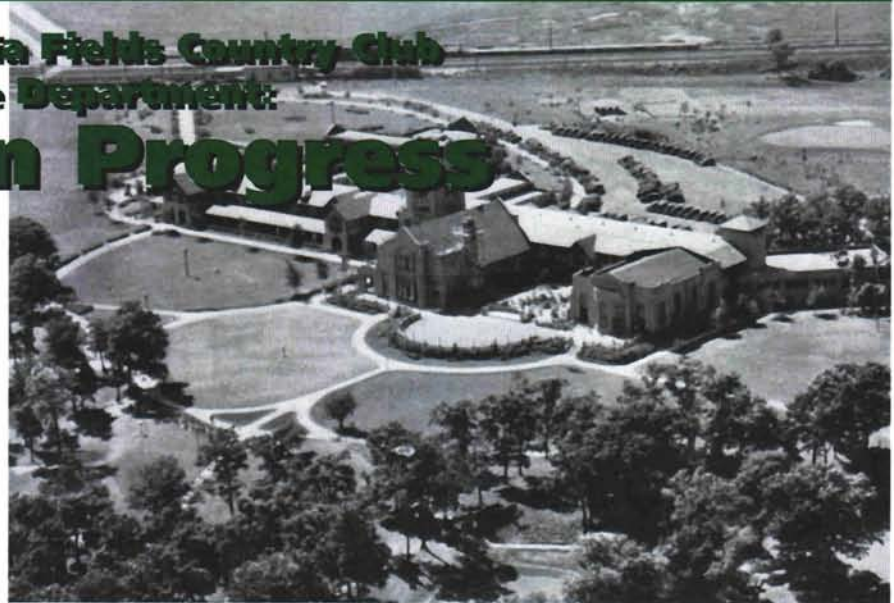


# Chronology of Olympia Fields Country Club Grounds Maintenance Department: A Work In Progress

Editors note: I had asked Dave Ward to do an article on Olympia Fields C.C. for this month. He is hosting the 1997 U.S. Senior Open on June 23 - 29. With the club being over 80 years old, I thought it would be interesting reading if Dave could find some of the club's history along with the art of greenkeeping back in "the old days." He did. I hope you will all enjoy this bit of history of the club from 1915 to 1944.



The double driveway west on 203d St. from depot, Kedzie Ave., extending to right upper corner, I.C.R.R., No.1 tee and 9th green of No.4 course may be seen beyond the autos. 18th green of No.3 course at bottom center, sunken. No.1 tee of No.1 course to left of left pathway. 18th greens on Course 1 and 2 may be seen among trees on left at bottom. Court and Dancing Pavillion and Putting Course in center.

Dave Ward  
Olympia Fields C.C.

As one approaches middle age (by some definitions, I've already been here a while), I think a natural reaction is to become a little more reflective and look back to the past much as 20-year-old looks to the future. One realizes that twenty years is a relatively short time and that events that seem like ancient history didn't happen that long ago. We are linked to greenkeeping and greenkeepers of past years whose efforts and accumulated knowledge form a basis for the profession as we know it today.

Looking back through the historical records of Olympia Fields Country Club, one can find ample information on former club officials, golf professionals, tournaments, tournament winners and even club managers. Information on the history of grounds maintenance at the club is sketchy at best.

Olympia Fields Country Club was founded in 1915; and in 1917, the club started publishing The Olympian. Several yearly compellations of the magazine were saved starting in 1923 through 1944. From these Olympians and also from talking with several people with knowledge of the club's history, including Bob Williams, Pete Vandercook, Oscar Miles and some

older club members, I have compiled the following chronology which I view as a "work in progress." I hope to write a more thorough rendition for the Olympia Fields Country Club Historian and would hope any reader would contact me with corrections, missing information, or insight into this chronology.

