

# Minneapolis Golf Club

*“A Golfing Tradition”*

*Since 1916*



# **Minneapolis Golf Club**

## ***A Golfing Tradition***

*“What a beautiful course for golf” Gene Sarazen – 1959*

### **Early Years**

Eighty-five years ago in 1916 there were only two golf clubs in Minneapolis, Minikahda C.C. and Interlachen C.C. In early 1916 five members of the Minneapolis Athletic Club set plans to establish another golf club to meet the growing popularity of the game. By July the Minneapolis Golf Club was incorporated. Land was acquired and 9 holes were built on the site of present day Golden Valley C.C. The opening of play at MGC commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of August 1916. Later that year our club was approached by Hyland Homes Company to consider the purchase of a larger piece of intact farmland in St. Louis Park. The Scottish architect Willie Park Jr. had been retained to lay out the golf course. On December 9, 1916 the MGC membership voted to relocate the course we play today. The first club event, a match play vs. bogey was held on May 19, 1917. (Times change; first place won a dozen balls and second won a driver!) And, by June 19, 1917 MGC had become one of the earliest member clubs of the Minnesota Golf Association.

By 1918 MGC had 400 members and there was a regular shuttle service to and from the Minneapolis Athletic Club operating during the golf season. In September 1919 plans were initiated to build a new clubhouse to accommodate the now larger membership. The original clubhouse was a converted four-room farmhouse located near the present third tee. The new clubhouse was to be built on the Northern section of the property. It opened with a gala celebration on May 12, 1923. By 1925 the underground sprinkling system had been installed. MGC was accepted as a member of the USGA on January 19, 1927 two days after our application was received. The rolling farmland our course was built on was virtually barren of trees for a stand of oaks in the Northern section by today's tenth and eleventh holes. The magnificent trees that line our fairways today were planted during a tree-planting program in 1930.

### **Course Architects**

We all know that we play a fine golf course. This intuition is reinforced by the excellence of the course architects. Two Scots, Willie Park Jr. (1864-1925) of Musselburgh and Donald J. Ross (1872-1948) of Dornoch at different times designed and routed our course. On November 26, 1916 *The Minneapolis Tribune* wrote, “Willie Park, well known golf course architect, arrived yesterday to lay out the course of the Minneapolis Golf Club.” Recently discovered field notes of the original land survey firm show that Mr. Park routed the course in early December 1916. Mr. Ross' involvement is demonstrated thorough a routing plan of our course executed by Donald J. Ross Associates, Inc. in 1920 that was recently found by the Chair of the History Committee of the Donald Ross Society. The two routings will be framed and displayed in the grill in early 2001.

## **Willie Park Jr.**

Willie Park Jr. had a fine golf pedigree. His father won the first Open (British) Championship at Prestwick, Scotland in 1861 defeating Old Tom Morris. His grandfather, uncles and brothers were also active in the golf profession. Willie Jr. was a renaissance man of golf having been a caddie, player, greens keeper, club maker, inventor, businessman and architect. He won the Open himself at Prestwick in 1887 and at Musselburgh in 1889. In the years following his win he developed his club making business to be the second largest of the time and had operations in London and New York City. In 1896 he wrote and published the first golf instruction book by a professional, *The Game of Golf*. He followed it later with *The Art of Putting* in which he described his legendary putting technique. Although not a great ball striker he was the best putter of his day and considered himself 'stone dead' at two yards. He is quoted as saying that "the man who can putt is a match for any man." In 1910 with the advent of mass production of golf clubs Mr. Park changed his focus to golf course design.

Willie Park Jr. is considered to have been the first great golf course architect. His course design accomplishments include the championship layouts at Sunningdale (Old), Berkshire, England and Carnoustie (revision), Angus, Scotland. In 1926 Bobby Jones said of Sunningdale, "I wish I could take this golf course home with me." Park was a principal in the first purpose-built residential golf community at Huntercombe, Oxfordshire, England, incorporating a course he designed. He designed about 50 courses in the U.S. and 100 in Britain. Some others of note are Western Gailes, Gullane #2 & #3, and Luffness New (revision) all in Scotland, Maidstone Club in New York, Olympia Fields- North in Illinois and Woodway in Connecticut. Sir Guy Campbell, a fine mid-20<sup>th</sup> century designer himself, declared Mr. Park "the doyen" of architects and credited him with setting the standards adhered to by those who followed.

