Golf course equipment: A history of progress, initiative

By CLAY LOYD

Roughly a half millennium ago, the only use made of the linkslands of northern and eastern Scotland was to pasture sheep. They found shelter in natural hollows. Turf, such as it was, consisted of bentgrass and some fescue with stiff blades. The sheep kept it mowed.

Rabbits were among the other animals that shared the land. They dug holes. Then, as some accounts would have it, bored shepherds began challenging each other to see who — using the staffs that were the tools of their trade — could strike the most rocks into the rabbit holes. But look out. Don’t land in those hollows.

That, they say, was the beginning of golf. It really took off as railroads came in and began transporting people from the cities to the coasts on holidays and weekends to see how this new game was played. Soon, the city folks, too, were swinging golf clubs. Then they carried their newfound sport back to town.

And grow golf did. Eventually, it became a struggle to keep pace with the demand for more and better golf course management equipment. It’s easy to see how such an industry has grown up around the game. Those hollows where sheep sought refuge centuries ago, for example, would become the bunkers of our age.

The rabbit holes of yesteryear would someday be the cups of modern golf and those sheep eventually would have to go. That was true in the beginning, and it is true today.

Until the mid-to late-1800s, scything was the only practical way to cut grass, except for sheep. But scything was only effective when the grass was wet. That meant you had to get up before dawn to take advantage of the dew. And it took teams of women and children following the tractor-driven National Mower five-gang mowing unit, circa mid-1920s.

A retired director of publications at GCSAA, Clay Loyd is an active member of GCSAA’s Historical Preservation Committee and has written a book about the association’s history.

A historical perspective of the golf course greenkeeper

By MEL LUCAS

As we enter into a new century where vast new horizons await all professions, we too must be prepared to advance with new technology and research. The last 25 years have pushed our industry into the most robust time a golf course superintendent has ever experienced.

Every segment of our earning power has been dramatically influenced by mowing equipment, irrigation technology, hybridization of turfgrass cultivars, bio-stimulants, putting green construction, fertilizer and chemical specificity toward fine-turf management, educational opportunities through journals, conferences geared toward turf care and the strong promotional activities of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

We must take note that in no small way, the environmental movement has helped us a great deal.

How did we get to this point? We should reflect on our humble beginning. Oftentimes superintendents refer to “custodian of the links” when describing the role of a greenkeeper.

Collections of antiques on view at MSU, Penn

Probably the two best collections of vintage golf course management equipment in the world are the Dr. Kenyon T. Payne Collection at Michigan State University and at Mascaro/Steininger Turfgrass Equipment Museum at Pennsylvania State University.

During his life, Payne gathered more than 120 pieces of antique equipment under one roof. Along with other groups and individuals, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has added to the collection.

Among the many artifacts at Michigan State are a Turferator (an early aerifier), an Ideal greensmower, a Caldwell de-mountable roller brush, a Thompson wheelbarrow seeder, a Shawnee-Worthington greensmower, steel horse hoof plates and a Paddleson leather horse boot.

In the toms of antique iron at Penn State are such pieces as Mascaro’s prototype aerifier; a creosoted, wooden irrigation pipe from a golf course; an early Greensauret aeration cylinder; a Rutland cutting, and a Worthington tractor.

Payne was a turfgrass scientist and educator. Mascaro, an entrepreneur as well as an inventor, is remembered for his “Vertical” mower to remove thatch from greens as well as for his aerifier. One of the best places to see modern and new golf course management equipment is at the huge GCSAA Golf Course Conference and Show held annually in a major Sun Belt city.
Greenkeeping: a work in progress

Continued from page 11

years, and are now shared with the title “golf course superintendent” in the British Isles.

Looking at the technologies we deal with today, one must ponder the manner of the major step forward made by Robert Gay. His invention of an instrument to form holes was purchased in 1828 by Musselburgh Golf Club. This is the first reference to such a tool. If we accept that golf came into being in 1457 and 371 years later the first greenkeeping tool was created, it must have produced a major impact on greenkeeping.

Prior to this invention, the greenkeeper was noted mainly for his ability to cut a circle and extricate the soil, by hand, in such a manner that the surrounds of the hole were not damaged. Should we dare think that this invention might have negatively affected their earning power?

When we read the wonderful books written from 1890 to 1910 that not only considered the play of the game, but included its history and the role people played in its development, we learn in-depth accounts. Throughout these volumes come the passages of the greenkeeper’s bent in life. His basic, if not only, duty to the golf course was to change cups, tend sheep and repair rabbit burrows as well as iron skelps (divots).

Horace Hutchinson wrote in Golf Greens and Greenkeeping (1906) that the rabbit was known at some courses as the “chief, and almost the only greenkeeper.”

Hutchinson continued that “the rabbits crop the grass short and produce an admirable quality of springy turf.”

The names of early greenkeepers are legend in the golfing world. Among them, Hurd, Dunn, Robertson, Denham, Gourlay, Gunn, Park and Tom Morris all worked prior to the turn of the century.

As golf courses have turned 100 years, and are now shared with the title "golf course superintendent" in the British Isles, it must have produced a major impact on greenkeeping.

Looking at the technologies we deal with today, one must ponder the manner of the major step forward made by Robert Gay. His invention of an instrument to form holes was purchased in 1828 by Musselburgh Golf Club. This is the first reference to such a tool. If we accept that golf came into being in 1457 and 371 years later the first greenkeeping tool was created, it must have produced a major impact on greenkeeping.

Prior to this invention, the greenkeeper was noted mainly for his ability to cut a circle and extricate the soil, by hand, in such a manner that the surrounds of the hole were not damaged. Should we dare think that this invention might have negatively affected their earning power?