(continued on page 10)

### Olympia Fields Country Club Golf Course Superintendents:

JAMES FOULES, JR.	GOLF PRO/SUPERINTENDENT	1917-1920
JAMES FOULES, JR.	SUPERINTENDENT	1920-1922
FRED KRUGER		1923-1940
JOHN BOETTGER		1940-
ARCHIE BRUNS	HEAD MECHANIC/SUPERINTENDENT	-1947
JOHN DURRAH		1947-1950
ARCHIE BRUNS		1950-1953
GORDON BRINKWORTH		1953-1959
WARREN BIDWELL		1959-1964
OSCAR MILES		1964-1975
DENNIS FULTON		1975-1976
WARREN BIDWELL		1976-1982
BRIAN CHALIFOUX		1982-1987
TOM RODEMS		1988-1990
DAVE WARD		1990-

**Founding**

The year was 1913 when Charley Beach and his friend Jim Gardner departed the Illinois Central train at Flossmoor and traveled by foot to explore the land which was to become Olympia Fields Country Club. After securing small deposits from 500 prospective members, a certificate of incorporation was granted by the State of Illinois on July 16, 1915. January of 1916 saw two important events. Amos Alanzo Stagg, the famed University of Chicago football coach, was elected the first club president. Options are taken on the 674 acres that were to become the club.

The property was made up of all or parts of 20 farms. The initiation fee was \$60 with annual dues of \$20.

**Early Years  
1916**

A temporary 9-hole course with sand greens was made playable. Tom Bendelow was hired to design

*The property  
was made up of all or  
parts of 20 farms.  
The initiation fee  
was \$60 with  
annual dues of \$20.*

the No.1 course (today's South Course). Another Scotsman, Willie Watson, was employed to design the No.2 course with the two to

collaborate on the No.3 course. One of America's early golf course architects, Bendelow worked for the Chicago sporting goods firm A.G. Spalding and Sons. Bendelow had a spotty reputation as an architect, although the No.1 course at Olympia has stood the test of time. He was also the original designer of the three courses at Medinah.

**1917**

On March 7, James Foulis, Jr., born in St. Andrews, Scotland, a golf course architect/construction foreman and winner of the 1896 U.S. Open, was hired as pro/superintendent to supervise the construction of the first three courses. Foulis was trained in golf by Old Tom Morris at St. Andrews. He came to Olympia Fields from Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton. On April 6,

(continued on page 12)

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**Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....**  
(continued from page 10)

1917, the United States declared war on Germany after German submarines sank several unarmed merchant ships. As a result, the club, whose numbers had exceeded 700, lost almost half of the membership.

**1918**

Courses No.1 and No.2 opened for play in spring. Greens were seeded to fescue, the tees were turfless clay. During the summer of 1918, the war effort came first. Due to a food shortage, oats and wheat were planted on 175 acres of fairways with the women members' help in the harvest, and a Red Cross Day Golf Tournament featuring Chick Evans, Jock Hutchinson, Jim Barnes and Warren Wood was held to raise war funds. Women members were also given the chore of handweeding the greens which the club secretary described as a "waist-reducing exercise." November 11, 1918, Germany surrendered.

**1919**

In late December, Tom Kennet was retained by the club as golf professional, and James Foulis, Jr., stayed on as superintendent of grounds. Many members took the train from Chicago and stayed at the club in as many as 67 tents in an area known as the Terrace

Colony. No cooking was allowed, and quiet time started at 10:30 p.m.

**1920**

On January 16, the 18th Amendment was ratified outlawing the sale of alcoholic beverages. In August, the club hosted its first major tournament, the Western

---

*Due to a food  
shortage, oats and  
wheat were planted  
on 175 acres of  
fairways with the  
women members' help  
in the harvest.*

---

Open, over course No.1 and No.2; and Jock Hutchison, another Scot from St. Andrews and the professional at the Glenview Club, won with a score of 296. In July, course No.3 was formally opened for play. On October 3, Willie Park, Jr. was retained by the club to lay out and supervise the construction of course No.4 (North Course). Park came from a long line of Scotch golfers, his family having been identified

with the game for more than 400 years. He won the British Open in 1887 and 1889 and was one of the most respected golf course architects of his time. Park laid out the course in 1920, but work didn't begin in earnest until 1922. He spent forty days at the club during construction. His fee was unknown.

