

# How Green-chairman Brought Up A Small Town Course

By JOHN P. MINCHEN

The year 1948 saw Carroll (Ia.) CC celebrate its 25th anniversary at its first party of the year. There were about 200 present with the entertainment and reminiscing program you'd expect at such an affair. The Carroll Times Herald wrote of the birthday celebration in one of those friendly detailed stories that makes anybody who's connected with the club feel a sense of personal gratification at the way the club has come along.

I read my name in the story and bowed to myself. Ray Moehn, one of the directors, said in his speech, "We don't know of anyone who has done more for the club than John Minchen. John laid out the course on a map and saw that it was put in. He has had a lot to do and is still doing a lot for the club." That is nothing like the flowers tossed in a political nominating speech but any fellow who has been a green chairman of a smaller town club and nursed it up from cow-pasturehood to become an asset in which the community can take pride and can enjoy, will understand why I bought extra copies of the paper to read and delight in the novelty of a green chairman being given kind words in public.

It could be that you are on a green com-

mittee of a club in a nice little town filled with pleasant people and that you too have the whimsical ambition to have somebody say something nice about you and your work at the club, after you've been around 25 years working for nothing.

You have set a difficult goal for yourself. Your friends, the members of the club, only want from you a course that is an architectural gem like Oakmont or Cypress Point with such improvements in design as will permit them to score well at all times. The condition of the course — greens, fairways and tees — must be as good or better than the best maintained courses in Des Moines, Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. If you can figure out a substitute for money and can carry out these improvements without objections by members who want several of the features of the old course retained, you have a touch of genius that I don't have.

## How to Keep Friends

All I can tell you is how to get by, having the course get a little better year by year, and keeping your friends.

First you have to love golf. Then you have to be lucky in getting the right people to advise you and work with you. Then, to really get action, and have an idea that



This view of the Carroll (Iowa) CC No. 1 tee shows arrangement of hedge Green chmn. Minchen has used to add to the beauty of the landscape and at the same time prevent the loss of too many balls that might otherwise land in the bordering roadway as a result of the well-known slice.



Expert advice coupled with enduring patience has helped Minchen bring to the Carroll course first class bent greens designed to fit into the natural contour of the land. This is No. 8 green showing trees and shelter in the background that give individuality to an otherwise monotonous terrain.

you know must be put across, let somebody else, or numerous others, take the credit. Being somewhat stubborn and caloused won't hurt you any if you are going to be on a green committee 25 years.

When golf was introduced to Carroll about 1899, Hi Jeffrey of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett Co. and Preston Beale of the Standard Oil Co. brought the game out from Chicago. There were just two holes on the first course. Later Jack Hawkins, our first pro and greenkeeper, laid out a nine hole course, and taught Stanton Sherman, son of the sponsor of our present course, and some of the rest of us veterans.



Looking toward the clubhouse from No. 9 fairway, open door at the entrance to the Pine Room on the ground level serves as standing invitation for a pause between rounds.

Our first club died after World War I when the passing of George M. Stanton, the driving force of the old Carroll G.C., left the enterprise without a leader with fervent enthusiasm. Unless the small town club has at least one fellow of that sort it'll never get anywhere.

When golf was revived in Carroll in 1923 I was the fellow who was supposed to lay out nine holes on a 40 acre square tract. It can't be done. I have seen several interesting nine hole layouts on 20s, end to end, but never on a square 40.

One fault of our course as it was originally laid-out was that it ran counter-clockwise. With most golfers being addicted to a slice the out-of-bounds on the right is going to cause a lot of complaints and discouragement and lost balls. This might have been prevented if at the start the club had been willing to pay \$50 to Charley Johnson, then the pro at the Omaha CC, to give it a rough layout and some good basic advice. But, as in so many other cases, the club allowed a well-meaning and incompetent fellow to give it for nothing a layout that had to be corrected over years whenever we could argue out a loose dollar.

#### More Ground; Better Course

An important step in the revision of our course came when we finally succeeded in prying a little piece from Jim Wieland whose farm adjoins the course on the south. I was visiting with Jim at his house one day and pointed to a worn-out clayhill about a half mile away and alongside our course.

"Jim," I said, "the sight of that knob of clay staring a buyer in the face cuts about \$25 an acre from the value of your whole farm. I think I can get the club to pay you about \$250 an acre for that piece, and that's \$50 an acre more than your farm is worth."

