

What The Superintendent Has Done For Golf*

By **JOSEPH C. DEY**
Executive Director, U.S.G.A.

What the superintendent has done for golf can be gauged in a variety of ways. One way is to reverse the subject—to trace the evolution of the superintendent's own position in the total golf picture—in fact, to see what golf has done for the superintendent. This is a pretty accurate measure, for what one receives—that is, one's position in any enterprise—is usually just a reflection of what one has given.

Now this doesn't imply that the superintendent has received his complete and total reward. In many cases there is, unfortunately, inadequate reward for this key position in the golf world. Who would say that a state of perfect relations has yet been reached between the superintendent and the 300 or 400 hackers and turf experts who make up his club's membership?

But let's take a brief trip backwards in time and we can get a better perspective on the position of the superintendent and thus on what he has done for golf.

When Supts. Were Custodians

In "Golf House," the USGA's headquarters in New York, there is a little memorandum book containing many signatures of Old Tom Morris. You may recall him as a famous Scotch professional and former British Open Champion, and so he was. But he was also Custodian of the Links at St. Andrews. Note that title—Custodian of the Links. The little memo book in "Golf House" consists entirely of receipts by Tom Morris for payments which the Royal and Ancient Golf Club made to him for maintenance of the golf course.

One of the earliest entries is as follows: St. Andrews 2 April 1892. Received from the Royal and Ancient Golf Club per C. S. Grace, Esq., Secretary, the sum of seven pounds 9/- being outlay on Links for two weeks.

This was signed by Old Tom across a postage stamp, as were all the others. The figure of 7 pounds 9 shillings—approximately \$37 then—apparently covered

all costs of maintaining the Old Course at St. Andrews for two weeks except for Old Tom's salary. The following entry tells about his own compensation: St. Andrews 14 May 1892—Received the sum of Twenty-five pounds being half year's Salary as Custodian of the Links to Whitsunday.

Fifty pounds a year—about \$250—for seeing to it that the Old Course was ship-shape. Of course, there are a good many double greens on the Old Course, and maybe the Club took full advantage of that fact in computing Old Tom's salary.

In 1894 the New Course at St. Andrews was built, so Old Tom probably was responsible for two courses when the following payment was recorded in the R. and A. receipt book: 11 May 1895 (they were still paying every two weeks)—Received the sum of Ten pounds 17/6, said sum including account to Blacksmith for tins and flags.

There is no indication of any increase in Old Tom's salary when he had two courses to superintend. It ought to be remembered that Morris not only was Custodian of the Links but was a prominent professional player, a teacher, a club-maker, and an altogether large figure in the game.

Not Much Greenkeeping Then

In the United States the game in the Nineties was much less refined than in Scotland. One of our host associations here today, the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents, may be surprised to learn that the first golf course in their district was a little three-hole layout at the Philadelphia Country Club in 1891. It was described as follows by H. C. Groome, then the Resident Secretary of the Club: Three empty pea cans were inserted in the lawn in a triangle, the sides of which measured about 75 yards; clubs were sent for, and every stray Englishman who appeared at the Club was immediately impressed as an expounder of the "Ancient and Honorable" game.

A New York newspaper of December 14, 1896, reported the following about a

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new course: Weather permitting, the Crescent A. C. golf links will be in condition to be played over by the first of the year, surely before that time should snow hold off. George Strath, the professional greenskeeper of the Dyker Meadow Golf Club, has charge of the laying out of the course, and all he asks for is ten days of good weather to get nine holes in playing shape. . . . There will be a charge for playing; and probably, following the fashion of other courses of a large club nature, there will be playing clubs for hire, the player so hiring assuming responsibility for their return in good condition.

The First Green Section Report

To get our next view on what the superintendent has done for golf, and vice versa, we skip some 25 years. The time is January, 1922, and we are listening to the first annual report of the USGA Green Section — the reporter is Dr. C. V. Piper, Chairman: The need of more and better green-keepers is so notorious as to require no discussion. Various suggestions have been made as to methods to meet this need. One of these was the idea of holding schools for six months, first in one golf center and then in another. Any bright young man of high school education should, under capable instruction combined with practical experience on a good golf course, become a fair greenkeeper after the six months. The idea is worth consideration.