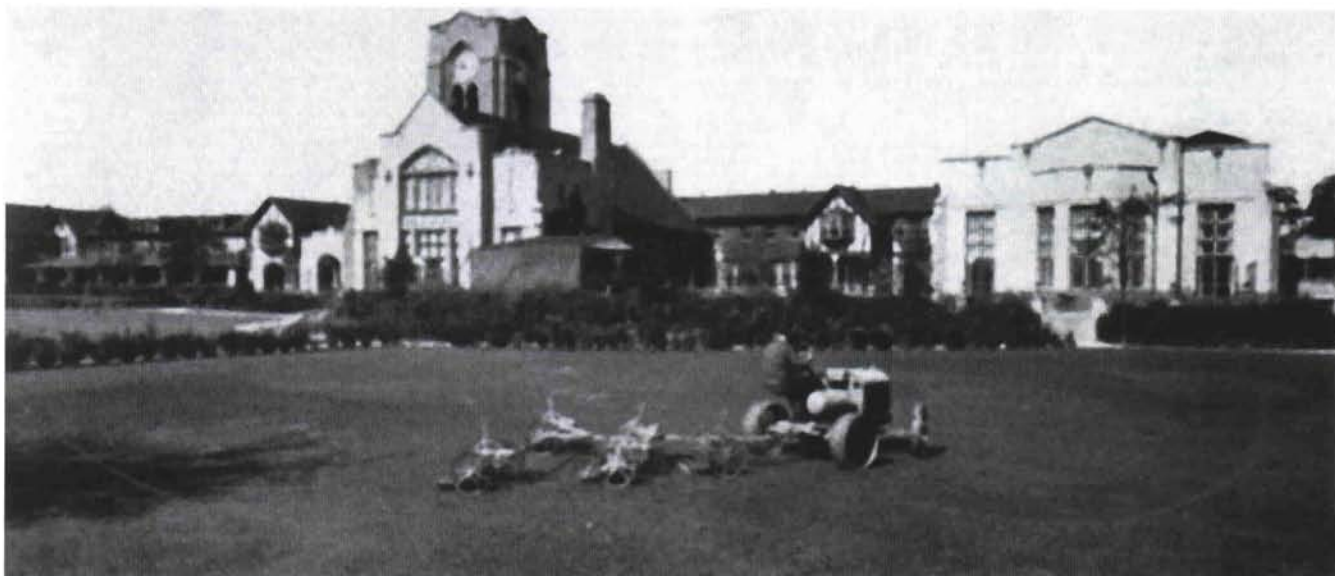
**1922**

In January, Fred Kruger, a construction expert, was hired to supervise the construction of the No.4 course. James Foulis, Jr., left the club to pursue a career as a golf course architect. Kruger was named to the superintendent position where he stayed until his death in 1940. Kruger along with John McGregor from Chicago Golf Club, one of the founding fathers of the National Association of Greenkeepers of America (NAGA), were the two biggest names in Chicago greenkeeping. Through the years, Kruger showed up in several pictures in The Olympian, always wearing a tie and white shirt. In April, the initiation fee was raised to \$415, and 5,000 trees were purchased for planting on the grounds.

**1923**

In March, the members approved the construction of a new club-

(continued on page 14)



Olympia Fields Country Club in 1925

## Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....

(continued from page 12)

house. Two plans were proposed: the "Greater Olympian Plan," which called for spending \$1.2 million on a clubhouse and various improvements to the facility; and the more modest \$500,000 "Round Table" plan proposed by a group of members, who sat at a round table in the old wooden clubhouse. (To this day the club still has a Round Table group in the men's grill known as the 73rd Hole.) The "Greater Olympian Plan" was adopted, and the present-day clubhouse was constructed. A new grounds maintenance "shed" was also built as a part of the plan. The debt would later almost cause the demise of the club. On July 25, Olympia held its first 72-hole medal play, a one-day tournament to mark the formal opening of the No.4 course. Olympia Fields became the largest golf facility in the world, with the new No.4 course recognized by experts as one of the top five courses nationwide.

The golf course was designed with irrigated greens, tees and fairways. Pipes were buried in shallow trenches in the roughs. Hose connection valves were located every 100 ft. Some fairways required over 200 ft. of hose for proper coverage. Water was supplied by six engines pumping out of the creek and required six men from sunset to sunrise. In dry summers, the creek was an unreliable source of water. The greens were constructed in a layered system with 6 in. of cinders surrounding clay tiles on the clay subsoil. The next layer was 10 in. of clay subsoil with cinders disked in. Next was a 2-in. layer of rotted manure topped off with a 10-in. layer of good prairie loam soil mixed with about three tons of humus and six tons of torpedo sand per 1,000 sq. ft. Each green cost about \$1,600 to build. (The cinder layer can still be found on original greens and still seems to move water extremely

(continued on page 16)



Ralph Johnson    Fred Krueger    John McGregor    Matt. Berzak  
Medinah           Olympia Fields    Chicago           Beverly C. C.

