

Memories of the original course at the Picton Golf Club

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This year the dreams of generations of Picton golfers have finally been realized with the expansion of the course to eighteen holes. The new holes, skillfully blended with the old nine, are wonderful: the mammoth rolling greens of St. Andrewsean proportions, the water and woods on several holes that force you to aim down the middle and pray, the spectacular vistas from numerous vantage points. All of this reinforces the feeling that we have embarked on a great new era of Picton golf.

For golfers of a certain age, I am certain that this milestone season brings back memories of 1961. For on opening day of 1961 we were presented with a brand new golf course thanks to the dedication and herculean efforts of our late beloved golf pro Fred Purcell. These nine holes that Fred conceived and built almost single-handedly have stood the test of time. The layout of the old nine is remarkably unchanged, apart from conditioning, from what we saw in 1961.

My mission here is not to write about the new course—it is too soon. Nor is it to write about the post-1961 course. This course is well-known to all and remains an integral part of the new eighteen. No, my mission is a historical one. This year's 18-hole expansion has lead, somewhat ironically, to a renewed historical interest in the original nine hole (pre-1961) course. And it is the original nine that I wish to describe. In this regard two questions seem to crop up. "Is it true that golfers used to drive across the highway?" "Were there actually six holes on the clubhouse side of the highway?" The answer to both these questions is yes.

Please join me. It is the summer of 1955, and we are going to play nine holes at the Picton Golf Club. Here is the card:

Hole	Yardage	Par
1	306	4
2	426	5
3	375	4
4	345	4
5	155	3
6	385	4
7	103	3
8	277	4
9	234	4

Hole 1. 306 yards Par 4. The tee-like mound to the left of the 17th fairway would make a perfect first tee for the original course. The actual first tee is not nearly so elaborate. Just behind the first tee is Fred Purcell's pro shop. Fred will have a friendly greeting for you along with words of encouragement. If you are having problems with your game, Fred will probably drop everything and give you an impromptu lesson.

Before heading out let's buy a golf ball, perhaps a Campbell Spot (price 50 cents) or a Spald-

ing Dot (price \$1.00). Tee up, aim for the roof of the old stone house on the horizon, and we're off. The shorter hitter will be in the valley with a blind second shot to the green; the longer hitter will be at or near the top of the hill with a great view of the green and a hundred yard or so pitch. All in all, a gentle introduction to the course. Just as well, because here comes the infamous second.

Hole 2. 426 yards Par 5. When visitors to the Picton Golf Club went back to their own course, I am sure they said, "You should have seen the second hole at Picton." Imagine a tee in the middle of the present first fairway at the corner of the dogleg. The second green is not too far from the present 14th tee. Keep your head down because you have to drive across the highway. Fortunately it is 1955 and we are talking about the Highshore road, not Highway 49. But there is still traffic and it is the job of the other members of your group to warn you

if a car is coming. A good drive will sail across the road and end up somewhere in the vicinity of the present second green. A poor drive will end up in the ditch and that is the prosaic truth. For years the present second green was framed by a large elm tree; this elm tree forces you to play the second hole as a slight dogleg. I am sure the better players regarded this hole as a birdie opportunity; for beginners it seemed to stretch on forever.

Hole 3. 375 yards Par 4. Tee off close to the present 14th tee and drive in the direction of the present 9th green. Don't slice because there is an out-of-bounds fence down the entire right hand side. A good drive will be at the base of the hill leading up to this green. But you have a ways to go because the green is adjacent to the road, a stone's throw from the red tees for the present 16th hole. Play short on your second for an easy bogey, but be careful if you are going for the green in two. You can be out of bounds both left (the road) and right (a bordering fence). A difficult par.

Hole 4. 345 yards Par 4. Tee off behind the third green. Much like driving on the present 16th hole only from a slightly different angle. The green, situated to

the left of the present 16th fairway, is protected by old-fashioned cross bunkers. Not too difficult a par four.

Hole 5. 155 yards Par 3. Here we go again. Death or glory. Hit across the road to a nicely built-up green framed by the maple tree that guards the corner of the dogleg on the present first hole. (Head down; it's less than a hundred yards to carry the road; surely I won't hit it into the ditch; oh drats.)

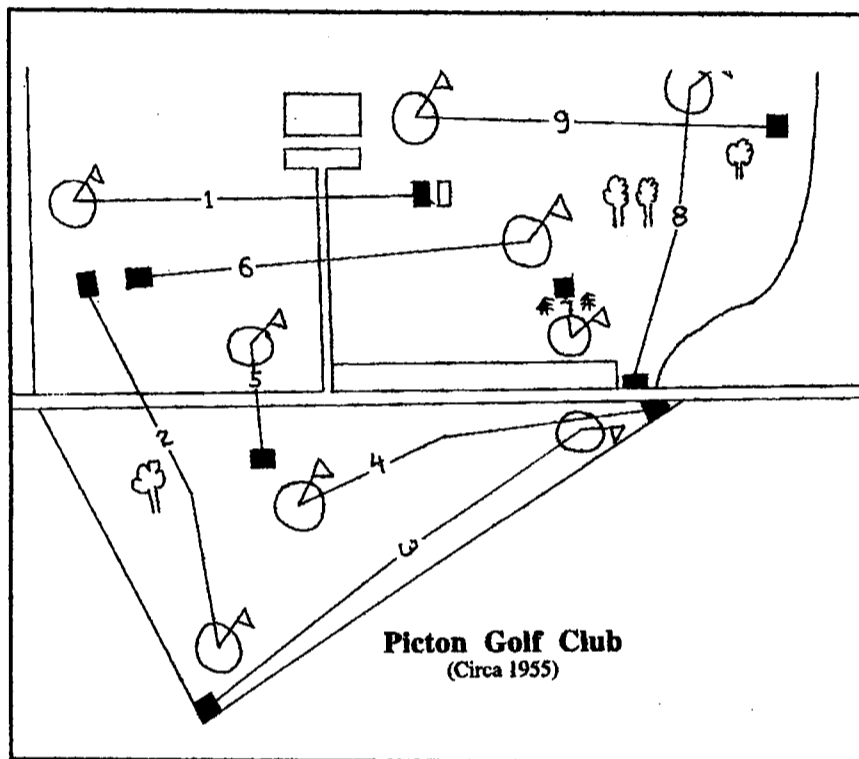
Hole 6. 385 yards Par 4. Tee off adjacent to the original second tee at the corner of the dogleg of the present first hole. A good drive will end up over the clubhouse road not far from the present 17th tee. Lots of work re-

