

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROAD HOLE

Written by William Brightly

Hackensack Golf Club is graced with one of the best holes ever built by Charles Banks. Our eighteenth is his version of the famous Road Hole, #17 on The Old Course at St. Andrews. This classic "template" was built time and again by Banks' mentors: Seth Raynor and C.B. Macdonald. Almost always one of the most difficult holes on the course, a Road Hole is often described as a "par four and a half" where making par is very tough and bogey is fairly easy. While our hole has undergone many changes over the years, it has been faithfully restored this year. We think our membership will appreciate understanding the history behind the hole and why the recent work was completed.

It is important to note that Macdonald, Raynor and Banks did not simply copy great holes in the U.K. Rather, they copied "features" and incorporated these features into the holes they built in the United States. So while the Road Hole at St. Andrews is a dogleg right, the hole Banks built at HGC is a dogleg left. Here is the original (photo inset right).



While this hole is loved and admired, it must be admitted that it contains a certain amount of "quirk" that could not be duplicated today. For example, the tee shot originally went over an old railroad shed, which has now been converted to part of the hotel.

As you can see, this structure hides much of the landing area. Obviously, Charles Banks was not going to build a large structure to hit over, so he designed a bunker that is fairly close to the tee. The intent is not to catch golf balls,

but rather to obscure the landing area. So when you see the new berm on the left side of our hole, you should know that it represents the building above!

As the above diagram shows, in designing the green complex, Banks was extremely faithful to St. Andrews. The three main characteristics are a very deep green that angles from right to left, a "road" behind and to the right of the green, and of course, the deep Road Hole Bunker menacing the golfer and protecting the green from almost any approach.



This hazard so enthralled C.B. Macdonald that he was inspired to build almost an exact replica at his masterpiece: The National Golf Links (photo inset left)

If you are familiar with the seventeenth hole at St. Andrews, you know that the hole also has one other very "quirky" feature: a road that runs extremely close to the green! Banks certainly would not build a road, so he represented this as best he could with an extremely long diagonally cut bunker over the green. This bunker was removed by William Gordan in 1962 when the club hired him to complete a "modernization." We are so very pleased that this feature has been restored to Hackensack, and we know that Banks would approve!

The last bit of recent work that needs to be explained is the fairway bunker work. The three new bunkers on the right come right off Banks' original plans. While it is unusual to place hazards on the outside of a dogleg, Banks did this because the preferred angle of attack to the green is from the right side of the fairway. It is classic Macdonald-Raynor-Banks design to challenge the better golfers by requiring them to flirt with the bunkers, yet giving shorter hitters plenty of room on the left to play to the green in three relatively easy shots.

The last change made to the hole was necessitated by the loss of the large oak that we lost in Hurricane Sandy. Our architect felt that this tree was strategically critical in guarding the green when long hitters played to the left side of the fairway, so a bunker was built at approximately 280 yards off the blue tee. Big hitters will face a variety of options now and we think this hole creates one of the most challenging tee shots on the course. A new red and white tee box has been added on the right side to give those players a more friendly way to play the hole.

We hope this explanation of the work helps the membership understand the architectural history of our Road Hole. We think it is a fabulous hole, one of the best closing holes in the Met area, and one that is perhaps the finest ever designed by Charles Banks.



Sean Morley in the Road Hole Bunker, National Golf Links, Southampton, NY