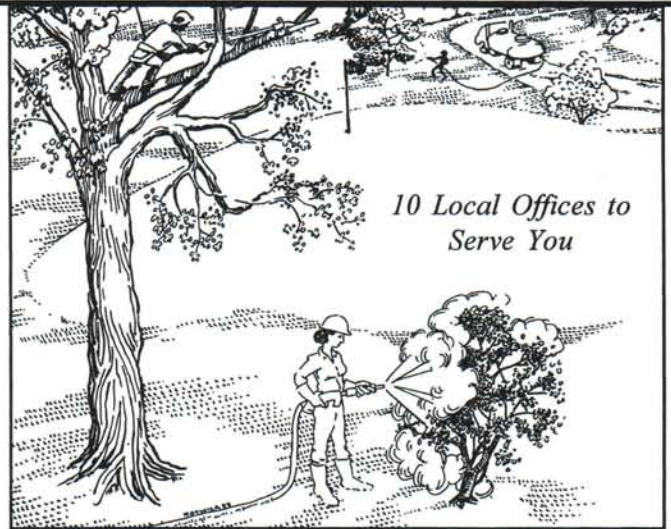
The keepers of greens and grounds have had their troubles this year. One could retire at night congratulating himself on having wonderful greens and awake the next morn to find something akin to tragedy was taking place on his precious greens.

These men whose activities mean so much to the tens of thousands of golfers, but who are not very much in evidence, no longer hide their light under a bushel, but

on the other hand hold regular meetings in the Chicago District and confer on their problems and counsel on ways and means of ending or preventing them.

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## Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....

(continued from page 14)

well.) Greens and tees were seeded to fescue and fairways to a fescue/bluegrass combination. The grounds budget was just shy of \$50,000 for four golf courses. The greens were topdressed five to six times per year and the fairways twice per year with compost. Also, the greens were topdressed once per year with torpedo sand.

### The Good Years 1924 to 1930

These years were the most prosperous of the club's early history. By 1927, there were 1,064 members; initiation fees were \$1,210 with annual dues of \$180.

### 1924

In the fall, greens on course No.3 were stolonized with stolons purchased from River Road Nursery in Virginia. At the same time, a three-acre turf nursery was established near the 3rd hole of the No.4 course using Washington Bent stolons from Flossmoor Nurseries, Inc. The bent was to be used for sodding the greens on the No.4 course in the fall of 1925. The Flossmoor Nurseries, Inc., was owned by a Flossmoor Country Club pro/greenkeeper H.J. Collis and Olympia member H.B. Smead. Collis, born in England, came to Flossmoor in 1906. He patented a sod cutter and eventually developed a strain of bentgrass which he named after Flossmoor Country Club. He collaborated with Olympia pro Jack Daray to design and remodel several courses in the Chicago area. Prior to World War I, most bents planted in the USA were from seed harvested in Germany, a source that was shut off during and after World War I. The remaining clay tees on course No.1, No.2 and No.3 were planted to turf.

### 1925

John T. Scopes was arrested for teaching Darwin's Theory of

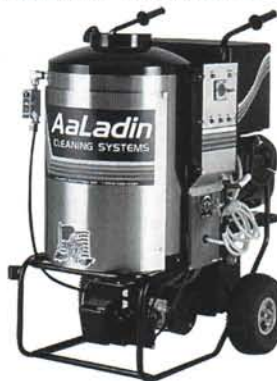
(continued on page 18)



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### Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....

(continued from page 16)

Evolution. The USGA Green Section challenged anyone to show them a fescue green more than five years old in good condition. The Olympia Fields Board voted to ban canvas tents in the Terrace Colony; all structures must now be wooden. The average grounds budget for a Chicago area 18-hole course was about \$20,000. The Olympia Fields grounds budget grew to \$75,299 (\$51,000 of which was labor). Fred Kruger's salary was \$4,772 plus a house on the course.

1925 was a tough year for green-keeping due to disease. Large brown patch and small brown patch (dollar spot) severely damaged greens in the Chicago district. USGA research found that mercury solutions controlled the disease but at \$15 per green per application was cost-prohibitive to most clubs. Interestingly, *pythium* is not men-

tioned. (I think it may have been lumped together with large brown patch since the diseases would occur under the same weather conditions.) In August and September, the No.4 course closed for play due

---

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application was  
cost-prohibitive to  
most clubs.*

---

to the disease outbreak and the need to have the greens ready for the 1925 PGA. On September 25,

Walter Hagen defeated Bill Mehlhorn 6 and 5 in the match play finals of the PGA Championship on course No.3 and course No.4. Greens on the No.4 course were sodded to the Washington strain of the Flossmoor Nurseries bentgrass in late September and October.

