

A 50-Year Survey of the GREENKEEPER'S JOB

By W. E. LANGTON



Every once in a while GOLFDOM runs an article that registers with unexpectedly strong and wide force. Such a one was the piece in February GOLFDOM headed "Putting on a 'Front' for the Greenkeeper is a Big Job."

This editorial analysis of factors that have retarded competent greenkeepers' earnings so they haven't kept pace with general rise in salaries was further developed in the address of GOLFDOM'S editor at the Greenkeeping Superintendents' association convention. In that talk it was pointed out that the average age of GSA members is over 40 and the scarcity of young men being attracted to course maintenance as a profession is a serious and growing threat to golf's future.

The paradox in the situation is that no phase of golf club operation has advanced as greatly as greenkeeping has due to the self-education programs of the greenkeepers.

GOLFDOM, as the only independent and informed advisory service, is frequently called upon by club officials searching for men of fitting qualifications. GOLFDOM is in position to see

clearly that capable young men are not being kept in greenkeeping or attracted to it in numbers any way near great enough to meet the growing needs of the game and business.

Veteran club officials commented on the GOLFDOM article by saying, invariably, that club boards are not able to appraise qualifications and responsibilities of a greenkeeper and, since the greenkeepers have nothing at all resembling a scale of salaries, are disposed to take the man who works for the least amount. Cases were reported of greenkeepers who had been on the job for years and had done remarkable work in bringing courses through the war years in good condition, getting very little more than laborers on the courses.

Among the many letters from club officials and greenkeepers commenting on the article that put the spotlight on the greenkeepers' salary and status one especially stirs additional thought.

It is the letter from the veteran, nationally noted, superintendent of the San Gabriel (Calif.) CC, W. E. Langton, which is printed here.



The article in February GOLFDOM on the greenkeepers' status was of particular interest. Perhaps one who has nearly reached the half century mark at greenkeeping should be permitted to make a few observations.

Greenkeeping, like most other vocations, is peopled by all kinds and conditions of men. Some are fat, some lean, some hard working and some lazy, some efficient and some just plain dumb. There are some dirty ones and some very clean. There are college men and others with no education whatever. There are good talkers among them and others who have not a word to say for themselves. There are some greenkeepers who know very little but who can sell themselves and cash in abundantly, others there are who could not sell a \$10.00 bill for \$8.00.

If ever there were a heterogeneous bunch of men it would be in a group of greenkeepers. Yet there is an affinity and social cooperation between them that cannot be surpassed in other professions. The reason

is they are one and all subject to the same economic climatic and natural laws, and it matters not what part of the country they come from. So after all, they are all brothers in grief and are willing to help where they can. But there is so little one can do for the other fellow, that most greenkeepers have to stand alone with very little help from outside sources. What is good for one club often will not suit another.

There are so many factors that govern the destiny of a greenkeeper that only grim necessity has allowed him to survive at all. First and foremost all golf clubs are governed by an inexorable condition of making income at least equal to expenditure. Golf is a pleasure although some would like to call it a necessity. When economic conditions are bad, many people quit spending money on things they can do without, and golf is one of those things. Hence when depressions come, club officials look around and see where they can cut, and the man who stands alone is the most vulner-

able to these economic attacks. And when once a greenkeeper's salary has been reduced club officials can find so many excuses to keep it down. Generally it takes some unprecedented condition like a war or a business boom to place a greenkeeper in the same financial status as before.

During my 50 years as a greenkeeper I have been through 2 wars and 3 major depressions, so can speak with some truth and conviction. It is my belief that during all that time the greenkeeper's status has not been raised very much.

Greenkeeper Stands Alone

He is surrounded by wealth and by men in high positions in the professional and business world, which cannot help but give him an inferiority complex. It matters not how tolerant these men in high places are or how good they are, there is one fact that always stands out, that a greenkeeper is never regarded as an equal in social standing, and is generally looked upon as a glorified laborer, subject to the vagaries of those in authority over him. If they want to be mean there is nothing a greenkeeper can do about it.

