

Golf's Grand Old Master

H Chandler Egan was perhaps the best player you've never heard of. And he was one of the game's most interesting, and respected, characters.

The photograph says it all. It's August 22nd 1937 and seven of American golf's most distinguished individuals are surrounding a water fountain at the Rogue Valley Country Club in Medford, OR. With a bronze profile of the man on one side, the fountain memorializes H. Chandler Egan who designed the front and back nines of Rogue Valley's 'Original Course' in 1924 and 1927 respectively. On the far left of the picture which hangs in the office of the club's general manager, Jim Norris, is Scott Chisholm the esteemed author and magazine editor, while 1940 US Open champion Lawson Little cuts a diminutive figure on the right. Between the two are Harry Cooper who had nine top-three finishes in major championships, writer Grantland Rice, Jimmy Thomson - the long-hitting John Daly of the 1930s, two-time Masters champion Horton Smith and, fourth from the left, the immortal Bobby Jones.

They had come from hundreds of miles away to play a handful of West Coast tournaments and also to honor not just the man who designed Rogue Valley, of course, but a great golfer and a great man, one whom relatives, a couple of generations on, recall as a humble, mild-mannered gentleman. Known to those close to him as 'Chan', and to most others as 'The Grand Master', Henry Chandler Egan was the sort of man who made friends and admirers out of just about everyone he met. But how did he win friends as illustrious as Jones, and why did the greatest amateur golfer in history, not to mention all the other renowned individuals in the photo, feel compelled to travel so far in order to pay their respects?

Egan's story is a fascinating one that surprisingly few people, even among hard-core golfers, are familiar with. But, as Jim Allen of Palatine, IL, says, the more you delve into the history books to research this native of Chicago, the more intriguing his life becomes. Allen's great great grandfather was Egan's grandfather's brother. 'I guess that makes me a very distant relative, sort of a shirttail cousin,' says Allen who started looking into his family's history about five or six years ago. 'I soon came across this man who had been an amateur golf champion in the early 1900s.'

A golfer himself, Allen began focusing his research on Egan but found progress hard to come by. 'It's been hard work and painfully slow at times because not many people know anything about him,' he says. 'Obviously, his daughter Eleanor who is now in her mid-90s and her two sons, Chandler and Morris, have been a vital source of information, and folks at Waverly CC, which he redesigned in 1930, and Eugene CC, whose old course he started building in 1924, have certainly helped. But really, he remains something of a mystery.'

Indeed, apart from an article by Egan's good friend, the 1916 US Open and US Amateur champion, Charles 'Chick' Evans entitled 'A Star for 30 Years' which appeared in the March 1930 edition of 'American Golfer', a story by reporter Tim Trower in a 2003 edition of the Medford Mail Tribune and a few pages from Todd Schwartz's book 'Breaking 100 - Eugene Country Club's First Century', Allen has unearthed very little that was written about him.

What Allen and golf historians *do* know is that in the early 20th century there were few better golfers, amateur or professional, anywhere in the world. He was born in 1884 to a

wealthy family, his father a successful rose grower, his grandfather an Irish doctor who had arrived in Illinois in 1833 and who is considered one of the Windy City's founding fathers. Egan first played golf in 1896 in Lake Geneva, WI, where his family had a holiday home. The next summer, he and his brother along with friends from the neighborhood built a nine-hole course bisecting lawns and crossing into the Egan's cow pasture.

In 1899, Egan's father joined Exmoor Country Club and it wasn't long before his son began showing a considerable talent for the game. Soon after starting at Harvard in 1902, Egan was made captain of the golf team which, later that year, won the Intercollegiate Division 1 Championship, Egan also taking individual honors. He then beat cousin Walter Egan in the Western Amateur Championship at Chicago Golf Club's eight-year-old course in Wheaton, the first 18-hole layout in the US. His Harvard team won the next two Division 1 titles as well and, in 1904, Egan also won his second Western Amateur and first US Amateur Championship after beating Fred Herreshoff, 8 and 6, in the final at Baltusrol. He also won team gold and individual silver at the Olympics in St Louis (the last time golf was part of the Games), the gold medal going to 46-year-old Canadian George Lyons who outwitted and outlasted his younger opponent in torrential rain, ultimately running out a 3&2 winner. In 1905, Egan won a third Western Amateur and defended his US Amateur crown at Chicago GC with a 6 and 5 victory over D.E. Sawyer. The rate at which Egan collected cups and medals slowed considerably over the next four or five years, however. A fourth win in the Western Amateur in 1907, and a runners-up finish at the US Amateur at Chicago GC two years later (he was beaten in the final 4&3 by Robert Gardner) were the highlights of a relatively unproductive period in Egan's life, on the golf course at least. Away from the game, it was a different story though as Egan graduated from Harvard, started selling insurance presumably to fund his golf, and was becoming romantically involved with a Ms. Nina McNally, daughter of James McNally, the younger brother of the co-founder of Rand McNally.

