

A Newly Discovered
Stanley Thompson Golf Course

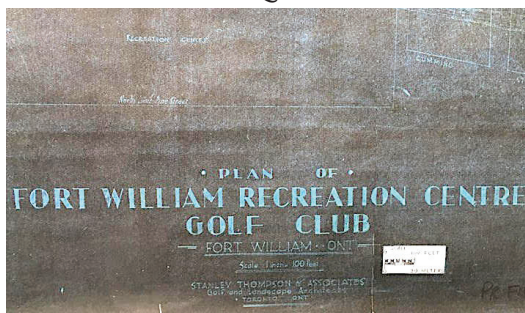
***Chapples Golf Course,
Thunder Bay, ON***

Also Known as Fort William
Recreation Centre Golf Club

By Dr. James M. Harris

THUNDER BAY

Thunder Bay, population about 110,000, is located along the north shore of Lake Superior. Settlements have existed here “on this sheltered bay of the western tip of Lake Superior for over 9,000 years.” Built on the traditional lands of Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850, Thunder Bay is an important city in Northwest Ontario. A gathering place for Indigenous peoples for millennia, with the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century it served as a waterway access to the future western Canada and later it is the place where the North West Company built Fort William as its fur trading headquarters. Next, in 1867 civil engineer Simon Dawson, who had been surveying the area since 1858, chose a site very near Fort William as the starting point for a road he was tasked with building by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald. The road was to open up the prairie west by going as far as Fort Garry (Winnipeg). That place was named Port Arthur after Queen Victoria’s third son. Through the last part of the 19th century and for much of the twentieth century a friendly rivalry evolved between the two neighbouring cities. That rivalry was finally resolved in 1970 when Fort William and Port Arthur amalgamated and Thunder Bay was chosen as the new city name. This article will use the name Thunder Bay but will also at times use the historic names of Fort William and Port Arthur.



The Stanley Thompson & Associates mark on the 1947 Stanley Thompson architectural plans.

THE GRAIN COMMISSION BUILDING

By 1913 trade in Marquis wheat that was being grown and shipped east by more than a million newly arrived immigrants in the prairie west became a major industry for Fort William and Port Arthur. That year the Government of Canada informed officials in Fort William that their city had been selected as the Grain Commission of Canada headquarters and that a building suitable to house the commission would need to be erected by its citizens. Work began on February 17, 1913 at the northwest corner of Victoria Avenue and Syndicate Avenue and the building was completed in mid-November 1913. However, there was an ensuing battle for where The Grain Commission of Canada should be located and in the end, Fort William lost that battle to the city of Winnipeg. With the big beautiful new building standing partly empty, Clement E. Chapple stepped into the breach. Chapple had moved to Thunder Bay in 1909 and opened the district’s first ladies ready-to-wear store. Seeing an opportunity for expansion, Chapple took a chance and leased the entire main floor and basement of the Grain Exchange building which in total was over 23,000 square feet. Chapples Departmental Store became the area’s largest of its kind and it soon expanded with branches



Clement E. Chapple

in many other northwestern Ontario communities. Chapple later bought the Grain Exchange building in 1946. The Chapple Store was sold to the Great West Saddlery company in 1959. Competition forced the store's closing in December 1981. It is said that there are still residents of Thunder Bay who fondly remember Chapples window displays, especially those at Christmas time.



Vintage Postcard of Chapples Ltd. Departmental Store (and nearby Kakabeka Falls)

Clement Chapple had achieved great business success by 1941 and he was now Chairman of the Fort William Town Planning Board. Upon recommendation of the Board, the city of Fort William took ownership of 331 acres of land around the Neebing River with the intention that it be used to create a recreation area. After 1942, with the Second World War underway, plans seemed to stall but that all changed on January 25, 1947 when Clement E. Chapple wrote to the Fort William mayor and council stating that if the city matched his funding, he would pledge \$5,000.00 per year for five years for the development of the Neebing Recreation Centre. Clement E. Chapple died in April 1947 and he would not live to see his dream come to fruition. However, with funding in place, the wheels began to turn for the project.

