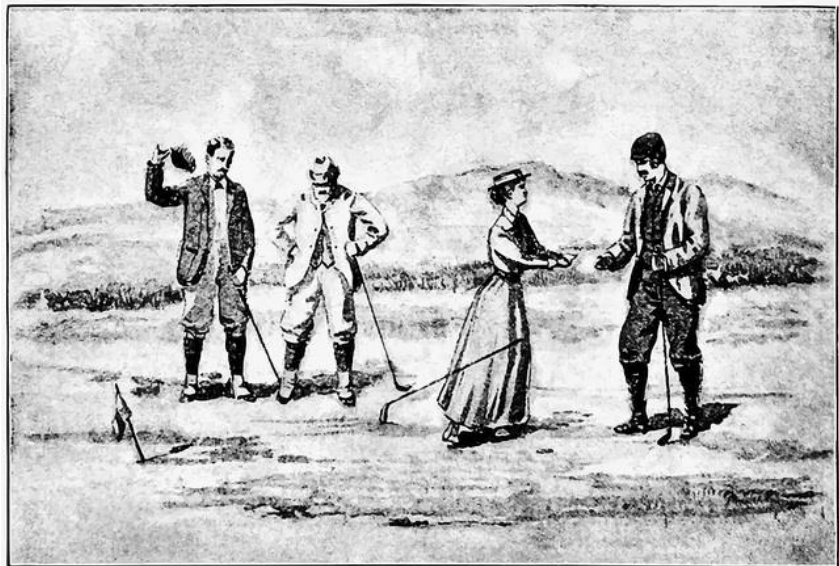


LINKS O' TAY GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

On a summer day in 1890 a bored Captain Alan F. Matheson collected his recently acquired golf clubs and made his way from the family home on Gore Street¹, across a timber bridge at the foot of Peter Street, and into the fields of the Matheson Farm on the west bank of the Tay River. A few weeks earlier, while attending to business at Montreal, a colleague had invited him to the Royal Montreal Golf Club and introduced him to the game of golf. Back in Perth on holiday, with no golf course within 150 miles, Matheson decided to knock a ball around the cow pasture.

Over the next few weeks, he invited several friends to give the game a try. According to later accounts in the *Perth Courier* they were "*Charles Stone, T. A. Code, John Code, Judge Scott, W.P. McEwen, and Senator McLaren*".² After a few visits to the farm, they, like Matheson, were hooked and had soon created a rudimentary three-hole course (now played as numbers one, eight and nine). "*From these seven men the Links O'Tay was born*".³

Perth's pioneer golfers were leading members of the community's business and social elite of the day. Charles Stone (1869-1927) published the *Perth Expositor*; Thomas Alfred Code (1854-1937) owned Code's Custom Wool Mill and was Perth's Mayor that year; John Code (1850-1932), Thomas Code's brother, was Lanark County Treasurer; William Paul McEwen (1858-1918) was Clerk of the County



Surrogate Court; and Peter McLaren (1813-1919), the 'Mississippi Lumber King', had been appointed a Canadian Senator only a few months earlier. When the *Courier* named "*Judge Scott*" among the group, however, it was in error. County Court Judge James Henderson Scott (1858-1935) was not appointed to the Lanark Bench until 1914. The golfing judge was William Stevens Senkler (1838-1920) who occupied the County bench in 1890 and would be elected the first president of Perth's golf club in 1901.

¹ 11 Gore Street East, now the Matheson House Perth Museum.

² *Perth Courier*, July 19, 1962, and *Perth Courier*, May 2, 1984.

³ Ibid.

Alan Frederick Matheson (1847-1928), the man who introduced Perth to the so-called 'royal and ancient game', was the youngest son of Roderick Matheson (1793-1873) and Annabella D. Russell (1811-1854)⁴. His father was a veteran of the American War of 1812 who, in the early days of the Perth Military Settlement, became a prosperous merchant, and then magistrate, Deputy Sheriff, life member of the Upper Canada Legislative Council and, at confederation, was appointed a Dominion Senator.

Alan Matheson received his primary and secondary education at Perth, attended the University of Toronto's Trinity College, and on graduation in 1869 went to work for the Merchants' Bank of Canada⁵. While assigned to branches at Cardinal, Hamilton, Ingersoll, Ottawa, St. Thomas, Toronto, and Windsor he always returned to Perth for annual holidays and in 1907 was transferred to the bank's Perth branch as manager, a post he held until retiring in 1916.

Matheson also maintained a lifelong connection to the militia. He served as a 19-year-old Lieutenant with the Perth Light Infantry Company during the 1866 Fenian raids and was later a Captain with the Queen's Own Rifles (Toronto) for 12 years and for another nine years with the Governor General's Foot Guards (Ottawa). Throughout his adult life he was always referred to as 'Captain' Matheson.

The property hosting Captain Matheson's proto golf course of the 1890s had been assembled into a single block, the 'Matheson Farm', by his father through purchases in 1825, 1839 and 1872⁶. When Matheson Sr. died in 1873, the farm passed to his sons.

Although considerably larger and better capitalized than most, the Matheson Farm still had much in common with most 19th century Lanark County farms. It grew field crops like wheat, oats, barley, corn, and hay and bred cattle, sheep, and hogs. In about 1880, the Captain's elder brother, Charles Matheson⁷, established the Riverside Cheese Factory there, at the foot of Peter Street, on the west bank of the Tay River where it flowed in a northwest-southwest loop across the farm. Milk from the Matheson Farm was combined with milk purchased from area farmers to produce cheddar cheese for export to England⁸.

