



GRAU'S Answers to Turf Questions

By FRED V. GRAU

Students of turfgrass deserve access to accurate information concerning the history and development of new strains and varieties of plants with which they will work in the years ahead. These data are not available easily at all times. Popular writings frequently garble the true identities of workers responsible for the development of varieties.

A case in point occurred recently on the radio during a garden-type broadcast. According to the information that was disseminated far and wide, Merion Kentucky bluegrass was developed by a man associated with a large garden supply house in the Midwest. A telephone call intercepted the radio personality and the facts were presented. A letter followed giving factual details. On the following Sunday (Easter) the record was set straight by a reading of my letter on the air.

A thumbnail sketch of Merion Kentucky bluegrass reads thus:

1935—Joe Valentine selected a promising strain at Merion Golf Club. John Monteith, pathologist for USGA Green section, designated this strain B-27 (27th in a collection of bluegrasses) and planted it at Arlington Turf Gardens.

1940—All grasses were moved to Beltsville to make way for building the Pentagon.

1945—Fred V. Grau, named Director, USGA Green Section, started weeding out the bluegrasses. B-44 was selected as No. 1, B-27 as No. 2.

1946—B-44 was hit hard with rust; B-27 OK. B-27 plot destroyed by a careless workman.

1947—listed as date of release in Agr. Handbook 170. Seed sent to Geary in

Oregon for increase.

1948—A few seeds from Ed Geary in Oregon were sent to Penn State for increase and purification. Breeder seed for the production of Foundation and Certified seed was produced both at Penn State and under Musser and at Beltsville under Grau. B-27 was known to be a low seed producer. Seed producers preferred B-5 and B-12 which were heavy seed yielders.

1950—The name "Merion" was given to B-27 by a committee of USDA and Green Section personnel to commemorate its place of origin. There were 20,000 lbs. of seed available in 1950.

A popular article on Merion (unauthorized) in a national magazine forced the release of Merion two years before seed stocks were adequate. This created a demand for an item that was in very short supply which forced prices to exaggerated levels.

Another case in point involves the popular no-maintenance groundcover legume, Penngift crownvetch (*Coronilla varia*). A thumbnail sketch of its brief history reads thus:

1905—introduced as impurity in imported alfalfa seed planted on Gift farm in Berks County, Pa.

1935—discovered by Fred V. Grau, then extension agronomist for Penn State.

1940—seeds from Gift farm were hand collected and planted by Fred V. and Anne F. Grau for seed production on their farm, Grasslyn, near State College, Pennsylvania.

1946—first seed harvest at Grasslyn by methods other than hand plucking.

1947—cooperative research on crownvetch started by Pennsylvania Department-

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ment of Highways and Penn State. Tests on highway slopes were planted by Department of Highways.

1951—first ton of seed in the world produced at Grasslyn. Processing machinery to prepare seed for market installed at Grasslyn.

1954—name "Penngift" given by committee on nomenclature from Pennsylvania State University. Bulletin 576 (out of print) published by Penn State; Musser, Stanford, Hottenstein.

1961—First Blue Tag Certified seed in the world produced at Grasslyn. 1961 was the World Seed Year.

1962—Registered as Penngift variety. (CROP SCIENCE 2: p. 356, 1962).

1964—first Crownvetch Symposium held at Penn State.

Much could be written between the lines because there were no guidelines to follow. No one had had any experience. Responsibility for development clearly would seem to rest with those who accepted the risks of buying land, planting for seed production, then learn-

ing from scratch the mysteries of harvesting, cleaning and processing, and then developing a market where none had existed. Significantly, the project received discouragement from the start because crownvetch was little known and it was considered to be unfit for animal feed, therefore, it was called "useless."

Under the leadership of A. A. Hanson and Felix V. Juska at Beltsville, all grass varieties are catalogued and a brief history prepared. Readers who are interested in this subject may profit by sending for: *GRASS VARIETIES IN THE UNITED STATES*, Agr. Handbook 170, revised June 1965, by A. A. Hanson. May be purchased at Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C. Price: fifty (50) cents.

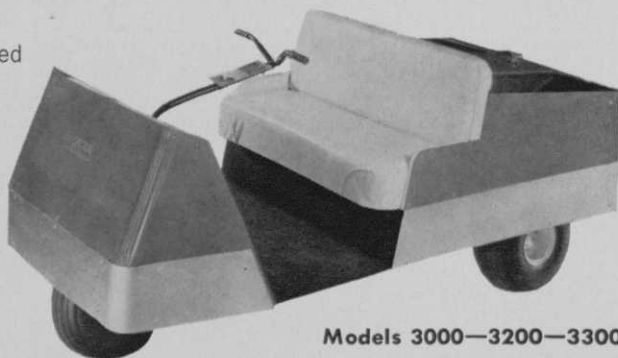
Historical reading always has been fascinating to me. During the preparation of this material it was necessary to dip into the past to ascertain dates of certain events. The *GOLFDOM TURF ROUNDUP* reprints from 1950-51-52 in my files proved to be highly informa-

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tive as were the TURF RESEARCH REVIEWS published at the same time by USGA Green Section. Constantly I was reminded of the story that we've heard Dr. Glenn Burton relate about his father who told Glenn, "Son, before you start for any place make sure you know where you are." Significantly, it was just 20 years ago that Dr. Aamodt, USDA, and I traveled to Tifton, Georgia and, together, scraped up enough money to start Glenn on his richly-rewarding work in turfgrass.

Each time that some historical event is called to mind I am forced to stop and ponder, "How many readers will be interested in this subject and who cares about the past anyhow?" To what extent do superintendents file their popular and technical literature and how often do they refer to them?

This is an open invitation to GOLF-DOM readers to submit questions on historical and other subjects for which they would like information.

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