



LILACS

By Monroe S. Miller

For about the first time in this busy spring, I took a few minutes to sit back and reflect on how beautiful a golf course is in the springtime. It can only be this special in mid-May.

I sat back in my golf car, feet up on the hood, and relished both the scenes of the golf course and the aroma of the delicious, steaming cup of coffee I'd just brewed.

It was the unusual light easterly breeze that drew my attention to our shopyard lilacs. Planted some twenty-five or more years ago to separate our yard from the state office building that is our neighbor, this rich and full planting serves up notice through its blossoms that the spring season is closing.

The season of the lilac is really very brief, as I reminded myself this morning. Because we are so busy these first days of each new golf season, we too often miss the beauty and change each day brings. The flowers of the lilac do not last long enough, making it important for us to watch them closely while they do bloom.

It would be nearly impossible to live, work or attend college in Madison and not be aware of lilacs. After all, we have the lilacs in the Longenecker Gardens at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. The lilac garden is the largest such collection in the United States. It has been here since 1935, and it now has more than 275 different kinds of lilacs in all kinds of colors—blue, lavender, deep purple, pure white and even red. Some of these lilacs are imported and have delicate blossoms; others are the bold, all-Wisconsin farm variety that I like best.

They are all beautiful, and visitors come from afar to see this singular collection. Think how lucky Randy Smith at the Nakoma Golf Club is—his shopyard is literally across the street from the Longenecker Gardens. Now there's a neighbor to have in the springtime!

The name lilac comes from a Persian word for "bluish". Plant historians, however, believe this extremely hardy shrub—it grows as far north as Hudson Bay—was brought from the moun-

tain slopes of southwestern China. An atlas will show you how far it is from that part of China to Europe; it's a long way to carry a transplant and have it survive. The fragrance and beauty of lilac flowers were powerful influences even centuries ago.

Lilacs were a favorite in Europe by the 17th century, gracing yards and gardens of magnificent castles and humble cottages alike. Those Europeans who travelled to New England for a better life took along lilac plants.

Some believe the first lilacs planted in America were planted in New Hampshire. It is, in fact, their state flower. Benning Wentworth, New Hampshire governor in 1750, landscaped his 52 room mansion and lilacs brought from England were an important part of that plan. Governor Wentworth was a gregarious fellow, entertaining lavishly and often. His guests frequently copied his use of lilacs and this shrub spread all over the countryside of New England.

History also tells us that some of America's earliest lilac imports were planted at George Washington's Mount Vernon home and farm in Virginia. Obviously our first president loved these spring blooms, too.

There is something about lilacs that always make me feel at home. That's not surprising for a person who loves New England and who had a profoundly happy childhood on a Wisconsin farm. Our farmstead featured dozens of individual lilac plantings. The blossoms and smells have been in nearly all of my Mays.

Almost every Wisconsin farm has lilacs—near the barns and sheds, in the fence rows and along nearby streams. Those planted near the farm house were called dooryard lilacs by my grandparents and others in their generation and before. As farmers left the rocky soils and harsh climate of New England for western lands like Wisconsin, lilac roots were among those possessions carried to begin again pioneer homesteads.

But on those farms they left behind, they also left behind lilacs. In the

wilderness, in the east, where some lilacs grow and still bloom, you know there once was a farm. Driving through the country on backroads, hiking over long abandoned roadways and searching through woodlands, lilacs almost always show the way to the cornerstone of an old foundation. Dooryard lilacs are also markers of old cellar holes.

Despite the completely disintegrated farm buildings and the crumbled walls of foundations of what was once a family's home, the lilacs bloom on. Often, they are nearly lost in the growth of the much larger trees which always move in to claim the unharvested ground. It is not uncommon, either, to find lilacs growing in old and abandoned graveyards.

This is all true in Wisconsin, too. Dooryard lilacs mark old original homesteads in our state. I can take you to places in southwestern Wisconsin and show you where one room schools used to stand; all that remains, often, to mark the spot are the steadfast dooryard lilacs.

In my inaugural spring at Blackhawk Country Club, my curiosity was piqued early on by a couple of clumps of very old lilacs. They were near our second and eleventh tees and tenth green. I suspected they were old dooryard lilacs, left from the farm that became our golf course early in this century.

The age of the plants was one clue—they were (still are) very old, even for that species. They were growing in somewhat peculiar places, not at all where you'd expect them to be if they had indeed been planted as golf course plants.

The evidence built when excavations, whether from irrigation system repairs or new tree planting holes, yielded things like rusty and square nails, horseshoes, broken bottle pieces, wire and hinges.