He stands alone, mostly financially unable to talk back, for he is dependent on his job to live. In this vast country where doctors, lawyers, business men, technical men, artisans, clerks, railwaymen and others are all organized, the greenkeeper still goes it alone. He has an organization that gives him technical advice but no solid protection, and oftentimes some ambitious worker will sell him down the river and secure his job. If we could take a census of greenkeepers 20 years ago and see what has become of them today, the story would not only be astounding, it would be alarming. In my own locale out of a master greenkeeper personnel of nearly 40 a decade ago, only 8 are in the business today and these are old reliables who have borne the brunt of battle and are nearly ready for the social security benefits to give them relief in their old age.

Perhaps the greenkeeper has not done all he could to raise his own status, perhaps he drank too much or neglected his work, did not shave and keep himself clean. Perhaps he should have put on a clean shirt more often and cultivated those social niceties that pros and managers do so prettily. What would that avail him if he had bad greens and a ragged layout? Even Hagen had to have something on the ball besides dress. But Mr. Editor, I know what you mean; a man at least should be respectable (or able to stand inspection) but even this is no guarantee of holding his job.

The most deplorable insult a greenkeeper can suffer is, after years of satisfactory work, to be denied the opportunity of giving one's best effort in a major improve-

ment, of being pushed aside as of no consequence and allowing some so-called expert to come in and take all the glory in achievement. This has been done so frequently that all the ambition and glory has been taken away from a greenkeeper, and only dull routine is left for him to do. When opportunity is denied him to prove himself an artist, his status will never be raised for he is just a hireling of no importance.

How to raise the standard of a greenkeeper is one of those complex questions that can never be answered satisfactorily. It depends upon the man, the club, the opportunity, and dear old Lady Luck. The unfortunate part of the whole business is that there is no ladder to climb. Today we are a worker, tomorrow, by some unforeseen circumstance, a greenkeeper—the change is too swift. We are either a man or a mouse.

It does not matter what our associations think, it's what club officials think that counts. If we had an organization that had the strength to decide who should be who, then things might be different, but we have neither strength nor power. We are like a bird in a cage, we can move a certain distance and no further, and to think we are masters of our own destiny is one of those pious dreams that carries us on and on but gets us no place. The only power we have is the privilege of quitting if we don't like the job.

S. CAL. TURF RESEARCH PUSHED—

Meetings at the Los Angeles CC have brought together Southern Calif. GA Golf Club Supts. Assn., UCLA officials, PGA officials, SC Public Links Assn., park and cemetery officials, golf architects and supply men interested in establishing a turf research program at the University of California, Los Angeles. Greenkeepers in the LA district have been advocating location of a turf experimental station and research work at the UCLA for some years. They have maintained that such work would effect tremendous savings in contending with unique problems of turf development and maintenance in Southern California. Presence of Dr. Vern Stoutemeyer of UC LA faculty and availability of his successful experience with the Iowa State college turf research work caused Southern California greenkeepers to renew their drive for this work. C. C. Simpson, chmn., green committee, Southern California GA, and George Armstrong, pres., SGGGA, went to bat in bringing other organizations into the collaborating group. Now there are hopeful signs that turf research in Southern California soon will have the benefit of university tie-up that has proved highly profitable in other sections.

Pro and Members Benefit From Competitive Programs

By **MARION ASKEW**

Pro, The Oaks Country Club, Tulsa, Okla.

The member's and the pro's opinions of what's the most important detail of the pro job may differ. And you know whose opinion carries most weight in case of a difference. It's the member's.

You and I as pros may think that the most important thing about our jobs is teaching so we'll have all of our members scoring better than most of them have any earthly chance of doing. But as we get older in our pro careers we see some of our happiest golfers are fellows who shoot around 100—or even higher—day after day. They make their dime bets and have a marvelous time.

Now should I, as a pro, try to get such a foursome of high-handicap men to be faithful pupils of mine on the lesson tee by high-pressure or discreet selling? I can say to myself that the fellows would have more fun if they could score better but in the case of a number of members they're so temperamentally and physically constituted that they're already having as great enjoyment out of golf as anybody else

around the club. So it's really a delicate thing to push instruction to them.

