduct a service at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church: "Rev. Mr. Ashton [sic], of Merrickville, Ont., preached at St. Andrew's Sunday. His discourses were much admired" (*Ottawa Journal*, 1 June 1898, p. 2

St. Paul's had him back in the fall of 1895, not to preach, but to lecture: "The Rev. Edward Aston of Merrickville will deliver a lecture on 'Handel' with vocal and instrumental illustrations" (*Ottawa Journal*, 8 October 1895, p. 1). He was in Ottawa to raise money for renovation of the Presbyterian manse in Merrickville. Aston was a big hit:

*Lecture on Handel*

*Rev. Edward Ashton's [sic] Entertaining Sketch of the Great Composer*

*A good-sized audience was delightfully entertained last night by Rev. Edward Aston, of Merrickville, in a most interesting lecture on "Handel." The lecture was in aid of Merrickville's manse. Rev. Mr. Aston, in giving a biographical sketch of "Handel," said*

*his life was divided into three periods, the preparatory, from his birth in 1685 to 1720, the operatic, from 1720 to 1740, and the oratorical, from 1740 to 1753, the year of his death. The lecturer interspersed his sketch with humorous several stories in which the life of "Handel" abounds, and which were greatly appreciated by the audience. He concluded with a summary of Handel's character, his place in art and his service to religion. The musical items were rendered by the choir of the church under the direction of Prof. Workman, Mr. Aston himself contributing a piano solo, "The Harmonious Blacksmith," which elicited a hearty applause.*

*In presenting his work in this city on behalf of his manse, Rev. Mr. Aston is being very sympathetically received by several generous people. (Ottawa Daily Citizen, 9 October 1895, p. 8)*

During the winter of 1896, Reverend Aston became seriously ill: "Rev. E. Alston, of Merrickville, who came to the city [Kingston] to attend the conference of Queen's College alumni, was attacked by tonsillitis almost immediately after his arrival here. He was removed to the general hospital for treatment, and has remained in that institution ever since (*Daily British Whig*, 5 March 1896, p. 1). He had planned to deliver his lecture on Handel, but he instead ended up in the hospital for at least three weeks. Later in the spring of that year, it was announced that "Rev. Mr. Aston, Presbyterian minister at Merrickville, will spend three months' leave of absence, on account of ill health, in Scotland" (*Weekly British Whig*, 18 June 1896). In the event, he was back home to Merrickville in less than six weeks, and he brought his wife's aunt back from England with him for a visit (*Daily British Whig*, 28 July 1896, p. 3).

As there was a golf course laid out in Merrickville by June of the following year, one wonders if Aston played golf in Scotland as part of his plan to recover his health, and, if so, whether he then laid out a links in Merrickville as part of a long-term plan to maintain his health.

Unfortunately, there was a threat to his health in Merrickville that was beyond his control. As fate would have it, this superstar Presbyterian minister's term as minister at Knox church ended before the turn of the century, just as his preaching vocation and his golfing avocation were gaining steam:

*Rev. E. Aston, Presbyterian minister of this place [Merrickville], while attending a concert held in the town hall on Friday evening, December 22<sup>nd</sup>, was seized with paralysis from which he never recovered consciousness. He died Friday morning, Dec. 30, and was buried Monday, January 2<sup>nd</sup>. The funeral was largely attended, and the*

*bereaved family have the sincere sympathy of the whole community. (Ottawa Journal, 10 January 1899, p. 2)*

Two months before his death, it was reported that “Owing to Rev. Mr. Allston’s illness there were no services in the Presbyterian church Sunday” (*Weekly British Whig*, 27 October 1898, p. 4). Perhaps this was a sign of things to come. Still, he was fit enough to travel to Lindsay in the second week of December (*Daily British Whig*, 14 December 1898, p. 3).

Still, the account of his illness and death in the *Ottawa Journal* seems to have provided an incomplete and rather sanitized version of events.

Aston’s death turns out to have been a traumatic and sad ending to a life in Canada that was still in its promising early stages.

The *Merrickville Mirror* reported that “an altercation ... took place between Demetrus [sic] Crozier and Rev. Mr. Aston, rector. It appears to have been a renewal of some old difficulty. Mr. Aston shortly thereafter became the subject of apoplexy, brought on by nervous excitement, and has since died” (cited in *The Advance* [Kemptville, 5 January 1899, p. 3]).

The “old difficulty” between Crozier and Aston is not explained.



Figure 14 Grave marker of Demetrius Crozier, Union Cemetery, Merrickville..

Demetrius Crozier (1844-1930) generally seems to have been regarded as a respectable citizen of Merrickville. He was the Council’s tax collector: was there an old dispute about taxes owed? Had they quarrelled about the taxing or the allocation of the apparently large amount of funds for renovation of the manse that Reverend Aston had collected from “several generous people” in Ottawa?

Crozier was later appointed by the Council to various other jobs, such as caretaker at the fire hall and worker at the locks, so he seems not to have been ostracized on account of his behaviour towards Reverend Aston.

Yet, according to Reverend Aston himself, what killed him was Crozier’s public expression toward him of sentiments and language the opposite of the “Christian warmth” he celebrated as a preacher.

At least such was Reverend Aston's claim, as quoted by the *Kingston Daily News*:

*Dies of a Broken Heart*

*Rev. Edward Aston, Presbyterian minister, Merrickville, died last Saturday under very sad and brutal circumstances. It seems that some years ago a member of his congregation laid a damaging charge against the reverend gentleman, which was afterwards withdrawn. On the evening of December 23<sup>rd</sup>, a public-school entertainment was given in the hall at Merrickville. To this Mr. Aston escorted a lady friend, and on applying for a seat to the usher, who proved to be Aston's old enemy, he was greeted with most insulting and brutal language. Mr. Aston was naturally greatly agitated at this piece of humiliation and took a seat in the rear of the hall. Shortly afterwards he keeled over in an epileptic fit and was taken home unconscious. He revived and during his conscious moments referred to the persecution he had been subjected to and also said he was dying of a broken heart. (13 January 1899, p. 4)*

Did the "old difficulty" have something to do with the lady accompanying Reverend Aston? As a result of the altercation, one notes, the latter seems to have separated himself from the lady to take "a seat in the rear of the hall."