maybe. But those elm trees can easily turn a three or four into a five or six.

Hole 9. 234 yards Par 4. Move the present 18th tee sixty yards back and you have the original 9th hole.

Take out your driver or three wood and have a go at the green. You have to play the hill just perfectly to find the green, and make sure that you don't slice. A great hole to end the round. And there would always be a group of golfers sitting on the veranda to cheer you on.

So there it is, the original nine, with six of the nine holes on the clubhouse side of the highway and two holes requiring tee shots across the high-



mains because the green is over the brow of the hill leading down to the 17th green. The plateau green is perfectly rectangular and very difficult to hit. Like number 3 an easy bogey but a very difficult par.

We now come to the last three holes which were perhaps a little short by modern standards, but oh were they fun to play.

Hole 7. 103 yards Par 3. The green is hard by a fence in the vicinity of the present maintenance shed. You have to clear a forest of evergreens between you and the green. Be very careful with your tee shot. The green is as hard as a rock, especially in dry weather, and a less than perfect shot may end up in Morley's cabbage patch. (Morley was the gentleman who lived behind the 7th green.)

Hole 8. 277 yards Par 4. Tee off by the highway and you will see the top of the flag fluttering between two majestic twin elms. You are heading for the present 17th green. This green is virtually unchanged from the original course. (Alas the twin elms were lost many years ago.) But you have to decide how to negotiate the elms. Do you drive through them, around them, or (if you are a very long hitter) over them? An easy four,

There was a feeling that those two tee shots across the road represented an accident waiting to happen. Every year there were more than a few close calls. So in the fall of 1956 Fred Purcell eliminated those two tee shots by building two new greens: the present

first green and the predecessor of the present sixteenth (which had to be rebuilt when the highway was widened). The original and largely unlamented second hole was replaced by a 165-yard par 3 (tee off to the right of the original first green and play to the present first green) and a 375-yard par 4 (tee off from the present second tee and play to the original second green). The original par 4 fourth hole was now replaced by a 485 yard par 5 fifth hole which played much like the present sixteenth except that the tee was the original fourth tee adjacent to the highway.

The new nine (which we now call the old nine) was ready for play Opening Day of 1961, so 1960 marked the last year we played the original nine, albeit in slightly modified form.

Nineteen-sixty. The very mention of that year brings back a flood of golfing memories. Please bear with me dear reader.

In the larger golfing world, 1960 is remembered as the year when Arnold Palmer became, well, Arnold Palmer. His come-from-behind victories in the Masters and U.S. Open electrified golfers and non-golfers alike. And in the much smaller world of the Picton Golf Club, it

was a very big year for this scribe. For that year I won the club championship, a fact that those familiar with current state of my game will find quite remarkable. So I guess I have the arcane distinction of being the last Picton golfer to win the mens club championship on the original course.

It was fitting that my opponent in the final club championship match to be contested on the original course should have been the late Pierce Jones. If you had to pick the top Picton golfers in the period 1945 through 1960, Pierce would have been at or near the top of your list. Pierce had a solid golf game. He was not overly long but long enough, consistently straight, and a great chipper and putter. When we played our 1960 final, Pierce might have been a little past his prime, but he was not past it by much. Indeed, he was the defending champion.

I remember our match as if it were yesterday. I was four up after the morning 18 and feeling very pleased with myself. But the match was far from over. In the first nine of the afternoon 18, Pierce sunk every putt in sight and narrowed the gap to a single hole. My ultimate narrow margin of victory in the final nine on that hot and humid August day owed itself entirely, I am sure, to the wonderful advantage of being eighteen years old.

Another thing that sticks in my mind about the 1960 club championship campaign is that I was very fortunate to get into the finals in the first place.

In the quarter-finals, I met one of the club's top left-handers. Our match was a nip and tuck affair, and I arrived at the final hole nursing a slender one hole lead. On that 234 yard hole I played for par four which I figured would be good enough. It wasn't. I can still see my honourable left-handed opponent hitting the shot of the day, a soaring drive that caromed off the hill just perfectly, coming to rest a couple of feet off the green. An easy chip and a putt for a birdie three. All tied after 18.

The wags on the veranda then informed an assemblage attending a clubhouse luncheon about the sudden-death entertainment that was about to transpire. So there we were, trundling down the first fairway accompanied by a sizable gallery. With nerves frayed, we both left ourselves five footers for pars on the first green. My opponent missed, I somehow made mine, and there it was: a one-up nineteenth hole victory.

So who was my tenacious left-handed opponent? Why, it was George Ross. And these days our matches regularly come right down to the wire, just like on that halcyon day thirty-nine years ago.

Golf. What a wonderful game.