

Dickinson Taught Superintendent How to Use Tools of Research

By ELIOT C. ROBERTS

"Prof's Mill" has become through the years a term associated with more than 500 course supts., maintenance workers, and professionals throughout the U. S. and Canada. It means these men are graduates of the school in Turf Management at the University of Massachusetts founded by Lawrence S. Dickinson. He held his first 10-week short course 30 years ago and the background for that initial meeting and the philosophy which has established these courses as "Prof's Mill" have made this work a real contribution to the greenkeeping profession.

Prof. Dickinson was graduated from the University of Massachusetts in his home town of Amherst. His first position as supt. of grounds on the college campus was in time combined with an instructorship in Horticulture. This, in turn, developed into a full time position as turf specialist.

As supt. of grounds there were never less than 12 men working with him. "My relationships with these men," he says, "have been valuable in developing a feeling for the turf worker." Records were kept of labor hours and materials used

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After 30 years of operation, the University of Massachusetts' "winter school" was closed this year. Heavy enrollment of regular students place such a burden on the faculty that it was decided to discontinue the school at least temporarily.

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for various jobs, not with the idea of necessarily increasing output, but to study work relationships under normal conditions. It was learned that expediency in working with fine turf does not pay for the results of such practices show sooner or later in increased cultural costs or, at times, by not getting turf of lasting quality.

Students have often heard of Dickinson's experiences from these early years. These have been of a nature which have served as lessons in turf management. He says that telling students frankly what he learned the hard way often saves them



Among many awards given Prof. Dickinson (right) during his career was this one from Homer C. Darling on behalf of the GCSA.

headaches. From his experiences as teacher and supt., Dickinson rates the following high in practical importance:

1. Cultural practices may slowly build up within the soil unfavorable conditions for fine turf growth. The accumulative effect of these practices often reaches the limit of tolerance of the plant. The competitive strength of various grasses change as these conditions vary. This may be best understood by viewing turf as a community with community problems arising from a population composed of varieties of grasses and weeds. Since preferences and limits of tolerance may fluctuate considerably for a given grass species, the supt. must understand basic conditions on the course in order to get the most efficient use of materials applied.

2. Business management of fine turf is equally as important to the supt. as cultural management. Often the brain of the man in charge is worth many times its weight in dollar bills spent for nonessential items. At times it means dollars should be spent. At other times it may mean the opposite. At all times it means that expediency leads to trouble and should be avoided. Cultural liabilities and assets must be evaluated more carefully than monetary costs.

3. It is good practice to lay away a bank account of good healthy turf as this is the greatest possible asset in times of depression. To determine whether this account is growing or shrinking all turf on the course should be inventoried regularly.

A Profession Is Born

Such theories were the beginning of comprehensive considerations of turfgrass problems. Demand for answers to questions increased rapidly through these early years and it became apparent there were sufficient aspects to turf management to occupy the complete attention of a specialist. Here was a chance to start in at the beginning of a new field of endeavor and an opportunity to be of service to a large number of people. Prof. Dickinson has said that many times he has been asked: "Why don't you give up teaching and extension and do full time consulting work on your own?" For a while, he admits, such thoughts were appealing. However, if this were done, the position of course supt. wouldn't have won the prestige he envisioned for it. The consultant would be making the decisions rather than the supt. Dickinson decided: "University personnel should work toward providing the best advice and recommendations possible and let course personnel carry the ball from there. All the credit in recovering a child from sickness does not belong to the doctor. The mother and nurse deserve a lot. In my way of thinking the supt. should rate the credit for doing a fine job — not a consultant."

Despite his views on regular consultation, Prof. Dickinson always has felt that intimate contact with the course and its personnel is essential to maintaining a realistic outlook on turf. Much of his time in the last 30 years has been spent in this way. In 1938 a thesis was accepted by the graduate school of the University of Massachusetts for the Master of Science degree. It was written originally as an official report on the conditions of one of the country's largest golf courses. The actual study took five weeks to complete and the report put special emphasis on business management of cultural practice. The fact that credit for an advanced degree was given for such work adds emphasis to the care that should go into this type of project.

Prof. Dickinson likes to look back at the small beginnings which have developed to notable proportions. As an example, equipment shows and conferences were

started around 1912. About 75 to 150 park and estate supts. came to Amherst by horse, carriage, and train. These programs were forerunners of the general horticulture show on campus. Attendances grew to from 2500 to 3000. The present horticulture show at the University attracts better than 20,000 spectators each year. In the mid-20s as many as 60 different lawn mowers were given trials and rated on a new scoring system devised for the purpose. The tests were designed to show a practical comparison of all mechanical features of mowers at that time.