Whatever the case may be, there was enough pathos in the story for it to be reprinted in newspapers across Canada, with appropriately sensational headlines: "Relentless Persecution: Rev. Edward Aston Dies Under Very Sad Circumstances" (*Manitoba Morning Free Press*, 14 January 1899, p. 9); "Of Broken Heart: Queer Death of a Presbyterian Minister at Merrickville" (*Windsor Star*, 14 January 1899, p. 5).

On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1899, the Reverend Mr. Edward Aston was buried in Ottawa's Beechwood Cemetery. He was just 45 years of age.

News printed in the *Weekly British Whig* a few weeks later makes one wonder whether Reverend Aston suffered from a hereditary vulnerability to shock: "Dr. J.P. Alston, Eccleshill, England, an older brother of the late Rev. Edward Alston, Merrickville, is dead. It is said that his death was caused by the shock of the news of his brother's death" (2 March 1899, p. 10). He died on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1899.

Demetrus Crozier seems to have killed two Astons with a single verbal blow.

Yet had Crozier himself been able to read the above statement, he would have clipped it out of this essay and added it to the newspaper clippings that he made part of his petition to the Brockville Presbytery requesting that Mary Aston stop blaming him for her husband's death:

*AGREED TO WITHDRAW*

*Provided the Widow and Family Will Cease Talking*

*Brockville, July 14 – At a largely attended meeting at the presbytery of Brockville a matter that engaged the serious consideration of the presbytery for some time and evoked much discussion was a petition presented in person by D. Crozier, a member of the Merrickville church, asking the presbytery to investigate certain rumors which connected his name with the late pastor of that church, the Rev. Mr. Alston. It will be remembered that about the first of the year Mr. Crozier and Mr. Alston met in a hall at Merrickville. They had not been on friendly terms for some time, and an altercation arose, in the midst of which Mr. Alston was taken suddenly ill owing to the excitement of the occasion, and died a few days later without regaining consciousness. His last words were: "My heart is broken." Mr. Crozier came in for some criticism at the time, chiefly in the newspapers. These clippings he had attached to his petition, and as he read them, Mrs. Aston, widow of the deceased clergyman, present at the meeting, although given no permission to speak, interrupted with the remark that the statements were true. This created a scene. The matter was discussed at some length. The presbytery considered it was a question for the civil courts, and refused to entertain the petition, but appointed a committee composed of Messrs. McDougall, Strachan and Gill to confer with Mr. Crozier, with the result that Mr. Crozier has decided to drop the whole matter and withdraw the papers from the presbytery provided that Mrs. Alston and family, in consideration of the above, cease all reference to the unfortunate circumstance. The presbytery instructed Mrs. Aston to govern herself accordingly. (Weekly British Whig, 20 July 1899, p. 1)*

It seems that Mary Aston knew how to govern herself according to the best traditions of the Congregationalist faith in which she was raised: according to her own conscience.

So Reverend Alton had left a “widow and orphans” – five children born in England, now ranging in age from 8 to 17 years of age, and a widow understandably bitter at the man she believed had been responsible for her husband’s death (*The Advance* [Kemptville, 2 March 1899, p. 8).

In the spring of 1899, congregations in the Brockville Presbytery were exhorted by their ministers to contribute generously to a fund to be collected for the aid of the bereft family.

And things may have come out alright for Aston’s widow and children: “The engagement is announced of Eugenie, only daughter of Geo. Raines, Esq., of Wakefield, England, to Mr. John Aston, manager Union Bank of Canada, Crysler, Ont., and eldest son of the late Rev. E. Aston” (*Ottawa Journal*, 7 December 1906, p. 10). At the subsequent marriage in Ottawa’s Christ Church Cathedral in May of 1907, one of John’s sisters was the bridesmaid; one of his brothers was the best man. Like his father Edward, John Aston had entered the working world as a bank clerk – and apparently at the same age: 17. Within 18 months of his father’s death, he could afford to spend the summer of 1900 in England and Scotland, no doubt visiting family and friends there. And he was soon appointed a manager in the Union Bank of Canada in the West.

Mary Aston never remarried, and lived out her days in Ottawa, visited by her children and grandchildren until she passed away in her 82<sup>nd</sup> year in 1935. She was also buried in Beechwood Cemetery.

Reverend Aston had been replaced in Merrickville by a Queen’s University theology student named William Fee who was ordained a minister and installed at Knox church all on the same day at the beginning of August in 1899.

It is not known, however, who replaced Aston that year as the president of the Merrickville Golf Club.

## The Secretary- Treasurer: Banker Waddell

Perhaps the new president of the Merrickville Golf Club in 1899 was its 1898 “secretary and treasurer,” John Bell Waddell, the manager of the local branch of the Union Bank and an active member of Reverend Aston’s congregation (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316).

As though he had experienced a foreboding of what the future held for the Aston family, at the beginning of November in 1898, Waddell offered Aston’s eldest son a start in the Union Bank. The *Weekly British Whig’s* correspondent in Merrickville wrote in December that “John Aston, in the Union Bank on probation for the last month, has been accepted and left last month for Smith’s Falls, where he will enter that branch” (15 December 1898, p. 11). Or perhaps it was the Reverend Aston himself who had a premonition of a threat to the family’s financial situation and asked Waddell to take his son on.

When Reverend Waddell’s funeral took place at the beginning of January in 1899, Waddell even arranged for John Aston to spend a week away from the Smith’s Falls branch of the Union Bank working instead in Waddell’s branch, presumably so that John could stay at home that week with his family.



Figure 15 John Bell Waddell (1866-1932), circa 1922.