After all, I'm hired to see that all members have the most possible fun. They don't care particularly how high or low my lesson income is, and if I were a member and one of the members were the pro I suppose I'd feel the same way about it.

Picking the people to whom lessons would add to the pleasure of their games gives me enough lesson time without putting on a campaign to get some cheerful and contented duffer whose improvement would entail a long and tedious routine at the expense of his playing time.

Or, if you believe the pro shop operations are the most important detail of a pro's competent handling of his job, again you'll have differences of opinion.

I see, as does every other pro, members playing with clubs that are so poorly fitted to them that if a pro playing star were under the same handicap he'd have trouble breaking 80. I, as every other pro, feel like kicking myself for not having sold clubs to



There is plenty of paper-work in a well handled pro job and at this desk in a corner of his shop Askew can handle that task.



Marion Askew at The Oaks has an attractive display by the sales-book and cash register where buyers get a tactful suggestion of "something more."

these members so they'd get what they need instead of what they picked up at some store.

And, naturally, I want to figure out some way of replacing this incorrect equipment with what the player should have. But again there's a chance for a clash of opinion between the pro and the member. The golf club is a place where low-pressure selling must be done. Not many members will be any too happy about coming into the pro shop if they think they are going to be "promoted" for a purchase every time they enter.

In the pro shop the policy has to be to make it tempting and easy for the member to buy, rather than let him be conscious that you are trying to sell him something.

Well, you get those differences between the pro's necessity of making a living and the member's insistence in having fun in a lot of activities at a golf club. The pro's successful handling of his job depends on how tactfully he can play to the member's opinion.

All Agree On Having Fun

There is only one place where there is no conflict in the opinions and interests of player and pro and that is in the matter of plenty of entertaining competition that gives everybody in the club a chance to win a prize. The member joins the club because he wants to play golf. The more golf

that is played the more money the pro makes, and the stronger he stands with his members.

Consequently there is fullest agreement and mutual benefit when the pro is intensely interested in the arrangement and operation of a lively and pleasant golf program.

The pro whose club isn't getting enough entries and a wide distribution of prizes at his club has a touchy proposition and one that certainly calls for his attention.

Perhaps the committee in charge of arranging the calendar has just kept the same events on the schedule year after year. The prize list may be low and distribution inclined to favor the same group of players. Correction of those and other defects benefits the members, the club and the pro. The pro has to use his experience and tact in putting a good calendar into effect unless his club's committee will take immediate care of the situation.

At The Oaks CC our committee has one of the best arranged programs I've ever seen for appealing to all the members and having new elements in the schedule each year.

We have 8 regular monthly handicap tournaments in addition to our 4 annual club championships. The 4 fixtures are the club championship at match play, the 4-ball championship, a handicap tournament and a "sudden death" tournament of 4 9-

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hole matches. We finish our season with turkey shoots on Thanksgiving and Christmas.

To pay for prizes for these tournaments members sign a \$5 tournament card which covers entry fee in every tournament for the year. Last year the entry fees under this plan were \$750. All of it was spent for pro shop merchandise as prizes. This year the total will be more than \$1000.

In working with the golf committee to provide good selection of pro shop prizes the pro not only helps get entries for the competitions but puts a goodly sum into his own cash register.

The women's tournaments should be given ample care by the pros. The women need help and although their prize list doesn't come anywhere near as high as that of the men it's business that brings a lot of good-will for the pro with it.

At The Oaks I give 6 group lessons to women in helping to build up women's tournament interest and ambitions.

This matter of paying particular attention to the competitive events of members I'm sure is something that every pro will find is part of his job that will benefit all of the members and make the pro a profit in cash and good will.

There often is a tendency to depend too much on the blind bogey competitions for pro shop profits. At some clubs the same group of fellows keep winning the balls. If that's the case the pro had better be ex-

amining his handicap rack cards. It could be that some of the members have lower handicaps than they really should have and are just too nice or unknowing to complain. They may resent being told that they are short-counting themselves on the handicap, but that's only one of a thousand situations the pro must treat with tact.

