

From Sunny Florida

By Herb Graffis

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When a fellow gets digging into the history of a game that has become a big business as well as a big national game he comes across innumerable questions, as well as some answers.

I've been digging for months for material for a history of professional golf and the Professional Golfers' Assn. in the United States. It involves a job of research and writing I wish I'd never taken. It's too much work; too important in pointing out that the Ancient and Honorable pioneer professionals in the United States eventually exercised more influence, beneficially, on the economic and social development of the United States than any other professional athletes, in this country or anywhere else.

But early I got into what might be confusing, except that in covering golf one quickly becomes adjusted to confusion and either keeps his cool or blows his job.

For an exhibit of a jolting reminder that things have changed a lot in golf business, look at Harper's Official Golf Guide of 1901. There isn't a professional listed. All the pros are presented as "greenkeepers," a word that to some extent continues incorrectly, according to observance of the Rules of Golf, as "greenskeepers." At Midlothian in 1901 Willie Smith and David Bell, both champion professionals, were given as "greenkeepers." Alex Smith, another celebrated Open champion, was at Washington Park Golf Club when it was at 61st St. and South Park, and was in the book as "greenkeeper." Alex Taylor was at Exmoor, Harry Turpie at Edgewater, James and Dave Foulis at Chicago Golf, and R. Leslie at Glen View and Polo Club "an 18 hole club of 5910 yards, one of the finest in the west" as greenkeepers.

Robert White, first president of the PGA (in 1917, '18 and '19) was pro-greenkeeper at Ravisloe. He told me that one winter he went to the University of Wisconsin short course in what was called the "farmers' school" to learn about growing grass.

That was the first time for the golf-agricultural school association, as far as I know, and the start of the college and golf collaboration that has extended to become the foundation of the educational programs of the GCSA, the PGA and the Club Managers Assn. of America, as well as the groundwork of the incredibly valuable work of the USGA Green Section which, with golf courses as the show window, has had far more effect in stirring up the national beautification program than even the golf course superintendents or the Green Section realize. In researching for the PGA history I ran across a reference in a late '90s golf magazine to a golf course manager, that I sent to Ben Chlevin.

That magazine item referred to a New Jersey man as a "golf course superintendent." The reference jabbed me because my brother Joe and I had conducted in Golfdom a tough campaign for changing the job label of the man responsible for the golf course from "greenkeeper" to "superintendent."

We'd discussed improvement of the golf course man's status being high among the many objectives we had for GOLFDOM. The pay of greenkeepers was just simply too damned low. We knew the work, the qualifications, the responsibilities and the compara-

tive social status, even in this so-called Land of the Free, of the golf course managers and their employers.

We thought it was a severe handicap, unjust in every way, to continue in a big business involving operation of a million-dollar-plus investment by a man who was burdened by the attitude of the city guy (often a displaced farmer) toward the grass farmer and the high-nosed air of His Lordship toward the land laborer. Hagen changed that situation in pro golf. Joe and I thought a comparable condition should be changed in golf course maintenance, and the man in charge of the golf plant should have the understanding and rating of any other man in charge of getting and keeping an expensive factory into fine money-making operating condition. So we started campaigning for "golf course superintendent" as the modern identification of "greenkeeper." We thought we were absolutely first to select the title of "superintendent" until I ran across that tribute in a golf magazine of about 1898 to a successful executive in charge of a golf course.

At this late date I still wonder how to identify a competent, successful golf course manager. Is he a scientist, an artist, a business executive, an engineer, a philosopher or a poet—or all of them?

I've seen any number of cases of superintendents I'd call really great having courses temporarily in bad condition while the guy in charge of a course a half mile away had his playground in marvelous shape.

What's the answer? Perhaps it's in the poetry of the job. Read Isaiah and Mark in the Bible, about grass. Read Emily Dickinson's poetry about grass and think that she was one of the family of Lawrence F. Dickinson who, at Amherst, started the modern golf course managers' educational program. Think of the mistakes. Carl Sandburg knew the poetry of grass in writing:

"Pile the bodies at Austerlitz and Waterloo,
"Shovel them under and let me work —
"I am the grass; I cover all."

Perhaps the superintendent as an artist and a poet gets back to Walt Whitman who reflected:

"A child said 'What is the grass?' fetching it to me
with full hands." Doesn't grass beat you; or is it
the golfers who beat you down?



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