

# Golf course equipment: A history of progress, initiative



Photo courtesy of Mel Lucas

By CLAY LOYD

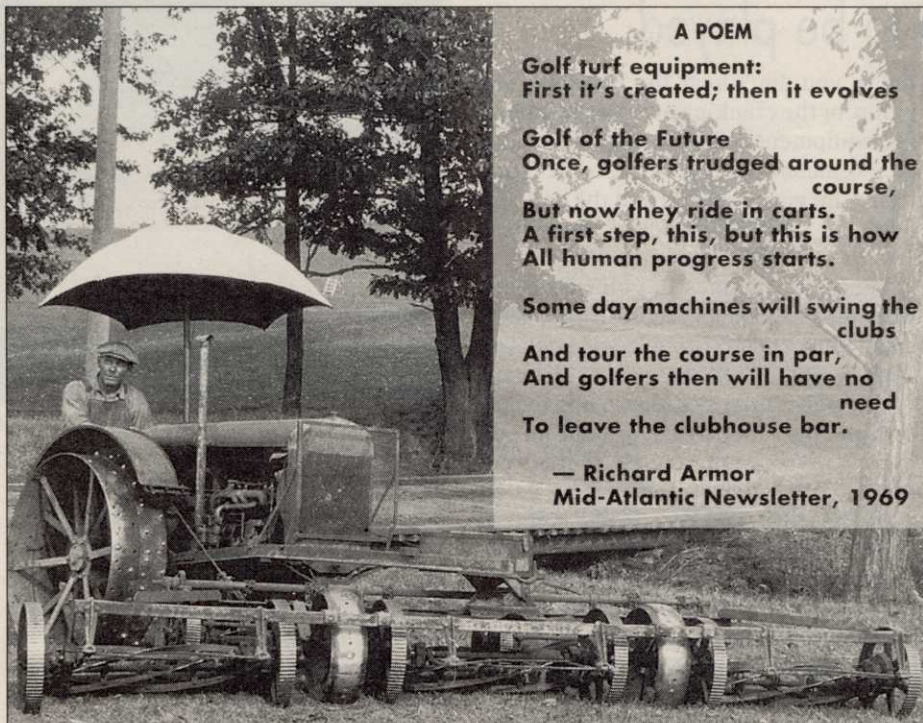
Roughly a half millennium ago, the only use made of the linklands of northern and eastern Scotland was to pasture sheep. They found shelter in natural hollows. Turf, such as it was, consisted of bentgrass and some fescue with stiff blades. The sheep kept it mowed. Rabbits were among the other animals that shared the land. They dug holes. Then, as some accounts would have it, bored shepherds began challenging each other to see who — using the staffs that were the tools of their trade — could strike the most rocks into the rabbit holes. But look out. Don't land in those hollows.

That, they say, was the beginning of golf. It really took off as railroads came in and began transporting people from the cities to the coasts on holidays and weekends to see how this new game was played. Soon, the city folks, too, were swinging golf clubs. Then they carried their newfound sport back to town.

And grow golf did. Eventually, it became a struggle to keep pace with the demand for more and better golf course management equipment. It's easy to see how such an industry has grown up around the game. Those hollows where sheep sought refuge centuries ago, for example, would become the bunkers of today and would have to be maintained.

The rabbit holes of yesteryear would someday be the cups of modern golf and would need to be leveled, and lined to

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A tractor-driven National Mower five-gang mowing unit, circa mid-1920s.

A POEM  
**Golf turf equipment:**  
 First it's created; then it evolves  
**Golf of the Future**  
 Once, golfers trudged around the course,  
 But now they ride in carts.  
 A first step, this, but this is how  
 All human progress starts.  
 Some day machines will swing the clubs  
 And tour the course in par,  
 And golfers then will have no need  
 To leave the clubhouse bar.

— Richard Armor  
 Mid-Atlantic Newsletter, 1969

Photo courtesy of National Mower Co.

prevent collapse. And — try though they did to keep the grass cut — those sheep eventually would have to go.

This is a quick look at the evolution of some of the many pieces of golf course management equipment required to build and maintain the venues for the game today.