JAYCEES SPONSOR NATIONAL JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2nd National Junior Golf Championship sponsored by the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce will be held July 29th through August 2nd, at the Mt. Hawley CC, Peoria, Ill. The tournament, a match play event, is open to all boys under 19 years of age, who have qualified in State Junior tournaments held or endorsed by State Junior Chambers of Commerce.

Tournament Chairman, Clifton Hill, announces the Peoria Junior Chamber of Commerce will provide full lodging and entertainment for all participants in the event.

HONOR HARRY ROBB—Thirtieth anniversary of Harry Robb as pro at Milburn club (KC dist.) was celebrated by 200 club members and their guests April 23. The widely known veteran suffered a heart attack the night before the party and couldn't attend. Latest reports are that Harry's recovering nicely but that he won't be playing golf for quite a while.

One Year's Fast Work Builds New Club

By ALBERT STIRLING

Publicity Director, Mount Lebanon (Pa.) Golf Club

On the outskirts of Pittsburgh, near the pit mouths of some great bituminous mines, a 9-hole course has done service for the golf-minded of that community.

The 90 acres used for this purpose straddled 2 incorporated townships, Castle Shannon and Mt. Lebanon, the course taking its name from the former, although the major portion of the land used for the course was in the township of Mt. Lebanon.

For over 40 years the property has been leased from a family of original settlers, and rumor has it that Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh's best known financier, and former secretary of the treasury, was one of the founders.

During that period Pittsburgh has grown, aided by the automobile and the arteries created thereby. One of these was the twin vehicular tunnels bored through a mountain that barred access to the south and west of the city. With the completion of this improvement and the gradual lengthening of the avenues leading from the tunnel exit, the district to the west and south grew by leaps and bounds.

Castle Shannon and Mt. Lebanon were in the paths leading to the open spaces and the sunshine that had been hidden by the hills surrounding Pittsburgh.

The former was the mining community, whereas Mt. Lebanon grew to one of the fine residential spots, where acre estates and homes of better than the average were built.

In the course of this building, the site occupied by the 9-hole Castle Shannon club became surrounded, and with the end of the war and a further demand for homes for GI and private citizen alike, covetous eyes were leveled at the property. The heirs, who had been immune to the pleas of the club membership to sell the property to them, sold to a local real estate development company, who soon issued orders to vacate so that building could commence.

Surveys were made and it looked as if the membership would be without a course on which to play for the years 1945 and 1946, but material to construct dwellings and build streets and install sewers, was not available and year-to-year and month-

to-month leases were given, permitting play until the end of last season.

Knowing that sooner or later the property would be used for construction purposes, a committee was delegated to look over available property in the vicinity with a view to purchasing same and establishing a new course, a modern course, an 18-hole course.

For weeks this committee roamed the hills, and to know Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania, one realizes that hills aplenty were encountered. Over a radius of 30 miles they treked, and in most cases soon discarded the sites as possibilities due to the hills and valleys encountered.

Locate Abandoned Farm

At the end of their journeys, apparently, they came upon an abandoned farm some 10 miles from the center of Mt. Lebanon, 190 acres of land overgrown with woodland, a former apple orchard and the usual stubble found in the neglected rural districts.

However, the rolling contour of the acreage, seen from a distant hill, made them realize that here was a possibility worth investigating. Their far-seeing eyes visualized just what might be accomplished if this property were available for the purpose they had in mind. Keeping their quest a secret and away from the real estate operators, they found that the property, like the Castle Shannon property we were being forced to vacate, was also an estate and that heirs would have to be consulted before a deal could be made.

Several meetings were had with the various heirs, and a tentative deal was arranged, based on conditions due to one of the heirs being a minor, and also due to certain mining and mineral rights that are usually retained by the original owners.

