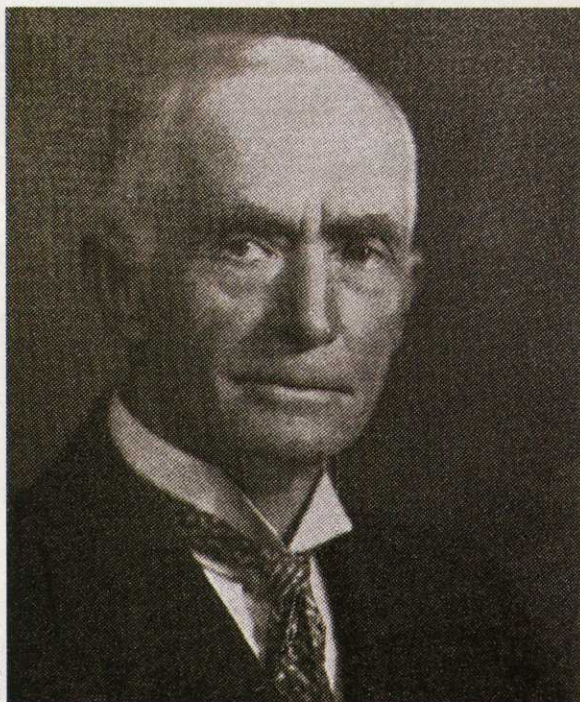


Col. John Morley



A man of vision for superintendents

Col. John Morley was the founding father of the GCSAA. There were other organizers, but the “Little Colonel” was the undisputed kingpin.

Morley wasn't a military colonel; he was a Kentucky colonel. The governor of that state commissioned him with that honorary rank in 1930 when the National Association of Greenkeepers of America (NAGA) — now GCSAA — held its annual conference and trade show in Louisville. Morley was also NAGA's first president. He served in that position longer than anyone, from 1926 to 1932.

Born in 1867 in Middleboro, England, Morley was a successful vegetable grower before becoming a “greenkeeper.” An Ohio club, in search of a way to distinguish its dining room from the others, decided to feature fresh vegetables on its menu. It hired Morley to supply them.

Somehow, that job also led to growing turfgrass, and Morley was off and running in a new

career. Before long, he was widely recognized as an outstanding turfgrass expert. Over the years, he traveled far and wide as a consultant, spreading the word about superintendents and their need to organize as professionals.

“It seems like a very ordinary subject, the growing of grasses, but it's one of the most interesting subjects I've ever encountered,” Morley said. “I know of nothing that gives me so much pleasure as to see a greensward develop under daily care.”

In 1913, Morley went to work for the Youngstown (Ohio) CC. NAGA was formed on Sept. 13, 1926, when 60 turfgrass pioneers, including Morley, met at Sylvania CC in Toledo.

Morley was called the “Little Colonel” because of his size. In his prime, he stood only 5-foot-5 and weighed only 130 pounds. Nonetheless, Morley looked, spoke and acted like a founding father. In almost every published photo of him, he's wearing a stiff, winged-collar and pinstripe suit fashionable in the 1920s and 1930s.

But above all, Morley was a man of vision for superintendents, and he could articulate it. He was an eloquent public speaker and a fine writer. He may have sharpened those skills through his involvement in politics. He was active in Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party and served as secretary to one of its chapters.

“The National Association of Greenkeepers of America will be founded upon justice, faithful brotherhood and generous benevolence,” Morley wrote philosophically upon creation of the organization that was to become GCSAA.

Morley was the first to receive what is today's GCSAA Distinguished Service Award, which he received in 1932 and again in 1940.

Morley died in 1946 at 79. Perhaps the greatest tribute written about him — one that captures the essence of his vision for superintendents — is this inspired verse by Gertrude Farley, Morley's secretary when he was president of the old Cleveland District Association of Greenkeepers:

“Welcome fellow greenkeepers, help hold our standard high, that NAGA colors may wave against the sky, that golfers of America may see them from afar and know what makes it possible to play a course in par.”

— Clay Loyd, Contributor