### 1926

Following the lead of Ravisloe Country Club, the Board of Governors voted to switch from sand mound tees to the popular wooden tees, eliminating the need to keep a sand box on each tee.

### 1927

Charles Lindbergh flew solo from New York to Paris. Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs.

### 1928

Another disastrous year for Chicago area greenkeepers due to turf diseases. On June 21 through June 24,

(continued on page 20)

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**Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....**  
(continued from page 18)

the U.S. Open Championship was played on the Olympian's No.4 course. Johnny Farrell and Bobby Jones tied at 294 after 72 holes. Farrell won a 36-hole playoff by 143 to 144. Of the 141 contestants, Ed Dudley's 68 was the only score to break No.4's par 70.

**1929**

After the recent poor years for greenkeepers, the Chicago area got a greens laboratory. Guy Peters, Olympia green chairman from 1924 through 1928, newly-appointed Green Chairman of the Chicago District Golf Association, along with the Midwest Greenkeepers Association helped arrange for the installation of turf plots in the fall of 1928. The plots were laid out on the estate of A.D. Lasker, west of Lake Forest. (The estate included an 18-hole golf course with the highest handicap rating in the Chicago District.) Mr. Tregillus, the

head greenkeeper, maintained the plots under the direction of the USGA Green Section. In the words of Guy Peters, "The test garden is set up to serve two purposes:

**Midwest  
Greenkeepers  
Association helped  
arrange for the  
installation of  
turf plots in  
the fall of 1928.**

demonstration and experimentation. On the demonstration plots will be grown all the recognized and known strains of putting green grasses, propagated from stolons and seed, fescues, red top and blue-grasses in both pure strains and mix-

tures. Experimentation will occur on many smaller plots of all species and strains. On these plots will be tried different fertilizers, different methods of cutting and watering and different methods of treating brown patch and controlling worms, grubs and other insect pests. Weed and clover control in both fairways and greens will be studied."

In September, Guy Peters wrote an Olympian article on the problem of white clover on course No.4. Clover was a particular problem on irrigated clay soil fairways. On greens it was removed by hand labor, usually by groups of "immigrant ladies." At a joint meeting of the USGA and the CDGA Green Sections, Dr. Monteith of the Research Committee of the USGA Green Section was asked to prepare a talk on the control of clover on watered fairways. Dr. Monteith replied that since the present knowledge of the control of clover could be summarized in one word, "nothing," he would prefer a broader subject on which to speak.

October 29 was Black Tuesday. The stock market crashed after a three-year Bull Market. October was also the last month of Guy Peters' five-year tenure as grounds chairman at Olympia Fields Country Club. The maintenance budget rose to \$72,500. The Virginia bentgrass on the No.3 course greens was removed, and the greens were resodded with Washington bent from Flossmoor Nurseries, Inc. In Mr. Peter's fifth and last annual report to the members, he challenged future committees with the following recommendations, which for the most part hold true today:

*This is the fifth annual report submitted by the Chairman of this Committee. In turning over this department to my successor, I cannot resist the temptation to pass on*

(continued on page 22)

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### **Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....**

*(continued from page 20)*

certain recommendations and advice. In doing so, I realize full well that each committee learns by its own mistakes and that the advice from one committee to another is usually of more benefit to the giver than to the recipient. However, our recommendations, are:

(1) Do not neglect or lower the standard of maintenance of our golf courses. Fight with the Finance Committee, fight with the Treasurer, fight with the board of Governors, but secure an adequate appropriation for the proper maintenance of the courses. The members will support you.

(2) Keep abreast of the developments in the art of greens and course maintenance. Keep in close touch with the Greens Section of the U.S. Golf Association, and particularly the subsection recently established in the Chicago District. Remember that

every year progress is being made in methods of treating turf diseases, development of more efficient fertilizers and the propagation of new strains of grasses. Avail yourselves of all the latest knowledge in golf course maintenance.