The first real breakthrough came with the invention of the mower. You might call it the superstar of the century in the golf course management equipment inventory. "Mowers," wrote Drs. Charles V. Piper and Russell A. Oakley in their landmark book *Turf for Golf Courses* in 1917, "are the most essential element on every golf course."

That was true in the beginning, and it is true today.

Until the mid- to late-1800s, scything was about the only practical way to cut grass, except for sheep. But scything was only effective when the grass was wet. That meant you had to get up before dawn to take advantage of the dew. And it took teams of women and children following the



An old Toro walkbehind greens mower.

Photo courtesy of The Toro Co.

"scythen" to collect the clippings.

Most of the credit for advancing beyond the scything era should go to Edwin Beard Budding, an engineer from Gloucester, England. In the mid-1800s, he adapted rotary knife machines used in textile factories to remove nap from cloth and invented what is believed to have been the first mechanical lawn mower. Its main advantage was that it could cut dry grass.

After obtaining a patent, Budding and a partner began granting licenses to manufacturers, and the commercial turf man-

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## Collections of antiques on view at MSU, Penn

Probably the two best collections of vintage golf course management equipment in the world are the Dr. Kenyon T. Payne Collection at Michigan State University and at Mascaro/Steiniger Turfgrass Equipment Museum at Pennsylvania State University.

During his life, Payne gathered more than 120 pieces of antique equipment under one roof. Along with other groups and individuals, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has added to the collection.

Among the many artifacts at Michigan State are a Turferator (an early aerifier), an Ideal greensmower, a Caldwell demountable roller/brush, a Thompson wheelbarrow seeder, a Shawnee-Worthington greensmower, steel horse hoof plates and a Paddleson leather horse boot.

In the tons of antique iron at Penn State are such pieces as Mascaro's prototype aerifier; a creosoted, wooden irrigation pipe from a golf course; an early Greensaire turf aerator by Ryan; a Royer soil shredder; and a Worthington tractor.

Payne was a turfgrass scientist and educator. Mascaro, an entrepreneur as well as an inventor, is remembered for his "Verticut" mower to remove thatch from greens as well as for his aerifier.

One of the best places to see modern and new golf course management equipment is at the huge GCSAA Golf Course Conference and Show held annually in a major Sun Belt city.

## A COMMENTARY

# A historical perspective of the golf course greenkeeper

By MEL LUCAS

As we enter into a new century where vast new horizons await all professions, we too must be prepared to advance with new technology and research. The last 25 years have pushed our industry into the most robust time a golf course superintendent has ever experienced.

Every segment of our earning power has been dramatically influenced by mowing equipment, irrigation technology, hybridization of turfgrass cultivars, biostimulants, putting green construction, fertilizer and chemical specificity toward fine-turf management, educational opportunities through journals, conferences geared toward turf care and the strong promotional activities of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

We must take note that in no small way, the environmental movement has helped us a great deal.

How did we get to this point? We should reflect on our humble beginning. Oftentimes superintendents refer to ourselves as a bit of art and a bit of science. This is, of

course, preaching to the choir. Let us trust that the choir is well informed as to where we are and from where we came.

Many people judge us on an individual basis, be it private or public golf course. As much as GCSAA makes people aware of an honorable profession, there have been times that we have been cast as a true artisan of turf grooming; times we have been vilified via TV coverage; and times regarded as journeymen, as perceived by a judge during a case involving geese killed on a New York golf course many years ago.

The very first mention of a person responsible for the golfing grounds was in 1774. The records from The Royal Burgess Golfing Society of Edinburgh mentioned that "a boy was engaged to convey messages to and from members, to serve as waiter at dinner, carry the Captain's clubs and to alter and mend golf holes on the links." Later in their records of 1774 the titles he was given were "our cady — our officer — our greenkeeper."

The terms "greenkeeper," "keeper of the green" and "custodian of the links" have been used throughout the

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Photo courtesy of Mel Lucas

The profession of greenkeeper has come a long way since the days of the boler hat and the first steam-propelled mower (circa 1910s).