

# GOLF

## Drawing on the Past

Original Bellevue designs found in Skaneateles attic

By Chris Wagner  
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Sometimes solving one mystery only creates a bigger one.

Such is the case with the recovery of a holy grail for Bellevue Country Club. The west-side Syracuse club belongs to a select fraternity because its course was designed by fabled golf architect Donald Ross. But for decades since its opening in 1916, the original drawings of Bellevue by the Scottish master have been lost. Until now.

Several weeks ago the club came into possession of design plans for 15 of the original 18 holes, prompting Bellevue historian Bing Loehr to comment Tuesday while looking at the drawings for the first time: "So, they finally turned up after all these years. Where were they?"

Where they were found was in the attic of a landmark Skaneateles estate. How they got there remains a head-scratcher. Further remarkable is the stroke of luck it took for the drawings to come into the hands of a former Bellevue member who immediately recognized them for their value and saved them from being tossed into a Dumpster.

**For that, Bellevue** general manager Brad Blair credits Marshall Skiff, part of the family who has owned and operated Beak & Skiff Apple Farms for nearly a century.

"When he saw them, he knew what they were right away," Blair said.

"It was quite a stroke of luck how all of this happened," added Bellevue member Jim Chapman.

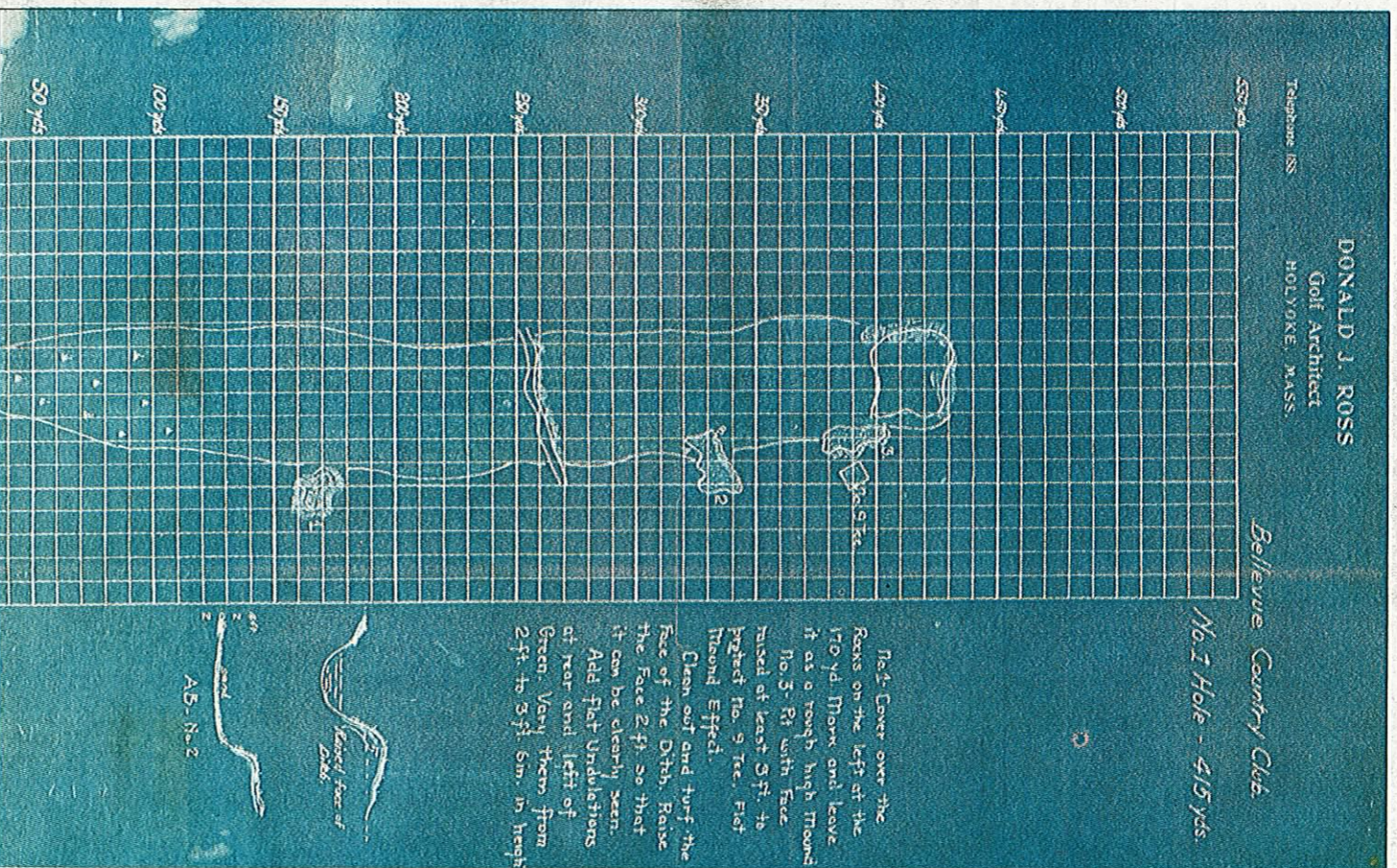
Here's how it unfolded.

