

Golf courses lend themselves well to journal writing



What may seem to be a new feature in this issue of the GRASSROOTS — “Jottings From A Golf Course Journal” — really is not. Most of the thoughts recorded in the “President’s Message” or “Editorial” over the past two years are journal thoughts. What I am doing in this “new” column is merely a horse of a different color. Giving up the GCSAA presidency was difficult; giving up the chance to express myself was impossible. The obvious solution is what you’ll see in issues to come.

I’d like to convince you of the rewards of journal writing. Most Golf Course Superintendents keep a log or record or daybook that registers their activities on the golf course. Important dates like fertilization, fungicide applications, starting times of projects and their progress are part of the record we keep. A journal can be an extension of that. Becoming a journal writer is an activity that can enrich your life beyond your wildest imagination. I speak from experience and assure you that it is no exaggeration. I started as a youngster with dairy projects for 4-H and will continue until I am unable to take pen to paper.

Journal writing not only is a vehicle to record your day to day activities on the golf course, it is a tangible way to describe your most private thoughts and is a positive growth experience. It can enrich your life. It

is easy, inexpensive and enjoyable. And there is no “right” way to do it; no two journals are the same. Your journal can be restricted to just the golf course or it can even serve as a family record keeper. There are no rules! It can be, to some extent, a public document (like mine) or it can be very private and personal. It is a sounding board that never tires of listening to you.

I did some research on journals and found out that while they are quite popular today, they have a history as old as paper and ink. During the Victorian period, journal writing was even an art form. Most families kept journals with the man of the house in charge of executing it. Many of those older journals were often written to make the author’s life seem more glamorous, successful and exciting than it really was. What was missing from most of those old entries was any description of emotion. Now that our society allows people to express their emotions and feelings more freely, it is perfectly acceptable to include personal feelings or perceptions. That’s pretty important to a sentimentalist like myself!

I think another one of the great features of a journal is that it is “fine selfishness.” It is an activity that can be done absolutely for you. It’s a private thing, even though you may share it with family or others at a later

date, like I’m doing to some extent. Since it is private, you don’t have to deal with other people’s acceptance or judgements. You do not have to worry about handwriting, spelling, grammar, or thoughts since they are only for you, if you wish it that way.

The game of golf, like many other sports, is filled with events and opportunities that are unique and interesting and fun to write about. Complement that with the fact that the field of play — our golf courses — are at least as important as the game and you have subject material that is endless. The people, the players, the changing of the seasons, the beauty of the course and the intrigue of nature itself all are rich topics for a Golf Course Superintendent to explore. And since we have so many factors beyond our control — weather, economics, disease, etc. — writing a journal can work as a way to concentrate our attention on the good things about our job that are too often forgotten during stressful periods.

So there you have it — my reasons why I think you should, if you are not already, become a journal writer. And maybe these paragraphs are a rationalization or justification or explanation for why I must continue what I started two years ago — sharing some views and emotions about this wonderful profession of ours.

MSM



Jottings From The Golf Course Journal

LET IT SNOW! LET IT SNOW! LET IT SNOW!

By Monroe S. Miller

I’ve loved snow for my entire life, or at least for as long as I can remember. I like it for all the reasons most other “snowbirds” do — for its beauty, for the outdoor sports it provides, and because winter (and Christmas!) just wouldn’t be the same without it. Artists love snow, kids love snow and plants need snow. I really think that all of Wisconsin’s Golf Course Managers should love it also. Even the Bible asks us: “Hast thou entered into the treasures of

the snow?” (Book of Job). But there are several more and different reasons it is important and fascinating to me.

Although I am still a young man (I guess 39 is still young — Jack Benny thought so!), I had the distinct good fortune to attend grade school in a rural one room school. You know, or surely have read, that in these rural schools all eight grades were in the same room and shared the same teacher. This left you on your own a lot of the time, to study and do assignments, to listen to the other classes, and to read. Library materials were obviously limited and quickly consumed, especially if all 8 elementary years were spent in this same room. So, believe it or not, I was able to almost completely read **two** sets of encyclopedias. What a learning experience and what a way for a kid to be introduced to the endless wonders of the world, its history and its important people. One story I remember better than most and that has stayed with me the longest is the story of snow.

The section on snow and frost was written by a man named

Wilson Alwyn Bentley, a farm boy from Jericho, Vermont, who became known around the world in the early 1900’s as the “Snowflake Man of Jericho.” The story of W.A. Bentley is a romantic one and is as interesting as the story of snow itself.

He was born in 1865 not too far from Mt. Mansfield, the highest peak in Vermont. When he was 11 years old his mother introduced him to the beauty of snow by letting him look into an inexpensive microscope and see the beauty of a fragile, single snowflake. That was the start of his lifelong interest and near obsession with these crystalline creations of winter. In 1885, with help from his father, he purchased a compound microscope and a studio camera — a \$100 extravagance. This same outfit is what he used for his entire life to photograph individual snowflakes, almost 50 years worth of pictures.

