

## The Good Old Days

by Ed Wollenberg, Gary Country Club

Continued from the April issue.

**MOWING EQUIPMENT:** Greens were mowed by hand with a Toro or Pennsylvania push type reel mower. I believe it was 1930 when we received our first power greensmower. Two Jacobsen 4 Acre mowers. But it wasn't until after World War II that power mowers really caught on. Except during the Great Depression when Toro and Worthington introduced triplex machines, which did cut down on labor but were hard on the grass and ruined areas on the greens. The height of cut on greens was from a very low 5/16" to an average of 3/8". Clippings were put on piles and hauled away whenever possible, but at least once a week. Some times by the 7th day the aroma was not the fragrance of expensive ParAsian perfume. Being the youngster I am. I missed the mowing of fairways with horses by a couple of years. At the Olympia Fields Country Club we had Model T Ford tractors pulling 5 units of Toro fairway mowers, or a Model T car converted into a tractor with a "Stade Wheel Kit" available in the 1920's. The height of cut averaged around 1 1/2 inches. The roughs were cut with a side bar mower powered by horses. The beginning of the 30's reel type mowers made their appearance in roughs and were tractor down. We are really getting modernized now. The fairway bunkers were cut maybe once a year and areas around trees and shrubs were cut with scythes. The bunker area around the greens and tees were cut by an ordinary hand type reel push mower. Strictly manpower. I believe it was 1935 or 1936 when the first power reel type mower made its appearance for bunkers and lawn mowing.

**FUNGICIDES:** There just were not that many fungicides for our problems, and those we had were handled very crudely and hard to apply. The only product we had that really worked with some consistency was Inorganic Mercurials, such as corrosive sublimate and calomel. And of course, it is still around today even with the controversial issue with E.P.A. This product was mixed with sand, milorganite or topdressing and applied by hand, letting it sift over the forefinger and applied in two directions to greens. Fungicides were only applied to greens. In the early 30's, a 55 gallon wooden barrel was introduced that had a hand pump bolted to one side on the inside, and a fitting attached to it where a hose with running water was attached to one side of the pump, and a discharge hose (spraying hose) to the other side. By mixing the proper fungicide rate with water in the barrel, this solution was pumped into the fittings and carried by the running water hose into the spraying hose used for application. We also used a 55 gallon wooden barrel mounted on 2 large iron wheels and a 4 foot boom mounted on the rear and pulled by hand, but this didn't seem to be very effective for fungicide but did work well for applying Ammonium Sulfate. In about 1934 a 200 gallon wooden tank Hardie sprayer was purchased and powered by a power-take off on a tractor, which really made things a lot easier and also do the job more efficiently. We use to spray 2 courses a night, as we felt this was more effective than daytime spraying.

**FERTILIZERS:** Except for Milorganite, most fertilizers used came in three categories. Hot, hotter and hottest. For fast growth and color, ammonium sulfate was used on the greens. This was put into solution in a 55 gallon barrel to which a 4 foot boom was attached and mounted on 2 iron wheels. We would start

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work at 5 a.m. so we could apply it before the sun got too hot. The rate of application was something like 5 pounds per thousand square feet. We would water it in immediately, being careful not to overwater or underwater because either would burn very badly. We would check for burns all day long, and it was considered a successful venture if you came out without any singes or burns. After about 3 days the grass grew so vigorously you could almost hear it grow, and the greens should have been cut at least twice a day. About 10 days after application you were back to normal growth again. The mixed or chemical fertilizers (usually 5-10-5) were also applied to greens and tees and had to be watered in. There were no slow release fertilizers. Fairways were fertilized with a chemical fertilizer, usually 10-8-6, in the spring and fall and a fall application of Milorganite was applied late. These products were applied with a tractor drawn spreader with a chain attached to the rear of the spreader to knock the fertilizer off the blades of the grass. It was not watered in, but we tried to time it when the rain was in the forecast.

In the late 20's we were also still doing some fairway fertilizing with steer and sheep manure. This was shipped bulk in railroad cars, and placed along a railroad siding of the Illinois Central Railroad which borders the Olympia Field Country Club on the west side. This was unloaded and spread with a farm manure spreader in the late fall. Because of the erratic spreading pattern of the spreader we had to hand rake areas in the spring where the manure had bunched and was smothering out the turf. Also a lot of weeds were planted using this type of organic fertilization. As the mixed and chemical fertilizers became more common and available, this procedure was discontinued.

**WEED CONTROL:** 2,4-D's had not been formulated or invented yet — they came into the picture about 1944 — so we applied chemicals with trial and error, using Sodium Arsenite and Arsenic Acid which seemed most effective on poa annua, clover, chickweed and crabgrass. At one time (in the 30's) the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission manufactured a product called Milarsenite, which was Milorganite coated with sodium arsenite. This product eliminated a lot of extra work and cost, but it was finally taken off the market for reasons I don't remember. Iron sulfate was also used and gave sporadic results. Broadleaves such as plantain and dandelions were hand picked out of greens and tees, and on fairways they were eradicated by a handmade plunger applicator to which an ordinary fruit jar was attached which dispensed several drops of gasoline to the plant. It was not unusual to see 20 to 25 men and Polish women working on a fairway using this applicator. Usually the results were temporary with only leaf defoliation and regrowth appearing after several weeks. Fertilization immediately after doing a fairway would improve the condition of the turf and help depress the weeds. Of course, today we have 2,4-D and preemergence chemicals that are specific and selective for weed control.