(3) Watch your greens with never-ceasing vigilance. They are the final test of a golf course. Watch the development, perhaps doing some experimenting of your own, of velvet bent. If you can find some reasonably economical manner of propagating velvet bent and can give the members a few velvet bent greens, they will rise up and call you blessed.

(4) Continue to beautify the courses. Plant each fall at least a few trees and some shrubbery. Continue the policy of screening with shrubbery unsightly places around the courses and breaking up with trees and shrubs the open areas.

(5) Adopt and stick to a program of

fairway fertilizing. We cannot continue year after year taking everything out of the soil and putting nothing back in. Unless fertilized, in the course of time, the fairways will seriously deteriorate. They have done so at other clubs. Once lost, it takes years of time and much money to restore them.

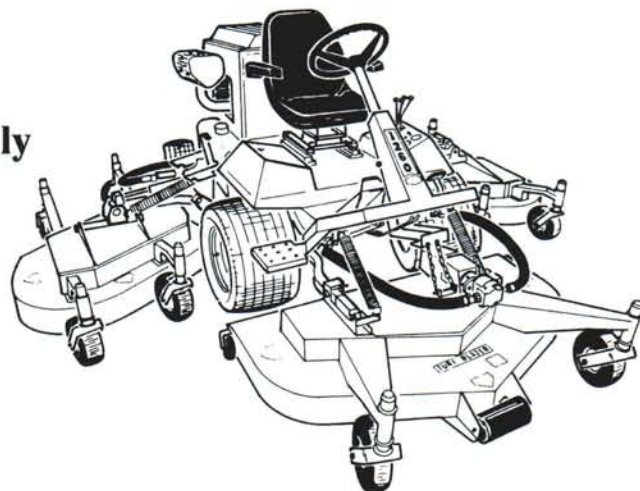
(6) When the finances of the club permit it, extend the fairway watering system to at least one other course.

(7) Insist on an adequate budget, and then for your conscience's sake try to keep within your budget. To do so will serve no purpose except your own satisfaction. After the close of the fiscal year, the auditors and the treasurer will find some way by "inventory adjustments," or the inclusion in your account of extraneous items, of making you appear to have gone over your budget. Treasurers and auditors have always done so and probably always will do so. But you yourself

*(continued on page 24)*

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### **Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....**

*(continued from page 22)*

*will have the satisfaction of knowing you have at least kept close to your budget.*

*Finally, on behalf of the committee, we wish to thank the members for their co-operation, their patient indulgence with our mistakes and their frequent kindly expressed appreciation of our efforts.*

### **The Depression Years**

#### **1930**

The 1930 growing season was marked by a severe heat and drought. Many Chicago clubs suffered extensive turf loss. Washington bentgrass greens held up better than mixed grass greens. At Olympia, 42 of the 72 greens were bentgrass and 30 were mixed grasses. Seven greens had been badly affected and needed to be rebuilt or resodded. The problem appeared after excessive moisture

was followed by excessive heat. Charles Bartlet publicized the problem in an August 4 article in the Chicago Tribune. He quoted John Megregor, greenkeeper at Chicago Golf Club and first vice-president of the National Association of Greenkeepers: "Poa annua was hit hard on the greens because of its shallow roots and also because of close cutting." Nineteen-thirty was the driest season on record and was the year many considered the beginning of the Dust Bowl. In November 1930, construction began on an 80-ft. toboggan slide and a skating rink to inaugurate a winter sports program. By December 1930, there had been 1,300 bank closures nationwide since the stock market crashed.

#### **1931**

Grounds expenditures for the year totaled \$67,815. Nineteen thirty-one was considered the hottest on record and was another poor year

for Chicago greenkeepers.

#### **1932**

September 30, Superintendent Fred Kruger's house burned down.

#### **1933**

January 30, Adolph Hitler became chancellor of Germany. In March, FDR launched the New Deal. In June, irrigation was installed on the fairways of course No.1 by the Olympia grounds crew. Steel pipes were buried down the center of the fairway with snap valves every 100 ft. so that no more than 50 ft. of hose would be needed for coverage. Trenches were hand dug about 1 ft. deep. Members were concerned about hitting a ball onto the snap valves. A club mathematician figured chances were 1 in 90,000, or once every 3,333 rounds of this happening. In August, MacDonald Smith won the Western Open, held on the No.4 course, with a 280. In December, Prohibition ended.

*(continued on page 28)*

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## Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....

