

Michigan Golf Architects:

Tom Bendelow — Golf's Johnny Appleseed

By Art McCafferty

Tom Bendelow was a golf architect who impacted golf perhaps more than any golf architect in the United States. He was nicknamed the “Johnny Appleseed” of golf, due to the fact, that he designed at least 480 and, perhaps, as many as a 1000 courses during his lifespan. That would make him the most prolific golf course designer ever— designing more than Donald Ross, more than Jack Nicklaus and more than Robert Trent Jones. However, not many people are aware of his place in the history of the game.

According to his biographer and grandson, Stuart Bendelow, Tom Bendelow was born in

*Photos of Tom Bendelow, pp. 5 & 6
courtesy of Stuart Bendelow*

Aberdeen, Scotland, on September 2, 1868, to John and Mary Edwards Bendelow. They were local merchants who operated the Bendelow Pie Shop. The young Bendelow began playing the game early in his life and became acquainted with many Scottish golfers who along, with himself, would later have an impact in designing American golf courses,

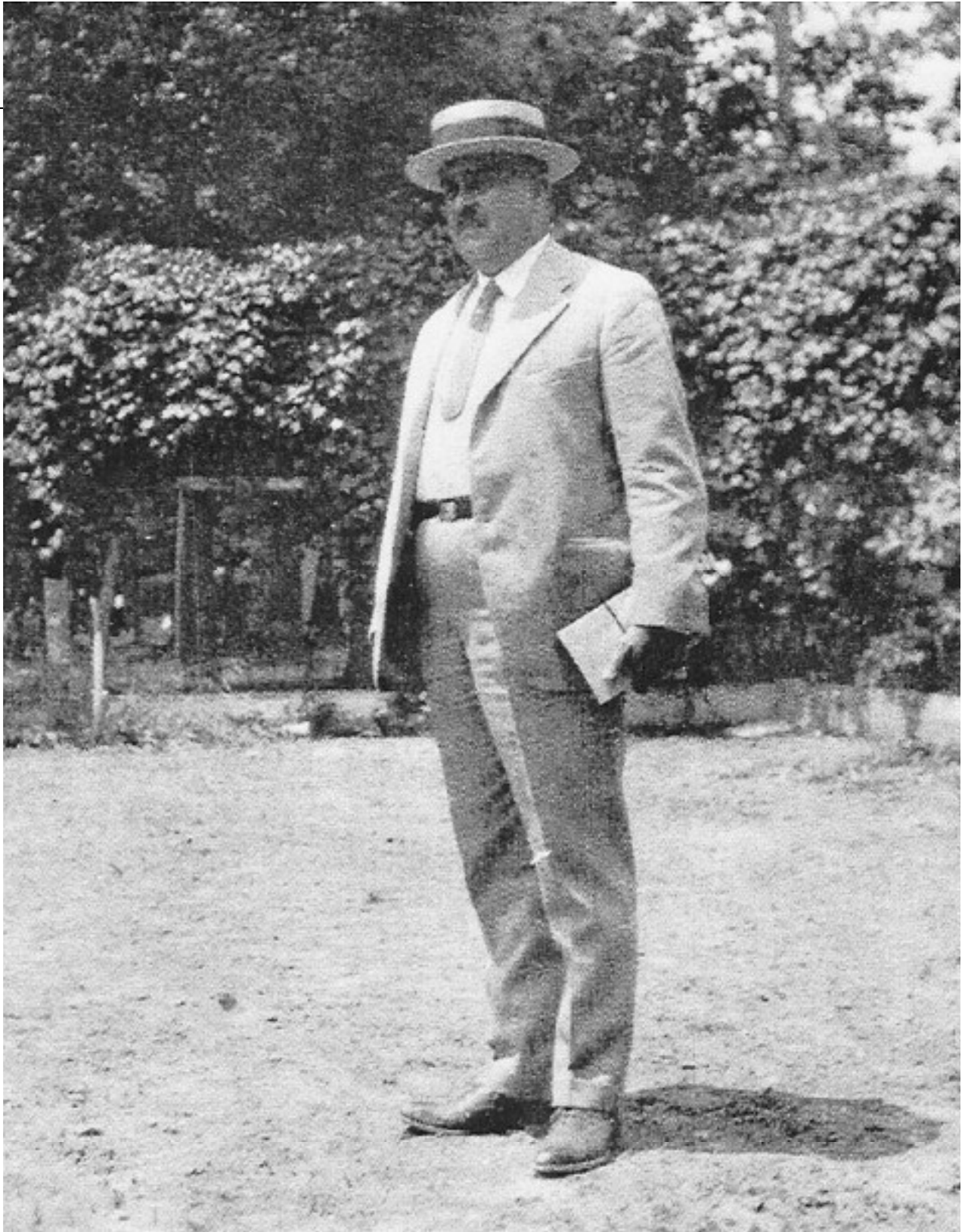
Bendelow came to America in 1892 and quickly caught on as a reporter for the *New York Herald*. He was a skilled newsman, having held a position at the Aberdeen Free Press in Scotland before he departed.

Bendelow's original forays into the golf design business were a series of two or three hole courses for wealthy and sports minded

American business men in New York, who were enamored with the sport and wanted to play it. He later designed a six-hole layout that provided the basis for the Nassau Country Club. That job was big enough job to draw the attention of others to his work.

“A major element of Bendelow's early golf architect days, was his association with A.G. Spalding and the Spalding Sporting Goods manufacturing company. He was involved in selling balls and clubs, offering instruction, organizing play and designing courses,” said Stuart Bendelow.

