

The following is the first of a two part article of the history of Chicago Golf Club, Wheaton, Ill., the oldest 18 hole golf course in the U.S. and the site of the United States Golf Association Senior Amateur Golf Tournament on September 17-22, 1979.

GREAT NAMES, TOURNAMENTS MARK CHICAGO GOLF CLUB HISTORY

Even though the last trace of snow melted almost a month ago, winter has left its reminder at Chicago Golf Club.

Many of the greens are temporarily blemished by what is called "snow mold" by many of today's green superintendents. Call it snow mold or plain, old "winter kill", Chicago Golf Club green superintendent Don Gerber isn't worried.

"They'll be all right", he said. "It'll just take a little rain, some warm nights, and some extra work. They'll be okay".

Gerber speaks with confidence when talking about the course, and why not? The course has been surviving the harsh northern Illinois winters southwest of Wheaton since 1894, two years after Chicago Golf Club was founded by Charles Blair Macdonald.

Spring is a season of great anticipation for those who play golf, and the members of the historic Chicago Golf Club (CGC) are no different than those who play the game at Downers Grove Golf Club, the original site of CGC, now owned and operated by the Downers Grove Park District.

The 1979 season, though, will be a little different. Chicago Golf Club, the site of the first 18 hole golf course built in the United States, is making something of a comeback. For the first time since the 1928 Walker Cup Matches, Chicago Golf Club will play host to a national tournament.

The United States Golf Association (USGA) Senior Championship will be played September 17-22 at Chicago Golf Club. Sixty years ago a national tournament was commonplace at Chicago Golf Club. From 1897 to 1912, eight USGA championships were contested at CGC, including three U.S. Opens.

The 1928 Walker Cup Matches are ancient history, but Chicago Golf Club is more contemporary than most courses built in the last five years. The club was the site of a USGA executive meeting in 1975 while the U.S. Open was being played at Medinah, and the golf course caught the fancy of the USGA's Frank Hannigan.

"For many of us, that was our first exposure to the course and that was when I got the idea of having the seniors there," said Hannigan, a tournament administrator. "It's really something...it's more than a golf course."

"The truth is, we went out after the club to host the tournament. It's a remarkably good golf course and is in generally immaculate condition. The senior championship doesn't put too much strain on the club, and we liked the quality of the golf course. It's very unique."

"It's a low-key event," explains Chicago Golf Club president Ed McGreevy. "It won't cause as much a problem as some larger events. We thought it would be good for us and wouldn't tie up the golf course much."

It's fitting that Chicago Golf Club makes its return to national exposure as host of the USGA Senior Championship. After all, Chicago Golf Club is one of the five founding members of the USGA, along with St. Andrews Golf Club of Yonkers-on-the-Hudson, N.Y.; Shinnecock Hills Golf Club of Southampton, N.Y.; Country Club of Brookline, Mass.; and Newport Golf Club of Newport, R.I.

If it hadn't been for Chicago Golf Club founder Macdonald, the Chicago area might not be the golf center it is. Macdonald learned to love the game as a young Chicagoan attending school in St. Andrews, Scotland, the birthplace of golf.

When he returned to Chicago, Macdonald lobbied vigorously among his friends to build a golf course. In 1892, after building a few holes in Lake Forest, he persuaded 30 of his friends to chip in \$10 each to buy some land near Downers Grove for a nine-hole course and form Chicago Golf Club.

Golf caught on fast in Chicago, and in 1894 Chicago Golf Club purchased 200 acres of farmland near Wheaton for \$28,000 to build the first 18-hole course in the country.

Macdonald designed the 18-hole course, and it was accepted as a championship course in 1897 when it played host to the U.S. Amateur and U.S. Open. Chicago Golf Club was a frequent stop on the tournament trail, hosting the U.S. Open in 1897, 1900, and 1911 and the U.S. Amateur in 1905 (when Robert Todd Lincoln, son of Abraham Lincoln, was club president), 1909, and 1912. The 1903 U.S. Women's Amateur also was held at Chicago Golf Club.

The club, with almost unlimited financial resources among its relatively few members, did everything possible to make its course the finest anywhere. Macdonald introduced creeping bent grass from Holland, brought sheep to graze on the course plus two horses to pull mowers, and then bought the first power mower to be used on a golf course.

Ten days before the 1912 U.S. Amateur, fire destroyed the clubhouse. But Chicago Golf Club members saved the tournament with a temporary facility that included a locker room.

Macdonald moved to New York sometime after the last Amateur. Golf changed because of improvements in equipment, and Macdonald's Chicago Golf Club course changed too. The founder was not happy about those changes.

"Nearly every change that has been made has been made for the worse and not for the better," said Macdonald in correspondence to a CGC member Oct. 17, 1917. "Chicago does not possess a golf course that compares with any of a dozen I could mention around the City of New York. And it's a pity because you have the material at hand to create a real golf course."

A "real golf course" was built a few years later with Macdonald's help. Seth Raynor, an engineer who didn't play golf, designed the new course with the help of Macdonald and the famed Chick Evans. Raynor, who combined with Macdonald in building several courses in the East, sat in the Chicago Golf Club clock tower for two days pondering the grounds.

Macdonald, who first introduced the out-of-bounds rule, and Evans helped set up tees and fairways. Evans, who won the 1916 U.S. Open and the U.S. Amateur in 1916 and 1920, hit hundreds of tee shots off prospective tees to help Raynor and Macdonald search for a "real golf course".

Earth was moved, bunkers were created, and a sophisticated drainage system was installed. Railroad cars containing 134 tons of manure, one for each acre of the course, rolled into Wheaton for the construction. In July of 1922, the first nine holes of the new course were opened and a year later the final nine was completed. The result was a 6,554-yard, par 70 course, a "real golf course".

There is a widely spread rumor that Macdonald designed the new course with almost all holes doglegging to the right. Macdonald was a slicer but

according to official club history, he didn't design the course with his shortcomings in mind even though most holes do bend right.)

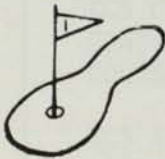
Reid Hanley
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