

"Meet the Mitchells"

New England's Mitchell family does a grand job of tending 99 holes of golf

By
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IF a man existed who stood nearly 30 feet tall, weighed 918 pounds and supervised maintenance of a golf course of 99 holes—with a budget of \$57,000—on property with tax assessment value of nearly \$1,000,000 — that greenkeeper would be quite a remarkable fellow.

That description, however, is an aggregate of the five Mitchell Family (of New England) members. Based on averages, the investment value of land, construction, buildings, turf and equipment these men are connected with, represents an estimated cash outlay well over \$3,000,000.

Robert A. Mitchell, the family head,—a quiet-speaking personage, modestly states that aside from the fact that his four sons and he are all in the greenkeeping business, there is little unusual about them. He feels there are many other greenkeepers that have equal or greater responsibilities. While it is said it takes three centuries to obtain turf abroad, Mr. Mitchell feels that in this country, despite varying conditions, we do better. "In fact," he said, "a greenkeeper who raises a piece of greens turf in a year, expects it to hold together when a clod is tossed the width of a fairway."

First Comes "Pop"

At the Kernwood CC, Salem, Mass., the elder Mitchell is in charge of maintenance with a crew of seven. The main sports facilities of this private club include 18 golf holes, and tennis. The club is famed in acreage turf circles for its Kernwood velvet bent, recognized as one of the better golf grasses.

As a gardener to the Carnegie Estate in southeast Georgia, then in the greenhouse business with his brothers, followed by 9 years teaching vegetable gardening at the Essex Co. Agricultural School in Massachusetts, Mr. Mitchell acquired the experience to develop the grass now used in various parts of the country. All of his sons had initial ground-schooling in greenkeeping under the capable guidance of their father. Other men, too, who are now greenkeepers in their own right, got their start with R. A. Mitchell.

He was one of the pioneers in mechanization of course work, and suggested a number of machine improvements now in use. In addition, the Senior Mitchell is a charter member of the Greenkeepers' Club of New England,—the oldest existing organization of its kind. The Club had Mr. Mitchell's services as secretary, and ultimately, as president. Monthly meetings usually find Mr. Mitchell present, and still taking active part, with his professional group,—and doing very well for his 65 years of a rather full life. His birth date is October 14, 1875.

Then There's Bob

Robert Lee Mitchell, the eldest son, born Feb. 23, 1907, is in charge of the private 27-hole Edison club in Rexford, N. Y. Membership in this club is made up largely of those connected with the General Electric Company in Schenectady. "Bob" as he is known to his associates, came to Rexford in 1931. His previous experience, besides at Kernwood, was at the Lynfield GC, and the private course of A. E. Little,

The Mitchell Family of golf superintendents: (left to right) Wm. F. Mitchell, Sam S. Mitchell, Robert A. Mitchell, Robert L. Mitchell and Henry C. Mitchell.



both in Massachusetts. Bob has two sons who aspire to follow the family calling.

Before winter short courses for greenkeepers were instituted, Bob attended a 10 week course at Stockbridge—MSC, back in 1924. Soils, fertilizers and introduction to agronomy were the subjects. In 1931, he attended the regular 10 week winter school for greenkeepers at Massachusetts State, took the advanced course in 1932, and an additional 10 weeks of post-graduate work in 1937. His applied knowledge attains good turf, despite the heavy clay soil at the Edison club. Then, too, Bob's wealth of greenkeeping learning led to his winning the GSA contest for best questionnaire to determine greenkeepers' fitness. This was told in October, 1939, *GOLFDOM*, page 24.

The first son of the Mitchell family is, at this writing, president of the Northeastern New York Greenkeepers Assn., an affiliate of the GSA. Bob has attended many conventions of the latter, serving as delegate for his region. The convention held in New York, 1940, had Bob present as a guest of the GSA for winning the qualifications contest mentioned earlier. 12 greensmen work at the Edison Club.

... and Sam

The second of the Mitchell progeny is Samuel S.—born Sept. 8, 1909. What the middle initial stands for appears to be a secret,—although the pseudonym "Sod", might be appropriate. From 1924 to '28, when he worked under his Dad, Sam got in time to complete the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, full two-year course, at Amherst. His work took him to the Lawsonia CC in Green Lake, Wis., then back East to the Salem (Mass.) Municipal GC on construction supervision—finally settling down at the Ponkapoag CC, Canton, Mass. This is a 27 hole munny course operated by the Massachusetts Commonwealth. Here, 15 men are employed in course maintenance, including a practice green of experimental turf grasses totaling 8,000 square feet. (Described in *GOLFDOM*, Sept. 1939, page 32.).

Sam's two sons are prospective greenkeepers, and his daughter is ambitious to become a golf champion. She, incidentally, is the only daughter in three generations of Mitchells. Sam is an active member of the Greenkeepers Club of New England, his name often appearing on the roster of officials of that association.

... and Bill

"Henry the Third" made his debut in this world Nov. 25, 1910. His second

given name, Crombie, is that of his mother's family. The Crombies, like many New England families, were sea captains in the days of iron men and wooden ships. Their home port was Bath, Maine. It was the great grandfather and great great grandfather of Robert A. Mitchell, both named John Mitchell, who also sailed from this Maine port.

Henry Mitchell's greenkeeping skill is applied to the 9-hole semi-private Walpole (Mass.) CC. From Kernwood, to the Homestead CC in Danvers, then Lake Garfield CC in Monterey, Mass., H. C. Mitchell acquired 13 years' experience before starting at Walpole in 1937.

The winter school for greenkeepers at MSC found Henry in attendance in 1933-34. He has one son, who does not intend to let his cousins outdo him in future course care. Henry C. is an active member of the G. C. N. E. Alert supervision keeps three maintenance laborers on the go at the Walpole club.

... and Henry

William Follet Mitchell, youngest of the course maintaining Mitchells, makes up in height for his shortage of years. Bill is 6 ft. 1 inch, and tips the scale at an even tenth of a ton. His Dad is 5 feet, 7 inches, and his brothers all are close to 5 feet, 10 inches. Bill celebrated his 29th birthday Dec. 27th last.

His club is the Lake Sunapee CC in New London, N. H. Besides its private 18-hole course, the club owns the Lake Sunapee turf gardens that at present consist of 250,000 sq. ft. of Kernwood velvet bent sod, and 10,000 sq. ft. of Piper velvet bent. In the late afternoon, the club can put its 20 men to cutting and loading sod on their own trailer truck, and deliver it to Long Island, N. Y., the next morning, ready for laying down.

Bill Mitchell started at the Lake Sunapee club in 1932, after his work at Kernwood, Lynfield Center GC and Cedar Glenn CC. In 1939 he was retained by the Vesper CC in Lowell, Mass., in an advisory capacity. Wm. F. took the regular 10-week course at MSC in 1932, and the advanced class of 1933. He has three sons to take on visits to their grandparents.

Professional organizations in which Bill is a member are The Greenkeepers Club of New England, The Northeastern New York Greenkeepers Assn., and the GSA.

All of the Mitchell family are well liked by those who meet them. Conservative in the New England manner, they are cordial and sincere with all their many friends.