

Sins of Commission and Omission

By ALFRED E. LUNDSTROM, *Greenkeeper,*
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THE gross cost of blunders made in the construction and maintenance of golf courses is impossible to estimate. The best we can do is to guess. We can readily understand why mistakes were made years ago, when there was no precedent to follow, but when they are made in this era of "scientific efficiency" it is not so. It simply proves that human nature does not change, and that like the poor, the simple-minded and gullible are still with us. However, there is a reason even for this. The average golf club member belongs to the office-and-desk executive type whose knowledge of the actual workings of the natural elements is at best only indirect.

Of course, he knows that grass is, or ought to be, green; that soil is something that grass grows in; and that a little water now and then is good for it. But when it is a question of constructing a new course, or even the maintenance of one, he finds himself in a *terra incognita* where his more or less profound knowledge of the stock-market, or legal technicalities, or political intricacies is of no avail. He contacts a set of activities entirely new and foreign to his training and mental habits.

THE SAD AWAKENING

AT FIRST, when the construction program begins he is usually tremendously enthused, and gullible enough to believe everything that the experts tell him, and hence very acquiescent and pliable. But it is at a later stage, when faults of construction and a senseless waste of money become only too glaring and obvious, that the pale cast of thought sicklies over his countenance. And when the inevitable special assessment and higher dues are found necessary



Alfred Lundstrom really should have the title of Professor because of his world-wide experience in the building and care of golf courses. While he speaks very frankly it is all for the good of golf.

in order to make both ends meet, the erstwhile meek lambs are metamorphosized into roaring lions.

There is a reason for this also. In every group of men there is always the Leader—the Master Mind—some dominant or even domineering character to whom the others look up to with awe and admiration as one whose judgments are infallible, who can do no wrong. He is as it were the keystone in the arch. He cheerfully and as a matter of course assumes all responsibility, and the others are only too glad to have him do so. But alas! as often happens, under the stress and strain of practical application the "Master Mind" proves to be the weakest link in the chain, and we all know that no

chain is stronger than its weakest link. There is a flaw in the keystone, and the arch comes tumbling to the ground with a great scattering of bricks, dust and confusion.

In a recent development that I have in mind they underestimated the golf course construction cost 74% (and without doubt all other improvements in the same proportion) simply because they allowed one man to dictate the choice of architect, design, contractors, and methods of construction—all without opposition. During this period those whose duty it was to protect the club merely stood at attention like well-trained and respectful boy scouts when the scout master lays down the law. Later, however, when it was discovered that the actual cost of construction (of the golf course alone) was 74% more than they had been led to believe, there was consternation and dismay in the erstwhile harmonious camp, and there was heard ominous rumblings of revolt.

This huge sum would not be so bad if they really had a modern and meritorious golf course—but they have not, for it is built on solid clay with not a foot of sub-drainage either in greens or fairways. The physical conditions of the soil, even in the greens, were never taken into consideration, badly as it was needed. It is a solid aluminum clay which should have been treated accordingly. And as for the design of the greens, I can best picture them all in the shape of a coal shovel, thus causing water to stand in the middle of the green and the approach—a most favorable condition for breeding disease and to cause scald.

From the standpoint of distribution the irrigation system is a joke. The supply is ample enough for the most lavish use, still its volume was not taken advantage of as it only has one (1) three-quarter-inch opening for each green, and for each fairway one (1) one and one-half (1½) inch opening. And with this they actually expected soft tees and greenswards in September!

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time again, not only to the unscientific way of building a course without a topo-map or soil-checks or drainage or water, but also to the obsolete type of machinery used as well as methods of construction and labor.

The only accounting system, to my knowledge, was the time-book and the gross amount of money spent, and no one knows what any individual branch of the development cost. In all, it is a hit-and-miss proposition, and the net result is a course that must be rebuilt before it can compare with a modern, well-constructed course.

It is hardly necessary to say that all of these stupid blunders have created a spirit of rebellion which even the lowliest workman on the course is aware of. The blame, however, should not be laid so much on the self-appointed dictator as on those who could at least have greatly modified his activities for the better—if they had possessed what is commonly known as “backbone.” Of course, committees were appointed, but they made themselves conspicuous by their absence while construction was going on. But these are the very ones who now complain the loudest. But it is no use; the damage is done, and they might as well grit their teeth and assume the burden.

GREENKEEPER MUST CARRY THE BURDEN

IT NOT only feel sorry for those who must pay for these blunders, but particularly for the greenkeeper who must carry on under all these handicaps and until the course is reconstructed. Ninety-nine per cent of the membership do not understand the true conditions and will invariably blame him. He is not in position to explain his side, for he comes in intimate contact with but a few of the members, and consequently is helpless. His bread and butter depends on his silence. If he protests, then he can make up his mind to look for another job, and if those who really are to blame were to confess it, then a miracle would happen, for the average man of affairs is loath to have his mistakes and ignorance become publicly known.

There are courses built years ago that stand today as creditable monuments to their designers and builders, and some of these may well stand as patterns for some of our present builders. Gross blunders are inexcusable today. There is no reason why a golf course cannot be constructed within a certain limit of cost, and at the same time be a meri-

torious piece of work, especially when we know that the building of even a railroad tunnel can be estimated within a fraction of one per cent.

Many a greenkeeper lost his position during the summer of 1931 only because his course was not scientifically constructed, and not on account of his method of maintenance. Still he had to take the blame. By this I do not mean to defend the greenkeeper who is lax or ignorant and lost his position justifiably. They also exist, goodness knows, much to the detriment of this profession.

A business man may thoroughly detest a man and still keep him in his employ simply because he realizes that the man is an asset to him. It is not always so in club life. There are not financial profits to be taken into account and hence the greenkeeper's personality is more of a deciding factor for or against him. Complications often arise and too often the greenkeeper is unable to follow his own practical and proven ideas, in the face of an invincible and haughty "know-nothingism." Whether he is responsible or not he is a handy man to blame if things do not go well. Unfortunately, in too many cases, those who have the power to hire and fire and judge are not always capable or wise.

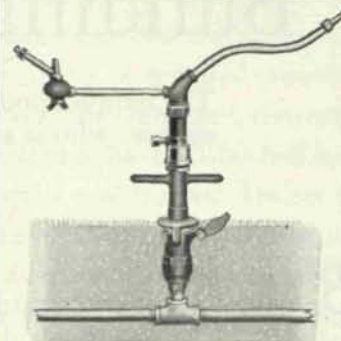
EVENLY BALANCED COMMITTEE IS A RARITY

AN EVENLY balanced, practical committee is a rarity. Few committees can boast of even one man who has a thorough grasp of golf course activity in all its ramifications. If they have, then a lack of time, and business interests, often prevent perfect cooperation, not to mention other complex conditions and peculiarities that minimizes the committees efficiency.

I can think of but one solution for this state of affairs. That is to have a committee of three, chosen as follows: *the chairman* to represent the club, whose duty it shall be to consider the club's position, both as to desires and finances. Secondly; the *professional*, who would consider the playing side of the game. Thirdly: the *greenkeeper*, who naturally would be interested in the practical side of construction, maintenance and labor.

It would be interesting to see such a committee functioning (especially if every man was made of the stuff he is supposed to be), for then we could expect to see the fur fly once in a while, with a net gain to the club as a result.

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