

Bob White, Pioneer Pro, Recalls Early Days of U. S. Golf

By HERB GRAFFIS



Robert White, first president (1917-1919) of the PGA, relaxes at his home in Myrtle Beach, S. C.

ROBERT WHITE, first pres. of the PGA of America, is living quietly in his stately home on Woodside ave. in Myrtle Beach, S. C. Bob's eyesight is bad; otherwise he is in excellent physical condition and is sparkling mentally. He is a large property-owner in Myrtle Beach and has other realty interests. He ranks among the wealthiest of professional golfers.

Bob served as PGA president in 1917, 1918 and 1919.

Before White's tenure there had been a previous effort to establish a PGA in New York but after a few casual meetings the informal organization collapsed. New England also had formed an organization of professionals which was headed by Harry Bowler. That group got together in 1914. Before professionals around New York and Boston formed their associations, professionals in the Chicago area were meeting regularly, were paying dues of \$2 a year into their organization and \$5 as an entry fee for each of the group's tournaments played monthly from April into September.

White served as professional of the Ravisloe CC in a southern suburb of Chicago from 1902 through 1914. It was during his connection with Ravisloe that the Illinois professionals elected White their association's president.

He was one of the Scots who came over early to handle pro jobs. He arrived in September, 1894, when Willie Dunn at Shinnecock Hills, Willie Davis at Newport, Willie Campbell at Brookline and perhaps a dozen others constituted the roster of American pro golfers.

Sunday Architect

The next spring Bob went on the pro job at Myopia at Hamilton, Mass., then a new 9-hole course. While pro at Myopia he laid out a number of golf courses in Massachusetts, several of them on Cape Cod. He'd devote his Sundays to this architectural work. He'd take 18 stakes and put them where the tees and greens of a 9-hole course were to be, give the owners an outline of how to build and maintain the course and then get back to Myopia. His fee was \$25 and expenses for laying out a course.

One of the courses Bob designed was the original 9 of the Salem (Mass.) CC where the 1954 USGA Women's Open championship was played. White ran across a memo of his charge for this job in an old notebook he discovered not long ago. The job was a bargain — \$10.39 — and some of the holes still are substantially as Bob designed them. He can't remember why he didn't get the standard price on that Salem job but he does recall that when he was laying out the course quite a garden party was being held on the club grounds.

From Myopia White went to the Cincinnati GC which had a 9-hole course that Bob enlarged to 18. From Cincinnati he went to Louisville where he laid out the first 9 of the Louisville CC, built the course and served as its pro.

During his 12 years at Ravisloe, White not only headed the first regularly functioning PGA but became the first greenkeeper to attend agricultural school.

The founding of the professionals' association at Chicago occurred in the spring of 1907, White recalls. He and his wife had been back to Scotland for a visit during the winter of 1906-07 and after their return to Ravisloe Bob was getting ready to open his shop at the club when he visited Spalding's store on Wabash avenue in Chicago to buy supplies and see the other pros of the district. The pros gathered for lunch at a restaurant around the corner

from the Spalding store and it was during one of these lunches that the professionals' organization was formed.

Recalls Chicago Pioneers

Among those recalled by White as being in at the beginning were Willie Marshall, Will Smith, Dave Bell, Jim Foulis, Laurie Auchterlonie, Harry Turpie, Bertie Way, Dave Foulis, Freddie McLeod, Alex Baxter, "Skokie" Watson, Bob Simpson, Stewart Gardner, Willie Anderson, Dave Livie and Walter Fovargue.

The first tournament the association ever held was at the old Homewood club which was the predecessor of the Flossmoor CC. Bob recalls that his first official duty was to arbitrate an argument about a score. "Skokie" Watson was one of the debating parties. Bob forgets who the other one was. As the argument neared the exploding point, White told the two that if they were going to fight they'd have to do it somewhere else as any further argument at the club would embarrass him and the other pros and their new organization. That reminder quieted the controversy.

White's pioneering in scientific course maintenance began at the University of Wisconsin in 1902 at one of the short courses then called "Farmers' Schools." Bob attended these schools yearly for 11 consecutive years.

He said that in the first hour he became impressed by the trouble the professors went to in answering questions and in charting the course of experience, observation and logic in successful farming procedure. White's problems were unique as he was the only one whose crop was golf grass. The other fellows, in classes and sitting around in hotels at night, would try to help Bob reason out the right answers in golf turf maintenance from their experience with other crops.

White tells how the fellows compared notes from their reading and once got into quite an argument about a book figure on the number of bent seeds in an ounce. They finally counted them after discovering they had to wear handkerchief masks across their mouths to keep from blowing the seeds away.

Fertilizer information was one of the especially valuable features of the "Farmers' Schools", Bob says.

Maintenance Neglected

In those days the pros made comparative-ly good incomes, but the greenkeepers didn't get much. The result was that the courses were not in good condition. The

pro-greenkeeper didn't have time enough to completely attend to both parts of the job so, naturally, he neglected the least profitable — the course maintenance.