Captain Alan Matheson set his first golf tee beside his brother's Cheese Factory and drove his first ball due north toward Matheson Island at the bend of the Tay River. Although he was not, at the time, a full-time resident of Perth, he inspired others and by about 1897 the farm-field golf course had grown to five holes.

⁴ Roderick Matheson (1793-1873) was the father of 13 children – Roderick Edward (1825-1901), John Robertson (1825-1833), William Marshall (1832-1895), Isabella Russell (1834-1911), Flora Madelina (1836-1894), Mary Fraser (1837-1851), Anna (1840-1929), Eliza Jean (1841-1929), Joanna (1842-1916), Charles Albert (1843-1917), Arthur James (1845-1913), Rose Thyme (1851-1895).

⁵ Founded in 1867, purchased by the Bank of Montreal in 1922.

⁶ The Perth Golf Course originally occupied parts of Bathurst Township C-1/L-26 & L-27, Bathurst C-2/L-25, L-26 & L-27, and Drummond Township C-2/L-1.

⁷ Charles Albert Matheson (1843-1917) was also partner in the Shaw & Matheson store, later 'Shaw's of Perth'.

⁸ In 1891, at about the same time as the first golf game was played nearby, the Matheson factory was chosen by the Dominion Dairy Commission as a site for experimental work toward improved cheesemaking. That effort was led by John Archibald Ruddick (1862-1953) who, the following year, supervised production of the famous Mammoth Cheese. The 'Mammoth Cheese' was not, however, produced at the Riverside Factory as claimed in some accounts. The Matheson Factory was one of 12 factories contributing curd to the project, but the 'Mammoth Cheese' was pressed in a purpose-built hoop installed in a freight shed at the Perth CPR station.

Messrs. Hudson⁹ and Laing¹⁰, in the Bank of Montreal, have taken the first steps toward organizing a golf club here, and have begun play in the field across the river on the Matheson farm between the Cheese Factory and the waterworks filtering basin¹¹ on the island. They have so far five putting holes placed, and they hope soon to have a strong club organized. Golf is now the most general outdoor game played, and it is fast gaining a hold in Canada like that it has acquired in Great Britain. In the United States, the game is becoming vastly popular, and 'links' are fashionable in all cities. The game is a Scotch one.¹²



Each spring, the longest grass was burned to clear the course, but during the rest of the season the Matheson cows, and those of Perth residents who also pastured their animals on the farm, kept the fairways in trim. The greens were fenced to confine the farm's sheep flock and thus ensure they were closely cropped. As the course added greens, more sheep were required and, in 1914, a motion was

passed at the club's annual meeting approving rental of the grounds to additional flocks.¹³ There was a down-side to pasturing sheep, however. The gutta-percha golf balls of the day were made from the resin of the Sapodilla tree¹⁴, a substance sheep found a tasty treat. On reaching the green, caddies were frequently called upon to wrestle a partly chewed golf ball away from a hungry ewe. The sheep themselves could also be in danger. For several weeks in the summer of 1916 the club ran a newspaper warning notice, "*Attention – Sheep at the golf links. Keep your dog in at night*".¹⁵

Despite the four-footed greenskeepers, in the earliest days the greens were hardly distinguishable from the fairways or rough, and livestock dictated the course's first local ground rule, that "*The player may remove his ball from rural soil without penalty*".

⁹ J. H. Hudson, teller at Perth branch of the Bank of Montreal.

¹⁰ J. S. Laing, clerk at Perth branch of the Bank of Montreal.

¹¹ The town's first 'waterworks', filtering basin and pump house, were built at the bend in the Tay, opposite Matheson Island, in 1897.

¹² *Perth Courier*, October 22, 1897.

¹³ *Perth Courier*, April 10, 1914.

¹⁴ Indigenous to Malaysia.

¹⁵ *Perth Courier*, August 11, 1916.

Perth's early golfers played their gutta-percha golf balls with a set of only five hickory-shafted clubs. There were "*painted posts and stone markers for the holes*"¹⁶ and at each tee a box of sand and a pail of water was supplied for use in forming a pyramid shaped sand tee. Reusable wooden tees did not come into use until the mid-1920s.¹⁷

The informal golfing fraternity that had gathered around Captain Alan Matheson in the cow pasture first structured itself as an organized club on Thanksgiving Day, 1899.

... Captain Alan F. Matheson started this club at its present location ... [with] T. A. Code [and] financial help from the late Hon. John A. Stewart¹⁸ ... and succeeded in enrolling 75 members for the first year. The membership fee was fixed at \$1.00 per annum".¹⁹



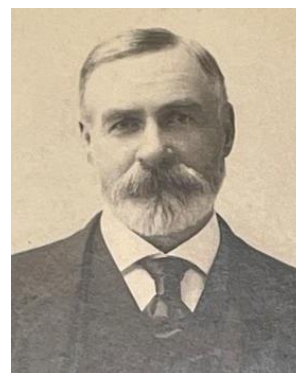
Captain Alan F. Matheson



Thomas A. Code



John A. Stewart



William S. Senkler

At its first annual meeting, held in April 1901, the members agreed to name their club the Links O' Tay Golf & County Club and elected their first slate of officers: "*President – Judge William Stevens Senkler; V.P. – Mrs. McLaren²⁰; Secretary – Mr. R. M. Steele²¹; Treasurer – Mr. F. L. Hall²²; Executive Committee – Mrs. W. Grant²³ and Messrs. R. J. Drummond²⁴ and James Armour²⁵*".²⁶ At the same meeting, the officers of the Smiths Falls Poonahmalee Golf Club, which had also been established in 1899, were elected honorary members.

