

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHY

by Dale Heckendorn

TOM BENDELOW (1868-1936)

Tom Bendelow designed Denver's City Park Golf Course in 1913. During this time, Bendelow, in association with sporting goods manufacturers A. G. Spalding & Brothers, also promoted the development of golf courses in the New York and New Jersey area. Over a two decade association with Spalding & Company, Bendelow designed more than 500 courses across the United States and Canada.



Denver's City Park Golf Course in 2006

In 1920, Bendelow joined the staff of the American Park Builders, stationed in Chicago, as chief designer. During his time with the American Park Builders he undertook some of his biggest, if not most notable, design efforts. Among his many designs were Lakewood Country Club in Colorado, Dubsdread Golf Course in Florida, Evansville Municipal Golf Course in Indiana, City Park Municipal Golf Course in Louisiana, and the three courses at Medinah Country Club in Illinois. The later were considered by many as some of his best work. Bendelow served as American Park Builder's chief designer until the firm's demise in 1933.

Tom Bendelow stands as one of the pioneer architects of American golf. During his 35-year career, he designed more than six hundred golf courses across the United States and Canada. He shared his enthusiasm for the game of golf and increased its public accessibility through his promotion of municipal golf course construction.

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on September 2, 1868, he learned to play golf at the age of five. He developed into a proficient golfer on the courses in Scotland and England. As his biographer and grandson Stuart W. Bendelow notes, "At this time, knowledge of the game and the ability to utilize the natural landscape were the essential qualifications for a 'golf course architect,'" though "greens keepers" or "club makers" carried out such design work.

Trained as a typesetter for the Aberdeen newspaper, Bendelow arrived in New York City on September 21, 1892, and assumed his first U.S. job with the *New York Herald* newspaper. He soon detected America's growing interest in the game of golf and recognized the lack of places to play. He began by teaching others the game and designed courses for friends, local clubs, and nearby communities. Beginning in 1895, his association with A. G. Spalding & Brothers sporting goods manufacturers gave him a more formal outlet through which to promote the development of golf courses. In addition, this relationship enabled Bendelow to redirect his career from the newspaper business to golf course development.

Bendelow followed the traditional methods and forms of Scottish and British course design. He walked and staked each site to get a first-hand feel of the land, the wind, and the natural vegetation. In 1898, the New York City Parks Department hired him to redesign and expand the Van Cortlandt Park Golf Course, originally opened in 1895 as one of the first public golf courses in the United States. His redesign made it the first public eighteen-hole course in the nation. Bendelow supervised the construction, the maintenance of the course, the operation of the facility, and the training of personnel. This experience with both overseeing the design and the operation of a public golf course was unique for his day and influenced Bendelow's future manner of course design and consultations with local communities.

Spalding & Brothers hired Bendelow away from the New York City Parks Department, and moved him to the firm's headquarters in Chicago as its golf department manager. In this position, he traveled from coast to coast and into Canada laying out or remodeling club and municipal golf courses. He particularly advocated public golf courses and used every occasion to promote their development and use. He made many of his early trips by automobile to small towns with few, if any, public park facilities. He employed his extensive powers of persuasion to instill the idea of spending public monies on a landscape for golf, while demonstrating that such facilities need not be financially burdensome.

During this period Bendelow also began an association with the University of Illinois, conducting an annual series of lectures on golf course design and landscape maintenance. As the first designer to conduct such open discussions of course design and landscape usage, he likely initiated the practice of institutional instruction in golf course design in the U.S.

No one has made an exact count of the many golf courses Bendelow designed, expanded or remodeled. Many of these courses no longer exist while others have been extensively remodeled with designs credited to the new architect instead of Bendelow. In some cases, the records regarding course design and construction have simply disappeared. *Golfers Magazine*, in February 1923, credited Bendelow with the design of over 600 courses more than a decade before he ceased active design work. A design pamphlet prepared for the American Park Builders in around 1926 contains an estimate of over 800 Bendelow-designed courses. Tom Bendelow died in 1936 at his home in River Forest, Illinois.

Adapted from “Tom Bendelow, Profile of a Landscape Architect (1868 – 1936)” by Stuart W. Bendelow. If you are interested in reading more about this influential golf course designer, consider picking up a copy of Stuart Bendelow’s book, *Thomas "Tom" Bendelow: The Johnny Appleseed of American Golf* (2007).