Waddell had been born in Buckingham, Quebec, in 1866, and right out of high school was employed by the Merchants Bank, but in the early 1890s he went to the Union Bank of Canada, serving as manager of branches in Norwood, Carleton Place, Smith’s Falls, Merrickville, Toronto, and Montreal, also serving as the bank’s inspector of its eastern division and in the 1920s being appointed one of the bank’s directors.

Before the latter appointment, he had actually resigned as a Montreal manager of the Union Bank to serve as president, vice-president, or director of many companies, including the Canadian Industrial Alcohol Company, Sir Mortimer Davis Incorporated, Consolidated Asbestos, Federal Asbestos, Canadian Consolidated Rubber, Northern Explosives, Bluestone

Mining and Smelting, the Dominion Reduction Company, and the Mason Valley Mines Company.

When posted to Smith's Falls in 1907, Waddell joined the Poonahmalee Golf Club. In the fall of 1907, the *Smith's Falls Record* reported that "Mr. J.B. Waddell broke the record at the golf links and now has the championship honors. He made the round in 36" (Cited in the *Merrickville Star*, 3 October 1907, p. 1).

Course record holder and club champion!

In 1908, when he left Smiths Falls for Toronto, he became a member of the Rosedale Golf Club, and when he then transferred to Montreal in 1913, he became a member of the Royal Montreal Golf Club.

By the time he passed away in 1932, John Bell Waddell had travelled far from Merrickville's Union Bank, the Merrickville Golf Club, and the first Merrickville golf links laid out north of the village in 1897.



## Golf Captain Postlethwaite

The Merrickville Golf Club's first "captain" was "C.W. Postlethwaite" (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316). The office of captain was conventionally awarded to the club's best golfer.

Born in Merrickville in 1863, Charles Wilson Postlethwaite spent the next 52 years in Merrickville. He seems to have followed a career in metalworking: he first described his job to census takers as that of a pattern maker, next calling himself a blacksmith, and then a jeweller. By 1911, he was described in the local newspapers as a "jeweller and optician" (*Merrickville Star-Chronicle*, 9 February 1911, p. 1).



Figure 16 Grave marker of Charles and Susan Postlethwaite in Unon Cemetery, Merrickville.

In 1914, however, upon the outbreak of World War I, he felt a call to test mettle of a different sort: he moved to Ottawa and became ordained as a minister of the Anglican Church: "He had charge of Anglican churches up the Gatineau, including Kazabazua, Aylwin, and Danford" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 28 December 1928, p. 4).

Before he left Merrickville, Postlethwaite had served on the committee overseeing the construction of the new Trinity Anglican Church in Merrickville between 1908 and 1909. Upon his sudden death in 1928 at 65 years of age, Reverend Postlethwaite's remains were returned to Merrickville for a funeral service in that same Anglican church.

## The Good Doctor: A Club Director without Portfolio

The 1898 Merrickville Golf Club had one more governor, Dr. T.C. D. Bedell – a director without portfolio.

It is not as though Dr. Bedell did not have enough on his plate already: he had been a very busy man from the moment he arrived in Merrickville.

Born Thomas Casey Dorland Bedell in Hillier, Ontario, in 1874, he had come to Merrickville directly upon graduation from medical school and established “a large and lucrative practice both in town and country” (*Merrickville Star*, 10 October 1901, p. 1).



Figure 17 "The Doc," drawing of Dr T.C.D. Bedell by Matthew K. Barrett.

He served regularly on the school board beginning in 1899. He was elected a municipal councillor in 1901, at just 27 years of age, and in the same year he married Laura Amelia Whitmarsh in Merrickville, with whom he had two children (a boy and a girl).

Bedell would later accept nomination for the position of reeve when the incumbent refused to run again (the reeve declaring that “someone else should shoulder some of the work”), but Bedell was a reluctant candidate: “Bedell says he is not anxious for office” (*Ottawa Journal*, 28 December 1910, p. 12). Still, *noblesse oblige!*

Bedell also supported the village’s sports clubs. In 1911, for instance, he was elected president of the Merrickville Croquet Club, charged with passing regulations on the size of the ball to be used and with fixing up the grounds and putting them into “first class condition” (*Ottawa Journal*, 23 March 1911, p. 3).

And in 1900, as we know, he had worked with Waddell and Putnam to help establish a senior men’s hockey team in Merrickville.

After being active in Merrickville in the early 1900s raising Patriotic Funds to support the wives and children of Canadian soldiers fighting in the South African War (also known as the Boer War, 1899-

1902), Dr. Bedell enlisted as an officer in the Canadian Militia, serving in Merrickville with the 56<sup>th</sup> Lisgar Rifles.

Originally appointed the medical officer of the 56<sup>th</sup> in 1907 at the rank of Lieutenant, he became a Captain early in 1908, then took “an advanced course in military training” and was by the fall of 1908 promoted to the rank of Major, making him the second most senior officer of the 56<sup>th</sup> (*Merrickville Star*, 14 May 1908, p. 1).



Figure 18 Lieutenant-Colonel T.C.D. Bedell, 156th Regiment, 1916.

Upon the outbreak of World War I in August of 1914, Bedell immediately enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and was one of the first to embark for England.

After months of rigorous training on Salisbury Plain, he served in the trenches of France and Belgium for eight months in 1915 until he was hospitalized with trench fever. Upon recovery, he was sent back to Canada to raise a new infantry battalion of volunteers to be drawn largely from Leeds and Granville.

Now a Lieutenant-Colonel, Bedell returned to England with this new battalion in the fall of 1916.

Surprisingly, almost as soon as this battalion arrived in England, it was disbanded, the soldiers distributed to other units, but Bedell worked tirelessly to

have it reconstituted, and he was successful.

In the spring of 1917, however, Bedell relinquished command of this battalion in order to transfer to the Canadian Army Medical Corps. From this point until the end of the war he commanded a number of military convalescent hospitals in England.

After the war, he remained a leading figure in ceremonies and reunions in Eastern Ontario commemorating the war service of veterans. In connection with these activities, he occasionally returned to Merrickville.