¹⁶ Perth *Courier*, May 1901.

¹⁷ Invented by Dr. William Lowell Sr. (1863-1954), a dentist from South Orange, New Jersey, and first patented in 1924. His tees were sold as the 'Reddy Tee', packed in boxes of 18 sold for 25 ¢ ... 18 because he imagined golfers would leave one behind at each hole.

¹⁸ John Alexander Stewart (1867-1922), lawyer, entrepreneur, Perth Mayor (1900-1904), MP, Minister of Railways & Canals.

¹⁹ Perth *Courier*, June 19, 1925, reporting a speech by golf club president W. E. Danner.

²⁰ Sophia Elizabeth Lees-McLaren (1845-1923), wife of Senator Peter McLaren (1831-1919).

²¹ R. M. Steele, briefly (1901-1902) cashier at Perth branch of Bank of Montreal.

²² Frederick Lewis Hall (1873-1923), pharmacist and partner in Perth Drug Company with Dr. Adelbert Edward Hanna (1863-1918).

²³ Mary Jane 'Minnie' Caldwell-Grant (1858-1934), widow of Dr. William Grant (1845-1897).

²⁴ Robert John Drummond (1841-1926), Manager, Perth branch Bank of Montreal.

²⁵ James Armour (1863-1936), Lanark County Registrar.

²⁶ Perth *Courier*, April 19, 1901.

Unlike most golf and country clubs and similar institutions of the day, the Perth club raised no bar against female members. The first to join was Gladys Code-Ferguson²⁷ in 1898, and in 1901 the club's first executive secretary was Sophia Elizabeth Lees-McLaren (1845-1923). That year the *Perth Courier* observed that, "... the golf grounds on the Matheson Farm are daily patronized by members of the club and the young ladies particularly are taking a great interest in the game".²⁸ In 1904, a Ladies Golf Club was organized, its first executive composed of,

Mrs. Peter McLaren - President; Mrs. (Dr.) Grant - 1st Vice President; Mrs. Muckleston²⁹ - 2nd vice President; Mrs. Isobel Hart³⁰ - Secretary-Treasurer; and Mrs. F. W. Hall³¹ and Miss Henderson³² – Captains. Executive Committee members were Mesdames T. A. Code³³, W. B. Hart³⁴, James Armour³⁵, C. J. Sewell³⁶, Torrance³⁷, and F. W. Hall. The ladies decided to hold afternoon teas every Saturday during May and June. Their fees are \$2 to playing members and \$1 for non-players".³⁸



**Gladys Code-Ferguson
Perth's First Female Golfer**

For its first half-century and more, opening day at the Links O' Tay was marked by a formal tea, hosted by the ladies' club. Dressed in their best spring ensembles, the ladies gathered around an outdoor table with the ladies' section president seated at one end, and the wife of the men's section president at the other.

²⁷ Gladys Code-Ferguson (1885-1938), wife of Major Hugh Cameron Ferguson (1883-1961), of Port Elmsley.

²⁸ *Perth Courier*, May 1901.

²⁹ Harriet Ferres-Muckleston (1849-1910), wife of Anglican minister Rev. William Jeffreys Muckleston (1849-1930).

³⁰ Probably Isobel Malloch-Hart (1846-1928), daughter of Judge John Glass Malloch (1806-1873) and wife of Thomas Hart (1835-1912).

³¹ Margaret Elsie McLaren-Hall (1869-1954), wife of Francis William Hall (1871-aftr.1927), lawyer, member of Provincial Legislature 1914-1919, Mayor of Perth 1909-1912.

³² Jessie Mable Henderson (1868-1956), daughter of farm machinery dealer Jesse Thomas Henderson (1835-1895) and Elizabeth Wordie (1840-1919). In 1907 Jessie Henderson married John A. Stewart (1867-1922), lawyer, entrepreneur, Perth Mayor (1900-1904), MP, Minister of Railways & Canals.

³³ Jennie Leslie-Code (1854-1907), wife of Thomas A. Code, owner of Code's Custom Wool Mill and Perth Mayor 1889-1890.

³⁴ Margaret McCallum Caldwell-Hart (1869-1945), wife of William Brown Hart (1859-1936), owner of Hart's Book Store and publisher of Hart's Almanac.

³⁵ Mariam Graham Bell-Armour (1867-1950), wife of James Armour (1863-1936), Lanark County Registrar.

³⁶ Robina Buchan Blackburn-Sewell (1871-1954), wife of Colin James Sewell (1871-1954), manager of Perth branch of Sovereign Bank and partner with Francis W. Hall and John Morris Balderson (1862-1943) in the Perth Shoe Company Ltd.

³⁷ Henrietta Isobella Sawyer-Torrance (1872-1939), wife of Dudley John Torrance (1864-1936), cashier at Perth branch of Bank of Montreal.

³⁸ *Perth Courier*, April 22, 1904.



Season Opening Tea

(Photo courtesy of Perth Matheson House Museum)

Female players became the majority during the First World War when so many local men served with the armed forces. During the war years, many Canadian golf courses that had not allowed play by women were wiped out, while at Perth golf survived and thrived.

The club recruited its first professional in 1903 when J. M. Barnes³⁹ spent several weeks during the early summer giving instruction⁴⁰. When he returned to his regular employment at the Rosedale Links⁴¹ in Toronto *"a great improvement was noticed, especially among the younger players"*.⁴²

In 1904, club members paid fees of \$5 for men and \$2 for women. Caddies were paid 5¢ for nine holes. Ten years later annual fees were set at *"regular members (Including locker) \$10, new members \$5, junior members (under 21) \$4, ladies \$4, transient players \$4, and visitors \$1.50/month"*.⁴³

Captain Alan Matheson was made an honorary lifetime member of the club at its annual meeting in 1905. In 1918 the club voted to make all of Perth's clergymen free members of the club.