I discussed my suspicions with one of the oldest men on the crew. He recalled quite clearly what the property was like in the days before Blackhawk, pointing out confidently where the barn had been and where the farm house was. The house had been near, according to him, where my lilacs were.

But the compulsive part of my personality demanded complete confirmation—maybe a legal description or a historical document or an aerial photo

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or even an old picture. I even thought about how I could enlist the help of someone with infrared equipment.

As each spring turned to summer, my need to verify what those dooryard lilacs told me faded. But each succeeding spring, renewed and even heightened interest returned.

One summer day about five years ago, out of the blue, I received a visit from a very nice couple from Illinois—the Harvey Bauers. Harvey was recently retired and had the time to search for and revisit scenes from his past.

And Blackhawk Country Club was an important part of his family history. You see, his father, John Henry Herman Bauer, was the greenkeeper for the first six years of the course's existence. He had, in fact, done much of the building of the golf course.

That day was magic for me. I learned score of things about the place where I had invested so much time. His clear memory of so many things filled in gaps of my information. Before he left I got his address, gave him a scorecard and a copy of each of the booklets written about the Indian mounds on the golf course.

Later, I mailed him a copy of the November/December 1984 issue of *THE GRASS ROOTS*. That one was the special heritage issue. It carried stories

about the founding of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association in 1930. The cover picture and a picture on page 9 showed those attending the 1930 University of Wisconsin Turfgrass Management Short Course.

Harvey called not long after that, excitedly. He and his wife had discovered, while reading *THE GRASS ROOTS*, his father in the picture on page 9. I quickly checked. Sure enough. Third from the left was John Bauer, then from Prairie View, Illinois and formerly from Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, Wisconsin.

In a subsequent summer Harvey returned with his older sisters Maida and Phyllis and his older brother Gerry. We walked the golf course and visited many of the places where this family had played when they were children. We stood where the farm house was in those days, and where the dooryard lilacs remain today.

Finally, the missing piece was in place and confirmed what the lilacs had told me over a decade earlier. My questions about who had lived there, where they went and what adventures they had experienced were answered as we stood in the grassed over area of the old farm house, next to the dooryard lilacs. Their memories were as sweet and lovely as the faithful lilacs

are when in bloom.

The aroma of the lilacs in my shopyard evoke memories of my rural childhood and Memorial Day parades. It reminds me of high school graduation and Sunday School at our Methodist Church. Nowadays lilacs remind me of the Bauer family and their time on our golf course, too.

The fragrance and blossoms and even the leaves of the lilac have inspired many lines of literature and poetry. Alfred Noyes of Old England wrote that if you "go down to Kew in lilac time you shall wander hand in hand in love." Amy Lowell sang of the lilacs in New England.

Walt Whitman reflected on the nostalgia-provoking fragrance of lilacs in "When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloomed". In the verses of this poem he was mourning the death of Lincoln. His message was that the promise of the lilac was whether or not we are here to smell or see them, they will surely come back again.

I shall, soon, put some lilac roots of my own into this golf course ground, leaving a bit of immortality to bloom when May comes for a hundred years hence.

What better mark than some beautiful lilacs could you hope to leave on a piece of this earth?

Voigt Honored at Retirement

By Randy Smith

On March 15th, approximately 150 persons surprised Woody and Betty Voigt with a party honoring Woody's retirement. His career included 21 years of service to the Ozaukee County Parks System and 13 years on a course in Fort Wayne.

Those attending the occasion at The Smith Brothers Fish Shanty Restaurant in Port Washington included two of the Voigt children, Lori and Ron and their families, relatives and friends associated with the Ozaukee County Park System. Also there were people from the Lions Club, the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association.

By late summer, the Voigts plan to move to a little warmer climate—Arkansas—where they will be neighbors to some other familiar people from Wisconsin, Al and Marge Vrana.



Retirement Celebration for Woody and Betty Voigt

I'll bet there will be a few rounds of golf played there too!

Best of wishes to a fine couple and may they enjoy many great years in a well deserved retirement. And please remember to visit your friends in Wisconsin once in awhile!

Otterbine Names Reinders Irrigation Division 1990 Service Center of the Year

Otterbine Barebo Incorporated, the Emmaus, Pennsylvania based manufacturer of vertical surface spray and asperating horizontal aerators, has named the Irrigation Division of Reinders Brothers Incorporated their 1990 Service Center of the year.

"We're quite gratified to receive this award," said Pat Matthews, Service Coordinator for Reinders Irrigation Division. "It's good to see the manufacturers we represent recognize our customer-first attitude."