



October 11, 2021

Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission
Golf Subcommittee
340 So. Pioneer St.
Ashland, OR. 97520

Re: Oak Knoll Golf Course / Cultural Landscape Architecture / Sam Whiting
and his ties to John McLaren, Robert Hunter, Alister MacKenzie, and Chandler Egan

Dear Parks & Recreation Commission and Golf Subcommittee,

In my dual capacity as President of the San Francisco Public Golf Alliance and as an Ashland (mostly summer) resident and homeowner-taxpayer (250 Almond St.), I write to thank and support the City of Ashland and its Parks & Recreation Department for the Oak Knoll Golf Course.

Golf architecture is a species of landscape architecture. This note is a brief introduction to the Ashland-San Francisco connection and the significant architectural pedigree of Ashland's humble-appearing Oak Knoll Golf Course.

In or about 2014, Ashland hired San Francisco's famous parks superintendent John McLaren, disciple of Frederick Law Olmsted and friend of naturalist John Muir¹ to design Lithia Park. Less well-known are the connections between McLaren and the Ashland and San Francisco public golf courses, and the prominence of the architects.

¹ The Cultural Landscape Foundation, Pioneer, John McLaren: <https://tclf.org/pioneer/john-mclaren> (EXHIBIT 1)

A June 19, 1927 Portland Oregonian news story identifies Sam Whiting as the architect of Ashland's public course, which opened on June 22, 1927.² The Oregonian does not say so, but John McLaren likely was the matchmaker between Ashland and Sam Whiting. .

McLaren was a Scotland native and had a Scot's appreciation for public golf. Following World War I, in 1926 he hired fellow Scots William Watson to build a great San Francisco public golf course in the southwest corner of the City near the San Francisco Zoo, at Harding Park (recently, the venue of the 2020 PGA Championship tournament). Watson's assistant was Sam Whiting,³ who had also assisted Watson in the construction of the San Francisco Olympic Club's Lakeside Course – which has been the site of several United States Open championships, most recently the 2021 US Women's Open Championship.

Before coming to America, Whiting had been the British golf instructor of Robert Hunter, a prominent early-20th Century Socialist, University of California Berkeley Economics professor, and golf advocate.⁴ Hunter was also the American sponsor and business partner of Alister MacKenzie, history's most famous golf architect – designer of several of the world's most famous courses, including Augusta National (venue of the annual Masters Tournament) and the Cypress Point Club on California's Monterey Peninsula.⁵

In or about 1929, John McLaren wanted to build a second great San Francisco public golf course at Sharp Park, on San Francisco city-owned coastal land about 10 miles south of the City limits. For this purpose McLaren hired Hunter and MacKenzie, who completed the Sharp Park Golf Course in 1932 – with tree-planting assistance from McLaren himself. MacKenzie's assistant architect on the Sharp Park commission was Chandler Egan, a Chicago native, Harvard graduate and turn-of-the-20th Century NCAA and US Golf Association amateur golf champion who in or about 1911 moved to Medford and bought an apple orchard. Egan was a prominent architect of golf courses in the Pacific Northwest, including Medford's Rogue Valley Country Club.⁶ Egan and Sam Whiting would have known each other, through their respective connection with Robert Hunter.

I recount these stories of early 20th Century landscapes, golf architecture, and significant ties between San Francisco and Ashland in hopes that they will lead to further scholarship and greater appreciation of the cultural landscape ties between San Francisco and Ashland and the Rogue Valley.

² Portland Oregonian, Sunday, June 19, 1927, Sports, p. 2, second column, "Ashland Plans Opening": https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KyAk2LrYrxToFLTHOau_avDfoKZscToz/view?usp=sharing (EXHIBIT 2)

³ The Morning Read, Aug. 3, 2020, Joe Passov, PGA Elevates Work of TPC Harding Design Duo: <https://www.morningread.com/where-to-golf-next/feature/2020-08-03/pga-elevates-work-of-tpc-harding-park-design-duo> (EXHIBIT 3)

⁴ NCGA Magazine, Fall, 2020, Robert Hunter: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10Fa9FkJJc-zk8aAV0Glle-PSgDxnWbAJ/view?usp=sharing> (EXHIBIT 4); Wikipedia, Robert Hunter: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Hunter_\(author\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Hunter_(author))

⁵ The Cultural Landscape Foundation, Pioneer, Alister MacKenzie: <https://tclf.org/pioneer/alister-mackenzie> (EXHIBIT 5)

⁶ NCGA Magazine, Fall, 2020, Chandler Egan: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-rWGcvAlyUUXY8GTRjFqX6cHx7vaUxjB/view?usp=sharing> (EXHIBIT 6); Wikipedia, Chandler Egan: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandler_Egan

The non-profit San Francisco Public Golf Alliance is dedicated to the appreciation and advocacy of affordable, eco-friendly public golf, in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond.

Very Best Regards,

Richard Harris

President,
San Francisco Public Golf Alliance

cc: Michael A. Black, Director
Patrick Oropallo

EXHIBITS

1. The Cultural Landscape Foundation, John McLaren:
<https://tclf.org/pioneer/john-mclaren>)
2. Portland Oregonian, June 19, 1927, p. Sports, p. 2, "Ashland Plans Opening":
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KyAk2LrYrxToFLTHOau_avDfoKZscToz/view?usp=sharing
3. The Morning Read, Aug. 3, 2020, Joe Passov, PGA Elevates Work of TPC Harding Design Duo:
<https://www.morningread.com/where-to-golf-next/feature/2020-08-03/pg-a-elevates-work-of-tpc-harding-park-design-duo>
4. NCGA Magazine, Fall, 2020, Robert Hunter:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10Fa9FkJJc-zk8aAV0Glle-PSgDxnWbAJ/view?usp=sharing>
5. The Cultural Landscape Foundation, Pioneer, Alister MacKenzie:
<https://tclf.org/pioneer/alister-mackenzie5>
6. NCGA Magazine, Fall, 2020, Chandler Egan: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-rWGcvAlyUUXY8GTRjFqX6cHx7vaUxjB/view?usp=sharing>