When we read the wonderful books written from 1890 to 1910 that not only considered the play of the game, but included its history and the role people played in its development, we learn in-depth accounts. Throughout these volumes come the passages of the greenkeeper’s bent in life. His basic, if not only, duty to the golf course was to change cups, tend sheep and repair rabbit burrows as well as iron skelps (divots).
Greenkeeping
Continued from page 15
and stewards, all tied into one. As years progressed, each phase of this “jack of all trades” became a specialized field of endeavor. The ranks of professional golfers grew from the ranks of caddies, who in turn were assuming greenkeeping roles at clubs. The club and ball makers came from iron mongers and carpentry trades, thus adding to the professional golfer and, too, the greenkeepers’ role. In the United States it was a lucrative opportunity for the Scots to be the pro/greenkeeper and, in several cases, this still exists today. However, major shifts in golfers’ desires for better playing conditions and having a person devoted to teaching the game to them at designated times, no longer allowed one person to handle both jobs. This became the true American way, which created two professions.

During the years since the PGA and GCSAA were formed, the two have been as far apart from their beginnings as any groups could be. But over the last 25 years the windows of golf have opened and the organizations have embraced each other. The USGA, PGA, GCSAA and Club Managers Association of America have recognized that in unity there is overwhelming strength to better the interest of golf and everyone’s intrinsic value to this game.

From the perspective of a golf course superintendent, to identify what has happened over the last 81 years, when Lees wrote his book, will take several authors to sift through the collection of the past, housed at GCSAA headquarters, in Lawrence, Kan.

Al’s best
Continued from page 14
Izzy’s Golf and Yacht Club, Ocania
Winston Golf Club of Pennsylvania “South Course”, Briardale*
The Minikahda Club, Minneapolis
Toro Park Country Club, Crystal, Minnesota
Somerstoe Country Club, Mendota Heights
Bolton Valley Golf Course, Lake Elms Town and Country Club, Saint Paul
Woodhill Country Club, Wayzata
Missouri
Blue Hills Country Club, Kansas City
Columbia
Keith Memorial GC, Warrensburg
Top of the Rock Golf Course, Ridgely*
Nebraska
Beatrice Country Club, Beatrice
TPC at Summerlin, Las Vegas
TPC at The Canyons, Las Vegas
New Hampshire
Amherst Country Club, Amherst
New Jersey
Ballyowen Golf Course, Sparta
Balmoral Golf Club, Springfield
Brigantine Golf Links, Brigantine
Brooklane Country Club, Florham Park
Fiddler’s Elbow Country Club, Far Hills
Meadowbrook National Golf Club, Jackson
Newtown Country Club, Newton
Pine Valley Golf Club, Pine Valley
Ridgewood Country Club, Paramus
Somerset Hills CC, Bernardsville
North Carolina
Carmel Country Club, Charlotte
North Carolina National Golf Club, Bolivia
Pinehurst No. 9 & 10, Pinehurst*
TPC at Piper Glen, Charlotte
Wade Hampton Golf Club
Kinston Country Club, Kinston
North Dakota
Apple Creek Country Club, Bismarck
North Dakota
Travellers Park Golf Course, Bismarck
Oklahoma
Black Butte Ranch GC, Black Butte Ranch
Crescent Golf Club, Twin Lakes
Heron Lakes Golf Course, Portland
Oregon Golf Club, West Linn
Pine Valley Country Club, Gresham
Pinehurst Golf Club, Cornelius
Quail Run Golf Course, Lake Oswego
Salishan Links GC, Gleneden Beach
Willow Creek GC, Bandon
Pennsylvania
Chester Valley Golf Club, Malvern
Hickory Hills Country Club, Bridgeville
Hill Crest Country Club, Lower Burrell
Huntsville Golf Club, Shavertown
Lords Valley Country Club, Hawley
Otteh O’Hatchen Pennsylvania, Hermitage
South Carolina
The Club at Seabrook Island
Kiawah Island Resort, Kiawah Island
Ocean Course and River Course
Occoneechee Course at Sea Pines, Hilton Head
Old Tom Fazio Links at Spring Island
Pawleys Island Plantation, Huntington
Whispering Pines GC, Myrtle Beach
South Dakota
Minnehaha Country Club, Sioux Falls
Tennessee
The Legends, Springfield
TPC at Southwind, Memphis
Texas
Barton Creek Resort, Austin
Fazio and Crenshaw Courses
Pecan Valley Course
Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort, San Antonio
Lakeside Country Club, Houston
La Cantera Golf Club, San Antonio
Padre Island Country Club, Corpus Christi
River Oaks Golf Club, Grand Prairie
Virginia
Robert Trent Jones Golf Club, Gainesville
Glendale Valley Country Club, Belvedere
McCormick Woods GC, Fort Worth
Royal Oaks Country Club, Vancouver
Sandhills Golf & CC, Blaine
West Virginia
Edgewood Country Club, Charleston
The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs
Wisconsin
Blue Mound G&CC, Watertown
Country Club of Wisconsin, Grafton
Monroe Country Club, Monroe
Oconomowoc Country Club, Mequon
Wyoming
Old Balby Club, Saratoga

* Denotes Audubon International Signature Sanctuary

At a Glance

1-800-257-7797

The treated course has an overall healthy appearance and offers improved playing conditions.

The untreated course exhibits dry spots and an overall unhealthy appearance.

Near infrared and aerial photography at Imperial Golf Club in Naples, Florida, captures the benefits of using InfiTrx Soil Penetrant on fairways.