ENTER STANLEY THOMPSON

Canada's greatest and most prolific golf course architect was having a trying time in both his personal and his business life in 1947 so word of a possible new project would have fallen on receptive ears. Stanley had built the Fort William Country Club in the much earlier and headier year of 1924 so he was familiar with Fort William. Moreover, Stanley had a history of building Mardon Lodge (now Allandale) GC, Inisfill ON and Kenogamisis GC, Geraldton ON for Major General Donald Hogarth* who was a gold mining financier and a former Conservative Party provincial politician who had represented Port Arthur. When Kenogamisis GC was being built in nearby Geraldton in 1938, Chapples Departmental Store had a branch there that was managed by Clement Chapple's son John B. Chapple. In 1947 John B. Chapple left Geraldton and moved back to Fort William. It is quite likely that Stanley and the Chapple family knew of each other. Regardless of how it came to pass, documents show that Mac Spence, the chairman of the Recreation Committee and S. T. McCavour who was Clement Chapple's personal representative met with Stanley Thompson "while (he was) passing through Fort William and Port Arthur, Tuesday night May 6. (1947) After explaining Chapple's grant to the city (they) discussed development of (a) golf course." It is apparent from the report of the meeting that Stanley was interested in pushing the project ahead quickly, however the Fort William men wanted to take a longer development approach. Before Stanley left Fort William the next day, it was agreed that he would design an 18 hole plan. However he left behind cost estimates of \$29,200 for the development of an initial 9 holes. The execution of the construction of those 9 holes was to be carried out by one of Stanley's men (likely Major Howard Watson) for \$300.00 per

* Hogarth died in 1950 but in 1965 his widow Madge purchased a large vintage stone sculpture fountain and the Hogarth Fountain was placed as a memorial in Thunder Bay's Waverley Park.

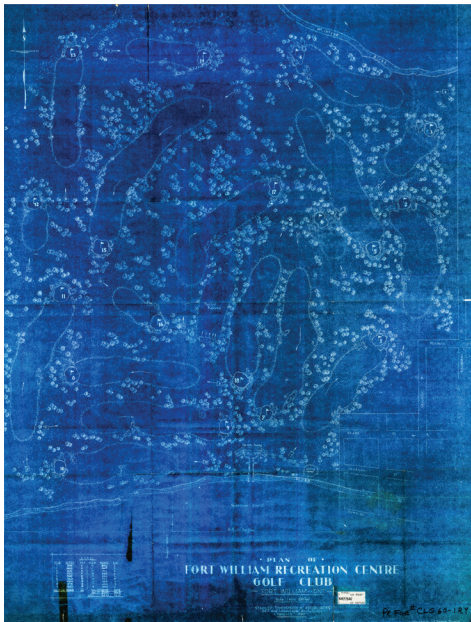
month plus expenses. Stanley further told them that his design fee “would be \$1,500 but normally this would run in the vicinity of \$5,000 to \$6,000.” One is only left to speculate why Stanley cut his fee in this instance, however Robert Trent Jones is quoted in 1974 as saying; “He would even cut his fee to sell a job ... he would use this tactic in maintaining members of his staff to whom, oftentimes, he fell five and six months in arrears in payment of wages.” Stanley continued on his travels to Edmonton AB but after he left, a formal decision was arrived at in Fort William to engage him to design the golf course. A wire was sent to Stanley in Edmonton on May 17 arranging a further meeting in Fort William. Stanley, who had a penchant for being put up in fancy digs, on his return trip east from Edmonton attended a luncheon meeting held at The Royal Edward Hotel in Fort William on May 23, 1947. The golf course layout was discussed with Chairman Spence, S. T. McCavour, Mayor Anderson, Ald. Booth and City Engineer W. E. MacLennan. After the luncheon meeting Stanley and several of the men walked the future golf course site near the Neebing River.



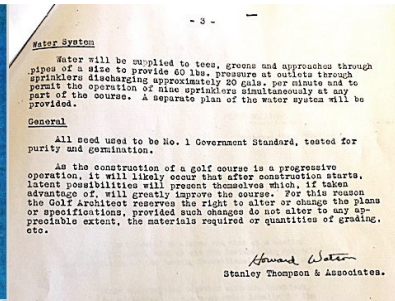
Stanley Thompson circa 1947

THE GOLF COURSE PLANS

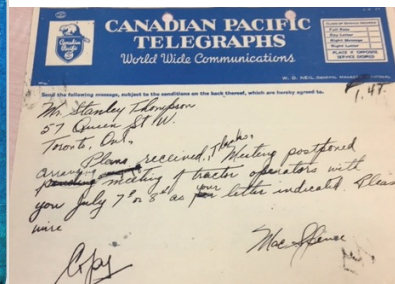
Following the May meetings with Stanley Thompson a telegraph was later sent to Stanley confirming that his plans had been received in Fort William. The telegram anticipates a further visit by Stanley in the summer of 1947. Further, a comprehensive three page document titled ‘Specifications and General Details Covering Construction of 18 Hole Layout, Fort William, Ontario’ dated July 1947 was received in Fort William over the signature of Howard Watson.