But he spent his retirement in Bloomfield, close to his place of birth in Prince Edward County, Ontario, where he died in 1946 – apparently the last surviving member of the 1898 Merrickville Golf Club's board of governors, and, as we shall soon see, the only known officer of the Merrickville Golf Club of 1903.

## The 1898 Golf Tournament

In celebration of the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the birth of Canada, the Merrickville Golf Club held a four-day golf tournament at the beginning of July in 1898. Fourteen of the club's fifteen members participated in a match-play competition. After three days of elimination rounds, just two competitors remained to battle for the championship. As was noted in the *Ottawa Journal*, for the first three days of the tournament, "The game was very interesting all through, but as usual the finals are the more interesting part of the tournament" (4 July 1898, p. 6).

The finals involved an 18-hole competition, pitting the 35-year-old club captain Postlethwaite against the local grocery and hardware king, 55-year-old William Miskelly.

Miskelly was always said to **look** younger than his age ("At 84 years of age he is still actively in business and doesn't look a day over 70"), and at golf he seems to have **played** younger than his age (*Ottawa Citizen*, 17 September 1927, p. 2).

William Miskelly (1843-1933) had been born in Ireland, coming to Canada with his family when just two years of age. He lived out in Wolford township until moving into Merrickville in 1859, when he was 16. He immediately joined Merrickville's militia rifle company and served in battle in 1866 during the Fenian Raids. He had just opened his tinsmith shop in the village when he had to leave it "to take care of itself" while he was away fighting for "three months and ten days" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 17 September 1927, P. 2).

When he died in 1933 in his 90<sup>th</sup> year, the Merrickville correspondent for the *Ottawa Journal* noted that "For more than 50 years he conducted a tinsmith business here and was active in all the work that had to do with the welfare of the community" (26 August 1933, p. 23).

Miskelly served as councillor and reeve over many decades in Merrickville. His calm but determined and forceful manner in all things (which may have helped him to reach the finals of the 1898 golf tournament) was shown in an incident that occurred when he was the township's reeve in the early 1890s – a time when the village of Merrickville had no resident policeman:

*One day there blew into the village a stranger who had too much hard stuff on board.*

*This stranger walked up and down St Lawrence Street trying to pick a fight ....*



Figure 19 Postcard showing St. Lawrence Street, Merrickville, circa 1890s.

*He finally took off his coat and, trailing it on the sidewalk, defied any and all of the residents to step on it.*

*Finally, Reeve Miskelly came on the scene and saw that it was up to him to cope with the situation. He ordered the stranger to leave town, or view the inside of the lock-up. This stranger expressed contempt for lock-ups in general, and the Merrickville one in particular. Then the reeve placed the obstreperous one under arrest and conducted him to the lock-up. He walked quietly enough to the place, but when inside the door, changed his mind about staying.*

*After some words, the stranger started to push the reeve aside in order to escape. The right fist of the reeve suddenly shot to the stranger's chin. He fell in a heap on the floor.*

*The belligerent one got slowly to his feet and gazed admiringly on the representative of law and order.*

*"Look here," he said, "that's all very well, but I'll bet you five dollars you can't do that again. You caught me when I wasn't looking."*

*The reeve started toward his prisoner again with the intention of once more vindicating law and order. But the stranger had had enough. He stepped back. "All right," he said. "I'll stay." (Ottawa Citizen, 24 April 1937, p. 2)*

This incident occurred a few years before Miskelly appeared in the finals of the Merrickville golf tournament, but one supposes that Postlethwaite would have been well aware of Miskelly's reputation for composure under the pressure of circumstance and that he would have been in no doubt that Miskelly would play as hard as he could in the championship final of the great Merrickville golf tournament of 1898.

But Postlethwaite was up to the challenge, although he seems to have been required to play perhaps his best golf, for the *Ottawa Journal* marvelled that his "score was very low, 84 for 18 holes, resulting in a victory for Mr. Postlethwaite, the captain of the club" (4 July 1898, p. 4). That the match-play contest continued for the full 18 holes implies that Postlethwaite was not able to vanquish Miskelly until the last hole.

Unless and until we learn of a lower score recorded on the first Merrickville golf course, 84 must stand as the course record.

## The End of the First Merrickville Golf Club

Just when Merrickville's first golf club disbanded is not certain.

Apparently, the popularity of the game waxed and waned periodically.

Interest in the game seems to have lapsed after the great tournament of 1898, for instance, such that we read in July of 1899 in the *Merrickville Star* that "The **interest in golf is reviving** here. A club is being organized in Smith's Falls and there is a possibility of having a few games between the two clubs before the season closes" (27 July 1899, p. 1, emphasis added). Sure enough, at the end of that summer we read that "A number of Smith's Falls golf players, with a couple of the home team, played over the links here last week" (21 September 1899, p. 1).

Yet the very next year, we learn that there had been no golf at all played by the beginning of June: "The golf players must be very busy men this summer. They have not appeared on the links so far this season" (*Merrickville Star*, 31 May 1900, p. 1). The newspaper made a similar observation in the fall: "The weather could not be surpassed for golf and yet very few games are indulged in by our enthusiasts" (*Merrickville Star*, 11 October 1900, p. 1). But golf seems still to have been a sport for special occasions: "Croquet and golf will be in order on Thanksgiving Day, and some interesting games may be looked forward to," and indeed "keenly contested games were played" that day on the "golf links" (*Merrickville Star*, 18 October 1900, p. 1 and 25 October 1900, p. 1, respectively).



Figure 20 G.R. Putnam, 1903.

Representatives of Merrickville still engaged the Poonahmalee Golf Club of Smith's Falls in competition as late as 1901: "Dr. Bedell and Messrs. [G.R.] Putnam and [C.W.] Postlethwaite went up to Smith's Falls on Monday. While there they went over the golf links with some of the local players, winning by a score of 164-170" (*Merrickville Star*, 18 July 1901, p. 1).

