

Heroes of the Game: The Foulis Brothers; Founding Fathers of Midwest Golf

They arrived from Scotland between 1890-1900. They came with few belongings, but with a wealth of knowledge. Many had studied under the "Master", Old Tom Morris, and were considered the craftsmen of their trade - course architecture and clubmaking. Walking "The Old Course" with Old Tom, he made succinct but insightful comments about what nature and Alan Robertson had brought forth. The subtleties of the mounds, the masterful bunkering - many shaped by the sheep lying against the wind - and the contours of the greens; each providing the ultimate challenge for the adventure-some golfer. These were the Scots who brought their game to America, and they were determined to spread their love of golf to their new neighbors. They plied their trade in typical Scottish style — with diligence and great detail. Sadly the names and faces of many are all but lost a century later. But one family is generally credited with having brought the game of golf to the Midwest from St. Andrews. Their name was Foulis.

From St. Andrews to Chicago

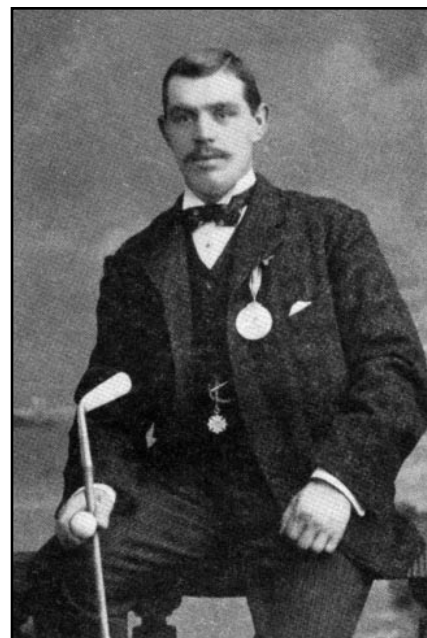


Jim Foulis - 1895
First Golf Professional
in the western U.S.

newly designed Chicago GC at Wheaton, the first 18-hole course in the country, he remembered the Foulis brothers whom he had met in his visits to St. Andrews, and thereafter offered the position to Robert. An eye injury sustained when struck by an errant shot prevented him from accepting, so he

From their home at 166 South Street in St. Andrews, Fifeshire, Scotland, only 4 blocks from the Links, came the Foulis brothers; James, Dave, Robert, John and Simpson. Their ties to golf were long, as their great-grandfather had herded the grass-trimming sheep at St. Andrews when George III was king of England prior to the War of 1812! Their father, James Sr., was foreman at Tom Morris shop for over 40 years, and was generally recognized as one of Scotland's foremost authorities on the manufacture of clubs. The brothers apprenticed in the shop, and they acquired quite a reputation from their days studying under Old Tom, especially young Robert as Tom took him under his wing. Jim, Dave and Robert each heard the call and became golf professionals. Simpson remained an amateur all his life and won a gold medal in the team competition at the 1904 Olympic matches. And while John did not follow his brothers, he was bookkeeper and manager for several clubs.

So when Charles Blair Macdonald wanted someone to be head professional at his



Jim Foulis - 1896
With his U.S. Open Medal



Robert Foulis - 1903
Head Professional at Glen Echo CC
in St. Louis

recommended his brother Jim in his place. The twenty-six year old proved himself very adept at his trade, even to the stern Macdonald. And despite never competing in The Open, he distinguished himself as quite a player; finishing third in the first US Open in 1895 behind Horace Rawlins, and a year later at Shinnecock Hills, winning the Open by shooting 152 (78-74) with the "gutta-percha" ball. So good was his round of 74, that it stood as the low score in the Open until 1904 when Willie Anderson posted a 72.



BELLERIVE COUNTRY CLUB
NORMANDY, MO.

Robert Foulis stationary logo
from Bellerive CC - 1910

infield of a race track, and the Florissant Valley CC. As was the norm at the time, each of these had just 9-holes. As groups saw these early successes other courses sprang-up, and by 1904 St. Louis had 11 courses seven of them by Jim and Robert, including Glen Echo CC, site of the 1904 Olympic golf matches and today the oldest 18-hole private course west of the Mississippi.