(continued from page 24)

### 1934

The grounds budget was reduced to \$46,000. Each member was asked to donate \$20 to install fairway irrigation on No.2 and No.3 courses. About 80% of the 745 members participated. The new systems were installed in the fall at a cost of \$15,000. Thirty-three thousand feet of welded steel pipe were installed by the grounds crew. Nineteen thirty-four was another dry year during the worst of the Dust Bowl. The Bird and Forestry Committee, active since 1917, was abolished with responsibilities going to the Grounds Department.

### 1935

A membership drive was started offering \$150 initiation fee and no dues for a year. Grubs became a problem on fairways. Professor Lunch, entomologist from University of Illinois recommended plowing up and

mechanically killing the grubs in area of two fairways on No.3 course. Seven-gang fairway units were modified to nine-gang units to save money. Greens were now mowed with three-gang mowers. The USGA Greens Sections may be abandoned due to lack of money as clubs fail to renew their memberships. The caddies threatened, but then canceled, a strike. A popular form of entertainment for the waiting caddies was boxing. A regulation ring was installed and boxing gloves were provided.

### 1938

The club reorganized about \$500,000 worth of debt left over from the "Greater Olympia Plan" for the construction of the clubhouse. Superintendent Fred Kruger won first prize at the National Greenkeepers Association Convention in Cincinnati for a 3-D model reproduction of the 13th hole of the North Course. The model was formed on a 3x3 ft.

board with a scale of 4 ft. = 1 in. with greens, traps, tees, trees, etc. After many years of debate, the club installed a swimming pool for \$25,000.

### 1939

DDT was discovered by a Swiss scientist.

### 1940

Fred Kruger died in August. A memorial tree was planted in his honor. (The location of the tree is not known.)

### 1941

John Boettger was hired as grounds superintendent. (Boettger would later move to Idlewild Country Club, Joliet Country Club and then the Park Forest municipal course.) Boettger worked for Fred Kruger for twenty years. He was assisted by Melvin Warnecke who went on

(continued on page 30)

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**Chronology of Olympia Fields C.C....**  
(continued from page 28)

to be a superintendent of some fame in the Atlanta area. Warnecke was a fifteen-year grounds employee and may have been married to Fred Kruger's daughter. The grounds budget was \$48,000, and the crew numbered 48 men. Fairways were cut every other day, with the sicklebar mower used for roughs. One tractor was equipped with headlights for night spraying. Eight power mowers and seven hand mowers were used for cutting greens and tees. Fungicide treatments were applied bi-weekly. Arsenate of lead was used for grub control.

**December 7, 1941**

Pearl Harbor was attacked; the United States was at war!

**The War Years**  
**1942**

The first controlled nuclear reaction occurred in a laboratory under the grandstands at Amos Alanzo Stagg Field at the University of Chicago.

**1943**

Olympia Fields Country Club was in poor financial conditions. The club could not pay off its reorganized debt. Membership was down due to the war. Many people considered playing golf unpatriotic. There was a golf ball shortage due to the rationing of rubber. Old golf balls were collected and remanufactured. The USGA began an advertising campaign to promote golf as a patriotic activity to keep people physically fit...as long as a horse-drawn vehicle or public transportation was used to get to the golf course. Pierce Vandercook, Pete Vandercook's father, became a member of the Olympia Fields Country Club Green Committee. Of the original 500 charter members, only 21 were left after 33 years. Club officials decided to sell off about half of the club's property, leaving two courses. The fourth course, now the North Course,

remained intact. The No.1 course (South) was modified using some of the holes of No.2 and No.3 courses.

**1944**

The club was in the process of reorganizing. The original plan for rerouting the South Course was altered. Holes 1 and 18 of the No.2 course became 8 and 9 of the South Course. Holes 5 and 6 of the No.1 course were abandoned; and No.7, a short par 4, became a 200 yard par 3. Number 1 and 18 of the No.3 course became the practice range. Members raised \$300,000 to save the club.

**June 6, 1944**

D-Day. The Allies landed at Normandy. ■

**Director's Column**

(continued from page 4)

due to the terrific support, we had an expanded menu. Thanks again to the vendors who made this possible.

In closing, I hope everyone has enjoyed the "off season" and prepared themselves for the upcoming golf year. I know being a more active member of the MAGCS has made my job more rewarding, and I encourage anyone interested to become more involved. A few Ed Braunsky jokes is a small price to pay for all that the MAGCS has to offer. ■



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