



1895

Charles Macdonald brought golf to Chicago with his makeshift course in Lake Forest in 1892. In 1895, he won the inaugural U.S. Amateur.

1899

Tom Bendelow arrived in Chicago in 1899, and designed the great majority of his approximately 600 courses while here.

1900

The Onwentsia Club in Lake Forest was an outgrowth of the Farwell Estate course. The photo shows its original clubhouse in 1900.

What Macdonald Wrought Golf at 125

By Tim Cronin

It was 125 years ago that Charles Blair Macdonald, a 36-year-old Canadian long transplanted to Chicago and schooled at the University of St. Andrews, convinced a buddy to let him plant a few tomato cans in the grounds of the estate of the buddy's father-in-law in Lake Forest.

The father-in-law either went along with the silliness or had no idea of the endeavor, but Macdonald proceeded to do so in April of 1892. He then took a golf club in hand, teed a perfectly good gutta-percha ball on a tuft of sand, and proceeded to whack it directly into Lake Michigan.

With that offering to the golf gods, the game, however primitive, was afoot in Chicago and vicinity. This year, we celebrate the quasiquintennial of that humble beginning.

Macdonald's buddy was novelist Hobart Chatfield Taylor. His father-in-law was former Sen. Charles B. Farwell. The course, from seven to 10

holes, depending on whose reminiscence one gives the most weight, was laid out on Farwell's Fairlawn estate.

Wrote Chatfield-Taylor in 1905, "Absurd it would seem to the golfer of to-day, but when Urban H. Broughton and the writer drove off in a blinding rain storm for the first game on that ridiculous course, and I tore up a divot the size of my hand and managed to send the ball about 10 feet, I confess that a hundred yards looked as formidable as a mile would to-day."

Let Chatfield-Taylor, then, hold the title of Chicago's first frustrated golfer. Countless others have followed since. He soon discovered that besides Broughton, an Englishman who already knew the game, his friends and neighbors were also intrigued by it.

"With merciless intent I managed to slip a club into the hands of each of these guileless Lake Foresters - business men for the most part - and tee a ball," he wrote. "In about three Saturday afternoons the town was conquered, and before the summer had passed Chicago converts began flocking to the course among the trees."

Quickly came the following: Chicago Golf Club, organized by Macdonald at Belmont, located, more or less, on the property that today is graced by Downers Grove Golf Course, a nine-hole course all can play. The Lake Forest Golf Club, nine holes at the edge of town, replaced the Fairlawn layout and allowed the Farwells to get some peace. Barely a year later, with LFGC bursting

with interest, there was a move across Green Bay Road to more spacious grounds, which were quickly named the Onwentsia Club, with no less than Chatfield-Taylor the first president.

By then, it was 1895, and already, Chicago Golf Club had moved to Wheaton, where it still holds forth on ground scouted by Macdonald. Clubs representing Riverside and Hinsdale had also come into being. By 1899, there were 30 courses in the area, including nine holes open free to the public at Jackson Park. The formidable first tee, about where the back of the Museum of Science and Industry stands today, demanded a drive over the lagoon to a distant fairway, perhaps the most intimidating opening shot in the history of Chicago golf.

Organization came in the form of the Western Golf Association, which codified the schedule of club tournaments and held its own Western Amateur and Western Open. Those would instantly become the second-most important of their kind on the national calendar, behind only the U.S. Amateur and U.S. Open.

The popularity of Jackson Park brought the common man into golf, and nowhere was this notion more fervently embraced than Chicago. A second course opened at Jackson Park in 1901, and in short order courses opened in Zion, in Elgin's Wing Park, in Garfield Park, in the infield of the Harlem Race Track in what is now Forest Park, and Marquette



1916 Chick Evans made golf history in 1916 when he won both the U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur. He's here with caddie "Shorty" on the right after winning the Open at in Minneapolis.



1934 Bobby Jones (left) congratulates Oak Park Country Club head pro Horton Smith after Smith captured the first Masters Tournament at Augusta National in 1934.