A New Ball, A New Club and More Innovations

In 1903 Jim and Dave were in the fairway of the Chicago GC hitting the newly designed rubber-covered golf ball [called the Haskell]. "Jimmy and I played one of the first dozen ever turned out", Dave would recall years later "and even Jim couldn't keep them from ducking to the ground just off the tee. We quit after a little while and rode our bicycles back to Wheaton. We remolded the balls, marking them the same as we used to mark the solid gutta-percha ones. That fixed them; Jimmy made 'em go after that. The trouble was that the covers were too smooth; they wouldn't grip the air." In an interesting addition to this story, Coburn Haskell, the inventor of the rubber-coated ball, heard what the Foulis had done to his ball, and threatened to sue them. What the brothers were doing was buying his ball, marking them to make them fly better and then reselling them. Haskell eventually did nothing, but he did buy one of their molds to mark his balls as well! The brothers made quite a bit of money improving the Haskell and making

It seems odd today, but prior to the Chicago GC relocation to Wheaton in 1895, there was only one golf club in the Chicago area, the original 9-hole Chicago Club in Belmont. And throughout the West and Midwest only a handful of 9-hole tracts dotted the landscape! But thanks to the Foulis more courses would begin quickly.

Golf comes to St. Louis

Jim cabled Robert in the summer of 1895 and told him that he had a position for him in Lake Forest, "same as mine", and upon his arrival began work at the Onwentsia Club, which he completed later that year. While Robert remained busy at Onwentsia Jim moved south at the request of St. Louis CC to work on their new 9-holes which opened in October 1896. Following that success, he completed three more courses in St. Louis prior to 1900 — none of which exist today - the Kinloch CC, the St. Louis Golf Club, also called the Jockey Club as it was located on the

"CLUB MAKERS FOR HALF A CENTURY"

James and David Foulis

Wheaton, Illinois

JAMES FOULIS, SR., foreman for "Auld Tam Morris" for nearly forty years.
JAMES FOULIS, JR., Open Champion of America, 1896.
DAVID FOULIS, Instructor at Chicago Golf Club.



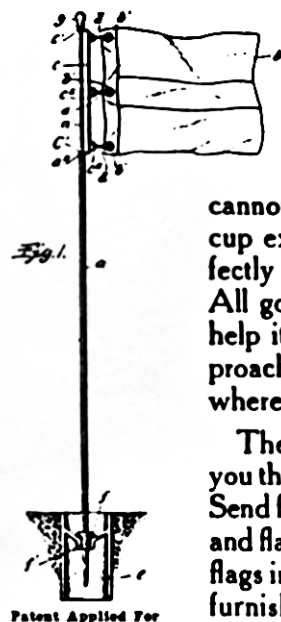
All stock selected personally and
IMPORTED DIRECT
Heads made from the best Selected Beech and
Persimmon Woods
Iron Heads Hand-Forged by
THOMAS STUART, OF SCOTLAND
The Best Maker of Irons in the World

Specialties at Regular Prices

American Eagle Golf Ball
Foulis' Concave Nibblacks

J. H. Taylor Mashie
Golf Courses Laid Out

Ad for Foulis clubs as published in the
1904 Olympic Program booklet



The Foulis Flag

cannot stand in the cup except in a perfectly upright position. All golfers realize the help it is on the approach to know just where the cup is.

The Foulis flag tells you the exact location. Send for prices of cups and flag sticks; bunting flags in the club colors furnished if desired.

DAVID FOULIS

Chicago Golf Club
Wheaton, Ill.

The Foulis Flag with cup

the ball fly further. Besides reselling the Haskell, they also manufactured their own golf balls, calling them the American Eagle, and though there is no record they ever sold any, it is known that they gave dozens away!

Dave then got around to the subject of their mashie-niblick. "That brought up the need for a new club, for the old ones wouldn't hold a middle distance pitch shot on the green with the new and faster ball. I took a niblick and remade it, and



(l-r) Robert, Jim and Dave Foulis - 1903

the result was the mashie-niblick!" [Today a 7 iron]. Dave built it and Jim tested it. Together they applied-for and received a patent on the new club. They held the patent on the club until 1920, and received royalties on each club sold.