Cornell University has now a course designed to train men to be superintendents of parks, of a golf course or a series of golf courses. Such men would not be greenkeepers in our present meaning, but rather agronomists skilled in soils, fertilizers, turf-growing, landscape gardening, etc., who would be competent to act as general superintendents. We need such men and through them we shall get our green-keepers better trained.

The period of greatest development of the superintendent's position was sketched clearly by your own late President, the beloved John Morley, in an address at the 1929 Annual Meeting of the USGA Green Section. Here is his voice speaking out of the past — this was 1929:—

"About 15 years ago the word 'green-keeping' was not generally known. About 70% of the courses were under the direct supervision of 'professionals'. They were handicapped because very little knowledge was to be obtained, even from Washington, as to the best methods. Not more

than 10% would qualify as the green-keeper is known today.

"It is true that we had turf experts in those early days of greenkeeping; one leading turfman thought he had discovered that by mixing clay, bone-meal, and cow manure in a cement mixer and placing them in layer formation in the making of a putting green, it would solve the problem of raising ideal turf.

"In those early days there were very few pieces of equipment suitable to keep a course in excellent condition. First we had to cut the fairways with a one-horse mower outfit. Then came the gasoline mower that weighed nearly a ton, with one single cutting unit. On an 18-hole course, if we wanted to cut the fairways once in nine days, we were compelled to use two mowers, for one or the other was out of commission most of the time. Then came the sulky mower with three cutting units, drawn by a horse which had to wear iron or aluminum shoes. If the horses were not flat-footed, and the turf was soft, they would dig the toes of these shoes into the turf, leaving the fairways full of small holes.

"About 12 years ago — (that would be about 1917) — golf in this country began to take rapid strides. And with this progress came improvements. But new courses multiplied so fast that it was impossible to secure enough men well versed in the art of greenkeeping.

"To a large extent we were very fortunate to secure men who had at one time been well versed in farming and gardening. But they soon discovered that the methods applied to farming and gardening would not produce results for successful turf. Each in his own way endeavored to find other methods, and with so many working along different channels, we gradually commenced to get information that tended to create better turf and better working equipment.

"Instead of 70% of golf courses which were formerly taken care of 15 years ago by professionals, today over 80% of the courses are in charge of greenkeepers."

That was in 1929.

And now today what is the picture? Everyone of you has been entrusted with a large and valuable property. To cite an extreme example of a superintendent's responsibility, the Oakmont Country Club near Pittsburgh, where the USGA Open Championship is to be played in June, spent \$63,000 in its Grounds Department last year and \$62,000 the year before. Each year the labor expense was nearly

\$40,000. True, some course changes were involved; also, the club was pointing toward the Open—but it certainly makes striking contrast with the 7-pounds-9-shillings rate every two weeks at St. Andrews 60 years ago.

This very occasion in which we are meeting is a splendid example of the development of the superintendent's position. This is your 24th National Turf Conference and Show—your 24th! And now you don't even call yourselves greenkeepers, or even Custodians of the Links; you are Superintendents!

This little historical review may have seemed a left-handed way of considering what the superintendent has done for golf. Actually, this growth of your own professional status is a conservative gauge because, with all your personal development, you have undoubtedly given to golf more than golf has given to you.

You have done this in a most demanding occupation. You are expected to grow fine turf—have several hundred heavy-footed people walk all over it each week, in all sorts of weather, and tear up big chunks with sharp pieces of iron and steel—and still have it green and beautiful at 3 o'clock Sunday afternoon. To do this you must be willing to devote endless hours, sometimes at low return in pay; you must know not only about grasses, and the use of water, and fertilizers, but you must know something about chemicals, you must be a mechanical genius, and you must be a diplomat. You are often hampered by changing committee personnel in your club. You must constantly match wits with Nature—or, rather, learn how to cooperate with Nature—and you are never expected to lose.

