

Jimmy Jones the main Maine man 60 years

BY VERN PUTNEY

Jimmy Jones isn't much bigger than a dozen hefty divots, but the Cape Elizabeth resident rates the heavyweight "Maine Greenkeepers' Greenkeeper" handle.

For 60 years, the golf professional-course superintendent has shaped stubborn earth in Maine's most mercurial weather.

His contributions to the golf game, which he discovered in 1917 as a caddie at Augusta Country Club, were recognized in 1986 by the Maine Golf Course Superintendents Association. Jones received that group's Distinguished Service Award.

Jones didn't rest on that coveted laurel. He continued his many years of mowing and maintenance duties at nearby Purpoodock Club as an aide to his course superintendent son Gary.

Jones tapered off a bit last summer. He oversaw operations at Salmon Falls Golf Course in Bar Mills, one of five Maine courses he's helped design and build, and he's active there again this year.

Austin Kelly, veteran pro-super at Bangor Municipal Course, says, "I learned more from Jones in one day than from anyone else in months. I have tremendous respect for his talents."

At 80, his back injured while wresting a timber from the old Purpoodock clubhouse is kicking up. The 110-pound frame lost that tug-of-war.

Jones was the Maine Golf Course Superintendents Association's first president, in 1940, and from the early 1930s to the mid-'50s was a tournament threat.

"About 225 yards was my longest tee shot," confesses Jones, "but I was accurate and had a sharp short game." Dr. Ray Lebel of Falmouth, several times Maine Amateur champion, termed Jones "the best putter I know."

Oddly, Jones remembers most a 4-iron shot on the 381-yard eighth hole at Portland Country Club. This dramatic eagle during the 1936 Maine Open propelled him into third pro place, behind host pro and playoff winner Ernest W. Newnham, and Eddie Bush of Norway Country Club.

Jones also was third in the Panama Open in 1938. He paired with Doug Doane of Cape Arundel Country Club in Kennebunkport, and Tony DeRocco, Oakdale Country Club in Mexico, for state pro-pro tourney titles, edged Norway pro Jim Browning in a Hi Ricker Memorial tourney playoff at Augusta Country Club, and set a course-record 66 at Wilson Lake Country Club in Wilton, to lead his pro-amateur team to a prize sweep.

However, minimizing divot damage, raking traps, grooming fairways and nursing greens were much more in vogue for pros in Jones' heyday. Especially if you presided over a nine-hole layout. You hung out the pro shingle, but were more easily found digging a ditch or watering a fairway.

Jones had no such headaches when, as a 9-year-old caddie, he struggled with his first golf bag at Augusta. His big worry was getting to the Manchester course from his Litchfield home, about 25 miles away.

The next family move, to Manchester, was convenient. By the time Jimmy was a junior at Augusta's Cony High, he was giving golf lessons afternoons. Augusta pro and three-time Maine Open champion Frank Gilman taught in the morning, then played.

Jones, a 1927 Cony High graduate, was Gilman's assistant for two years. His first