On June 29th 1910, the two were wed at St. Chrysostom's Episcopal Church, about three miles north of downtown. Soon after, they traveled to Oregon, a far-off part of the country that was now accessible by rail-road and which adverts in magazines and journals made very appealing. In May of the following year, Egan returned with a group of friends and, for \$75,000, purchased the Bates' brothers 115-acre orchard which reportedly produced a healthy crop of Newton and Jonathan apples and D'Anjou pears. He built a house at 2620 Foothill Rd while Nina remained behind in Illinois with Eleanor (she would be their only child), who was barely a month old.

Five weeks or so after leaving Chicago, Egan came back for the US Open at Chicago GC. It was his third appearance in the event, having played in 1904 at Glen View and 1906 at Onwentsia, both in Chicago's northern suburbs. At Chicago GC, he finished 23rd, 14 shots behind Philadelphia's Johnny McDermott who became not only the first native of the US to win the title, but also the youngest at 19.

Allen finds Egan's movements around this time somewhat confusing. 'Why, when he was near the top of his game did he leave for Oregon?' he asks. 'And why did he all but quit competitive golf and move to a town whose only course was a makeshift nine-holer? Also, why did he go to Oregon, knowing he would be back so soon for the US Open?' He admits it's all speculation, but Allen has his theories. 'I think he may have been attracted by the thought of leaving Chicago and setting up his own business in an exciting

new part of the country where he could make use of his Harvard education,' he says. 'As for Medford only having a small, crude golf course, I don't think he was overly concerned with the town's golfing facilities as he was strictly a gentleman amateur player, much like Bobby Jones after him, and was more interested in developing a successful business and providing for his young family than continuing his golf career (interestingly, Chick Evans wrote in 'A Star for 30 Years' that it was conceivable Egan felt his golf career had come to an end.) As for the US Open, being a relatively young man he probably considered himself invincible.'

Chandler Everett throws more light on the subject; 'I think his going to Oregon was a case of wanderlust,' he says. 'The railroad adverts must have made the west sound very exciting. And it was a business decision too. He now had a family that he wanted to provide for and he had horticulture in his blood so probably felt he would make a good go of it.'

It appears the move didn't turn out quite as planned, however. Piecing together the events of the next four or five years is difficult, but Everett suspects it was not an altogether happy time for the Egan's. 'I think perhaps he was too much of a city boy,' Everett says of his grandfather. 'And when my grandparents split in 1916, he sold off the orchard.' Despite his background in, and obvious fondness for, Chicago, Egan had actually grown to love the wide, open expanses of the northwest so didn't return to Illinois after the breakup of his marriage. Instead, he remained in the house on Foothill Rd, which soon came to be known as the 'Egan Mansion' and, in 1997, was added to the National List of Historic Places (Egan would later marry Alice Scudder while Nina married Harold Bingham who owned the orchard next to Egan's.)

His fruit farming days may have been over but it was not long before Egan found gainful employment as a golf course architect. In 1912 he had added to Medford's existing course so that he and his friends had somewhere half decent to play and, shortly afterwards, built the 18 holes of Tualatin CC in Portland. In 1917, he designed Portland's Eastmoreland GC, thought to be the first course he designed for pay.

But he wasn't just designing courses. He had begun playing them in competition again too. Three years after his 1911 US Open appearance, he dusted off the old niblicks and entered the Pacific Northwest Amateur Championship (PNWA) at Seattle GC, losing in the final to Jack Neville who, five years later, would co-design Pebble Beach. In 1915 at Tacoma GC, Egan got his revenge on Neville in the semi-finals then beat Paul Ford 3&2 to win his first PNWA Championship.

Over the next 20 years, Egan continued playing to a very high standard while designing or redesigning over 20 courses in Washington, Oregon and California. His design credits in the '20s and early '30s included Indian Canyon in Spokane and, in Oregon; Riverside, Oswego Lake, Rogue Valley, Reames and the superb original layout at Eugene CC which opened in 1925 and was subsequently altered by Robert Trent Jones in 1967. A year after creating the course at Eugene, Egan won the California Amateur Championship at the same Pebble Beach he would redesign two years later, and a year after completing his work there, he entered the 1929 US Amateur and created great excitement by reaching the semi-finals.

It is thought he and the great Alister Mackenzie worked together on the alterations to Pebble Beach but, in fact, Mackenzie had modified the 8th and 13th greens in 1926 - two years before Egan arrived. Egan worked alongside Robert Hunter rebuilding the bunkers,

16 of the greens (he left the 8th and 13th well alone) and adding artificial sand dunes which, sadly, have disappeared over the years. Egan and Mackenzie did team up briefly, however, working on a handful of courses in California.