**INSECTS:** Insects will always be around, regardless of how long the world has been here or how much longer it will continue to be. We may not have heard of Ateanias or Fruit Flies in years past, but I'm sure they were around someplace. And we did have all the other common nemesis such as cutworms, sod webworms, grubs etc. Unfortunately we did not have Diazinon, Dursban and so many other fine insecticides we have


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today. So, we did most of our combatting and wars with Lead Arsenate on any and all varmints we were abused by. One of our worst pest was the earthworms on greens. As we know they do not feed on the turf but live in the soil and interfere with the playing qualities by the casts they deposit on the surface of the greens. They were so bad at times that after poling the greens the putting surface would be black. Also it would pick up on the greensmower roller and raise the height of cut by the accumulation, unless it was cleaned off at each round. Arsenate of Lead acted very slowly on them so we used a material called Mowrah Meal. This was a by-product of the seed of the bassia tree from India after the oil had been extracted from it. It was shipped in 160 pound burlap bags, and real dogs to handle. The Mowrah Meal was applied with a scoop shovel and spread around with the back of a wooden rake, and then watered in heavily. The earthworms would come to the surface almost immediately and we had special rakes that we used to scoop them up. Sometimes we would get 3 gallons of worms from a single green. For fast results but temporary control we would use corrosive sublimate. This treatment was only effective if the turf was well watered before hand, so the worms were close to the surface.

**SODDING & SEEDING:** Sodding was done by cutting it with a hand sod lifter or with a piece of equipment constructed of two handles, two small wooden rollers, and a cutting blade attached to the handles and frame. It was a 2 or 3 man operation. The person manning the handles and positioned behind the equipment would guide and kick it with one leg, as the one or two men stationed in front of the machine would pull it simultaneous in spurts of maybe 2 feet at a time. It cut a strip of 12 inches wide and at adjustable depths. Any irregularities in the thickness of the sod was then placed, grass side down, on a constructed bench to which pieces of board were nailed on the side to a predetermined height so all strips could be cut uniformly. This was done by using a scythe blade or an old bed knife and slicing off the excess soil by sliding it across this box like bench. Not too many greens were sodded in the early days. They were mostly stolonized or seeded, with stolonizing usually the most common procedure used. The bent seeds we had in the early days were few and not the quality that we have today. Seaside, Velvet, Astoria and Highland were the only bent seed available, with seaside being considered the best for greens. The rye grasses were of poor quality in comparison to today's rye grasses, and were planted primarily as a "nurse" grass where temporary cover and protection was needed for permanent and slower growing grasses to develop. The perennial rye leaf texture was such that it was almost impossible to get a clean cut with a reel type mower. Redtop was also used quite extensively as a "nurse" grass and often referred to as a substitute for bent grass. The blue grasses were of the common type, sold as 21 pound, 24 pound and 28 pound with 28 pound having the plumper seeds and higher germination. Fescues were very popular in the early days with chewings being used in fairway and tee mixture, and sheeps fescue used for roughs and bunkers. Most of the chewing fescue seed was imported from New Zealand and Australia with the germination very poor because of poor storage conditions in the storage holes on the ships and the length of time in arriving in this country. Today of course, almost all seed planted is grown in Oregon, Washington and Canada. We also seeded a certain amount of poa trivialis in

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wet and shady areas. It was a shallow rooted grass and really nothing more than a glorified poa annua.

**AERIFICATION AND TOPDRESSING:** The mechanical aerifier didn't make its appearance on the scene until late 1940's. Prior to that time we used garden forks or pitch forks to open the soil on local hard spots and green collars. A very tedious and time consuming effort. When the power aerifier did make their appearances, many were crudely built and very slow and only stayed on the market a short time.

We had no power topdressing machine then like we do now, so all topdressing was done by hand with scoop shovels. This was an art, mastered by only a few employees with consistency. Greens were topdressed on an average of every 4 to 5 weeks during the playing season. Using steel mats, backs of wooden racks or a 3 foot stiff bristle brush were used to work the topdressing into the turf. It's a lot easier today.

These are then some of the things that were done on golf courses in years past. So, the question asked me by my junior colleague friend, "Were the golf courses better in the "good old days?" All I can say in a nice way is, "Bull Feces". Today for one, we are working together, sharing ideas, plans, experiments, results good or bad, not only with ourselves but we have the help from universities and manufacturers. Years ago nothing was shared, and if you asked a question you were given the opposite answer. The self implied adage was, "Find out for yourself, I had to".

The golf courses are show places today compared to yesteryear. The golfers have never played on better golf courses than they are playing on today. The golfer or person who says the courses were in better condition years ago, is only thinking of it costwise. Yes, they did play for a lot less in the "good

old days", on golf courses that also offered a lot less than they do today. We have the best today, believe me, I've been around a long time.

## VANDALISM

By Patrick Klein  
Hillcrest C.C.

With summer fast approaching, the weather beginning to warm and schools letting out, numerous incidents of vandalism will once again be with us and we will all be trying to come up with ideas to control it. At Hillcrest Country Club which is a tract course built through a housing development that does not permit fencing, we are very open and susceptible to vandalism.

Last year as things began to get out of control, our Greens Committee decided something would have to be done — but what? After much thought and many ideas (most of which were either cost prohibitive, against local ordinances, or totally unfeasible), we thought we would try something different. We decided to host an open house cocktail party for everybody living around the course.

Invitations were made and hand delivered wherever possible. That night after everyone arrived, we started an informal discussion on the problems we were having and then turned it over to the people, letting them inform us of problems that they might be having — whether it was complaints against the Club or whatever. We tried to resolve any complaints that were brought up. At the close of the evening we asked one thing in return — if they saw anything happening that was out of order they should let us know. After that night vandalism was down to almost nothing and if anything did happen I was informed immediately.

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