They were very innovative in their little shop in Wheaton. One of the things we take for granted is the liner inside the hole. Dave Foulis invented the metal liner for the cup!

Early on, the holes were just excavated by the greenkeeper and weren't changed daily. The size of the hole would vary as player after player holed out. Dave made the following observation in a 1905 article in *Golf Illustrated*, "After a few days the hole would get deeper and deeper, as caddies would scoop sand from the bottom to make tees at the next teeing ground!" In those days, the tee was often immediately adjacent to the green, just a few yards from the hole. Another innovation was the "Foulis Flag" which "stands in the cup in a perfectly upright position" when used with the metal cup liner.

Jim and Dave worked together for several years at the Chicago GC. When Jim left in 1905, Dave became the head professional, and later, in 1921 he held the same position at Hinsdale CC. He retired from Hinsdale in 1939 as golf professional, having held that position for 18 years, staying on as greenkeeper. His son Jim also became a professional and was head pro at LaGrange CC for many years. Jim Foulis [Dave's son] was also an excellent player, playing in the first Masters and winning the Illinois PGA Championship many times.

Jim and Dave are also credited with organizing the first Professional Golfers Association of the United States in Chicago. When the PGA



Tom Morris Golf Shop St. Andrews - 1888
Old Tom in the middle with his ever-present pipe. Jim Foulis Sr. to his right and young Robert in the back row at far right.

was founded in 1916, the Foulis played a minor role in its formation, but their local chapter was the first in the country.

Robert Foulis; The Safest O the Family

Following his success at Onwentsia, Robert came to St. Louis in 1901 and completed the Glen Echo and Normandie clubs. This time, however, he stayed and planted his roots. In 1908 he briefly went to St. Paul Minnesota and created 9-holes for the Minikahda Club, an outstanding layout that has hosted the US Amateur and US Open during its history. In 1910, he, Jim and Dave helped The Field Club make their move to a new home in St. Louis where it was renamed Bellerive. His reputation grew and between 1910 and 1917 he laid out Sunset Hill, Midland Valley, Log Cabin, Riverview and Bogey Club. He would also work on Forest Park, Ruth Park and Triple A. He ventured to the Missouri capital of Jefferson City in 1920 to give them their first nine holes. Ninety-three year old former pro Bill Miller, who assisted Robert on the University City GC in 1931, recalls him as a very typical Scotsman "a little dour, very meticulous, and warm hearted to those he befriended."



Robert Foulis - 1927
Head Professional at Bellerive CC

Robert was so highly regarded throughout the country that he was looked upon as perhaps the greatest authority on green-construction. His greens at Normandie GC, in use from 1902 until 1921, were never out of play despite the often-horrible heat and humidity for which St. Louis is known. His brother John worked with him at the Bellerive shop, and Jim and Dave would visit them often as they collaborated on courses. He continually experimented with various grasses to find which would do the best in the different climates. He consulted on virtually every course constructed in the St. Louis area prior to 1930. In 1927 he made the following statement about

his early days in St. Louis. "When I came to St. Louis in 1901 there were no greens, nor any fairways, just cow pastures. The clubs didn't want to spend any money. I brought seed from Europe, experimented with them until I found what was right for St. Louis. The greens we have at Bellerive have not been out of play since 1912. Fungicide treatments have brought our greens through the summers without a brown patch."

But he didn't spend all his time on the course. He also raised a family. His son Ronald became a lawyer was part of the Commission which developed the Gateway Arch grounds in 1966. His daughter Eleanora was a teacher and shortly before her death in 1995 penned a book about her father titled "Safest O the Family" a Scottish term loosely describing the most easygoing, trusting or affectionate member of the family. This was the term used to describe Robert.

Robert never considered himself much of a player — he competed in only one Open in 1897 — seemingly content to spend time perfecting his courses rather than playing. But while reminiscing years later Dave recalled that in 1900, while entertaining Harry Vardon and J.H. Taylor in Chicago, he and Robert took on two-thirds of the "great triumvirate" and bested them over a 6-hole match. In a total of six matches Robert and his brothers played against Vardon and his various partner, Vardon would be on the winning side but once!

