

Did You Know?

The Quest for RTJ Fairfax Recognition



For the past four years the ANCC Foundation has been working to gain recognition of our Fairfax golf course as a Robert Trent Jones design. Although we have had several “victories” along the way, it was only in August of 2018 that full recognition was achieved.

The Quest

ANCC Fairfax’s Journey to RTJ Recognition

By Bill Stahler

Just prior to the demolition of the old Fairfax clubhouse in March 1996, Keith Beaver (our current Fairfax head golf professional) entered the building and retrieved the framed “General Plan” of the Fairfax Country Club Estates (now ANCC Fairfax). This drawing, which currently hangs in the second-floor hallway in the Fairfax clubhouse, is significant because it documents Robert Trent Jones (RTJ) as the architect of the original Fairfax golf course.

I had been aware of the “Master Plan” from the days it hung in the men’s locker room at Fairfax. One day Keith and I were talking about the “Master Plan” when Keith mentioned that The Robert Trent Jones Society did not recognize ANCC Fairfax as an RTJ designed course, a situation I confirmed shortly thereafter. Having long been interested in golf course architectural history and having recently read John Paul Newport’s article “Country Club Dig Up Their Histories” in the December 14, 2013 edition of the “Wall Street Journal”, I decided to research this apparent oversight.

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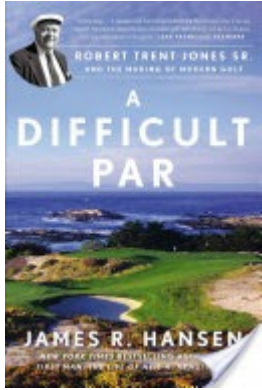


Through the RTJ Society web-site, I contacted Jack Borchelt, the Society's Executive Director, who put me in contact with Roger Rulewich, RTJ's long-time associate, who was the RTJ Society's "keeper of the list". I first contacted Roger in early 2014 and during our exchanges I mentioned that Keith Beaver recalled a conversation he had with Charlie Mock, a long time Fairfax greenkeeper who had worked for John S. Connolly, the developer of Fairfax Country Club Estates. According to Keith, Charlie said that Connolly, who was the head greenkeeper at ANCC Arlington from 1932 to 1936, built the Fairfax course himself. Upon hearing this, Roger explained this may be the source of the Fairfax course's absence from the list since RTJ believed that a course was not truly his creation unless he (i.e., one of his construction companies) built the course. In June 2014, based upon a digitized copy of the "Master Plan" we provided and the Charlie Mock narrative, Roger agreed to add ANCC Fairfax to the RTJ Society listing with the annotation "Routing", a promise that was fulfilled in early 2015.

From the beginning of my relationship with Jack Borchelt, he urged Army Navy Country Club to apply for membership in the RTJ Society. My response was always the same – until ANCC Fairfax is recognized as an RTJ course by the Society, I would not make such a proposal to the Club's Executive Committee. Now that ANCC Fairfax was duly recognized, I campaigned to have ANCC send a contingent that included at least one Executive Committee member to the annual RTJ Society meeting. The next meeting was scheduled for September 2015 at the Wigwam Resort in Litchfield Park, Arizona (West of Phoenix). Unfortunately, the date of the RTJ meeting coincided with the ANCC Board of Directors "Installation" dinner which made the attendance of a member of the Executive Committee a "non-starter". As the result it was decided to delay our "audit" of the Society event until 2016.

While the situation with the RTJ Society developed, James Hansen, a history professor at Auburn University in 2014 published "A Difficult Par", a biography of Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Being an avid reader of golf course architectural history, I commenced reading the book shortly after its publication. On page 118 I came across the following:

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“...in March 1940, Jones got an assignment to design his first golf course in the Mid-Atlantic region, a nine-hole layout for John S. Connolly. By the fall of 1940, the course in Bethesda, Maryland was finished, and Connolly wrote to Jones, “If we have any growing weather at all, it should be in good shape by spring...I think it is going to be a very pleasant and attractive course.” What happened to the unnamed Connolly golf course after Pearl Harbor is unknown, but it seems certain that it did not become an operating golf course. Connolly served in the war as a U.S. Army major; Jones wrote to him in June 1945 wanting “to talk the whole thing over,” but nothing seems to have come from it.”

It was obvious that this “lost course” was Fairfax Country Club/ANCC Fairfax. Accordingly, I contacted Jim Hansen in October 2014 and provided him with the history of ANCC Fairfax and supporting documentation in the form of the “Master Plan”. Jim’s response was very positive and the subsequent paperback version of “A Difficult Par” that was published in May 2015 substituted the following for the first edition paragraph:

“One that did proceed lead to the design and construction of a course for Fairfax Country Club in Fairfax, Virginia, a facility which later became known as Army Navy Country Club Fairfax. In March 1940, Jones got an assignment to design his first golf course in the Mid-Atlantic region, a nine-hole layout for John S. Connolly Not only was Jones “impressed with this land you have purchased and the fine possibilities you have for an outstanding course,” he was, as he wrote Connolly, “anxious to have a course of my design in the Washington, D.C. area.” By the fall of 1940, Jones had finished nine holes, and Connolly wrote to Jones, “If we have any growing weather at all, it should be in good shape by spring... I think it is going to be a very pleasant and attractive course.” Work on the second nine started in the spring of 1941, then came Pearl Harbor, stopping further work on the course. Connolly served in the war as a U.S. Army major. In June 1945 Jones wrote to him, successfully getting the project going again and finishing the second nine holes of the course in 1946...”



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The next opportunity for ANCC to “audit” the RTJ Society annual event was in September of 2016. The Executive Board agreed to send a contingent consisting of four members – myself, Jim Schroeder (Finance Committee Chairman), Dave Graff (Planning Committee Chairman) and Al Sack (ANCC Foundation President) – to the event at the Dunes Golf and Beach Club in Myrtle Beach. The participants came back favorably impressed and, following a presentation on the RTJ Society and the event, the Executive Board gave their approval for ANCC to join the RTJ Society with me as the ANCC representative director on the RTJ Society board.

But this does not end the story. I had remained in contact with Jim Hansen following the ANCC Fairfax changes to the “A Difficult Par” narrative. As the result of our discussions, Jim brought to the 2016 event (where I played a round of golf with Jim) copies of nine letters relating to Fairfax Country Club that he had obtained from RTJ Collection/Archives at Cornell University. These letters between RTJ, John Connolly, and Fred Goellner (the golf course construction contractor who RTJ had recommended to Connolly) clearly demonstrate that RTJ made at least three visits to the Fairfax site prior to and during construction. They also indicate that RTJ provided detailed construction drawings, including drawings for the green complexes, and that John Connolly used Fred Goellner to construct the front nine (opened in 1940) and probably the bulk of the second nine in 1941 (the second nine was not completed until after World War II in 1946). In other words, the “Routing” designation did not reflect RTJ’s full involvement in the development of the Fairfax course.

I immediately set to work persuading Roger Rulewich and Jack Borchelt that the “Routing” designation needed to be dropped. The persuasion was the easy part given the available documentation. It was the website change proved the “long pole in the tent” because the website “master” was lost and had to be recon-structed. In August 2018 the mission was accomplished with the RTJ Society website posting that provided a “clean” (unannotated) listing of ANCC Fairfax on both the Chronological and Location listing of RTJ courses.

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