In short, gentlemen, you are a rather remarkable group. You are the soul of devotion—I know, for I've had the pleasure of seeing many of you operate at close range when you have had USGA championships at your clubs—fellows like Mal McLaren, Joe Valentine, Elmer Michael, Leonard Strong, Ed Casey, Bill Johnson, John Price, Herman Borhardt, and many others. Gentlemen, our hat is off to you!

What Supts. Have Done

What are some of the specific and direct things that individual superintendents have done for golf? Fred Grau and I have talked about this and he recalled many contributions made by individuals—that have enriched the game as a whole.

Joe Valentine, spotted one day on the 17th tee of the Merion East course, near Philadelphia, a different, unusual strain of grass. For five years he observed it quietly. Then he gave a plug of it to the USGA Green Section for development. Because of Joe's alertness, we now have Merion bluegrass.

A Florida superintendent, Gene Tift, was responsible for selecting a strain of Bermuda on his own course which has been developed to be one of the best for putting greens in the South.

Bill Beresford, at the Los Angeles Country Club, and Joe Ryan, at Rolling Green near Philadelphia, had their eyes open and came upon new strains of bentgrass which helped solve some of their local problems.

Elmer Michael, at Oak Hill in Rochester, has broadened his interests beyond turf for golf and has become a developer of wonderful trees which beautify Oak Hill.

In mechanical inventions, superintendents have often shown the way. Your excellent president, Mal McLaren, was instrumental in developing a turf slicer for bent on putting greens; it helped Canterbury in Cleveland prepare for the 1946 Open championship. This device was a forerunner of modern aerating equipment.

Jim Morrison, at the Hershey CC in Pennsylvania, devised a vertical mower for crabgrass cutting. It resulted in final development of a new machine for vertical mowing.

Joe Valentine dreamed up a flexible rake on fairway mowers to rake up and cut crabgrass—the forerunner of the present flexible comb.

Bob Scott, at the Baltimore Country Club's Five Farms course, has turned out various devices for improving greenkeeping methods, such as a fertilizer distributor, a square plugger, and a simple home-made duster.

Jim Haines, at the Denver Country Club, invented a tree root-cutter, and leaf-raking and suction equipment.

You could go on calling the roll for hours. The point is that all these superintendents gave that something extra—that plus—which has always advanced causes ever since there was a cause on earth. This attitude of hope, of expectancy, and of devotion beyond mere duty should challenge all of us. The end is never in sight. Right on your own courses, under the very nose of each of us, there

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the operating end. Weiss warned that with so many fairways being bent, the thatch problem on fairways was due to become a much worse and more expensive headache than thatch on greens and probably is an inevitable aftermath of the demand for closecut fairways.

Bill Beresford, Los Angeles CC supt., got the final session started with a talk by F. S. LaBar, Stroudsburg, Pa., nurseryman on landscaping that gives the course added values for players without unduly increasing maintenance operations.

Summaries of the reports of turf experiences in 1952 as observed by O. J. Noer, Milwaukee Sewerage Commission, and Arthur E. Anderson, supt., Brae Burn CC, West Newton, Mass., on northern courses and on southern courses by James L. Watson, Toro Mfg. Co. and James L. Jennings, supt., River Oaks CC, Houston, Tex., are appearing in GOLFDOM. The four expert observers accented the lessons of a generally troublesome year in turf rather than merely relating the troubles or their absence.

The conference finale was a symposium in which three chairmen who know the superintendent's problems and are in the middle between the members and the course maintenance men made it plain that the superintendent didn't have any monopoly on course headaches. V. J. (Pat) Pazzetti, Jr., former green chmn., Saucon Valley CC, Bethlehem, Pa., and George Hurd, the club's present chmn., together with Adm. Jack Phillips, chmn., Army-Navy CC, Arlington, Va., and rated by superintendents as one of the most valuable men in turf maintenance at Mid-Atlantic courses, told the officials' and players' side of the story and debated the issues with superintendents. A summary of this frank discussion will appear in April GOLFDOM. This program feature, in the opinion of those whose departure schedules permitted them to hear it, was the best educational material on operating and officials-relations policies ever presented before superintendents and should be spotlighted earlier in future conferences.