³⁹ Canadian Open Championship runner-up in 1912 and 1920.

⁴⁰ Some of the club professionals who followed over the years were: P. W. McLeod (1905), J. J. Newman (1914), Harry Yorke (1925), Stuart Aiken (1930), Jim Cochrane (1934), Harry Mulligan (1946), Alex 'Sandy' Leiper (1949), George O'Donoghue (1950), Len Elliott (1956), Frank Jenkins (1958), Jerry McKee (1963), Bruno Guarda (1968).

⁴¹ Established 1893.

⁴² *Perth Courier*, July 4, 1903.

⁴³ *Perth Courier* April 2, 1915.

The post and stone markers were replaced in 1914 when club member A. C. Gourlay⁴⁴ *“presented the Links-O’-Tay Golf Club with five flags of bright red color, on long staffs, for marking the putting greens”*.⁴⁵ The flags were donated as part of a major course upgrade that included *“levelling, grass seed sowing, and stands for holding sand and water. All this will bring these beautiful links further on to date.”*⁴⁶

That the Links O’ Tay golf course lay within walking or bicycle distance of downtown Perth represented one of the course’s greatest attractions. That it was so close to town, and that the Matheson Farm had long been treated as a recreation area by Perth’s young people, could also be problematic.

In May 1914 the club warned *“the boys ... against interfering or damaging in any way the property of the club, as all infractions will be presented at the police magistrate’s court”*.⁴⁷ In the spring of 1925 the club felt it necessary to publish a notice that *“carrying guns into the Golf Club grounds is strictly forbidden. Boys or anyone else practicing it will be looked after. Give the birds and Chipmunks a chance”*.⁴⁸ Just a month later they published another warning.

*The boys that use the swimming hole on the Golf Links property are not all bad, but after repeated warning some still persist in trespassing on the small foot bridge and the course. They have broken one sand and water box, stolen balls from the bags of players, deliberately mutilated two of the greens and besides have been very insolent to members of the club. Unless their lawlessness is stopped the swimming hole will be closed to the public.*⁴⁹

Despite repeated warnings, *“lawless”* boys continued to invade the course leaving damage and destruction in their wake. In 1926 yet another notice appeared in the pages of the *Perth Courier*.

*Since the incorporation of the Links O’ Tay Golf & Country Club Ltd. the directors have permitted the use of the grounds to the public as a means of access to the river and the woods, but in the past year or two acts of vandalism have become so common, that it is now necessary to reserve the property entirely for members of the club. The directors regret that this will mean that Matheson Island, which is part of the club property, will no longer be available to swimmers.*⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Austin C. Gourlay (1881-1918), accountant at Perth branch of the Bank of Montreal.

⁴⁵ *Perth Courier*, May 15, 1914

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Perth Courier*, May 15, 1914.

⁴⁸ *Perth Courier*, May 29, 1925.

⁴⁹ *Perth Courier*, June 26, 1925.

⁵⁰ *Perth Courier*, June 25, 1926.



Another year passed and few, it seems, paid much attention to the 'no trespass' signs and threats of prosecution. In 1927 the club issued a new warning.

Notice To Bathers – As a result of thieving and damage to club property, the Golf Links property will be closed to the public. The bridge leading to the club is also included. The directors of the Golf Club are prepared to permit bathing on the island provided that access is obtained other than over the club property, and also that bathers do not create a nuisance as in the past.⁵¹

Eventually town and club reached some degree of accommodation, but the issue of young people entering the club property to swim at the third-hole bridge, remained one of long standing. In 1975, after a half-century of repeated warnings, the *Perth Courier* still felt compelled to express concern.

A number of youths are making a habit of swimming and playing in the Tay right in the line of fire. These youngsters aged from about five to 15 seem to have little concern for the potential dangers in that area ... the possibility, slim yet very real, is that one of them could be hit by a golf ball. It could result in nothing more than a stinging bruise, but enough force in the right spot could result in serious or fatal injury.⁵²

In preparation for the 1920 season, the club leased, apparently for the first time, the golf course site from the Mathesons. However, the club hastened to inform those who had long held the privilege of pasturing their family cow on the farm that,

⁵¹ *Perth Courier*, July 15, 1927.

⁵² *Perth Courier*, August 21, 1975.

*"This does not mean that cattle will not be allowed to pasture there as in former years, but this year the cattle will be allowed on the grounds only after May 10th. A caretaker will take charge through the year and the greens will be kept in the best possible shape"*⁵³.

The caretaker in question was William 'King Billy' Wilson⁵⁴, whom the club hired, with his team, to operate their newly acquired horse-drawn mower that, in a year or two, supplanted the sheep and cattle. Wilson quickly assumed the full duties of greens-keeper. He had learned the essentials of the trade working with his father, John Wilson (b.1837), who laid out Elmwood Cemetery when it was created in 1872 and was caretaker there for many years. William had a farm in Drummond Township on the outskirts of Perth but was well known in town as a gardener who specialized in laying grass plots at manufacturing plants, churches, and private residences.

Billy Wilson worked at the Links O' Tay for over a decade and some days in his life there were more dramatic than one might expect for a greens-keeper. In October 1923 the *Perth Courier* reported,

The golf links on Friday afternoon was the scene of an unusual accident ... Mr. William Wilson, caretaker of the links, used a team of horses and wagon for drawing earth to the greens, and while working at the remote part of the links left his horses attached to the wagon behind the building near the club house. Left to themselves the horses wandered to the river, probably to get a drink, and the course being down-hill the wagon pushed them clean into the stream and they were left to struggle against drowning.