In 1932, Egan won the last of his five PNWA Championships and, in 1934, was chosen for the Walker Cup team to play Great Britain and Ireland on the Old Course at St Andrews. There, US captain Francis Ouimet paired Egan with Baltusrol man Max Marston for the first day's foursomes and together they beat Michael Scott and Sam McKinlay 3&2. It was the second time Egan represented his country (1904 Olympics being the first) but the only match Egan would play in the biennial encounter.

Eight months later, Egan received an invite from Bobby Jones asking him to compete in his Augusta National Invitational event (it became known as the Masters in 1939) and finished 60th, 32 shots out of the Craig Wood, Gene Sarazen play-off which Sarazen had gotten into by virtue of an albatross two at the par 5 15th (Sarazen beat Wood over 36-holes).

That same year, Jones, who regarded Egan as much a mentor as a friend having followed a similar career path (well, the amateur golf part, not the fruit farming), recommended him for a design job - North Fulton GC - in Atlanta. Egan also laid out the terrific West Seattle GC around this time and then moved north to Everett where he supervised construction of Legion Memorial GC on Marine View Drive.

On March 30th 1936, however, he succumbed to the northwest's cold, moist atmosphere and was taken to hospital with pneumonia. Doctors were unable to halt its progression and six days after being submitted, Egan died. He was just 51. His funeral was held in Seattle and his body taken home to Medford.

"It's a shock to know that so grand a fellow and so fine a golfer is dead," Jones said from Augusta where he was hosting his third Augusta Invitational. "We will all miss him terribly. His comeback was an inspiration to everybody in the game."

A year and four months passed before Jones and those six other leading lights from the golf world came to pay tribute to a man for whom they, and indeed the whole game, had a great deal of affection and an ocean of respect. "My heart bleeds when I think that H. Chandler Egan is no more," Chisholm had said shortly after Egan's passing. "There was a champion to the very core. He possessed every fine and gracious quality; he represented the very essence of what a champion should be. In the heat of battle, he preferred to help an opponent, never to hinder him. He was an outstanding credit to golf and a grand example for our youth to follow."

Harvard graduate, world class golfer, highly regarded course architect, pear farmer and a man much admired by all. They really don't make them like H Chandler Egan anymore. Well, not many.

Written by Tony Dear - As first appeared in the December 2007 issue of Pacific Northwest Golfer magazine

Timeline

- 1884** – Born on August 21st in Chicago.
- 1896** – Plays first game of golf at Lake Geneva, WI.
- 1899** - Father joins Exmoor CC in Chicago, not long before Egan is best golfer in Chicago
- 1902** - Starts at Harvard, wins Western Amateur, beating cousin Walter in the final.
- 1902-1904** – Captain of Harvard golf team which wins Intercollegiate Division 1 title.
Egan wins individual honors in 1902.
- 1903** - Walter beats him in Western Amateur final.
- 1904** - Wins Western Amateur. Wins US Amateur at Baltusrol, Olympic silver medalist, beaten by Canadian George Lyons in the final at Glen Echo in St Louis.
- 1905** - Beats Walter again in the Western Amateur final, defends US Amateur at Chicago GC. Graduates from Harvard.
- 1907** - Wins Western Amateur a fourth time.
- 1909** - Loses in final at US Amateur.
- 1910** - June 29th, marries Nina McNally, daughter of publisher James McNally. Makes first trip to Oregon.
- 1911** - April 9th – daughter Eleanor is born. May; Medford Mail-Tribune newspaper reports his purchase of 115-acre Bates orchard (for \$75,000). Ties 23rd at US Open back in Chicago.
- 1912** - Upgrades Medford golf course and designs Tualatin GC in Portland.
- 1914** - Re-emerges on competitive golf scene losing to Jack Neville in final of Pacific Northwest Amateur Championship at Seattle GC.
- 1915** - Beats Neville 5&4 in the PNWA semi-final and then beats Paul Ford 3&2.
- 1916** - Divorces Nina.
- 1917** - Designs Eastmoreland in Portland.
- 1920** - Wins PNWA.
- 1923** - Wins PNWA.
- 1924** - Starts work at Eugene Country Club.
- 1925** - Wins PNWA.
- 1926** - Wins California Amateur Championship at Pebble Beach.
- 1928** - Buys home in Del Monte and re-models Pebble Beach.
- 1929** - Plays in US Amateur at Pebble Beach, reaches semi-finals.
- 1930** - Designs Indian Canyon in Spokane.
- 1932** - Wins fifth PNWA.
- 1934** - Plays on Walker Cup team at St. Andrews.
- 1935** - Plays in Masters, finishes 60th. Designs North Fulton GC in Atlanta, GA. Lays out West Seattle GC.
- 1936** - Working on Legion Memorial in Everett when struck down by pneumonia on March 30th. Passes away on April 5th, aged 51.
- 1940** - West Seattle GC opens.
- 1985** - Inducted into the PGA Hall of Fame.
- 1997** - House on Foothill Drive in Medford is placed on National Register of Historic Places.