1942 World War II all but stopped golf, but the CDGA, the USGA, and the PGA stepped in with the Hale America National Open at Ridgemoor in 1942, won by Ben Hogan.



1967 Jack Nicklaus eyes an iron shot en route to his Western Open title at Beverly Country Club in 1967. (Western Golf Association archives)

Park. Only the American entry into the Great War slowed the expansion of the game, and once the Kaiser had been vanquished, the American golf boom was on in earnest.

Chicago being a cliquish town, various ethnic and religious groups organized golf or country clubs along their own interests, and the early ones in the days of the horse and buggy were usually near, if not directly against, railroad lines, just as in Scotland. Thus Chicago Golf in far-off Wheaton was a quick train ride from downtown. Likewise Midlothian, founded in 1898 in the rolling farmland to the southwest of the city, where the high-profile membership – fellows named Smith, Armour, and McCormick populated the locker room – financed their own rail spur from the Rock Island Line two miles to the east.

The influence of Chicago on American golf was strong from the start, thanks to Macdonald, whose complaining about

the rules and conditions at a pair of ersatz national amateur championships led directly to the formation of the Amateur Golf Association of the United States. Almost before the ink had dried on the parchment, the group was renamed the United States Golf Association. Macdonald, whose victory in the first U.S. Amateur momentarily quelled his penchant for argument, was the USGA's key rules committeeman in talks with the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews for 18 years.

A second golf boom beginning in the teens and running until early in the Great Depression brought dozens of courses to the area, among them the multi-course golf factories called Olympia Fields, Medinah, and Cog Hill, which started with two courses and eventually expanded to four during the 1960s boom under the direction of visionary Joe Jemsek, who created the country club for the masses.

From almost the start, with stars such as Chick Evans, whose double crown of the U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur in 1916 was unprecedented, as well as Elaine Rosenthal and a galaxy of imported pros led by Jock Hutchison, made Chicago a major center of American golf. For some time, it *was* the center. The PGA of America headquartered here. The major pro championships – the U.S. Open, Western Open, and PGA – were often played here, and the CDGA became a regional leader. Chicago became the most golf-crazy town this side of St. Andrews.

Modern spectator golf was even born here. Business efficiency expert George S. May wasn't the first promoter to offer an outsized purse, but he was the first to offer \$1 tickets, put up grandstands, and promote relentlessly. As a result, his Tam O'Shanter tournament grew from one weekend to a carnival of two weeks featuring pro and amateur tournaments for men and women the first week, capped by

a World Championship that would eventually offer a \$50,000 first prize, and double that for 50 exhibitions by the winner. A player couldn't make that for the of the fledgling Tour all season.

Perhaps most important, May also brought golf and television together, creating new fans and eventually filling the pockets of the players.

The most recent building boom is long over, but it brought players gems such as Harborside International, The Glen Club, Black Sheep, and the Highlands of Elgin. In keeping with changing times, all but Black Sheep are public courses. In keeping with ancient tradition, Black Sheep is both private and male-only. In both cases, Charles Blair Macdonald would probably approve, and surely note that for all the novelty in the game and hiccups in the business of it, the outlook was bright.

Enjoy the quasiquicentennial!



1968 Jack Nicklaus accepts the J.K. Wadley Trophy from Chick Evans after winning his second straight Western Open, at Olympia Fields in 1968. (Western Golf Association archives)



1995 Joe Jemsek led the way in upgrading the public golf experience, his capstone being the Western Open on Cog Hill's Dubsread layout for 20 years beginning in 1991.



2009 The 2012 Ryder Cup at Medinah Country Club attracted enormous galleries, and provided a surprise finish when the Europeans rallied on the back nine of Sunday's singles matches. (Tim Cronin)



2012 A changing economic climate has led to changes in golf in the 2000s, including course closures and status changes. Ravisloe Country Club, pictured here, went from private to public in 2009. (Tim Cronin)