Putnam, who was school board chairman, district census commissioner, reeve as of 1902, and so on, served alongside Bedell, Waddell, and Postlethwaite on the executive committees of many local sports organizations (such as lawn tennis, lacrosse, hockey, and so on) and he was probably also a member of the original Merrickville Golf Club.



But whether or not Putnam, Bedell, and Postlethwaite had travelled to Smith's Falls as representatives of the Merrickville Golf Club or merely as individual golfers is not clear.

That golf in Merrickville was no longer organized by an official golf club but rather was pursued by individual golfers is implied by a newspaper report in the fall of 1902 that "Some of the local golf enthusiasts have received an invitation from the Smith's Falls golf club to go up and play them a game. In all probability the invitation will be accepted some day next week" (*Merrickville Star*, 9 October 1902, p. 1). The Poonahmalee Golf Club issued its invitation not to a golf club in Merrickville, but to individual golfers. In due course, we read that "A number of local golf players are in Smith's Falls today where they are enjoying a game" (*Merrickville Star*, 16 October 1902, p. 1).

The fact that we read in April of 1903 that "An effort is being made to start a golf club at Merrickville" suggests that there was no golf club in 1902 (*Almonte Gazette*, 3 April 1903, p. 8). The first Merrickville Golf Club would seem to have become defunct sometime between 1901 and 1902.

The Merrickville Golf Club certainly suffered significant setbacks in the early 1900s. Secretary-Treasurer J.B. Waddell had been transferred to Norwood at the beginning of 1900. At a banquet held in his honour in February of 1900 there were formal toasts offered to acknowledge Waddell's role in the organization of local sports (including baseball, croquet, lawn tennis, and hockey): C.W. Postlethwaite offered the toast for golf, acknowledging Waddell's important role in the development of this sport in Merrickville (*Merrickville Star*, 8 February 1900, p. 1). And we recall that the Reverend Mr. E. Aston had died at the end of 1898.

Of course, Aston and Waddell represented 50% of the 1898 board of governors.

Perhaps equally significant for the club was the likely loss of nominally less important members. For, by definition, fads do not last. And so across North America in the early 1900s the faddists dropped the game as quickly as they had picked it up. As the *Victoria Daily Times* observed at the beginning of the 1903 golf season, "It is said that the golf fad has about run its course, and that a season of decadence of enthusiasm has set in" (22 June 1903, p. 4).

Perhaps this is what happened at Merrickville.

Presumably a combination of faddists dropping the game and the virtually simultaneous departure from the village of both the President and Secretary-Treasurer led to such a low club membership that the first Merrickville Golf Club disbanded by 1902.

Yet in that very year, the local newspaper observed that a new generation of players was demonstrating interest in the game:

*Golf seems to have taken quite a strong hold on some of the young men of the town and golf parties are to be found daily on the links. The game furnishes good clean sport, and no doubt as the season advances quite a number of new recruits will join the ranks to try their skill at the "auld Scottish game." (Merrickville Star, 29 May 1902, p. 1)*

Golf seems to have become a fad for some of the young men of the town in 1902: golf parties frequented the links daily!

So on Thanksgiving Day in 1902, we find once again that "golf players enjoyed several rounds on the links," but we now have reason to believe that these golfers comprised both the older, original members of the 1898 golf club and a new generation of golf enthusiasts that had taken to the links in the spring of 1902 (*Merrickville Star*, 23 October 1902, p. 1).

It seems likely that talk of starting a new golf club in the spring of 1903 was driven by the emergence of this new generation of golfers.

The future of golf in Merrickville would probably depend on whether the new golfers of 1902 were genuine in their enthusiasm for the game, or mere faddists.

## The “Hot-Stove” Parliament

We have met six of the fifteen members of the Merrickville Golf Club of the late 1890s: Reverend E. Ashton, C.W. Postlethwaite, John Bell Waddell, Dr. T.C.D. Bedell, William Miskelly, and G.R. Putnam.

Perhaps the ringleader of the young men of the town constituting the daily golf parties seen on the links in 1902 was William Miskelly’s son Mervyn, who was apprenticing with his father as a tinsmith.

Born in 1881, he was a child of William Miskelly’s first family with Ellen Bellerose (1843-1892), which included Mervyn’s older siblings William (1870-1897) and Edith (born 1875). By 1895, son William had been asked by his father to join him as a partner in his store. Invited by the journal *Hardware: Devoted to the American Hardware Trade* “to contribute ... news of new stores, changes, improvements, etc.,” Miskelly proudly wrote to announce that “Wm. Miskelly, Hardware merchant, has taken his son into partnership, and the firm now is W. Miskelly & Son” (vol 11 [10 May 1895], p. 50). But son William was in poor health, suffering from a mysterious illness that had him travelling to Montreal early in 1895 to be examined by experts. He was occasionally unable even to leave his house. Son William died in 1897, and so Mervyn became the son in Miskelly & Son.



Figure 21 Mervyn Miskelly, Rover, Merrickville hockey team, 1903-04. Digital collection of the Merrickville and District Historical Society.

Mervyn was an athletic young man who enjoyed sports. He played the position of Rover on the 1903-1904 Merrickville senior hockey team and he was also a local baseball star.

When Mervyn was invited to take his brother’s place in the family firm, he was also thereby invited to witness – and even participate in – conversations about village events, for, as Linda Seccaspina points out, the chairs around the hot stove in the centre of the Miskelly & Son store were the unofficial village clearing-house for local news, views, and ideas (<https://lindaseccaspina.wordpress.com/2019/02/21/tales-of-miskelly-of-merrickville/>).

It was probably in this impromptu parliament, for instance, that Bedell, Waddell, and Putnam, along with several others, first talked of the formation of the Merrickville hockey club in January of 1900 – perhaps in front of 18-year-old Mervyn who

would become Rover on the team. It was probably here that golf enthusiasts such as Ashton, Waddell, Postlethwaite, and Bedell first talked of the possibility of laying out a golf course on the northern edge of the village in 1897. And after the disbanding of the original golf club, it was probably here that talk of forming a second golf club began in the winter of 1903 – perhaps a conversation involving Mervyn.