The rediscovered 1947 architectural plans



Detailed outline of construction specifications



Confirmatory telegram

Construction of the golf course occurred through the remainder of 1947 and 1948. In February 1949 the Neebing Recreation Centre Committee passed a motion to change its name to the Chapple Memorial Recreation Centre. Clement Chapple's widow Annie cut the ribbon to officially open the 9 hole golf course on July 16, 1949. Since opening the golf course has been known as Chapples Golf Course.

BEYOND STANLEY THOMPSON

Stanley died in early 1953 and it is not known if he ever returned to see the finished product. However, after the opening of the golf course a golf pro was hired who was a "very fine and likeable chap, but unfortunately through no fault of his own, secured the position of Golf Pro in preference to a Golf Superintendent". The result was that the golf course "became a problem in 1956, due as I see it, to inexperience and lack of maintenance knowledge" according to a desperate sounding letter written by Mac Spence to the Agronomist at Toro Manufacturing after hearing him speak about golf course maintenance at a conference in Minneapolis. In his letter, Spence tells of filling certain gullies and shortening some of the holes in the fall of 1956. Presumably, the maintenance problems were thereafter soon resolved. Plans to build the second nine holes were contemplated as early as 1960. In October of that year, a Mr. Oliver was in Fort William to judge the local flower show. Oliver who worked for the Department of Agriculture in Ottawa stated that ... "years ago he was a design consultant with Mr. Thompson, well known Golf Architect in Canada." Oliver offered to provide some ideas about expanding Chapples GC.

In the years after the 9 hole golf course opened, the ringed Chapple Road was constructed and within the area enclosed by that ring upgraded tennis courts, soccer pitches, and baseball diamonds were all built. In the process, the land for holes 7,8,12,15,16, and 17 from Stanley's 1947 architectural 18 hole plan were sacrificed. Between 1971 and 1973 the golf course was expanded to 18 holes with three holes that seem to be from Stanley's original drawings plus six brand new holes.

Today Chapples GC is a well conditioned Thunder Bay city owned golf course that provides enjoyment and challenge to golfers of that city. Below its surface lies most of the bones of a 1947 Stanley Thompson original design. It would appear that 12 of Stanley's original hole routes and green sites are still in play. Stanley Thompson has been recognized as a Person of National Historic Significance by the government of Canada and Chapples GC can now rightly take its place in the family of Stanley Thompson golf courses. Finding an original Stanley Thompson blueprint is sometimes referred to as finding the 'holy grail' by those who study the career of Stanley Thompson and Chapples GC is fortunate in this regard. There is undoubtedly more to learn about this historic and exciting find.

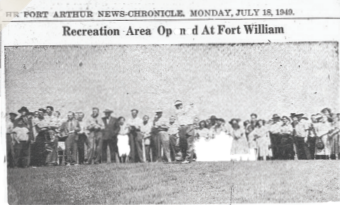
CELEBRATING

70

CHAPPLES
GOLF COURSE

TODAY CHAPPLES GOLF COURSE IS A WELL CONDITIONED THUNDER BAY MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE THAT PROVIDES ENJOYMENT AND CHALLENGE TO GOLFERS.

Below its surface lies most of the bones of a 1947 Stanley Thompson original design, with 12 of his original hole routes and green sites still in play. Stanley Thompson has been recognized as a Person of National Historic Significance by the Government of Canada and Chapples Golf Course can now rightly take its place in the family of Stanley Thompson golf courses.



— THE *grand* OPENING —

On July 16, 1949, Clement Chapple's widow Annie cut the ribbon to officially open the 9 hole golf course. Between 1971 and 1973 the golf course expanded to 18 holes with 3 holes stemming from Stanley's original drawings plus 6 brand new holes. Since opening, the golf course has been known as Chapples Golf Course.



CLEMENT E. CHAPPLE HAD MOVED TO THUNDER BAY IN 1909 AND SEEING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPANSION, TOOK A CHANCE AND LEASED THE ENTIRE MAIN FLOOR AND BASEMENT OF THE GRAIN EXCHANGE BUILDING.

