

FINDING FRANCIS

By Charles D. Burgess

Francis Ouimet, the son of immigrant working class parents, grew up in rural Brookline, Mass. across the street from one of the most fashionable private country clubs in America, known simply as The Country Club, where golf was introduced in 1893. Francis fell in love with golf and caddied at the club as soon as he was old enough. He practiced the game on a few makeshift holes he created in his own backyard and faithfully followed the exploits of such famous British golfers as Harry Vardon, James Braid, and John Henry Taylor. As he got a little older, he traveled miles from his home by trolley car to play at the Franklin Park Golf Course in Boston, just the second public golf course in the nation. A skillful self-taught golfer by age 14, he joined the new Brookline High School golf team – one of only a handful in the entire state of Massachusetts. The team practiced at the Woodland Golf Club in the neighboring city of Newton.

In the very early spring of 1909, Woodland's professional, Charlie "Chay" Burgess, came across the Brookline schoolboys practicing on the still frozen fairways of Woodland. He took an interest in their practices and willingly gave them advice and instruction. Young Francis clearly stood out as one of the most talented and dedicated boys on the team. Chay took him under his wing and gave him clubs and individual lessons. A lifetime relationship between the experienced Scottish pro and the aspiring American amateur began.

"It was my good fortune to meet Charlie soon after he became associated with the Woodland Golf Club in 1909... Thus it was we came to know him because each time we appeared on

*the scene Charlie was there with his cheery hello and general good nature. The members of the golf team could do everything with a golf ball but hit it straight and Charlie voluntarily gave us many suggestions that were responsible in greatly reducing our scores. In other words he took a fatherly interest ... and helped us tremendously." **

– Francis Ouimet

Charlie "Chay" Burgess was born in Montrose, Scotland in 1873 and as a youth excelled at the popular Scottish sports of association football (soccer) and golf. Famed Montrose professional Bob Dow and legendary "Old" Tom Morris from nearby St. Andrews, mentored and influenced the development of young Chay on the links. At 22 Burgess



BURGESS COLLECTION

Chay Burgess (center) Montrose professional and Links Champion, with fellow PGA professionals and Open Champions Harry Vardon (left) and James Braid (right) in 1905.

became one of Montrose's finest amateur golfers when he began a six-year career in professional British football. In 1903 Chay succeeded Bob Dow as professional at Montrose's Royal Albert Golf Club – the seventh oldest golfing society in the world — where he became renowned as a great competitor and teacher of the game. Burgess was an active member and governing committee member of the Scottish Section of the Professional Golfers Association (1901) and was a contemporary of accomplished British golfers Harry Vardon, James Braid, John H. Taylor, and others.

In the mid-1880s Alex Findlay, another well-known Montrose golfer, immigrated to America, bringing his love of golf with him. Findlay designed more than 100 courses across the continent and joined the Wright and Ditson Sporting Goods Company of Boston in 1897 as head of their new golf department. While residing in the Boston area Findlay joined the Woodland Golf Club and in 1908 returned to Montrose intent on convincing Charlie Burgess to come to America as Woodland's professional. Burgess accepted the offer and began his tenure at Woodland in the spring of 1909.

When the new Woodland pro came across Ouimet and his teammates, it was within weeks of his arrival from Scotland. Recognizing the talent of Francis and his inability to afford a membership to the private club, Charlie invited him to be his guest at Woodland every Sunday afternoon for the next several years. At a crucial time in the young golfer's life, Charlie voluntarily devoted his only day off to give Francis lessons and to hone his game to a championship level. After observing Ouimet's progress, the members of Woodland created a special "junior" membership for him in 1910 and Ouimet's tutelage continued with Burgess as he competed in statewide and national tournaments. By the fall of 1913, Francis had won his first State Amateur Championship and had competed in two National Amateurs.

"In 1910 and 1911 I played with [Charlie Burgess] often – took lessons and had the satisfaction of seeing my scores drop from around 85 to the low seventies. I would give anything

if I could play those Sunday afternoon matches over once more because they represented red-letter days in my life.”
– Francis Ouimet

Two of the greatest professional golfers in the world, Harry Vardon and Edward “Ted” Ray of England, were on an exhibition tour across America in 1913. Ray was the reigning [British] Open Champion and Vardon was a five-time Open Champion and had won the United States Open in 1900. The visiting Englishmen finished their tour in September by playing in the U.S. Open, held for the first time at The Country Club in Brookline. It drew the largest and most prestigious international field ever assembled, as well as 20-year-old local amateur Francis Ouimet. No amateur golfer – British or American – had ever won it before.

On the fourth and final day of the tournament – a day of heavy, wind driven rain – the great English golfers finished in a dramatic 304-stroke first place tie. Surprisingly, as the rains made play nearly impossible, young Francis Ouimet, unknown to most of the golfing world, was the last golfer still out on the course who had any hope of catching the British stars.

Rain poured on the lanky Ouimet and his little 10-year-old caddie Eddie Lowery as an army of loyal supporters accompanied them over the soggy Brookline course. Laboring against flooded fairways and unpredictable greens, Ouimet slowly gained a stroke here and there to close in on the Englishmen. As he approached the final few holes, the impossible began to seem possible. On the last hole, with his final putt, young Francis miraculously tied Vardon and Ray, forcing a three-way, 18-hole playoff! Hundreds of joyous onlookers rushed to the green and carried Francis off on their shoulders to the clubhouse.