By the spring of 1904, however, Mervyn had decided to head out West, where his aunt lived at Sandford in Manitoba, a few miles outside of Winnipeg:

*Mr. Mervyn Miskelly left for Winnipeg on Tuesday. He expects to remain in the west for some time and may possibly make his permanent residence there. Mervyn will be greatly missed here as he was a valued member of our baseball and hockey teams. The best wishes of his many friends goes with him. (Merrickville Star, 7 April 1904, p. 1).*

Eventually, Mervyn returned to Merrickville – perhaps after his aunt died in 1906 (he may have returned East with his father, who had travelled to Manitoba for his older sister’s funeral).

But there was no more Miskelly & Son in Merrickville. The firm was now simply Miskelly. And Mervyn would eventually leave Merrickville again – and this time for good.



*Figure 22 Private Mervyn Forsey Miskelly, 38th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917.*

On the first day of spring in 1917, Mervyn Miskelly left the family business in the hands of his father and travelled from Merrickville to Kingston to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, as his half-brother Lawrence had done the year before.

Private Miskelly served for a while in Canada as a driver for an ammunition column, but he sailed for England at the end of April and trained there for service in the trenches before being sent across the English Channel to serve at the front in Belgium. That fall, on the day before Halloween, his battalion was ordered at 5:40 am to “go over the top” of the front-line trenches in the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres.

Mervyn Miskelly died in action that day, and because of the heat of the battle his body lay where it fell. Afterwards, it could not be found.

The Imperial War Graves Commission searched for the body of Private Miskelly and the bodies of tens of thousands of other soldiers until 1921 (two years after the end of the war).

But Mervyn Miskelly's body was never found.

And so, along with the names of 54,000 other soldiers whose bodies were never recovered from No Man's Land, his name was engraved on the Menin Gate in Ypres in 1927. There, each day at 8:00 pm since 2 July 1928, to express gratitude for these soldiers' sacrifices, the Last Post Association has closed the road that passes under the Menin Gate and its buglers have sounded the "Last Post."

The ceremony will be held again tonight.



*Figure 23 Union Cemetery, Merrickville.*

Without a body, however, a funeral service was nonetheless held for Mervyn Miskelly back home in Merrickville in the fall of 1917.

And he was given a burial plot in Union Cemetery.

His plot remains empty to this day, still marked by the stone monument seen in the photograph to the left.

And yet, should a sudden heaving frost in a distant Belgian field someday disturb his bed, and a farmer find his bones, Mervyn might yet come home to Merrickville, and the plot beneath this marker receive his mortal remains.

## Post-Fad Golf

The Merrickville Golf Club was by no means the only Eastern Ontario golf club formed in 1897 or 1898 that disappeared after a few years. The Picton golf club that was formed in 1897 did not last long, and neither did the Carleton Place golf club mentioned in 1898.

Yet the departure of the faddists from golf clubs was seen by golf's devotees not as debilitating, but rather as strengthening the new game.

In his 1901 essay, "Golf in Canada," W.A.R. Kerr, an accomplished amateur golfer at the Toronto Golf Club who won the Canadian amateur championship in 1897, reflected on the post-fad state of the game:

*Golf is somewhat of a fad at present; that is to say, it is being played by people who have in turn tried their hands at every passing game that has been born and died within the last twenty-five years. This does not mean that golf will languish when its present pretended admirers jilt it and shift their affection to the next fashionable favourite. When the popular wave leaves it, golf will not be stranded, it will still float on the steady-going current which has brought it down through half-a-dozen centuries. (Canadian Magazine, vol 17 [May to October, 1891], p. 340)*

The feeling in the United States was the same. In 1901, Robert Bage Kerr, Secretary of the United States Golf Association, was asked about golf's prospects as it moved from its late-1800s growth as a fad to its hope in the early-1900s to grow as a serious sport:

*Possibly there is not so much furor about the sport [today], but this is because it is no longer a novelty. It is taken as a matter of course now that a man plays golf in his leisure moments and not so much talk is made of it. Another thing is that the faddists have left the game for good. And, I might add, for the game's good also. This is another reason why there is less talk about it. The man who played because it was "the thing," and not because he liked it, has given way to those who love the sport for its own sake. There are just as many players and just as many links, but the game has assumed a more rational and permanent basis. (Tribune (New York), 25 November 1901, p. 9)*

And so, it is perhaps not surprising that golf enthusiasts in Merrickville tried to organize a new golf club in the spring of 1903 only a few years after the demise of the first one. The population of golfers in the village had been reduced, but it now comprised at a minimum “those who love[d] the sport for its own sake.” Perhaps there was a chance now to organize a golf club on “a more rational and permanent basis.”

Moreover, there was a chance that Merrickville’s lovers of the sport for its own sake might be supplemented by like-minded “new recruits”: “some of the young men of the town.”

As C.W. Postlethwaite, Dr. T.C.D. Bedell, William Miskelly and Mervyn Miskelly all still lived in Merrickville in 1903, and as the young Miskelly was a leading figure on the local sports scene, it is virtually certain that these men would have been involved in this 1903 attempt to resuscitate the Merrickville Golf Club.

There is even a chance that John Bell Waddell maintained an interest in reviving golf in Merrickville in the early 1900s. Although he had moved to Carleton Place in 1902, and although he was soon transferred to the Union Bank in Smith’s Falls, just a short distance from Merrickville, he habitually spent a considerable amount of time in the village visiting his in-laws, the parents of Harriet Jean Percival (a poet), whom Waddell married in 1901 (not long after their work together on a committee raising funds to support families of Canadian soldiers fighting in the South African War). Waddell was mad about golf and no doubt played a round on the links with his old chums whenever opportunity allowed during his visits to the village.

But whoever in fact they were, Merrickville’s devotees of the royal and ancient game were certainly not willing to give up on the idea of forming a golf club.



Figure 24 F.A.J. Davis, 1903.