Skiff said his daughter and her husband, Deborah S. and Edward J. Brennan, bought the 1905 Skaneateles lake-front estate of Sieglinde Wikstrom at 3018 West Lake Road in 2003 and began a lengthy restoration project. A couple of years ago, construction workers were in the attic when they came upon a box of rolled up architectural drawings.

Some of the prints contained designs to remodel Skaneateles Country Club's original clubhouse, which was an old farmhouse. Fifteen others contained blueprints of golf holes at Bellevue Country Club and/or Syracuse Country Club, with routings that match the original Bellevue course. Affixed to the top of each of the golf course designs was the following: Donald J. Ross, Golf Architect, Holyoke, Mass., and his three-digit company phone number: 188.

"I think Deborah knew their importance right away and turned them over to me," Skiff said. "I stored them at my house the past couple of years, forgot about them, then remembered them this spring."

**In short order** he contacted Jim Fields, the general manager at Skaneateles Country Club, where Skiff is now a member. Even more good fortune: Fields was quite familiar with the Ross legacy, having served for more than four years as the clubhouse manager at Rochester's Oak Hill Country Club, one of Ross' most famous courses.



PICTURED IS the original drawing of the fourth hole of Bellevue Country Club by legendary golf architect Donald Ross. The original drawings for 15 of the original 18 holes were recently handed over to the club.

Courtesy of Bellevue

By coincidence, Fields was already scheduled to meet with Blair in three days, and the transfer of the long-lost documents was completed about five weeks ago.

Blair and Chapman now plan to have the drawings, which are in remarkable condition for their age, preserved, framed and displayed at the club. They also plan to donate reproductions to the Tufts Archives in Pinehurst, N.C., which this year is celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ross' design of the renowned Pinehurst No. 2 Course, site of the U.S. Open in 1999 and 2005.

Skiff is ecstatic about those plans. "Our position was, we didn't want the drawings sold," said Skiff, who belonged to Bellevue for more than 40 years. "We wanted Bellevue to have the originals. They belong there."

**As for how** the blueprints wound up in Skaneateles, there is no clear answer. But one clue may lie with the former owner of the Wikstrom estate.

"The estate used to be owned by Edward N. Trump," said Fields, who added he doesn't believe Edward was related to modern-day mogul Donald Trump. "Edward N. Trump was the original president of Skaneateles Country Club, serving from 1916 to 1922."

Now, here's another twist in the mystery. The original courses for both Bellevue and Skaneateles were built at almost the same time. Construction on Bellevue's original 18 started in 1915 and the course opened in 1916. Skaneateles opened its first nine holes in 1915. While Bellevue's designation as a Ross course is well documented, the architect at Skaneateles is unknown.

Could it have been Ross, who was no doubt in the area to review the Bellevue project?

"I guess it could be," said Fields, "but officially it's unknown. Records just weren't kept from back then. We just don't know."