On Saturday, Sept. 20, 1913, in a patriotically charged contest, the young American stood up to the enormous pressure of playing head-to-head against the two greatest golfers in the world. In the up and down 18-hole battle, Ouimet pulled ahead of the British stars on the 17th hole to win the playoff by a convincing six strokes over Ray and five over Vardon. Adoring fans surrounded the young champion once again and accounts of Ouimet’s astonishing victory



BURGESS COLLECTION

A Pro-Am gathering at the Woodland Golf Club. Seated left to right: John Brady pro at the Commonwealth Golf Club, Chay Burgess, Nashua Country Club pro Jock Blair, Francis Ouimet, Woodland assistant pro Harry Nicoll, boyhood friend of Ouimet Tom Columbo, and Boston Red Sox infielder Hal Janvrin.

made headlines around the world. It was the greatest upset in golf history and Francis Ouimet became America’s first golf hero.

“Whatever progress I have made in golf I owe directly to Charlie Burgess. He always had the faculty of putting me in the proper frame of mind when entering an important match -- and I repeat he taught me everything I know about the game.”

– Francis Ouimet

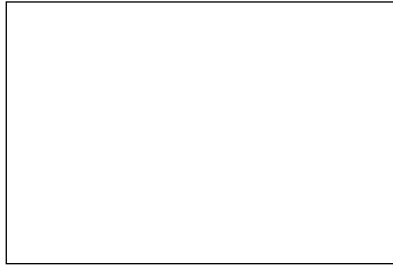
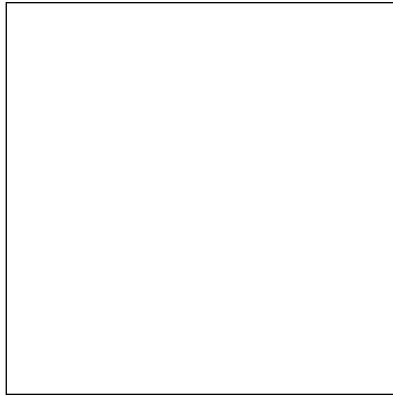
Ouimet went on to win the 1914 and 1931 U.S. Amateurs and dozens of prestigious regional and national golf tournaments. He had a storied career as a member and captain of multiple American Walker Cup teams and in 1951 became the first American elected as Captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club in St. Andrews, Scotland. His many achievements made him an original inductee into the World Golf Hall of Fame.

Throughout the fame and celebrity, Ouimet maintained a lasting friendship with his loyal teacher and mentor. In 1931, after a drought of 17 years, Francis regained his National Amateur Championship at the Beverly Country Club in Chicago with Charlie Burgess at his side. Upon their return to Woodland, Francis affectionately remarked to the assembled club members and the press,

“[Charlie] was always there when I needed him. I don’t know what I would have done out there without Charlie Burgess. He was a great strong bulwark to lean on at all times. When things were going a little tough you will never know what his encouragement meant.”

Like Francis, Charlie “Chay” Burgess had an impressive and influential career. He taught and mentored two more National Amateur Champions, Jesse Guilford in 1921 and Stanley “Ted” Bishop in 1946, and became a sought after instructor to countless celebrities including baseball stars Babe Ruth and Jimmie Foxx. During golf’s off-season, he was the first professional soccer coach at Harvard University from 1909 to 1922, winning back-to-back National Championships in 1913 and 1914. In addition, in 1921, he founded the New England Professional Golfer’s Organization in response to the young PGA of America’s perceived lack of support for club professionals. His organization influenced the reform of the PGA’s governance structure and he became the first president of the New England PGA in 1922. He is in the NEPGA Hall of Fame. Chay also became known as “The Man Who Saved the Ryder Cup” by organizing an unprecedented fund-

SEE FRANCIS, PAGE 17



FRANCIS

CONTINUED FROM 13

raising exhibition match in 1928 for the cash strapped PGA. The event featured golf greats Bobby Jones, Johnny Farrell, Walter Hagen, and Gene Sarazen, with Chay's good friend Francis Ouimet as the referee.

Author's note – Ouimet's quotes [] are from written remarks presented at a testimonial dinner for Burgess, April 6, 1929. For more about Chay Burgess and Francis Ouimet see: GOLF LINKS - Chay Burgess, Francis Ouimet and the Bringing of Golf to America, (revised edition 2016). Available at www.Mcfarlandpub.com. (Reviewed in Bulletin No. 212, September 2017.)*

Editor's note – Charles D. Burgess has been a teacher, administrator and educational consultant in Greater Boston for 40 years. His sports and entertainment writings have appeared in both the U.S. and Great Britain. He lives in Norwood, Mass.



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Francis Ouimet (right), Jesse Guilford (not pictured), 1931 U.S. Open Champion Billy Burke and U.S. Open runner-up George Von Elm take direction from Woodland professional Chay Burgess (left) before an exhibition match at Woodland shortly after Burke's Open victory.