

# Different Perspective

## Local Author Offers New Findings on Donald Ross

BY BRITTANY JENKINS

Staff Writer

Donald Ross remains one of Pinehurst's most celebrated legends, known for his profound impact on golf — the sport that all but defines Pinehurst's small-town character.

With his new book, "The Life and Times of Donald Ross," local author Chris Buie proves that there's more to Ross' story than one might expect.

After publishing his first book, "The Early Days of Pinehurst," in 2014, Buie had no clear inclination to write another book — that is, until he was struck by what he describes as an epiphany.

"The first day that I went to the 2014 Open, I walked up, and I was standing on the hill there, where you could see the clubhouse from one side and down the No. 1 course, and it was totally filled with people," he says. "I mean, I couldn't believe it. I realized that none of these people would be here if it wasn't for this one guy. I was, like, can you imagine, more than a hundred years after you create something, you have droves of people coming from all over the world to see your work."

That single moment was all it took to create the spark for Buie's next book. From there, he spent the next year exploring all things Donald Ross, and what he found in his research came as a surprise, despite his life-long Pinehurst residency and extensive experience in the golf world.

Buie will be at The Country Bookshop at 5 p.m. Thursday, July 20, for a book talk and signing.

"His place in history has been prolific architect, since he did some of the best courses," Buie says. "I was just going with that common narrative at the beginning, and I didn't think there would be anything new. It was so surprising to read through stuff and find new information, and realize that this narrative was really wrong. It made it more interesting because it was kind of like reading a mystery; I didn't know what was going to happen next or where the story was going."

The "common narrative" that Buie describes refers to Ross' famous role in designing golf courses, particularly Pinehurst No. 2. But Buie makes the adamant assertion that nobody

played more of an important role in the establishment of golf than Ross himself.

"He's kind of like the Henry Ford of golf," Buie says. "Henry Ford was the main guy that brought cars to the common man, and they became a fundamental part of American culture. Donald



TED FITZGERALD/The Pilot

Local writer Chris Buie stands in front of a picture of Donald Ross in the pro shop at the Southern Pines Golf Club.

Ross came in and brought proper golf, and he told people how to do it — how to caddie master, how to run the clubhouse, and how the game is supposed to be played, and golf became a fundamental part of American culture."

As Buie read through archived material, he began to see the real narrative take form.

"There were a lot of great in-depth interviews and stories that were colorful," he says. "(Ross) looks like somebody that might be boring, but he's not like that. He's a genius and interesting, and he was funny and bright and all of those things — he just didn't look like it. There was a lot of color in his personality, and the amount that he did is truly phenomenal."

Not only did Ross help establish the game of golf in America, but he played a critical role in the evolution of the nature of those involved in the game. He took on numerous kids as caddies, and trained them to carry out his legacy with marked skills and class.

"All of the guys that worked for him were immaculate in behavior," Buie says. "I mean, they did all the right things. They were unfailingly kind and patient. So he trained dozens of guys, and they would be installed at his courses, and that way, his ethos would really be carried out."

He also helped transform the golf pro from a profession of servant-like status, in which pros weren't even allowed in the clubhouse, into a career associated with respect and

a true middle-class lifestyle. Today, America's 28,000 golf pros invariably experience the results of Ross' dedication to building the profession.

After competing in a poorly run British Open, Ross set out to pursue his next big undertaking. He arrived in Pinehurst and said he would create the best golf tournament in the world. With that goal in mind, Ross created the North and South Open, which would later serve as inspiration for today's Masters Tournament.

"It was by far the most well-run tournament in the world," Buie says. "It was in the springtime at the Carolina, with all the dogwoods and all the best players. It was a whole dream world. It was a sharp contrast from these golfers' day-to-day lives."

During the process of writing the book, Buie had the unexpected chance to speak to five people who knew Ross personally. Their collective perspective further confirmed Buie's previous findings about who Ross was as an individual, beyond his accomplishments in golf.

"They described him as immaculate gentleman, like the perfect gentleman," Buie says. "He just had a quiet elegance. He was incredibly charming, and he truly was an authentic genius."

Once Buie had a complete grasp on Ross' life and character, he faced a new challenge — he had an overabundance of material. His solution? He created an appendix that's more than 100 pages to give readers the maximum amount of content and entertainment that he could provide.

"I took the best of the extra stuff and put it in there, so if you read the story and you want extra facts, you can look at them," Buie says. "With this many things in there, maybe you won't like all of them, but there's bound to be something you'll like. It's supposed to be a good experience for the reader, even if they don't necessarily like golf."

Buie's ultimate goal is that his book can present a renewed narrative to seasoned golfers, and even more so, invite people — especially those who live in the Sandhills — into the world of golf.

"I want readers to feel like spending time with the book was a really fulfilling experience," Buie says. "The average citizen here in the Sandhills — it's understandable that they wouldn't know very much about Donald Ross, but I think they would find his story interesting. And these guys — him and the Tufts family — they worked phenomenally hard to make this area special. They turned a desert wasteland into a dream world, which is what this place is. He truly helped build the America that we inhabit today."

The Country Bookshop is located at 140 NW Broad St., Southern Pines. For information, call (910) 692-3211.

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### WANT TO GO?

**WHAT:** Book Signing  
**WHEN:** Thursday, July 20, 5 p.m.  
**WHERE:** The Country Bookshop  
**INFO:** (910) 692-3211