The agricultural school knowledge that Bob adapted to course maintenance helped him to keep Ravisloe in remarkably good condition for those days. C. C. Worthington, the noted engineer who owned the Buckwood Inn hotel and course at Shawnee-on-Delaware, Pa., and who pioneered in mechanizing golf course maintenance, brought White to Shawnee as pro-greenkeeper. After a year there White went to Wykagyl CC at New Rochelle, N. Y. as pro-greenkeeper. He engaged pros to attend to the teaching and shop duties so he could spend more time directing course maintenance.

Jimmy Reith, Fred Moore and Sal Di Buono are among the young pros who worked for Bob. Due to this arrangement White was able to supervise the maintenance of Wykagyl and 11 other clubs in Westchester.

It was while Bob was at Wykagyl that Rodman Wanamaker had the historic lunch that resulted in the founding of the national PGA of today. Herbert Strong, then at Inwood and later prominent as a golf architect, was the PGA's first secretary. Dues were \$10 a year.

First offices of the PGA were at 34th st. and 5th ave., and Percy Pulver, a New York golf writer and publicist, spent part time in the office and eventually started a magazine for the group.

Retires in 1932

White stayed at Wykagyl until his retirement in 1932 to specialize in the design, building and maintenance of golf courses. It was in the fall of 1927 when he went to Myrtle Beach to lay out a course that he began making the investments that have so decidedly endorsed his judgment.

Increasing duties in course construction and real estate business eventually compelled White to virtually retire from PGA activities. His brother-in-law, Alex Pirie, became pres. of the PGA in 1927, '28, '29 and '30 and during those years along with his colleagues, laid solid foundations for great and solid growth the PGA has experienced.

Another chapter in the White pioneering could be written about his role in the American golf club industry. He relates that one July Fourth while he was in the shop at Myopia and the celebration was in gay and noisy swing outside, a Yankee

(Continued on page 59)

Promotion at Roanoke

(Continued from page 37)

ting local publicity for tournaments and extracurricular events staged at Roanoke.

One of Maples' better known members is Davey Crocket (no kin of the original), who has been the subject of newspaper and magazine pieces on the strength of an unusual round he played this spring at Roanoke. He shot the nine holes in a regulation 35 although he parred only one hole. Davey, 66-years-old and a daily golfer who plays in the 70s, did it by shooting four birdies and as many bogeys. Crockett is also well known in Southern Seniors competition, having distinguished himself in recent years in several tournaments for the golfing elders.

Maple's cousin, Nancy, is another who has established a solid reputation as a golfer in the Carolinas. Just last May she reached the high mark in her career by finishing as low amateur in the Peach Blossom Open at Spartanburg, S. C.

Bob White, Pioneer Pro

(Continued from page 44)

carpenter dropped in and watched Bob make wood heads.

White says the carpenter gazed at him sawing and filing and sweating like a pony and eventually remarked:

"I always thought the Scotch were smart but they must be damn fools."

"Why?" asked the perspiring White.

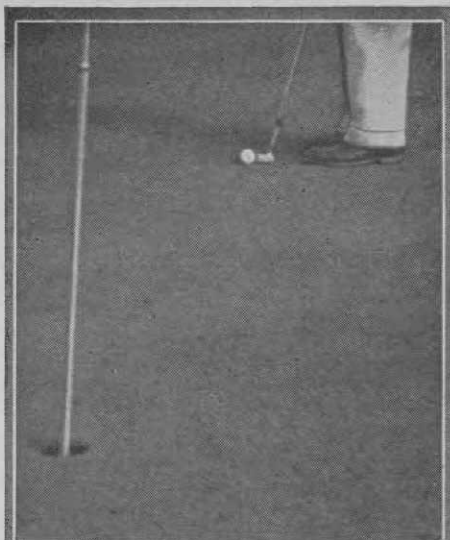
"Because there's a shoe last factory at Lynn where I do some work that could do that wood job in two or three minutes. I'll show you. I may spoil one or two of your blocks but I'll show you how to beat this job you're doing," said the carpenter.

"And he did turn out some beautiful heads," Bob adds.

When White went to Cincinnati, then to Louisville and Chicago, he learned about the Dayton (O.) Last Works and had this company make heads for him and other professionals. That business eventually developed into the Crawford, McGregor and Canby golf playing equipment manufacturing concern, the predecessor of the MacGregor Golf Co.

PGA Schedule

The PGA's fall tournament schedule includes dates at the following locations: Sept. 20-23, Oklahoma City Open Inv., Twin Hills G&CC; San Diego (Calif.) Open Inv. (site to be announced); and Western Open, Presidio CG, San Francisco.



Vertagreen®

Builds TOUGH

Fine-textured Turf

Vertagreen is the complete plant food you should use to have outstanding greens, tees and fairways. Vertagreen provides the elements necessary for a deep, vigorous root system . . . that keeps turf green and beautiful through extreme weather conditions.

Good greens "make" a golf course. Keep your greens in perfect playing condition throughout the season with Energized Vertagreen.



ARMOUR FERTILIZER WORKS