Some boys saw the occurrence and brought the golf players to the scene, but they could do nothing from the shore to aid the poor animals and the water was too deep to wade out, Col. T. R. Caldwell⁵⁵ located a boat further up the river and, rowing it to the vicinity, began the work of rescue. In the meantime, one of the horses had been drowned, and the other, putting up a strenuous fight for its life, was exhausted almost to the limit before aid came. However, it, its dead mate, and the wagon were brought to shore.

*It was felt by the president that, though the owner of the horse had no claim on the Club for the loss sustained, it would be a hardship on him to bear it, so a subscription was taken up to cover the price of another horse and the proceeds given to Mr. Wilson who acknowledged the gratuity thankfully.*⁵⁶

Three years later, there was a happier outcome when Wilson saved the life of a boy who had disappeared while swimming in the Tay from the banks of the golf course.

*W. W. 'Billie' Wilson, through herculean efforts saved a 10-year-old boy, Israel Baker, from drowning in the Tay River above the bridge on the Golf Links side of the stream. Israel had been swimming with his older brother, David, when he sank out of sight. David started to yell for help ... Wilson, at work nearby on the golf links, dove in, found the boy lying on the bottom ... took him to shore and began the work of resuscitation and returned the boy to consciousness.*⁵⁷

⁵³ *Perth Courier*, April 16, 1920.

⁵⁴ William Welland Wilson (1863-1933), known as 'King Billy' for his enthusiasm for the Orange Lodge.

⁵⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Richey Caldwell (1889-1956)

⁵⁶ *Perth Courier*, October 23, 1923.

⁵⁷ *Perth Courier*, August 13, 1926.

Nominated by the *Perth Courier*, Wilson received the Royal Canadian Humane Society lifesaving certificate.

The golf club's Peter Street bridge and the banks of the Tay bordering the course were a favorite swimming and fishing spot for Perth's young people, and there were several drownings there through the first half of the 20th century.

Willie White⁵⁸, 11-year-old son of Mr. & Mrs. Eli White of Grant street drowned Tuesday evening about 6:00 p.m. when playing at the bridge leading to the golf links. He had been sent to get the family cow pasturing at the golf links.⁵⁹

Monday evening ... Howard Strong, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Strong, North Street, was drowned in the Tay River above Allan's sawmill. The lad had followed two other lads to the pasture, While the older boys were across the field, they missed the younger boy and gave the alarm. Fred Moore an employee of the sawmill, heard the alarm and swam from the golf links across the marsh and river, and all credit to him for this brave deed. When Mr. Moore reached the spot he dived and with Mr. Charles Lyon located the body and was able to raise it with a pike pole. Mr. Moore was unable to resuscitate him.⁶⁰

Links O' Tay club member Charles H. Lyon (1856-1946), who helped locate young Strong's body, was the brother of George S. Lyon (1858-1938), one of era's greatest golfers. George Lyon was Olympic gold medalist (1904), eight-time Canadian Amateur Champion (between 1898 and 1914), ten-times Canadian Seniors' Golf Association Championship (between 1918 and 1930) and a member of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame.

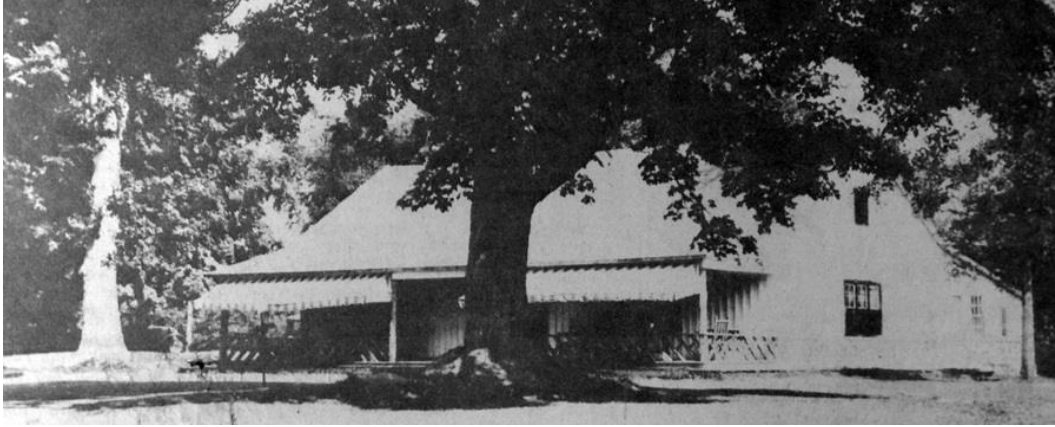
Early in 1921 the informal club of 1899 was incorporated as the Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club Ltd., with the sale of \$25 shares realizing \$40,000 in working capital. The first corporate directors were Thomas Alfred Code, President; Thomas Boyd Caldwell (1856-1932), Vice President; and Hugh A. O'Donnell (1893-1958), Secretary-Treasurer. The corporation's first order of business was to purchase the 87.5-acre golf course from the Matheson family for \$3,000.

When the Links O' Tay purchased the Matheson Farm property in 1921 it moved immediately to create a clubhouse by renovating the former Riverside Cheese Factory. The building was moved a short distance back from the riverbank and remodelled to provide a large recreation room, a kitchen, a club room with a brick and stone fireplace, ladies' and gentlemen's locker rooms, and a verandah where golfers could relax in the shade and watch the finishing hole.