Short Course Begun

About 1925 Prof. Dickinson realized that course supts. and their assistants could be better served through attendance at an annual short course. Approximately 100 courses in New England were contacted to determine the extent of interest in such a program. Enthusiasm was great and in 1927 the first Winter School for turf mgrs. was held in Amherst. This school has been held continuously since then except during World War II years. Asked what factors have led most directly to the success of this program, Dickinson lists these:

1. The winning of the men by a practical approach to their problems.

2. Overcoming opposition to the idea of teaching turf management. Men come not to learn how to be turf managers but to get ideas that will help them do better the jobs they already are acquainted with.

3. A model course designed by Walter Hatch as a special problems project for the school adds more to the realism of the program. The model has many of the good and questionable features of the average golf course.

4. The short course has always been 10 weeks long except in 1955 when it was limited to 8 weeks. This has been important in leading to a coverage of lecture and lab material which is clearly understood and does not breed confusion. Prof. Dickinson says, "In a ten week course a man learns how to use the information obtained. In a three day school he runs the risk of jumping to unsound conclusions."

5. The fine cooperation of other departments such as Agricultural Engineering, Botany, Entomology and Horticulture.

Besides the Winter School, in 1947 a two-year turf major was established in the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. This was timed so that men could attend and

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Brainstorm Ideas

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12. Have good lighting on displays.
13. More brainstorming by all groups.
14. Use more animation in displays.
15. Make better displays.

Merchandising

1. Equip and outfit foursomes.
2. All items should be priced.
3. Have a bargain barrel.
4. Install a putter rack at the putting green.
5. Put red bands around putting green putters.
6. Put your own labels on merchandise—where practical.
7. Sell "package" golf equipment and apparel.
8. Induce high handicap players to use better equipment.
9. Let members win small bets.
10. Promote team competition.
11. Try to get members to play for golf ball nassan's.
12. Plan local tournaments.
13. Have club president write to members about Pro Shop.
14. Better shop arrangement.
15. Have a clean shop.

Records

1. Obtain birthdays of all members, use them.
2. Have notebook handy for all requests.
3. Keep a file of members' sizes.
4. Keep better records all around.
5. Keep records of your stock turnover.
6. Keep records of overhead — watch them.

Teaching

1. Work on high handicap players.
2. Hold your own clinics.
3. Have group instruction for juniors.
4. Educate members to buy from you.
5. Teach your employees to sell right.
6. Watch foursomes off first tee for "tips".

Buying

1. Be more selective in your buying.
2. Buy things that will sell.
3. Stay away from "junk".

Inventory

1. Maintain adequate stock of fast moving items.
2. Move stock once a month.
3. Take inventory more often.

Make Sure Your Club Officials
Receive Golfdom in 1957
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Dickinson's School

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not miss more than 3 or 4 months of outside work on the course. A placement training period from April to Sept. during the freshmen year makes this possible and at the same time serves to initiate the relative newcomer to turf work in his chosen field. Both schools now are accepting men recommended by previous graduates. Some are sons of former students.

Saw Need for Instruction

Dickinson has leaned away from an active career in turf research and placed emphasis on instruction. He says: "There is and always has been a great need for men who know how to evaluate research information so that it can be put to its best use. Turf research is highly important but it is valueless until applications are made that benefit the turfgrass and resultant playing conditions. Many research projects are so controlled that knowledge gained must be carefully applied to actual conditions. Since there is great variation from one location to another, it is not an easy matter to predict how grasses will respond to specific treatments researchers recommend. The kind of information which will in the long run be of most value is that which leads to a better fundamental understanding of the functions of the plant itself. The personal factor, the supt., for example, is not scientifically controlled. We try to fill the gap between researcher and the supt."

Three years ago, Prof. Dickinson was asked to head a new venture at the University. This one is far removed from turf-grasses which had been his intimate concern for over 30 years. Most of his time now is spent in other activities but he still devotes many hours to the turf work he loves.

PGA Educational Session

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approach shots. Jackie had his right hand rolling over shortly after contact. Sam keeps the back of his left hand square across the line as long as he can.

Fleck was commended by Snead for his head work. Jack is one golfer, said Sam who can balance a glass of water on his head while swinging. Probably only a few of the pros can do it.

Jay Hebert said Snead has the "finest turn away from the ball" of anybody in golf. Burke's lead was: "I'm like all the