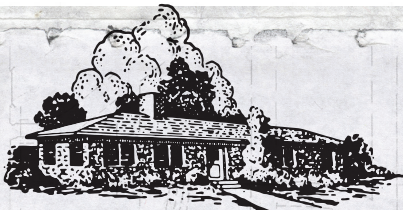
By 1941, Clement Chapple had achieved great business success and was now Chairman of the Fort William Town Planning Board.

Upon recommendation of the Board, the city of Fort William took ownership of 331 acres of land around the Neebing River with the intention that it be used to create a recreation area. After 1942, with the Second World War underway, plans seemed to stall but that all changed on January 25, 1947 when Clement E. Chapple wrote to city officials and pledged \$5,000.00 per year for five years for the development of the Neebing Recreation Centre.

THE YEARS AFTER: CHAPPLE'S LEGACY

Sadly, Clement E. Chapple died in April 1947 and he would not live to see his dream come to fruition. However, with funding in place, the wheels began to turn for the project.

The Chapple Store was sold to the Great West Saddlery company in 1959. Competition forced the store's closing in December 1981. It is said that there are still residents of Thunder Bay who fondly remember Chapples window displays, especially those at Christmas time.



COURSE DESIGNER
Stanley

THOMPSON

STANLEY HAD BUILT THE FORT WILLIAM COUNTRY CLUB IN THE MUCH EARLIER AND HEADIER YEAR OF 1924 SO HE WAS FAMILIAR WITH FORT WILLIAM

In 1947, while passing through Fort William and Port Arthur, Stanley met with the Recreation Committee and Chapple's personal representative where they discussed Chapple's grant to the city and the development of a golf course. Stanley was instantly intrigued, agreeing to design an 18 hole course. Before leaving on his travels he left estimates for the development of the initial 9 holes.



New Golf Course Officially Opened

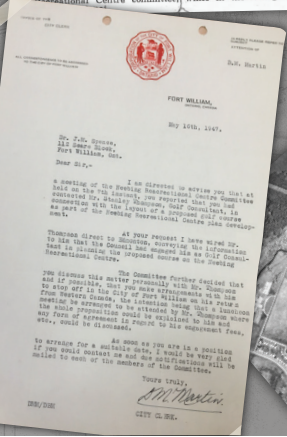


Mrs. C. E. Chapple, widow of C. E. Chapple, is shown above as she cut the ribbon to officially open the new 9-hole golf course, Saturday, which comprises the first unit of the Chapple Memorial Recreational Centre on the Neening river, east of the Fort William Recreational Centre on the Neening river, east of the Fort William Recreational Centre committee, while in the background is Mayor



THE FINAL AGREEMENT

While travelling to Edmonton a formal decision was made to engage him to design the course. On May 23, 1947, a luncheon meeting in Fort William with Stanley and city officials was held at the Royal Edward Arms hotel to discuss the course layout. After the meeting, Stanley and several of the men walked the future golf course site near the Neening River. In February 1949 the Neening Recreation Centre Committee passed a motion to change its name to the Chapple Memorial Recreation Centre.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SOURCES

Credit for the discovery of the original Stanley Thompson documents goes to the sharp eye of Pat Berezowski, Supervisor of Golf Operations, City of Thunder Bay. Recognition of his passionate pursuit to find more original documents also goes to B. J. Skinner, Lead Hand superintendent, City of Thunder Bay. This article relied mainly on those original City of Thunder Bay documents.

Thanks go to Thunder Bay Corporate Strategic Services for providing editorial suggestions and to the Thunder Bay museum director for the following source: Thunder Bay from Rivalry to Unity, Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp, Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society, 1995, p. vii

An important additional source was; 'The Chapple Building' from '[the Walleye: Thunder Bay's arts and culture alternative](#)'. Story by Laurie Abthorpe, Photos by Brooke Towle. Laurie Abthorpe is the heritage researcher for the Heritage Advisory Committee, which advises Thunder Bay City council on the conservation of heritage buildings, sites and resources, and their integration into development. The article was retrieved at www.thewalleye.ca:the-chapple-building.webloc.

Also, an article titled 'Chapples Had Humble Beginnings: Where Legends Live On' by Diane Imrie, from The Chronicle Journal, The Newspaper of the Northwest, July 7, 2016 was extremely helpful.

The quotation from Robert Trent Jones comes from; 1974, June 17 [Jones Recalls His Madcap Partner](#), by Marv Moss. *Montreal Gazette*, Montreal QC.

This article is written in the style of the 2018 book [Stanley Thompson and Icons of Canada; A History and a Biography](#) and serves as 'missing text'. The book by Dr. James Harris is available at www.stanleythompsonociety.com