

## **Draft statement of Significance for the E.V. Buchanan Thames Valley Golf Course**

November 27, 2013

### **Legal Description of Property**

The E.V. Buchanan Thames Valley Golf Course, bounded by the Thames River, Hyde Park Rd., Riverside Drive, and Sunninghill Rd is legally described as located at 850 Sunninghill Avenue; Concession C, Part Lot 24, Plan 360, Lots 1,2, 13-20, Part Lots 10-12, Forest Closed Plan 534, Part Block A Part Sunninghill Ave.

### **Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest**

The Thames Valley Golf Course possesses cultural heritage value as the site of the former Ward's Hotel, as part of the early water reservoir system for London, as one of the earliest community public golf courses in Ontario and also as a World War II Army training facility. In relation to the public golf course the site has an historic association with both E.V. Buchanan and John Innes. Through Buchanan's efforts, the Thames Valley Golf Course is significant as the first publicly owned course in London and one of the earliest publicly owned and operated golf courses in Ontario

The historical interest of this site dates to 1848 when the John Ward family received a land grant from Colonel Thomas Talbot. In 1878, the Board of Water Commissioners expropriated 'water rights' on the Ward property. They used the underground springs to construct wells which connected, via pipe, under the river to the Springbank Pump House as part of the project to supply the City of London's growing demands for water.

The construction of a dam in 1878 to facilitate the pumping of water for the new city water works raised the water levels on the Thames sufficiently to make boating and other recreational activities popular along this stretch of the Thames where a new park system was developing. Taking advantage of these activities, Mike Ward, John's son, built a hotel in 1880, on the site of the current 17<sup>th</sup> hole of the golf course. The hotel's dock was a stopping point for the boats that ferried Londoners to the new Springbank Park, including the ill-fated Victoria, and the hotel became the centre for summer sports including a boating regatta. The hotel was demolished in 1923.

E.V. Buchanan (1887-1987) a Scottish emigrant had joined the Water Commission in London as an engineer and had been promoted to General Manager of the Commission by 1915. He held that position until 1952. On a trip to the United Kingdom, accompanied by a friend, Thomas Adams, a noted international town planner, Buchanan had observed the number of public golf courses along Britain's riverways and returned to Canada with the determination to build one in London. The land suggested was the 100 acres, already owned by the Public Utilities Commission, located on the north bank of the Thames opposite the Springbank Pumping Station.

Buchanan's vision and fundraising efforts saw the development of a small golf course funded, at no cost to London taxpayers, by local Rotarians, teachers and prominent community members. The original six holes were designed by John Innes, a veteran of World War I and another Scots migrant. Innes held the position of Golf Professional at Thames Valley for 33 years and was later recognized for his humanitarian contributions including his Chairmanship of the Annual Poppy Campaign in 1954.

The official opening day was June 14, 1924. Due to demand for play on the course, before the end of the year, three more holes were added. By 1926, the season opened with the course having expanded to 18 holes. With additional land acquired from the Dignan and Ward families in 1931, the main 18 hole course was supplemented with a second 9 hole course. The official opening match of the expanded course took place on July 29, 1933 and featured an exhibition match between four notable golfers: pros, Joe Kirkwood and Gene Sarazen, and local area amateurs, Sandy Sommerville and Jack Nash.

As public transit to the golf course was via the London Street Railway to the station in Springbank Park, the first clubhouse was located in the waterworks pump house across the river and accessed by a shaky oil barrel bridge or flat bottomed boat pulled by wire across the river. A steel suspension bridge, built in 1928, was paid for by golfers' fees to link to the electric street car station. A new clubhouse was constructed in 1930; it later was purposely destroyed by fire to allow for the construction of a new clubhouse in 1967/68 which still stands today.

Golf operations were shut down when the Thames Valley Golf Course was leased by the Department of National Defence for military use during 1940-45 for training as many as 2000 soldiers at a time. This required the construction of water, sewer and cooking facilities. After the war, the golf course was reclaimed, after much clean up and grooming, to reopen in 1946.

In a fitting tribute, the course was renamed in 1983 “the E.V. Buchanan Thames Valley Golf Course“ in honour of his service as General Manager of the London Public Utilities Commission from 1915 to 1952.

In 1992, the layout of the course reverted to the layout used between 1933-1972 with the regulation Classic 18 and the 9 hole Hickory Course.

The E. V. Buchanan Thames Valley Golf Course forms a significant part of the landscape and park system that borders the Thames River, a designated a Canadian Heritage River. Springbank Park and Thames Valley Golf Course were the forerunners of an extensive network of parks, trails, paths and green spaces which Londoners enjoy today along the Thames River. The site combines designed landscapes with natural beauty, recreation and heritage.

#### **Description of Heritage Attributes**

The Thames Valley Golf Course derives its heritage attributes from the historical and built heritage values associated with pioneer establishment and urban development and recreation usage, detailed in part as follows:

Several significant artifacts of the past are still present and deserve specific mention and preservation where feasible:

- The remnants of c.1870s well structures from municipal water supply from London Water Works Reservoir system are found along the river bank in the lower portions of the course
- Remnants of the Ward’s Hotel former dock pilings remain at the river bank alongside the 17<sup>th</sup> fairway
- Remnants of the concrete foundations of showers and cookhouse show evidence of the Army’s occupation for training purposes.

**Source:** John Cowie *From Rough to Fairway: the first 85 Years of the City of London Golf Courses* (nd)