WHAT SUPT. HAS DONE

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probably are opportunities crying to be recognized.

And incidentally, gentlemen, developments like these we have named are news, and you individually should see to it that the appropriate news agencies are

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informed of them.

Down through the years the standards of play have been vastly affected by improvements in course maintenance. Here are some statistics pertaining to the USGA Open Championship: The first time the Open was played at 72 holes was in 1898 at the Myopia Hunt Club, South Hamilton, Mass. Fred Herd, using a gutta ball, won with a score of 328 — an average of 82 per round.

Today, 55 years later, the scoring record for the Open is 276, made by Ben Hogan at Riviera in Los Angeles in 1948. He averaged 69 per round. Hogan took 52 strokes less than Herd for the 72 holes — an average of 13 strokes per round less. This improvement of the standard has been caused by a combination of factors — increased competition, the rubber ball, better clubs—but probably no other single factor has been more influential than the improvement of golf course maintenance. This progress has helped tremendously in attracting new players to the game. Now that has been good for the game, but it has been even better for those players themselves. For golf, played in the proper spirit, is a restorative—a real re-creator. The superinten-

dent has made a profound contribution to the well-being of those of his fellow-men who have come to our game seeking the tonic of healthy play. That sort of contribution should be the most gratifying to you all.

Yes, despite the drawbacks, it must be mighty gratifying to work hand in hand with the Source of all life, in helping to bring about better and better growing things upon the face of the earth.

The position of the superintendent is not unlike that of a certain Englishman who had a little garden plot outside London several years ago. The authorities had turned over certain land to some of the poorer folk for subsistence gardens. The land was not very fruitful, or else the people who worked it were not very diligent, because none of them had real success except this certain individual. He, however, worked hard at it, and produced wonderful crops in his little plot.

One day the vicar of the parish happened along and saw the diligent gardener hard at work. The vicar stopped to praise him, and in a rather pontifical manner said:

"Well, my good man, it certainly is wonderful to see what you and the Lord

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have done together,"—and he emphasized "and the Lord."

"Yes," replied the perspiring gardener, "but ye should've seen it when the Lord had it by Himself."

You, gentlemen, you and your predecessors, going back even beyond Old Tom Morris—you, together with the Senior Partner of us all—have literally taken a cow pasture and transformed it into a lovely garden. You have, in the words of Isaiah, made the desert blossom as the rose. You have thereby helped to enrich your fellow-man in body and spirit.

For this you have the profound thanks of the world of golf.

INVITATION TOURNAMENT

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exception of the championship flight all flight and consolation prizes are identical.

After the championship final match has teed off we set up a table with white cloth on the first tee and put the medalist and championship flight prizes on it. The Northland President makes a little speech at the conclusion of the match and awards the boys their prizes. This adds

dignity to the thing and winds it up in good style.

The regular flight prizes are picked up at the golf shop.

Of course a lot of this operation costs money and perhaps some clubs could not afford all of it but many of the ideas here could be carried out in a smaller way with home-made signs, etc.

The instructions to committee chairmen and members and to key men and women of the club staff set forth every detail of operation and definitely place responsibilities.

Arrangements are outlined, points that were not completely satisfactory in previous Northland Invitation tournament operations are noted and methods to avoid recurrence of such mistakes are presented.

All points have been thoroughly discussed in committee meetings and coordinated before the letter of instructions is prepared and mailed. Operations and facilities in the clubhouse and on the course are described in detail. Special house rules are given for the event.

The details pertaining to actual play

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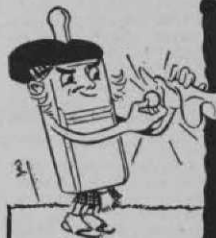
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