He was lucky to have been born in this part of New England because the winter comes early and leaves late and it snows quite frequently. He was also fortunate because, under the shadow of Mt.

Mansfield, the types of snowflakes were widely varied.

His camera equipment for taking photomicrographs was simple. So was the building where he worked. It was a small, unheated shed. When a storm would begin, Bentley would hold a smooth black board about one foot square outside. His hands were gloved and the board was held by wires, both steps to minimize any transmission of heat. Once he had captured a number of flakes on the board, he inspected them with a magnifying glass. The imperfect ones — those that were stuck together or damaged or malformed — were brushed off with a bird feather (another expensive tool!). Those that were in perfect condition were carefully transferred from the black board to microscope slides. He had his camera pointed toward a window in the unheated shed to take full advantage of light. Each picture was taken through the microscope with the light passing through the snowflake. He had an ingenious arrangement of ropes and pulleys that allowed him to focus the camera while watching a ground glass at the rear. The snowflake images on this large glass plate were magnified from 64 to 3,600 times. He had to use long exposures, usually from 10 to 100 seconds, to get the pictures he wanted.

Mr. Bentley photographed over 6,000 snow-crystals during his life and he never once found any two the same. It was his belief, now commonly accepted that each snowflake is unique and individual and that nowhere on earth is there another like it. A copy of one of Mr. Bentley's photomicrographs is included here. His pictures are to be found in college texts, in periodicals, in art, in jewelry, on sleds made in Vermont, and even in an encyclopedia that I read thirty years ago.

When Cheryl and I traveled to New England the autumn before last, I dreamed to visit Jericho and see if I could at least find the Bentley farm. It is not listed in any literature about Vermont history, but my hope was that someone in



the village could direct me there. We traveled the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont early in our trip, prior to visiting the Jericho area, and stopped in the town of St. Johnsbury to visit the Fairbanks Museum. This museum was given to the citizens of St. Johnsbury by the world famous inventor. We had spent nearly an hour there studying this great collection before I discovered, on a back wall, six framed displays of — YES! — original W.A. Bentley photomicrographs of snowflakes. Their collection has scores of the pictures he had taken between the years of 1876 and 1931. It was one of those rare discoveries that gives one an almost euphoric feeling, a feeling I'll never forget. The "Snowflake Man" contributed something to the world that is invaluable and should never be forgotten. And I will be forever grateful to him for my love of snow!

I also love snow for reasons that may be the same as those of an artist. I love what a fresh snowfall, especially one early in the season, does to the landscape of late fall and early winter, particularly the landscape of my golf course. Snow on a golf course is able to lie where it falls — we don't have to move it and disrupt what it does. It tends to soften the stark and sharp lines of leafless trees, especially if it is a wet snow. It creates an entirely new look and feel on a golf course as it smooths out and softens the arcs and curves and contours even better than the grass does in the summer. It gives dimensions you just cannot see or that you are not aware of at any other time of the year. Everything is fresh and clean and simple.

And quiet. For anyone whose golf course is in the city like mine is, the snow of winter creates a quiet that is unfamiliar to other seasons. There are infinite numbers of tiny cells or pockets that hold air within a blanket of snow and they are highly effective in deadening sound and echoes by absorbing them. Walk your course in the snow sometime and immerse yourself in this unusual quiet.

As with most Golf Course Managers, I am forever and finally the pragmatist, even when it comes to snow. I'm reminded of the old adage I heard farmers speak of when I was young: "A

year of snow, a year of plenty." I think that is true for golf courses, too. Snow is an incredibly efficient insulator and can be important in the overwintering of turfgrass. One of the earliest and simplest experiments designed to measure the insulating value of snow involved setting a thermometer in the open air and one at 7 inches below the surface of a snowdrift. When the open air reading was —27 degrees F., the thermometer buried in the drift read 24 degrees F. — a difference of 51 degrees was caused by only 7 inches of snow. In other results, a —32 degree F. air reading was tempered up to a —1 degree F. reading one inch below the snow surface, and at one foot below the surface the temperature was a cozy +31 degrees F.! The same air pockets that serve to deaden sound account for snow's almost total inability to conduct heat, thus making it a superior insulation for a golf course. I know that I sleep much better on winter nights when there is a comfortable cover of snow. Snowmold? No problem, really. Low temperature fungi have always been easy to control on my golf course. Give me the snow any day.

For those who grumble that snow is monochromatic, I say nonsense! The late late fall preceding the first snowfall might be colorless, but not after snow. The snow gives us great color contrasts — the green of evergreens is more intense against the snow. The bright red fruit of the hawthorns and crabapples and highbush cranberry viburnum are highlighted by the snow. Snow makes the open water of ponds and water hazards on a golf course seem almost black. My eyes see a lot of color in the winter snow.

So forget about the slush on the streets, the snow shovel and snowblower, and the heavy boots. At least for the first couple of snowfalls, let yourself gleefully sing;

"Let it snow!
Let it snow!
Let it snow!"

Monroe S. Miller