⁵⁸ William D. White (1907-1918), son of Eli White (1875-1961) and Eleanor E. Westerman (b.1881).

⁵⁹ *Perth Courier*, September 13, 1918.

⁶⁰ *Perth Courier*, June 5, 1911.



Converted Cheese Factory Club House c1925
(Photo courtesy of Perth Museum)

Before the cheese factory conversion, the 'Summer House', located near the present sixth tee, had served the purpose for about 25 years. Little more than a roof over a post and beam frame, it provided golfers' a haven during many a summer shower and remained a feature of the course well into the 1950s.



Summer House c1910
(Photo courtesy Perth Museum)

The new Links O' Tay clubhouse was inaugurated in September 1921 with an opening dance.

The public invitation resulted in a very large turnout, but even then, the capacity of the new clubhouse was not taxed, and ample room was found on the spacious floor to dance at all times during the evening ... This being the first entertainment given at the new club house many obstacles had to be overcome, such as the lighting which had to be done with gasoline lamps kindly loaned by James Brothers⁶¹. It is hoped that before very long electric lamps and water will be laid across to the club house from the town supply. Much amusement was caused by crossing the old bridge by lantern light.⁶²

⁶¹ James Brothers Hardware Store and Foundry.

⁶² Perth Courier, September 30, 1921.

By opening day 1922 water had been piped to the greens and the Links O' Tay clubhouse outfitted with electric light, *"connected with the main plant. The lighting is brilliant"*.⁶³

The clubhouse got a new roof in 1927 and further remodelling was undertaken in 1949. The floor was raised, a new foundation installed, and living quarters for the Club Pro built next to the Pro Shop. Another renovation was undertaken in 1957 when the club spent over \$9,000 enlarging and improving the facilities.

Perth's Links O' Tay club joined with golf clubs at Brockville, and Ottawa to form the Ottawa City & District Golf Association in 1921, playing for the association's annual challenge cup. In 1926 the Links O' Tay was a founding member of the St. Lawrence District Golf Association, comprised of clubs from Brockville, Carleton Place, Cornwall, Gananoque, Kingston, Perth, and Potsdam, New York, with Ogdensburg, New York, joining in 1932.



The golf course was extended in 1924, reaching across the Tay at the water works intake, to a new green on Matheson Island donated by T. A. Code. *"In playing the matches, the tee there will have to be used, and to enable the sport to cross and recross, Mr. Code has built a neat cedar bridge at his own expense over the gap between the two cement dam abutments already there, so that access has already been furnished to the extension"*.⁶⁴ The addition became the course's 'signature hole'.

The club benefited from an influx of new members in 1930 from the Smiths Falls area when the Poonahmalee Golf Club there ceased operation and the Links O' Tay served both communities until the Smiths Falls Golf & Country Club was re-established in 1954.

In 1931 Billy Wilson's horses were replaced with a tractor to pull the mower and in 1932 water was first piped from the Tay to the greens. In 1961, a new sprinkler system, fed by 11,000 yards of plastic pipe, began carrying water from the Tay to all fairways and greens.

Over the first half-century of its existence, golfers playing the Links O' Tay did not always enjoy a background chorus of birdsong and the burbling waters of Tay. Rather, through much of each summer, they endured the high pitched whine of the circular saw at the Allan Sawmill.

⁶³ Perth Courier, May 18, 1922.

⁶⁴ Perth Courier, May 30, 1924.

The steam-driven mill, producing lumber, lath, and shingles, had been built on the east bank of the Tay, between North and Peter Streets, in about 1874, long before Captain Matheson whacked a golf ball on the opposite bank. It burned in 1884, was re-built in 1889, burned again in 1897, was rebuilt yet again and continued to operate until 1941 when, after a run of more than 60 years, the golf club negotiated *“a three-way agreement resulting in tearing down of the old sawmill”*.⁶⁵



Allan's Sawmill and the Matheson Bridge connecting Peter Street to the golf course c1900
(Photo courtesy of Perth & District Historical Society, Isabel Hardie Collection)

A rudimentary timber bridge connecting the Matheson Farm to the Town of Perth at Peter Street, had been built by the Matheson's in the 1840s. It was rebuilt in about 1880 to a standard adequate to support the passage of wagons going to and from the cheese factory. Then in May 1914, as teamster Carl Bates (1889-1975) was delivering a load of lumber to the golf course, the bridge *“slipped off its timbers ... and immersed the load in deep water. The horse was rescued, and Bates got the wagon and lumber out, but he received a ducking ...”*⁶⁶ The bridge was repaired that winter but, in the spring of 1917, Captain Matheson had to, once again, have *“the rustic bridge leading from the foot of Peter Street to the Golf Links put in a state of repair after the winter's ice and the spring freshet forced the west end off level”*.⁶⁷

When the Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club purchased the golf course from the Matheson estate in 1921, the bridge was part of the deal and over the winter of 1924-1925 the club had the much fatigued old bridge replaced.

*Contractor DiCola is working steadily on the new bridge over the Tay leading to the golf links, and the whole length is well on the way to completion. The stone approaches at either end have been built, only need sinking through the ice, to be leveled up and graded, and the stringers, which are cedar timbers, eight to each pier crossing, are in their place. When the golf season opens the bridge will be ready.*⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Perth Courier, April 2, 1941.

⁶⁶ Perth Courier, August 31, 1914.

⁶⁷ Perth Courier, June 22, 1917.

⁶⁸ Perth Courier, March 13, 1925.

The new bridge cost \$1,000 and in May 1925, during the Old Boys Reunion held that year, it was officially opened, with the unveiling of a plaque naming it for the Matheson family.