"Damn if I don't think you're right," Jim allowed and the upshot of that talk, followed by some sessions on the clubhouse porch with Jim and me washing the dust out of our throats with a few beers, was that we added 2½ acres. The knob gave us space for two tees for our No. 4 short hole which was taken over from the original 40 acres, a big double green in the valley and an area where we could get some good black loam for top-dressing. Furthermore, it allowed us to switch our layout so players weren't knock-



—Larry Shafer, photo

### REMINDER TO CHECK FIRE RISK

What's left after \$75,000 blaze gutted section of clubhouse of Kirtland CC (Cleveland dist.) last fall is a reminder that check-up on fire prevention, fire control and fire insurance is one of the important jobs to be done during time when golf clubhouse operations in central and northern states are in a lull. Increased building costs point to need of insurance revision upward. Manager and officials can use this time too in discussing operating practices to reduce fire risk when the season is on. Fire insurance fellows say "every country clubhouse burns once," and attribute high fire insurance rates in most cases to causes that can be eliminated without undue expense. Fire insurance men don't tell, however, how to fully control carelessness of members and help so fire risk will be reduced. That's one of the problems that make managers grey-headed.

ing balls into Jim's oats which was something that didn't improve anybody's disposition or pleasure.

While the changes were being made steadily and slowly I was studying books on golf architecture and with that basic training was questioning good architects and greenkeepers and pros, hoping that someday we would have license for bragging we had the best smalltown course in Western Iowa. But nobody ever wanted to discuss the merits of famous holes illustrated in the copy of *The Links* I often carried around with me.

A friend of mine from San Diego, Si Boysen, who knows the beginning and has seen the change in our course, said to me I was doing a \$5,000 job for the club. That was a pleasing shock to me but when I got over being built up to myself by the comment I got to thinking what the time I'd spent in 25 years on the course might be worth, even at mighty low wages an hour. Any earnest green-chairman who will do the same thing after serving his club for some years will be surprised at how the total will run up. But nobody will give a damn.

The average golf club member in any size or class of club just wants to have all possible pleasure at least possible expense and no work at all, so some conscientious nut has to do what the others won't. And, to tell the truth, I don't know where a fellow with the correct fit of persistence, patience, eagerness to learn and willingness to put up with indifference or criticism from the uninformed, can get any more satisfaction from ultimate achievement in a hobby than a green-chairman gets when he sees his course gradually develop into something that receives high approval from his fellow club members and their guests.

A rather amusing contradictory thing about the average golfer is he will come home with glowing accounts of playing an interesting hole on some neighboring course. But if you suggest building a green like it he will have seven kinds of a cat fit. Funny ain't he? A case in point with us is the No. 4 hole at Perry, Ia. Our No. 4 could be made to conform and be almost as interesting.

One very important thing that the chairman of the smaller club will learn is that for maintaining keen interest of players

the layout of the course ranks right along with condition. In our limited area we haven't got the long hole arrangement I'd like for our 3,000 yd. course. But we do have an interesting variety that calls for all the shots in almost anybody's bag. Here's our card:

HOLE	YDS.	PAR
1	400	4
2	300	4
3	390	4
4	125	3
5	500	5
6	355	4
7	330	4
8	220	3
9	380	4
	3000	35

By continuously keeping in mind a long-range landscaping plan we have been able to diminish risks of parallel fairways and use trees and shrubs so they have just as positive effect in determining shot placement as some expensive sand trapping which a club of our income couldn't afford to maintain in first class condition.

One of the effective and unorthodox uses of landscaping as a hazard and direction control factor is a hedge that runs into the course from the Lincoln highway which is to the right of our first hole. How that hedge has reduced the number of balls sprayed out into the highway by being a reminder that one had better aim well to the left! It also reduces club liability for accidents to passing motorists.

It was a tedious trial to overcome the original handicaps of old-fashioned square greens, impoverished soil and worn-out and cheap equipment. Remember, we were trying to have a golf course on a shoestring. Many a time instead of risking criticism for small expenditures I paid the bills myself and forgot them. I spent hours running back and forth with repairs for our ancient Fordson tractor and our fairway mower which was practically a museum piece. Greens were mowed by hand.

#### Gets Expert Advice

All one winter the boy who did our greenkeeping hauled manure from a dairy five miles away. That gave us a start in getting some real turf on worn-out pasture land. We couldn't afford a greenkeeper. The youth who did the work on the courses did the hauling during the winter in return for occupancy of a house I'd got for him.