Having made this much progress the committee reported back to the Castle Shannon club, and suggested that rather than make a direct change-over from one club to the other, that a new corporation be formed, thus giving all members of the former club the privilege of joining the new club or withdrawing and receiving their pro-rata share of the proceeds of the liquidation, this being one of the clubs that

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had money in the bank and other assets worthy of division.

This move having been made, a further meeting of those interested created an organizing committee, with power to form a corporation, take out a charter in the name of the Mt. Lebanon Golf Club, and arrange finances to proceed with the purchase and development of the property.

The committee was formed and the club was fortunate to have a variety of counsel in creating the project, their being engineers, lawyers, realtors, insurance men and publicists in the group, and each did his part in the most efficient manner.

With this array of talent, all substantial citizens of Mt. Lebanon, it was much easier to persuade a local bank to advance initial capital, in order that the property could be secured and construction started as soon as possible.

One of the first objects encountered was membership, it being decided to limit the list to 300 senior members, with the usual junior and ladies' memberships available.

With slightly over 30 members enrolled, it was decided that immediate steps should be taken to purchase the land, proceed with construction and campaign extensively for a quick closing of the membership rolls.

Preliminary engineering on the site brought out the fact that with the first layout shown there would not be over a 4 per cent grade on any up fairway. This was doubted by many, so with instruments this detail was proven to be true. Later, in rearranging the layout it was necessary to make one or two hops over small ravines, but with the aid of a small bridge between two fairways the necessity of making a severe climb was eliminated, and the 4 per cent grade was again established.

This feature has appealed to many of the older golfers of other clubs, where the hills were too much for their legs and hearts, and they have transferred their affiliations in order to lengthen their golfing days.

The next step was to get the best golf course architect and contractor available, and this work was turned over to James Gilmore Harrison, who for 15 years had been a right hand man of Donald Ross. Harrison had constructed several courses in the Pittsburgh district, and was well known for creative work in New Jersey and on Long Island.

Machinery Rushes Work

On May 4, 1946, Harrison moved in his machinery, consisting of several bulldozers, and a new tool used by power companies in making right-of-ways for power lines, called a tree-dozer. This machine, similar in construction to a bulldozer, has a heavy blade that travels about a foot un-

derground, and above same the plow effect tended to throw the trees to one side after the blade cut down the trees. The machine was capable of cutting down a 6-inch thick tree quickly.

In a matter of weeks the fairways, as laid out, were cleared of trees and brush, and it was found that the entire acreage was covered with a rich topsoil to the depth of one foot on an average. Only on one spot, where it was necessary to gouge into a hillside for a green did they encounter any rock, and it was a shale and easily handled.

So rapidly did the contractors work that the committee found themselves being hurried to keep up with the construction and provide all the facilities needed. The course was soon plowed, harrowed and raked, and water was the next objective, as we had been promised that seeding would commence in September.

Being out in the country, with no water mains available within 3 miles, although it had been promised by a nearby water company which had plans to lay mains to near the course, but which was stymied by state authorities due to changes in road construction, other plans had to be made and done so hurriedly. Tests of various wells and springs on the property soon proved that quantity would not be available.

Not to be outdone at this stage of construction, and learning that the water company had a lake, which was one of their sources of supply, within 2 miles of the course, invasion pipe was purchased from a Government agency, and with permission granted by adjoining landowners an overland pipeline was laid from the lake to the golf property line. A private pump house with pump and motor were installed at the lake, with watchmen available to turn on or off as needed. This assured the course of all the water needed, the line being a 6-inch pipe with no interference from other users. In addition the water was of the "live" variety, not having been treated with chemicals as are waters in company mains. The lake is stocked with bass.

Lines were laid on all fairways, with sprinkler outlets every 90 ft.

Seeding was started early in September, and shortly thereafter water was pumped into the lines, just in time to bring out the grass, and with a long and warm fall season, fairways and greens have come forward with great rapidity.

In the construction of the greens and traps Harrison brought out the latest in ideas for this work, building these parts of the course so that mowers can be used entirely and eliminating all handwork which is necessary where the embank-