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CELEBRATING AMATEUR GOLF SINCE 1897

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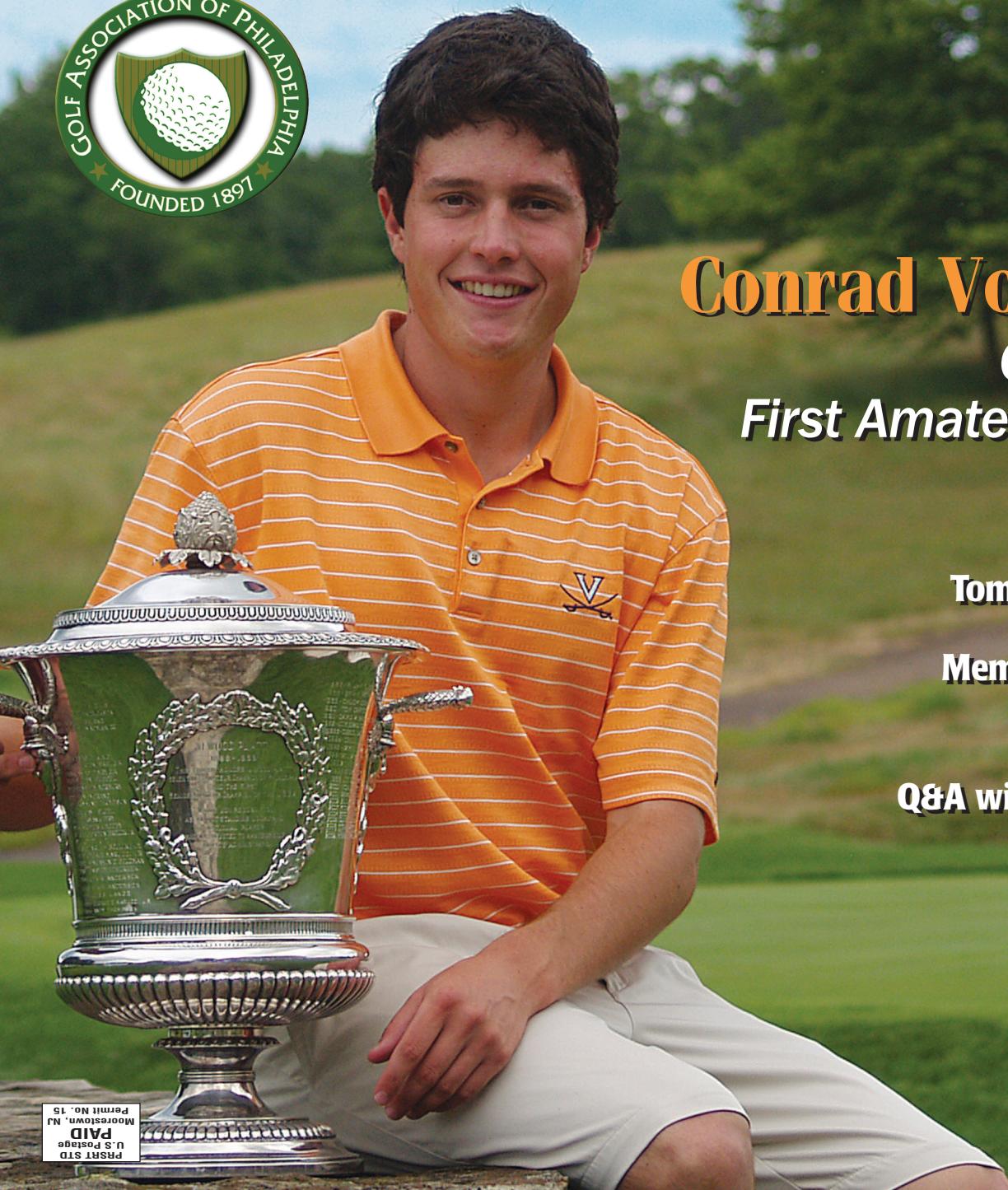
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Chester Valley Golf Club

By Neil Geoghegan

It's a case of Who Done It when it comes identifying Chester Valley Golf Club's architect

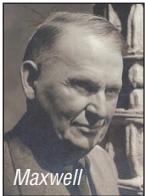
Beginning in its early association with the Pennsylvania Railroad, on through a location change at the height of the depression, and then a near complete reconfiguration in the late 1960s, Chester Valley Golf Club has a complicated past, with a mysterious twist.