As was the case in Almonte, so in Merrickville: the local newspaper was supportive. In March of 1903, the editor of the *Merrickville Star*, F.A.J. Davis, observed: “Sap’s runnin’ .... Now for croquet and golf” (12 March 1903, p. 1). And his support extended beyond mere words to material deeds, for he made his office available to the organizers of the new golf club: “A meeting for the purpose of organizing a golf club will be held in the *Star* office on Tuesday evening next at 8 o’clock. A full attendance of all those interested in the game is urgently requested. – T.C.D. Bedell, President” (*Merrickville Star*, 26 March 1903, p. 1).

So there was actually a president, at least for the time being, of the second Merrickville Golf Club: Dr. T.C.D. Bedell, the director without portfolio on the board of governors of the 1898 club.

Alas, the meeting was not a success: “A sufficient number of those interested did not turn out on Tuesday evening at the organization meeting of the golf club” (*Merrickville Star*, 2 April 1903, p. 1). Were the young men of the town who had taken to the game so enthusiastically the year before mere faddists?

Try, try, and try again: “Another meeting will be held shortly when it is hoped there will be a full attendance” (*Merrickville Star*, 2 April 1903, p. 1).

Yet after this hopeful note in the *Merrickville Star*, we hear no more of any attempt to form another golf club in Merrickville. Was a second Merrickville Golf Club ever organized? Or did golf continue to be played by individual devotees of the royal and ancient game without any supervision by or affiliation to a formal golf club?

A similarly fitful post-fad revival of the game by optimistic golf enthusiasts occurred at this time in both Picton and Almonte.

In Picton, the Presbyterian minister of St. Andrew’s Church, Reverend Donald George Macphail, had brought golf to town in the 1890s and converted a number of young men to the game, but nothing came of the Picton Golf Club of 1897. It wasn’t until 1902 that a proper and enduring Picton Golf Club was formed, and it still exists today. (See my essay, “Early Golf in Picton: Of Presbyters & Proselytes, 1897-1907” on my website, *Golf Histories of Eastern Ontario, the Outaouais, and Jekyll Island*.)

In Almonte, a golf club was formed in 1902 and much encouraged by the *Almonte Gazette*, but it may not have even finished the 1903 season. It was not until 1906 that it was revived and endured for another ten years, being revived again in 1925 and enduring until 1927. (See my book, *The Almonte Golf Club: A Story of Common Cause*, on my website, *Golf Histories of Eastern Ontario, the Outaouais, and Jekyll Island*.)

Was golf still played in Merrickville in 1903 and the following years?

Did golf enthusiasts continue to play on the “short” 1897 golf course.? Was this old golf ground even available for play?

Or was a new golf course laid out?



## The Second Golf Course

We know that Merrickville's golf enthusiasts played on a new golf course at some point after 1903, for a postcard that features in the foreground St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, which was completed in 1903, indicates that in the "back ground" can be seen the "Golf Links" of Merrickville – evidently located on the south side of the Rideau River, perhaps somewhere in the fields south of the village, or perhaps somewhere next to or even adjacent to the fair grounds on the west side of the village.

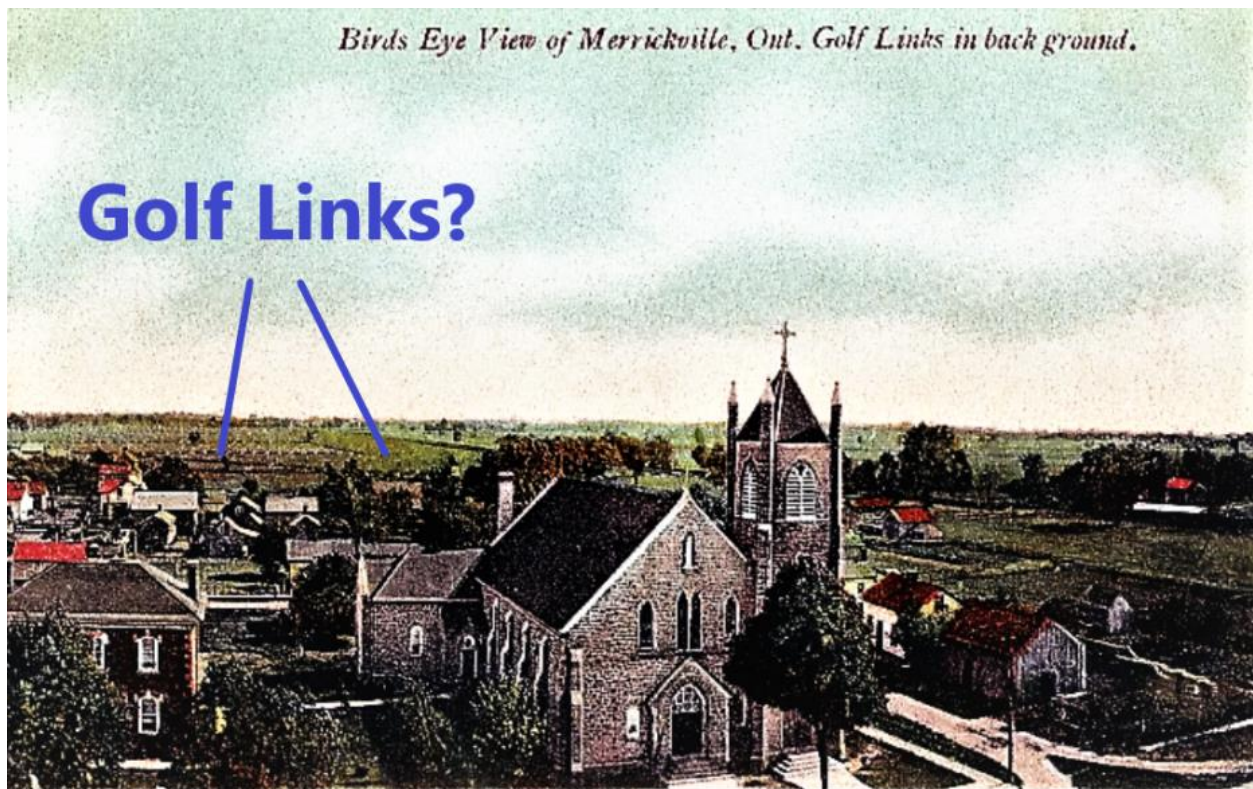


Figure 25 St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, which opened in 1903, appears in the foreground.