That bridge served until 1941 when it was *“replaced by a metal bridge of modern design and substantial construction”*⁶⁹. This ‘new’ bridge had actually once spanned the Mississippi River at Playfairville and was donated and installed by club member Lawrence James⁷⁰. When completed, his wife Marion⁷¹ and daughter Ethel James⁷² cut the ribbon, and led *“a procession of golf club members and cars across the bridge”*.⁷³

The bridge of 1941 was seriously damaged in 1958 when the Perth Fire Brigade responded to a minor fire ignited by an overheated oil stove in the living quarters of golf pro Frank Jenkins.

*When the pumper was crossing the bridge to the golf links the heavy 9-ton machine broke the stringers under the planks and could not be taken back over the structure. Sandy Parks⁷⁴ placed a couple of steel girders on the floor of the bridge and the pumper was driven safely over the bridge.*⁷⁵

Thus reinforced the bridge continued to carry traffic from town to club and back without further incident until 1971 when a new 60-foot span concrete bridge was constructed, paid for jointly by the Provincial Department of Transport (\$40,000) and the Links O’ Tay Golf & Country Club (\$11,000). That bridge received a \$12,500 upgrade by the Perth Works Department in 1985.



Golf was not the exclusive activity at the Links O’ Tay Golf & Country club. In the early 1920’s the club also maintained tennis courts at its premises on the former Matheson Farm.

*Arrangements have been made for a Tennis Club to play on the court at the Links-O’-Tay Golf & Country Club together with all club house privileges. This is a chance for all those wanting to play tennis on a fast hard court, to get into the game. The club when formed will in all probability immediately join the Ottawa Valley Tennis Association for tournament purposes.*⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Perth Courier, January 30, 1941.

⁷⁰ Lawrence Henry James (1877-1958), partner with his brother George Sutton James (1869-1964) in James Brothers hardware store.

⁷¹ Alison Marion Hislop (1876-1969).

⁷² Ethel Alison James (1914-1997).

⁷³ Perth Courier, May 8, 1941.

⁷⁴ Robert Alexander ‘Sandy’ Parks (1917-1971, building contractor.

⁷⁵ Perth Courier, May 8, 1958.

⁷⁶ Perth Courier, June 15, 1923.

From 1977 until 1984 the club also hosted the Tay Valley Cross Country Ski Club Loppet, an event in which up to 500 participants competed over 10 Km or 30 Km distances from Murphy's Point Provincial Park to the finish line at the Links O' Tay.

When the 1970 golfing season opened, in addition to the main course, Links O' Tay offered a new 9-hole, par-3 course laid out by club member Rusty White⁷⁷. Constructed at a cost of \$2,500, and available *"to all club members and on which visitors may pay green fees under the same rules and conditions as the main course"*⁷⁸, the club hoped the investment would prove a *"profit maker"*⁷⁹. However, although the par-3 course was initially popular, interest waned, it was allowed to grow over in the late 1970's and was replaced with a 10-tee driving range in 1981.

The Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club was officially 'dry' for the first six decades of its existence, until an LLBO beer license *"with both men and women admitted"*⁸⁰ was granted in 1952, followed by a license for beer and wine served with meals in 1953, and a license to serve liquor without meals in 1962.

For over a half-century the converted cheese factory served Links O' Tay members well, but by the 1970s more modern amenities were called for. In January 1975, club president Alf Aston, cut the ribbon on a new, \$160,000 clubhouse: a two storey, 5,160 square foot facility, built only a few meters from the site of the demolished cheese factory clubhouse. The new building had been erected, without employing an architect⁸¹, in only 92 days under the direction of 'Director -In-Charge' Joe Perkins⁸². In addition to construction costs the new facility was outfitted with \$50,000 worth of new furniture, fixtures, kitchen, and bar equipment.



Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club clubhouse, constructed 1974.

⁷⁷ Ronald William 'Rusty' White (1911-2000).

⁷⁸ *Perth Courier*, April 23, 1970.

⁷⁹ *Perth Courier*, March 26, 1970.

⁸⁰ *Perth Courier*, May 8, 1952.

⁸¹ The lack of an architect may be evident in the resulting unadorned, graceless, rectangular box.

⁸² Joseph Acheson Perkins (1908-1990), businessman, owner of Perkins Motors and Taggart Trucking, property developer.

In 1983 the Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club was granted a coat of arms by the Lord Lyon King of Arms (or *High Sennachie*), the official responsible for regulating heraldry in Scotland. According to the inscription document, "*The said club is amongst all Nobles and in all places of Honour to be taken, numbered, accounted and received as an incorporation Noble in the Noblesse of Scotland*".⁸³

Facing severe financial difficulties, the Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club Ltd. was sold in August 1997 to Jim Baxter, who owned several other golf courses. He restored the course to profitability by expanding it to 18 holes. Designed and built by Baxter in 2000, the extension bears little resemblance to the front nine, presenting challenges not found on the original links. Baxter also changed the name from the 'Links O' Tay' to the 'Perth Golf Course', a very unpopular move among local golfers and long-time members. The property was sold again in 2022 to Caivan Communities.



Links O' Tay c1925

At the debut of the 21st century, the sign at the club entrance on Peter Street reads, "*Canada's Oldest Golf Course – Est. 1890*". Alan Matheson and friends played their first game at the site in 1890, but that does not, in fact, make the golf club and course they created the oldest in Canada. That honor goes to the Montreal Golf Club⁸⁴ founded 17 years earlier in 1873. Moreover, at least five other Canadian golf clubs predate the Perth course: the Quebec Golf Club⁸⁵ (1874), the Toronto Golf Club (1876), the Brantford (Ontario) Golf Club (1879), the Niagara-On-The-Lake Golf Club (1881), and the London (Ontario) Hunt and Country Club (1885).