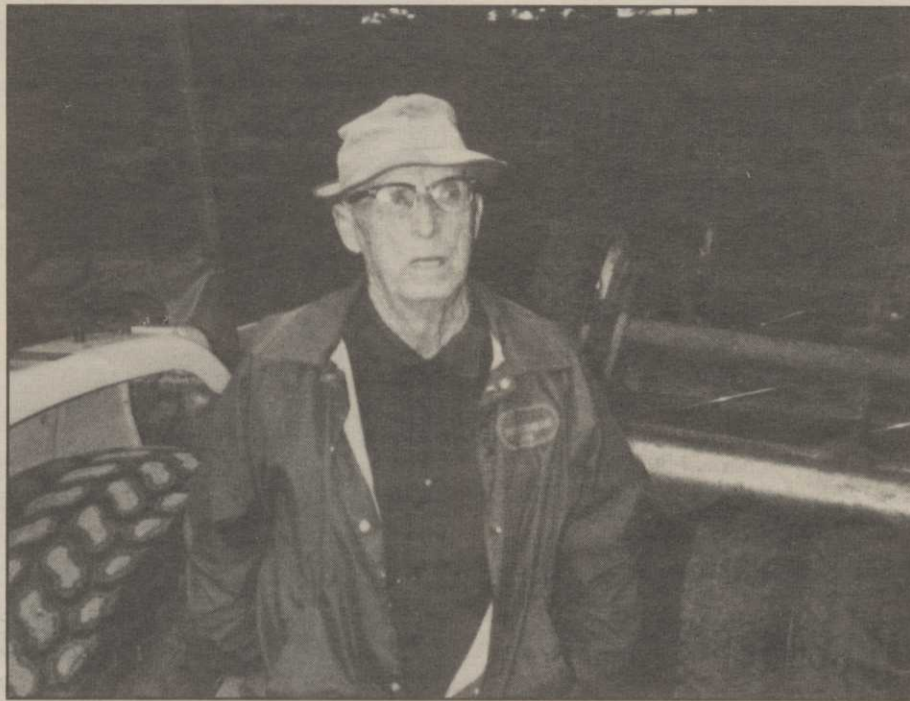


Photo by Dr. M. Carman Pettapiece
Jimmy Jones in front of the heavy machinery he has mastered in shaping courses.

"pro" job came in 1929, at Piscataquis Valley in Guilford.

Starting in April 1 to ready for a May 15 opening, Jones dealt with frozen pipes, old machines ready to give out, no grinders and no mowers. Any swinging Jones did that spring was at the end of a scythe or sickle.

Next assignment was at Northport Country Club in Belfast. Again, much more time went into watering, hauling hoses, cutting brush and repairing maintenance equipment than in perfecting a putting stroke.

Jones was head pro at Bath Country Club for 16 years. He returned to Augusta in 1950 as course superintendent, switched to Purpoodock in 1954, and in 1971 became course super at Salmon Falls while retaining a Purpoodock work connection.

The 5-foot-5 Jones, now "inflated" to 125 pounds, still operates the efficient if monstrous mowing machine. "I can

command a good view of the course, see what's going on and frequently spot trouble areas," Jones explains.

Like most pros who reveled in Maine's ideal summer and fall, Jones preferred to spend winters in warmer climes. His first southward venture was in 1938, a five-month pro post in the Panama Canal Zone. After 45 discouraging days of rain, Jones gave 715 lessons to Army (14th Infantry), submarine and air base personnel. World War II ended Jones' pleasant refuge.

From 1974 to 1984, Jones worked winters at Mountain Lake Country Club in Lake Wales, Fla. Older brother George, who had been a pro at several Maine courses, fled the state for good after World War II. He made Mountain Lake his work headquarters until 1985, and now resides in Haines City, Fla.

Had anyone for 23 years inquired in the Mountain Lake dining room, "Where's George?" the answer would have been, "Not

here."

Jones eventually made it — through the front door. After playing an exhibition with Arnold Palmer and Gary Player, they ate. When Player learned that George was making his long-deferred dining room debut, Player cracked, "Do you suppose you can wangle me another steak?"

It was part of clubhouse folklore that the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) also was denied entry. "Members Only" meant just that to the security chief.

Relaxing in Purpoodock's lounge two days after Thanksgiving, as lightly clad golfers delighted in no-breeze, 60-degree weather, Jones reflected on more Spartan times.

"Purpoodock frequently was playable after other area courses closed. Most players, though, carried whisk brooms to brush the snow from their line of putt."

It's a long way back to the days of horses equipped with leather shoes so as not to damage the fairways during mowing operations.

"Then," recalls Jones, "a course might have three or four horses. If a horse worked one day, two or three days of rest would follow. Rangeley Country Club had five horses, a pair for each unit."

Jones has seen it all, from horses to Fordson tractor to triplex units, the beginning of the time-saving hydraulics systems.

He might be a tad envious of modern tools at course superintendents' disposal, but admits they'll come in handy for his next course-building venture.

If you know of a standout golf course superintendent who is long overdue for peer recognition, please let us know. Golf Course News welcomes nominations for such accolade.

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