He was a crucial figure in adapting seemingly ill-suited heathlands into well-draining grounds for golf turf. This was important in Scotland of his day with the growth of golf and a need to create courses for golfers who lived inland and thus far from the traditional links land. At Sunningdale, Park was the first to create raised, contoured putting surfaces. His innovation developed into the sculpted greens of contemporary design. His design philosophy included the concept that "It is only fair to permit a golfer to get warmed up before severely testing his abilities." He made the most of limited construction techniques of the day by routing holes in a simple, uncluttered manner that maximized upslopes for short holes and downslopes for longer par 4s and 5s. He was known for an economy of design and presentation, as well as a distinct preference for strategic rather than penal bunkering.

## Donald J. Ross

In 1919, about the time MGC was considering relocating the clubhouse, Donald J Ross and his design assistant Walter B. Hatch were completing the revision of Willie Watson's original design of Interlachen C.C. In 1920 Donald J. Ross Associates, Inc. produced a revised routing of MGC to accommodate the relocation of our clubhouse. Their routing plan is the same course we play today. Other Ross courses in Minnesota are White Bear Yacht Club (1915), Woodhill C.C. (1916), Interlachen C.C. (1919), and Northland C.C. (1927). Donald Ross grew up in Dornoch, Scotland playing one of the world's purest links, Royal Dornoch. Much like Willie Park Jr. he became a golf professional after being a greens keeper and club maker. He also authored a book, *Golf Has Never Failed Me*. Both he and Park produced their work in the "Classic Period" of golf architecture. Ross had a genius for sound routings with very little walking required from one green to the next tee. Other trademarks include greens that invite run-up shots, but deep trouble over the green – usually in the form of fall-away slopes. He molded putting surface contours into the existing terrain. His green sites almost always put a premium on recover shots. His hole designs do not repeat from course to course because each was original and designed for the landscape.

A typical Ross design course returns to the clubhouse in two loops if possible and at the same time takes advantage of existing plateaus and high ground to facilitate natural drainage. His overall philosophy was that golf should be a pleasure not a penance so he designed courses that are playable by nearly every level of player. He avoided the use of water hazards and placed strategic but not penal bunkers. He believed that golf is to be played close to the ground and accommodated low shots in most greens by creating openings in front. He gently turned the golfer in different directions through the course. Many of his finishing holes are long par fours, often playing into a prevailing wind. Nearly all of the greens he designed slope fairly drastically from back to front and less so from side to side. Natural grasses and vegetation were allowed to flourish in out of play areas.

We are fortunate that both of the primary architects of our course shared the essential philosophy of design that produced a playable course incorporated into the natural terrain. The tees, greens and fairways we play today are approximately 60% Park and 40% Ross. Others have made minor changes to the course. In the 1950's Gunnard Johnson, MGC head professional, added the lower tier to the 4<sup>th</sup> green and eliminated the blind tee shot that previously existed on the 8<sup>th</sup> hole. Geoffrey Cornish a fine architect in his own right modified some of our bunkers and mounds and suggested tree placements in 1984 and 1988. More recently Joel Goldstand our former head professional and a respected architect moved the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway slightly to the East to accommodate a driving range in the early 1990's and added some championship tees in 1999. As Ben Crenshaw told Head Professional Dave Podas a couple of years ago: "This is a wonderful old course. Do all that you can to preserve its classic integrity."

## Golf Events

MGC has a great golfing tradition. It developed in part due to the quality design of our course. By the mid-1920's MGC was growing in local and national recognition. Local and national golf associations began to seek us out to host their championships. In 1940 after Sam Snead played an exhibition match at MGC he said that he "hoped that we would some day host a U.S. Open." Although we never received that invitation we have hosted many local, regional and national championships. The most prestigious amateur event was the Golden Anniversary (50<sup>th</sup>) U.S. Amateur in 1950. As result of holding the 1959 PGA at MGC we are in elite company as one of only 102 golf clubs in the world to have hosted a Grand Slam event (British Open, U.S. Open, Maters & PGA) since 1860. We are dedicated to continue the tradition of hosting prestigious local, and national, amateur and professional events.<sup>1</sup>