⁸³ Perth *Courier*, May 4, 1983

⁸⁴ The Royal Montreal Golf Club from 1884.

⁸⁵ Now the Royal Quebec Golf Club.

The road sign's 'exaggerated' claim is, however, an exception to the more common and carefully worded promotional claim that Perth's is *"the oldest golf course in Canada to remain in continuous play on the same site"*. This claim implies that the six older courses have not been in continuous play, but at least one of them, the Niagara-on-the-Lake Golf Club, dating to 1881, also claims to be *"the oldest surviving golf course in North America"*, and in continuous play. Although its holes, bunkers and greens have been rearranged over the years (as have those at Perth) the Niagara course remains on the same *"tight rectangle of land bounded by Lake Ontario, Fort Mississauga, and the stately homes of Queen and Simcoe Streets"*.



Regardless of the competing claims, the Perth Golf Course, dating back more than 130 years, is without doubt among the very oldest golf clubs and courses in Canada. It is probably tied for seventh oldest with Yarmouth Links, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and Fort MacLeod Golf Club, Fort MacLeod, Alberta, clubs that also date from 1890.⁸⁶

Entering the 21st century the course was certainly one of the best in Ontario. The links are well treed and make a graceful sweep along the loop of the Tay River at a total length of 6,699 yards from the longest tees. The fairways and greens are fully watered and there are two sporting water hazards. Par for the course is 71.

Captain Alan Frederick Matheson, founder of the Links O' Tay golf course, died on November 12, 1928, at the Matheson family home on Gore Street, at the age of 81 years.

Holes-in-One at the Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club

A great many holes-in-one have been fired at the Links O' Tay. The first was scored in 1907 or 1908 by Fred McEwen⁸⁷ on the 230-yard fifth hole. When McEwen died of TB in September 1910, at the age of just 25 years, the *Perth Courier* recalled his remarkable shot.

*Phenomenal Shot at Golf – The passing of Mr. Fred McEwen last week recalls a feat performed by him on the Links O' Tay two or three years ago that is probably unequalled in Canada's golfing records. While three Perth players were holing out on the 'Sunset' green. Fred drove from the tee and, in spite of the fact that the distance was 230 yards on rising ground, the ball was driven so that it rolled over the green and into the hole in the presence of three astonished Perthites, who would not have believed it possible had they not seen the performance. 'Holing out in one' at such a distance will stand for a record here for a long time, we fancy.*⁸⁸

Using the equipment (club and ball) available in the early 20th century, a drive of 230 yards as astonishing indeed.

⁸⁶ The interchangeable use of the terms 'golf course' and 'golf club', which are not the same thing, complicates and confuses the debate.

⁸⁷ Frederick Charles McEwen (1885-1910), son of William Paul McEwen (1858-1918), one of the club's founding seven.

⁸⁸ *Perth Courier*, October 7, 1910.

In later years, Rusty White scored no less than four holes-in-one on the Links of Tay. As Club records are far from complete, no full list exists of those accomplishing the feat has survived, but the following accounts for most of them.

Bert Beatty	Frank Jenkins	Gord Rutherford (1987)
Miss Blum	Stan Kilfoyle (1985)	Tom Ryan (1971)
Bob Burrows (1975)	A. H. Leif (1971)	Jeff Shannon (1982)
Gene Chouinard	Matthew Leitch (1982)	A. J. Sidall
Richard Cordick (1972)	Bill Lipka	Ken Smith (1966)
Alan Code	Steve March (1985)	Ted Smythe
Dr. D. O. Craig	Hugh McDougal (1975)	Jennie Smolkin (1970)
Harold B. Dranly	Fred McEwen (c1907)	Bob Trombly (1971)
Wes Dunbar (1965)	Margaret McGregor (1961)	Al Vallely
Greg Fournier (1969)	Ron McLaren (1980)	Rusty White (X4)
Howard Fournier (1982)	Richard Mills	Jack Weir
Ray Fournier (1985)	R. A. Ratchell (c1929)	Marian Wright (1965)
Gerald Girard (1962)	Gwen Robinson (1938)	Fraser Wright (1977)
James Healey (1955)	Stan Robinson (1932)	Odey Young (1982)
Herb Higgins (1985)	Mrs. M. Robinson	

Links O' Tay Golf & Country Club Presidents

Judge W. S. Senkler	1901	Robert Carr	1943-1944
	1902-1914	Leslie Stephenson	1945
P. MacDonnell	1915	Fred Cheetham	1946-1947
W. J. Cowan	1917	J. S. Benson	1948-1949
	1918-1920	Hugh C. Wilson	1950
T. A. Code	1921	H. E. Burns	1951-1952
T. R. Caldwell	1922	Hugh J. O'Donnell	1953-1954
W. E. Danner	1923-1925	Harold D. Duby	1955-1958
J. E. Maloney	1926	Frank DiCola	1959-1960
A. L. Code	1927-1928	Hugh J. O'Donnell	1961-1963
C. A. Campbell	1929-1931	Tom P. Warapius	1964-1966
E. B. Code	1932-1933	Ronald 'Rusty' White	1967-1972
S. J. Kirkland	1934-1935	Alf B. Ashton	1974-1978
D. C. Fraser	1936-1937	Joe A. Perkins	1979-1982
Lawrence H. James	1938-1940	Harold Taggart	1983-1984
E. M. Sabiston	1941-1942	Rick Duval	1985-

- **Ron W. Shaw (2022)**