Tom Bendelow's “most notable early efforts, and the ones that really propelled him into national prominence were at Van Cortland





Notable North American Golf Courses Designed by Tom Bendelow

Olympia Fields CC (IL),
<http://www.olympiafieldscc.com>

Medinah CC (IL), <http://www.medinahcc.org>

Alleghany CC (PA), <http://thegolfcourses.net/golfcourses/PA/7833.htm>

East Lake GC (GA), <http://www.eastlakegolfclub.com>

Jefferson Park GC (WA), <http://www.jeffersonparkgolf.com>

Dubsdread GC (FL), <http://www.golftoday-magazine.com/0404Apr/Dubsdread.htm>

Lake Shore CC (IL), <http://thegolfcourses.net/golfcourses/IL/9443.htm>

Big Foot CC (WI), <http://thegolfcourses.net/golfcourses/WI/2501.htm>

Tripoli CC (WI), <http://thegolfcourses.net/golfcourses/WI/2612.htm>

Dallas CC (TX), <http://thegolfcourses.net/golfcourses/TX/3572.htm>

South Shore CC (IL), http://cpdgolf.com/location_south_shore.html

Rosedale GC (Canada), http://www.golfontario.ca/features/top50_ratings.shtml

Royal Ottawa GC (Canada),
http://www.golfcourse.com/search/coursedtl_ga.cfm?source=GA&courseid=16930

Park, in the Bronx. Here he redesigned the existing nine holes, added a second nine, supervised the construction and maintenance of the course, directed play (including the introduction of reserved play 'tee'times), orga-

nized tournaments and players associations, and offered instruction. This was the country's first eighteen hole municipal golf course and something of a model for what Tom, and A.G. Spalding, felt should to be replicated across

the United States," said Stuart Bendelow.

Tom Bendelow, then began to work with A.G. Spalding in designing golf courses all over the U.S. He worked with municipal

Michigan Golf Courses Designed by Tom Bendelow

Albion GClb

Huron Hills Golf Course

Bay City CC

Michigan CC

Birmingham Golf Club

Bloomfield Hills CC

Charlotte CC

Redford CC

Wawonowin Golf Course

Escanaba CC

Flint CC

Grand Beach CC

Atlas Valley CC (Flint Golf Course)

Spring Lake CC

Grand Rapids Elks CC

Highlands CC

Mosanic CC

Park System

Hillsdale Golf & CC

Portage Lake CC

Golf Club

Ella Sharp Park Golf Club

Meadow Heights CC

Big Course

Kalamazoo CC - Short Course

Riverside CC

Manistee Golf & CC

New Hotel Course

Mullet Lake Golf & CC

Muskegan CC

Niles Golf Club

Plymouth Park Golf Course

Northport Point Golf and CC

Owosso Golf Club

Port Huron Golf and CC

Stag Island Golf Club

Gull Lake CC

Red Run Golf Club

Royal Oak Golf Club

Saginaw CC

South Haven Golf Club

Traverse City Golf & CC

White Lake Golf Course

Duck Lake Golf Course

Cascades Golf Course, Cascades Eighteen

Cascades Golf Course, Executive Nine

Green Ridge CC [nle]

Highland Park GC

Kalamazoo CC - Big Course

Ludington Golf Club (Lincoln Hills GC)

Marshall CC [nle]

Palisades Park Golf Club [nle]

Rochester Golf Club

Sharp Park GC

parks and businessmen to provide basic golf course design instruction for courses which were, “inexpensive to build, easy to maintain and which would provide the maximum in playable rounds of golf,” said Bendelow.

Bendelow picked up an enormous amount of work around the Chicago area, which explains the many courses on the Western side of Lake Michigan. Most of the courses in Michigan at that time were built in areas where both boating and train traffic prevailed .

In researching a story a number of years ago for the Michigan Golfer, we discovered that Tom Bendelow actually designed Muskegon Country Club in 1911, not Donald Ross, as Ross claimed in his book, “Golf Has Never Failed Me”. As we continued to research golf architects, the name Tom Bendelow kept coming up.

In our continued quest, we con-

tacted both grandsons, and found Jack living in Montague, Michigan, and Stuart now retired and living at a Del Webb Community at Hilton Head.

Jack had the company of his famous grandfather for 11 years, before he died in 1936. He remembers his grandfather taking him down to fish off of the South Haven pier. He also remembers his grandfather’s summer home at the Palisades in Benton Harbor.

Jack was the golf professional at the Old Channel Trail and worked for Meriam Leeke for a great many years.

Stuart’s research had cooled down from a few years ago, but he still would like to publish a book.

“Well, I have been told that if I want to ‘set the record straight’ about Tom Bendelow, I should get his story into print. My intentions are to gather as much factual evi-

dence as I can to document his life, ideas, work and general contributions to the game of golf in America and then write his biography,” said Bendelow.

To that end, the *Michigan Golfer* has been proactive and put his name in front of a couple of publishers.

When I contacted Stuart Bendelow about Michigan courses, this is what he said, “Art, I currently have identified 55 courses that Tom Bendelow did in Michigan from 1898 to 1929; some no longer exist, some may have relocated and some may still be active. I have not been able to track down all the particulars on each course to date, still a work in progress.” MG

*Note-Much of the material for this story was taken from an interview with Stuart Bendelow at <http://www.golfclubatlas.com/interview-bendelow.html> MG

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