The private club near Malvern, Pa., which reopened on May 21 after an ambitious \$2 million renovation plan, gained national prominence as the primary host of the Senior PGA Tour's Bell Atlantic Classic from 1985-1997.

But was the original course architect the legendary Donald Ross, as was thought



Ross



Maxwell

for decades? A recent club brochure says it was the renowned Perry Maxwell, but where is the evidence? Or could it have been somebody else, like maybe an anonymous local club professional,

which was a common practice at the time?

"There is no evidence that I know that either Ross or Maxwell stepped foot on the

course," said CVGC head professional Jonathan Doctor.

"I have heard that Maxwell was the designer, but I never saw his name in the meeting notes from that period," added Seward Ridlon, a former board

member at Chester Valley. "It's very strange."

And here is more strangeness: Back in 2001, Ridlon did have evidence of Ross's limited involvement, but the paperwork is now missing.

"The board meeting notes that I had did not say who the architect was," Ridlon reported. "It said that the plans for the course layout were sent to Donald Ross in Pinehurst, N.C., and for the sum of \$150, he approved the plans.

"I turned them back into the club, and now they can't find them. I was sick when they told me that."

We do know that what is now Chester Valley had its beginnings in the mid-1920s as the Pennsylvania Railroad Golf Club in Delaware County. The cramped 109-acre site was leased from nearby Llanerch



8th hole



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14th hole

Country Club and the course was built by the railroad for its employees.

In 1928, the railroad purchased the Smedley and Hatton farms in East Whiteland Township, Chester County for \$350 an acre, and construction began on a new more spacious location. The plot of land had historical significance dating back to the Revolutionary War.

The routing included nine holes that ran north and south, up and down a substantial hill with power lines dissecting most of the fairways. The grand opening of the Pennsylvania Golf Club came on May 30, 1930. During the recently completed renovation, workers discovered several plates that covered irrigation valves that said "PGC" on them, according to CVGC superintendent Dave Visocan.

Geoffrey Cornish and Ronald Whitten indicate that Maxwell designed the course in their book: 'The Architects of Golf,' but offer no evidence. It is possible that Maxwell's alleged association with PGC is actually an honest mistake because he is listed as the architect of record for the original Pennsylvania Railroad Golf Club in Delaware County, according to noted golf course researcher Jay Flemma. It is a mystery that may never be solved.

Difficult economic times and lagging membership led the railroad to sell the club to some existing members in 1948, where it became Chester Valley Golf Club. In 1967, former local golf professional George Fazio was hired to oversee the relocation of

holes 6, 16 and 17 in order to accommodate the construction of Route 202.

"After looking at the property, Fazio convinced the club to allow him to build five holes across Swedesford Road and reconfigure another 10 holes so that the power lines did not come into play," Doctor said. "The only original holes from 1928 are 3 and 4."

According to former club president Tom Feeney, Jr., a settlement of about \$250,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation from the land used for Route 202 paid for a big chunk of Fazio's work.

The original clubhouse, a converted barn, was destroyed by fire in 1950. It was rebuilt and later underwent a major renovation in 1994 with proceeds from the Bell Atlantic Classic. One of the more successful annual stops on the Senior Tour, the Bell

Atlantic spent 12 of its 15-year run at Chester Valley and was regarded as one of the toughest tests for the world's best over-50 players. Golfing great, Lee Trevino, regularly called Chester Valley a "hidden jewel."

Yet another twist in the history of the 187-acre Chester Valley site actually goes back 232 years, to an infamous Revolutionary battle that never actually took place. On Sept. 16, 1777, a portion of General George Washington's three-mile defensive line was positioned where Chester Valley is now located.

Fresh off a victory at the Battle of Brandywine and seeking momentum, British Commander William Howe moved his troops into the region to battle

Washington's 10,000-man army. But before the two sides became fully engaged, a severe rain storm ensued. The soaked gunpowder rendered the firearms useless, and what became known as the "Battle of the Clouds" never materialized.

The latest chapter in Chester Valley history necessitated closing the course last August for nearly 10 months to execute a renovation plan that included rebuilding eight greens, laser-leveling every tee box and re-grassing all greens and fairways. Although only recently opened, improvements have been so well received that Chester Valley was awarded the Pennsylvania Senior Amateur Championship, which will take place in August of 2010.

Neil Geoghegan is a sports writer for Journal Register News Service and has covered golf since 1993.



13th hole