As signs of improvement began to show I was cheered and managed to get the

fellows to agree to remodeling and modernization of some greens. The members wanted bent and I argued with them bent was wasted on greens of the design and construction of our original ones. I got all the advice I could about the bent to put in.

John Monteith, then of the USGA Green section, came out one time to advise us and was greeted by a stiff argument about grasses from one of our members. My good fellow citizen didn't know any more about bent for greens than a hog knows about Sunday, so his remarks were somewhat embarrassing to me after I'd prevailed upon the USGA authority to come to help us. However John took the assault in stride and outside of saying our member was "hostile" didn't seem to be upset.

Every course I visited was studied for an idea that might contribute to Carroll. At Wakondah at Des Moines I saw how holes that ran with out-of-bounds to the right had been dog-legged in away from the boundaries. We adapted that idea to considerable advantage.

When we finally got the dissenters to agree to remodeling some of our greens and get bent on them, I got Bill Keating, the greenkeeper at the Des Moines G&CC to come, at my expense, to get us started off right. What a joy and relief it was to me to have a member who first met Bill on arrival refer to him as "the best greenkeeper in Iowa." That heralding I knew would get our folks to accept Bill's recommendations as the law.

I'd been having some mild debates with members who wanted the new greens built up from borrow areas along the fences that already were barren of decent top-soil. I was getting nowhere until Bill said we could get enough good soil around the sites of the remodeled greens to give us desired elevation and some smart trapping from where this soil had been removed.

The new greens were designed to fit like nature had made them for the shot. Their soil structure and drainage was made according to sound modern ideas. The bent couldn't be mowed by hand without breaking a man's back so we had to buy a power greens mower, and that's been a great help to us in keeping fine greens turf in best condition.

I'd already found that having a golf course in pretty fair shape in the spring is not too tough a job but the test of good maintenance comes in the summer. Keating's advice to us in bringing the course through the summer was invaluable.

And let me tell the chairman of any small town course that if there is a greenkeepers' association in his territory by all means attend all of that organization's meetings and listen to and ask questions of these very able men. The Iowa Greenkeepers' association members and meetings have helped me in work for our club more than could be appraised in just dollars and cents. These men not only know what turf and maintenance problems the chairman has but the policy and personnel problems. They'll give you as many of the right answers as the green chairman ever can get from practical experts. But a lot of the other right answers you'll learn only from headaches, as I did.

## BUILDS GREENKEEPER

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not only by the graduating class, but by greenkeepers from all parts of New England and neighboring states. This conference also serves as a "homecoming" period for the graduates of the winter school and they gather from far and wide. Speakers at the conference include men noted in the fine turf field. Members of the graduating class are also selected to give their views on the profession.

Upon completion of the course, the graduate has received ten weeks of intensive study. He is eminently equipped to handle the numerous problems of his chosen field. During his studies he has been encouraged to compile a set of complete notebooks from lecture notes and from precis that are handed out in class. These notebooks serve him in future years as a text giving him the latest and best information. It is considered that a graduate's set of notebooks represents at the time of his graduation the most complete

and up-to-date text available on the growing of grass.

Graduates of the eighteen Winter Schools which have been held to date, occupy a great variety of positions. Several own their own courses, some are managers, others are pro-greenkeepers and others are with equipment and supply dealers. Five lost their lives during World War II. By far the greater number of the graduates are greenkeeping superintendents. Arthur Anderson, Ed Casey, Jack Counsell, Tom Festo, Emile Mashie, John McNamara, Charles Storrier and Norman Butler are a few of the graduates on whose courses National Championships have been played.

A number of graduates own their own businesses. For example, Clinton Kent Bradley, writer for *Golfdom*, runs his own equipment business in New Jersey and Henry and Bill Mitchell, two of the four famous Mitchell brothers, all graduates of the school, own and operate a velvet bent nursery in New Hampshire and are also in the golf course construction business.

Ted Glowa is Superintendent of Grounds at the United States Military Academy. Casper McCulloch is greenkeeping superintendent at Banff Springs in the Canadian Rockies and keeps a watchful eye on other Canadian Pacific courses. G. H. Cassell is in charge of all fine turf areas controlled by the United States in the Canal Zone including the Fort Amador Golf Course at Balboa Heights.

### Demand Exceeds Supply

It is not within the scope of this article to catalogue the positions held by all the graduates, but all are doing well and all are making valuable contributions year by year to the fine turf work. The alumni of the eighteen Winter Schools now constitute a large group within the greenkeeping profession.

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