The next reference to golf in Merrickville that I can find occurs in 1905 in connection with a Sunday-school picnic:

*The Sunday School of Trinity [Anglican] church had its picnic on Wednesday in Mr. [John] Church's grove, and a very pleasant outing was enjoyed by the scholars and many older friends. The programme embraced the drive from the church to the grove, games of various kinds, singing, football, golf practice, races and abundant feast partaken of in real picnic fashion. (Merrickville Star, 10 August 1905, p. 1).*

In the activity called “golf practice,” the girls’ prize for “Putting the golf ball” was won by 15-year-old “Ethel Postlethwaite,” niece of the captain of the original Merrickville Golf Club, C.W. Postlethwaite (*Merrickville Star*, 10 August 1905, p. 1).

John Church (manager of the Union Bank branch in Merrickville) and Charles W. Postlethwaite were two of the most important laypeople in Merrickville’s Trinity Anglican Church, taking charge in 1904 of the plans to tear down the existing church and replace it with a bigger, better building (which was opened in 1909).

So what do we make of this grove belonging to John Church out to which one drove in order to engage in “golf practice”? Had a new golf links been laid out on Church’s property?

References to golf in Merrickville after 1905 are few and far between, yet in its column about news in Merrickville, the *Weekly Advance* of Kemptonville notes in April of 1913 that “The golf season opened here last week” (17 April 1913, p. 13). So golf would seem to have had its fairly regular seasons in Merrickville right down to the beginning of World War I.

So many golf enthusiasts enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the war that most golf clubs scaled back their operations. For the duration of the war, big clubs, such as Royal Ottawa and Rivermead, suspended competitions with other golf clubs, and even suspended competitions within the golf club. Some small clubs golf clubs disbanded. Such was the case in Almonte. Such may have been the case in Merrickville.

At this point, just where golf had been played in Merrickville between 1903 and 1913 is unclear – as unclear as the background images in the postcard above that refers to the “Golf Links” in question.

As is the case with the fields where the first Merrickville golf course was laid out north of the village, however, so with the fields where the second golf course was located south or west of the village: somewhere under the turf, there are golf balls waiting to be found to tell us just where the golf course of the early 1900s was located.

But these golf balls will not be gutta-percha balls, but rather examples of the new golf ball invented by Coburn Haskell in the late 1890s. Featuring a solid rubber core wrapped with high-tension rubber thread, all contained within a thin rubber cover, this new ball displaced the old gutta-percha ball as of 1902 when the U.S. amateur championship was easily won that year by the great Walter J. Travis while using the new ball.

Nicknamed the "Haskell Flyer," or simply the "Haskell," the new golf ball flew 20% further than the old ball. In fact, the increased distances over which the new golf ball could be driven may be a reason that the "short" course of 1897 was replaced at some point with a new one (*Official Golf Guide*, p. 316).

<h1>The Haskell Golf Ball</h1>		
<p><i>A justly celebrated favorite, because of those pre-eminently</i></p>	<p><b>MADE IN TWO MARKINGS</b></p>  <p><b>REGULAR &amp; BRAMBLE</b></p>	<p><i>good qualities not possessed by any other ball.</i></p>
<p>The experience of golfers everywhere justifies the statement that there is no golf ball like the "Haskell," and that its use means play of a higher order and the satisfaction that comes to one who has bettered his score or, maybe, reduced the bogey.</p>		
<p><b>The B. F. Goodrich Co.,</b> Akron Rubber Works <b>AKRON, OHIO</b></p>		
<p>NEW YORK, 80-88 Reade St. DETROIT, 305 Woodward Ave. BUFFALO, 9 West Huron St.</p>	<p>SAN FRANCISCO, 392 Mission St. CHICAGO, 141 Lake St.</p>	<p>PHILADELPHIA, 922 Arch St. BOSTON, 157 Summer St. DENVER, 1615 Tremont St.</p>

Figure 26 An advertisement for the new rubber-cored "Haskell" golf ball published in *Golf*, vol 10 no 4 (April 1902), p. 287.

An interesting question with regard to this new golf course south or west of the village is whether the Merrickville golf enthusiasts laid it out themselves or instead availed themselves of the services of a golf professional.

Although the short nine-hole golf course of 1897 was probably laid out by one of the local golfers who had some experience of the game (the most likely candidate being Reverend Aston, who had come to Ottawa from Musselburgh), by 1903, golf clubs in Eastern Ontario tended to hire the nearest golf professionals in Montreal, Ottawa, or Toronto to do the job.

In Almonte in 1902, for instance, the Almonte Golf Club accepted the offer by the Royal Montreal Golf Club of the loan of its professional, James Black, for the purpose of laying out a proper links. And in 1907, when the Almonte Golf Club moved to new grounds, it brought in George Sargent from the Ottawa Golf Club to lay out its new course. At Caledonia Springs, Charles Murray of Montreal's Westmount Golf Club was brought in to build a nine-hole course in the spring of 1904. And the Picton Golf Club brought in George Cumming of the Toronto Golf Club to lay out its first nine-hole course in 1907.

Perhaps someday we will find a reference in an old newspaper or golf magazine to a golf professional's visit to Merrickville in the early 1900s to lay out a new golf course.

## Afterword

At this point, we do not know the precise lifespan of either the first or the second Merrickville Golf Club.

And neither do we know precisely where the first or the second of the Merrickville golf courses was laid out.

Yet for all that we do not know about the late-1800s and early-1900s golf clubs and golf courses of Merrickville, at least we now know that they existed.

So at long last we have made a start on recovering the history of golf in Merrickville.