Championships we have hosted:

### **Minnesota Amateur events:**

MGA Junior Championship (1) 1924  
MGA Senior Championship (2) 1962 & '75  
MGA 4-Ball Championship (1) 1976  
MGA Amateur Qualifying (4) 1964, '68, '70' & '79  
MGA Amateur Championship (4) 1925, '36, '53, '88 & '05  
MGA Senior 4-Ball Championship (3) 1971, '82, & '90  
MWGA Match Play Championships (7) 1924, '31, '51, '58, '68, '78 & '90  
MWGA State Championship (1) 2001

### **National Amateur events:**

Western Amateur Championship (1) 1940  
USGA Amateur Championship (1) 1950  
USGA Amateur Local Qualifying (1) 1962  
USGA Junior Local Qualifying (1) 1966  
USGA Senior Amateur Local Qualifying (2) 1960 & '90  
**USGA US Girls Junior Championship**

### **Minnesota Professional events:**

Minnesota State Open (6) 1924, '27, '32, '44, '57 & '75  
Minnesota Section PGA (1) 1971  
Minnesota Golf Champions **(27) 1975-2000; 2007 - 2009**

### **National Professional events:**

PGA Championship (1) 1959  
U.S. Open Local Qualifying (4) 1965, '75, '95, '98 & '03  
USGA Senior Open Local Qualifying (1) 1985  
Dayton's Challenge (6) 1995, '96, '97, '98, '98, 99, & 2000

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<sup>1</sup> Edited 2009

## Head Professionals

The outstanding Head Professionals who have run the golf operations of MGC have made valuable contributions to our great golfing tradition. They have enriched our golf experience and provided excellent instruction and event management. As ambassadors of MGC they enhanced the club's reputation and standing in the golf community. We are fortunate to have had the following head professionals:

William Clark	1917-23
Dow George	1924-25
Ernest Penfold	1926-37
Les Bolstad	1938-45
Gunnard Johnson	1946-72
Joel Goldstand	1973-88
Dave Haberle	1989-93
Dave Podas	1994-2002
Dan Simpson	2003-Present

## Members

Our great golfing tradition has been refined by a consistently golf-centered membership that is friendly and hospitable. We have been active and progressive in support of local and national golf associations in many ways from hosting championships to active participation in the Minnesota Golf Association. It was MGC members serving on the MGA board who helped standardize and implement the computerized handicap system that was ultimately adopted by the USGA. MGC members of the MGA board also developed the idea that ultimately resulted in the Green Acres legislation in Minnesota that reduced property taxes for golf courses.

The enthusiastic enjoyment of golf at our club is legendary. At the end of the 2000 golf season MGC had 185 players with U.S.G.A handicaps of 9.9 or less. Since MGC was one of the founding clubs of the Minneapolis City League in 1926 we have won the championship frequently. The records since 1971 show MGC as the winning team in 14 of those 30 years. MGC was also a founding club of the Minneapolis Senior City League in 1933. Since then we have won 29 of the 67 championships.

In 1928 there was a movement to rename our club. The names proposed were Braeloch C.C., Kitchisibi C.C., Westmoor C.C., and the runner-up Tapawingo C.C. It seems unlikely that our golfing tradition would have fared as well if the most appropriate name, Minneapolis Golf Club, had not won out. WE can be proud that over the years hundreds of members, scores of committee and board members, numerous loyal staff members and our enthusiastic golfers maintained our mission of being, "*A golfers club for the entire family where the tradition of golf is central to all recreation.*" AS Tom Watson said after playing here in 1999: "I love this golf course. It's wonderful. This course is all you want, it has great character to it."

By: John Crowley – January 2001

In the fall of 2007, a major renovation of the golf course took place that changed and improved all of the bunkers as well as three tee complexes. Several forward tees were added as well and significant drainage work was completed. With original design work by a renowned Ross renovation architect, new bunkers were added, some original bunkers were eliminated and the remaining bunkers were realigned and repositioned. A new look was the result and it is impressive. The course improved aesthetically and the new placements of the bunkers create a course that successfully challenges the golfer of today.