

Doc's Dugout - An Inning from our Past & Present

by Dr. Kent Kurtz, STMA Historian

Remember the Worthington

For those of you who were involved in the management of sports turf from the 1950s, '60s or '70s, you may remember the tractor-drawn mowers that were used to mow large turfgrass areas such as golf courses, parks, and sports fields. Several companies sold these mowers but basically there were two major manufacturers with two basic colors available - the red Toro units and the orange Worthington gang mowers that were pulled by tractors. Toro, Worthington and Jacobsen manufactured tractors specially designed to pull these multi-unit mowers because these companies had their early roots in developing engines and tractors.

People have a passion for early equipment because it brings individuals together to reminisce about the past and leads to some very interesting discussion and a bonding between both young and old. Now let's

look at the name Worthington - ironically, that was my mother's maiden name and my middle name, and for that reason I did some research into the name.

Worthington was the backbone of the turfgrass industry in the early 20th Century because of their development of the Worthington fairway gang mowers. The fairway gang mower was invented in 1910 by Charles C. Worthington who came to Shawnee, Pennsylvania, on the Delaware River, around 1904, and purchased 10,000 acres of land, half of it on the New Jersey side of the river and half on the Pennsylvania side, where he built his home. Included in his purchase were two large islands. On the upper island he built a 9-hole golf course for his personal use. The fairways were mowed with a 30" mower drawn by a horse with leather boots on its hoofs to protect the grass. The

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mowing unit was imported from Ransomes, Sims & Jeffries, Ltd., Ipswich, England, where the fairway unit was born many years earlier. Worthington decided that a horse could pull a greater load so he imported two more mowing units and designed the first three-gang mower. The gang mower frames were constructed of 4" x 4" oak beams and all the necessary unit posts were hand-made by a local blacksmith.

For several years, visitors to Worthington's estate saw the advantages of the three-gang mower and many of his friends asked him to build a set for them. Based on the demand for his mowers by friends, he realized that there was a market for his three-gang mowers. Holding the patent rights for the gang mower, he formed the Shawnee Mower Company in 1912 and started production in 1913. A few years later, he designed the five-gang quintuplex drawn by two horses. In 1919, Mr. Worthington designed and built a tractor to pull the gang units and that was the end of "horse-power" as turfgrass

maintenance equipment. In 1929, Worthington built the Worthington Mower Company plant in Stroudsburg, PA. The Shawnee Mower Company was dissolved and moved to the Stroudsburg plant in the early 1930's. By 1945, the Worthington Mower Company was producing tractor-drawn gang mowers which could be purchased in groups of 3, 5, 7 or 9 units. They also specialized in golf course and sports turf tractors to pull the gang mowers. The Jacobsen Manufacturing Company acquired the Worthington Mower Company in 1945, and production of these units continued in Stroudsburg until 1961, when the entire operation was moved to the Jacobsen facilities in Racine, Wisconsin. The familiar orange color of Jacobsen and Worthington mowing equipment can be seen today in the Textron (Jacobsen) line of equipment. Gang mowers have shown continued improvement over the years with some of the units a combined tractor and mower in one unit. That's Progress!

STM

Members on the Move


Matt Mattes, former student member, has taken the job of Head Groundskeeper with the Columbus (GA) Redstixx. Matt's new phone number is 706/324-5260.

Jeff Limburg, former student member and 1998 STMA Scholarship recipient, is now Head Groundskeeper with the Columbus (OH) Clippers. Jeff can be reached at 614/462-5250.

Raechal Sager, former student member and 1997 STMA Scholarship recipient, is the new Head Groundskeeper for the West Michigan Whitecaps. You can contact Raechal at 616/784-4131.


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