

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE COWICHAN LAWN BOWLING CLUB

The Cowichan Lawn Bowling Club has had a long and, sometimes, ignoble, history. Although lawn bowling was handed down to us from English nobility, bowling in the wild west of Canada's Cowichan Valley sometimes lacked the genteel finesse of the English gentry.

Two of our early bowlers from the late Nineteenth Century were Sam McGee and Dan McGrew. The following is a true story from this exciting period in the history of lawn bowling in North America.

Sam was originally from Nashville, Tennessee, where he developed quite a reputation as an excellent bowler – perhaps the best that the United States has ever produced. However, it was at CLBC where he is best known as the bowler who actually froze to death in the midst of a game during one of our famous cold and wet Spring days. My grandfather arranged to have his body cremated on the marge of Lake Lebarge in Canada's Yukon. So famous was Sam McGee, that Ashville's leading lawn bowlers erected a memorial crematorium in his honour and, once per year, the doors of the crematorium are opened to the public, and Sam can be seen grinning from ear to ear and clutching his beloved number seven bowl.



The CLBC Clubhouse (circa 1915)



The Real Sam McGee – Champion Bowler from Tennessee

Sam McGee was a gentle soul. However, Dan McGrew was anything but gentle. So uncouth was Dan, that several rule changes were introduced as a result of his behaviour on the green. One of these changes is the rule regarding possession of the head.

The details of the story are somewhat murky; however, after careful research, I have finally uncovered the truth of the matter.

It seems that Dan McGrew was involved in a singles tournament back in July, 1915. His opponent was,

interestingly, a Mr. Bulley (perhaps related to one of our current members). The game was to 15 points and, on the final end of play, the score was tied at 14–14. McGrew had shot bowl exactly six inches behind the jack.

Now, Dan McGrew was an inveterate cigar smoker and, as Mr. Bulley delivered his final bowl, the ash on Dan's cigar was already an inch long. Mr. Bulley chose the wide side and by the time his bowl was half way to the jack, the ash on Dan's cigar had grown to almost two inches (CLBC has always had a fast green).

As Mr. Bulley's bowl approached the jack, McGrew was beside himself with anxiety. In his excitement, Dan ran out to examine the progress of Mr. Bulley's bowl toward the jack (which was now moving almost at right angles to the rink as it rolled resolutely toward its intended target).

McGrew jumped up and down and cursed the progress of the bowl. And just before the bowl reached the jack, three inches of cigar ash fell to the ground. Bulley's bowl ground to a halt and, exactly 29 seconds later, fell on its side away from the jack and McGrew won the match by the tiniest fraction of an inch!

From that day to the present, no bowler is allowed to visit the head while his opponent's bowl is in motion. The smoking of cigars on the green was also banned and, eventually, this was extended to include cigarettes (and pot).



**Dangerous Dan McGrew – Long Criminal Record for Smoking on the Green.**