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**Greenskeeper battled
dandelions on course**

by Jeff Nordlund

The late John MacGregor came to the United States from Scotland in 1907 at the tender age of 20.



John MacGregor (right, center) was the greenskeeper at the Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton from 1921-1945.



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(Editor's Note: This article was written in the late 1970's, date of picture unknown. Pictured left to right: R. N. Johnson, Fred Krueger, John MacGregor, and unknown.)

He probably didn't think at the time he would spend most of his next 40 years combatting the dandelion.

But that is, in part, what MacGregor did when he became a greenskeeper, eventually serving at the Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton from 1921-45.

The dandelion was then the scourge of golf courses, and Barclay J. MacGregor of Wheaton remembers his father's efforts to rid the course of its presence.

The problem was especially critical when the club hosted the 1923 Walker Club matches with England.

"The Chicago Golf Club was proud of the course," MacGregor said. "And they wanted everything perfect."

"It was hard working for my dad then," MacGregor continued. "My brother and I were expected to work harder than anyone else. There were no such things as an eight-hour day or five-day work week."

So they worked, and despite their effort a particularly large dandelion caused a Walker Cup official to lose his golf ball — in the middle of the fairway — just prior to the start of the tournament to John MacGregor's embarrassment.

Such was the life of a greenskeeper, though.

"He was always working on something," MacGregor recalled of his father. "He was probably the first person to mow the fairways at night — and he did that during the Walker Cup matches."

Among the other achievements of the late MacGregor were the blending of a fertilizer still in use for golf fairways and a temporary (but effective) method of dealing with dandelions. The weeds were "gassed" with gasoline.

John MacGregor, who died in 1964, worked at Chicago Golf Club during the years in which the course was remodeled.

Work began in 1921. The new lay-out was completely different from the old one, and was set up to play left to right (unusual for courses of the day). The reason was the architect, Charlie McDonald, was a terrific slicer.

Manure from the stock yards was brought in and spread heavily over the new lay-out. A hydrant system was set up, the first of its kind, to water the fairways.

"We didn't use to say so," Barclay MacGregor, who once caddied there, said of the hydrants, "but we used them to tell the difference to the green easily. Each hydrant was spaced 50 yards apart, and all you had to do was count the hydrants."

In those days, one man was assigned care for two holes. He weeded, mowed and trimmed the hole — and that was a job for the entire year.

But it seems as if dandelions and pursuit of their elimination occupied a good deal of everyone's time. When spreaders proved too destructive for the fairways, John MacGregor invented a weed killer consisting of a can of gas attached to a spike.

The weeder poked the spike in the weed and gas spilled inside.

The pictures that appear with this story are reproduced from originals Barclay MacGregor plans one day to give to the county museum.

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