Jim, on the other hand, was one of the best players in the country, and one of the longest drivers. At an exhibition match with Alex Smith in 1898 the papers noted that of the holes that were over 350 yards, he frequently drove within 50 yards of the green. He is also known to have driven the ball 308 yards at Wheaton in 1896 while playing a match against the better ball of H.J Whigham and C.B. Macdonald.

He left Chicago GC in 1905 and moved to Calumet for five seasons and then to St. Louis CC from 1912-15. He returned to Chicago and was at Olympia Fields from 1917-23. While he was not directly involved in the design of the four courses there, he did oversee their construction.

Epilogue

Gradually the brothers retired from their positions. Their mark on the game goes largely un-noticed except by those who take the time to research their contributions. Some of their courses have been turned into housing developments, while others have been "updated" to reflect modern trends. But a visit to a few of their courses will recall an earlier day in golf. One which was inspired not by profit or ego, but by love of the game. These courses were meant to be walked; to feel the grass underfoot in the same way the architect and the early players did as they walked the land. The trees may have grown taller and the land interrupted by cart paths, but the "feel" of these courses is timeless.

James died on March 3, 1928 of acute kidney failure in Chicago. Robert died unexpectedly on March 6, 1945 at the age of 71 while on vacation in Orlando. Dave was the last of the brothers, as he died in 1950 at the age of 82, following a brief illness. They are buried in the family plot, along with the rest of their clan, in the Wheaton Cemetery, adjacent to the Chicago Golf Club.

About the Author:

Jim Healey is a Golf writer and Historian in St. Louis. His book "Golfing Before The Arch: A History of St. Louis Golf" was published in 1996. He also has collaborated on several Club Centennial books.

1920 Jefferson City CC (MO)(9)
1931 University City GC (St. Louis)

Golf Courses where Jim Foulis was head professional during his career.

1895-1905 Chicago Golf Club
1906-1912 Calumet CC
1912-1915 St. Louis CC
1916-1918 Windsor GC
1919-1923 Olympia Fields CC
1924-1927 Edgewater GC

Courses designed or remodeled by Jim Foulis

1896 St. Louis CC (Original)
1896 Onwentsia CC (with Robert Foulis)
1897 Milwaukee CC (Original)
1898 Florissant Valley CC (St. Louis)
1898 St. Louis Golf Club (The Jockey Club)
1899 Kinloch CC (St. Louis)
1899 Burlington CC (Wisconsin)
1900 Kent CC (Michigan)
1900 Nippersink CC (Wisconsin)
1901 Glen Echo CC (St. Louis)
1901 Normandie CC (St. Louis)
1902 Denver CC
1905 Memphis CC
1909 Meadowbrook CC (Minneapolis)
1910 Bellerive CC (with Robert & Dave Foulis)
1911 Calumet CC (Chicago)
1917 Sunset Hill CC (St. Louis) (with Robert Foulis)
1921 Edgebrook CC (Chicago)
1922 Bonnie Brook (IL)
1923 Hickory Hills CC (Chicago)
1924 Burlington CC (Wisconsin)
1924 Hillmoor CC (WI)
1927 Joe Louis the Champ GC (Chicago)

Golf Courses where Robert Foulis was head professional or greenkeeper.

1896-1900 Onwentsia CC
1901-1907 Glen Echo CC
1902-1910 Normandie CC (greenkeeper 1902-1907)
1910-1942 Bellerive CC

Courses designed by Robert Foulis

1896 Onwentsia CC (IL) (with Jim Foulis)
1897 Lake Geneva (WI) CC
1900 Town & Country CC (MN)
1901 Glen Echo CC (with Jim Foulis)
1901 Normandie CC (with Jim Foulis)
1902 Triple A (St. Louis)
1904 Algonquin GC (9) (St. Louis)
1906 Minikahda Club (with Willie Watson)
1909 Log Cabin Club (9) (St. Louis)
1910 Bellerive CC (with Jim and Dave Foulis)
1910 Bogey Club (9) St. Louis
1911 Midland Valley CC (St. Louis)
1913 Forest Park GC (St. Louis)
1916 Riverview CC (St. Louis)
1917 Sunset Hill CC (MO) (with Jim Foulis)