

GREEN IS THE COLOR OF GOLF

A History of Turfgrass Management

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Early on, "green" has been the color of golf. In those early days when Dutch Traders called at St. Andrews (one of the world's largest trading markets and fairs in the 12th century), the green Linksland between harbor and town was ideally suited for Het Kolven--a popular ball and stick game from the Netherlands. The sandy coastal soils; the smooth wind-blown, rolling terrain and the soft, springy turf sustained by howling gales and gentle rains produced the Green Links. Natural, too, were the pits of sand where sheep huddled for shelter, later to become hazards in the evolving game of "goff." Through the centuries the game cast its spell over these people and their land and eventually over the earth.

These were simple times. The implements and balls of the day were as simple as the playing conditions crude. But the game persisted from the 12th Century on and by 1700, townsfolk of St. Andrews simply called the narrow strip of land leading to the harbor and the sea "The Green." The course was known in this way for generations. There they would tee up with a handful of sand, hopefully drive the leather-wrapped feathered ball to the "fair-green" all the while keeping it out of the surrounding heather and mass of entanglements. Once on the fair-green, the next target was on the 'play-green,' a roughly prepared area with an equally roughly prepared hole in it. Sometimes the hole was so deep it took a long arm to retrieve the expensive ball. In early 'golfe,' the winner was determined by the number of holes he won in the contest, not by the total number of strokes taken during the round. Whether it be 5 or 15 was of minor concern, just as long as he 'won the hole.'

It was in 1754--a rather recent date in the annals of golf, that the Royal and Ancient Golf Club was formed. Since the beginning of time, the Old Course has always belonged--and still does--to the citizens of St. Andrews. The Royal and Ancient Golf Club sought playing privileges there and in return worked out an agreement with the town fathers to pay for the maintenance of the course. This raises an interesting historical point, at least from the grass growers perspective. The Royal and Ancient was actually concerned with the care and maintenance of the turf on the Old Course fully 100 years before assuming responsibility for The Rules of Golf! In other words, course conditioning received very early attention. It was not until 1892 that the R&A became the one and only governing body for the Rules. (Unification

of the American and British Codes of Rules did not take place until 1951.)

By the end of the 1700's, the first greenkeepers came into being. Not unlike today, they were charged with making things better for the golfer. From Horace Hutchinson's book, "British Golf Links," (1897), there appears this record from the Aberdeen Golf Links on July 6, 1820:

"The secretary was instructed to pay Alexander Monroe at the rate of L4 (approximately \$15) per annum for taking charge of the Links and providing accommodation for the member's club boxes, and for that sum Monroe is to pay particular attention to keeping the holes in good order. If that was not bad enough, the above allowance was diminished in 1822 to L3, an alteration which may be regarded as an illustration of the well known prudence of the Aberdonians in financial matters."

Long before there was golf on the western side of the Atlantic, the Society of Golfers at St. Andrews (1832) decided to rebuild some of their "old greens." They enlarged them to the enormous and famous double greens of St. Andrews as we know them today!

And so the care of "The Green" had its beginning. The early golf professionals frequently became the greenkeepers as well. Neither job was known for its security even in those days. If a man could win at competitive golf it was all to his credit. But he would also be wise to know how to make club heads or golf balls or care for the course just in case.

Old Tom Morris, still considered the Grand Old Man of Golf and four times winner of the British Open, became greenkeeper of St. Andrews in 1865 and continued until 1904. He had two rules for his maintenance program: "Mair sound, Honeyman" was his cry for his assistant Honeyman to apply evermore topdressings of sharp sand to the greens and fairways in order to "maintain the character of the grass." His second rule was, "Nae Sunday Play. The course needs a rest if the gowfers don't." As a tribute to Old Tom Morris for his care of the Old Course, the first patented hole cutter developed by Charles Anderson was presented to him in 1869.

Golf was now sinking its roots in this country and around the world. It caused people to take an increasing interest in grass. The first turf garden in America was established at Manchester, Connecticut in 1885 and the first turfgrass research was recorded in 1895 at Kingston, Rhode Island. Grazing sheep were still used in the early 1900's for mowing and nurturing the green cover of golf courses. But the lawnmower, having its start as early as 1830, was slowly adopted for horsedrawn use and special leather shoes were placed on the horses so the golfing surface would not be disturbed.

Now two explosions lie just ahead for golf in America. The first occurred in 1913 when an unknown American caddy by the name of Francis Ouimet beat the world's greatest golfers of the day, Englishmen Vardon and Ray for the U.S. Open Championship at The Country Club, Brookline, Massachusetts. The popularity of the game soared. About the same time, agricultural science had budded and was about to bloom. The USGA, organized in 1894, supported publication of a new book in 1917, "Turf for Golf Courses" written by Drs. Piper and Oakley of the Department of Agriculture. These men were not only scientists but golfers as well. Others throughout the country who loved the game could see the need for better, more dependable playing surfaces. Agricultural science would now serve golf.

The Green Section of the USGA was formed in November, 1920 and gained immediate support from green chairmen and greenkeepers (now they prefer to be called golf course superintendents) throughout the country. It's difficult for us today to even imagine or understand the complaints of the golfer just 40 years ago! For example, earthworms were a major problem especially on greens. Either their casts or their bodies were always in the line of a putt. One early Green Section agronomist recalls the golfers would complain bitterly that their ball would invariably be deflected away from the hole while putting over these impediments. In all his years however, he never once heard a golfer complain that his ball was

deflected into the hole by the earthworm. Surely, the scientist thought, statistically this must have happened at least now and then!

Disease was the big grass killer of those days and Dr. John Montieth, then Director of the Green Section, in the late 1920's developed the first effective fungicides for their control. His findings are still in use today.

The march of science made possible new machinery, new grasses, chemical fertilizers, weed controls, insecticides, improved soil mixes, irrigation and drainage principles, etc. All followed in blazing succession from the early 1930's to the present day.

Dr. Fanny Fern Davis received the 1975 USGA Green Section Award for her tremendous contribution to golf through work with turfgrasses. During World War II, Dr. Davis left her job with the National Capital Parks Service and served as Acting Director of the USGA Green Section. During this time, she was instrumental in recognizing and adapting newly developed chemical plant hormones for the control of broadleaf weeds in turf. If you have ever played golf in a sea of dandelion seedheads, you will recognize immediately the importance of her work with 2,4-D. She ushered in a new era for the game. Dr. Davis' contribution in weed control has had far-reaching effects and she is the first woman to receive the Green Section Award.



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The idea of an agency to carry out turfgrass research and disseminate unbiased information caught on. Throughout the world, other golf associations recognized the value and formed their own Green Sections. The USGA Green Section's mission has changed little over the years. It did and still does conduct research and disseminates unbiased, factual information to USGA Member Clubs and their superintendents on matters pertaining to turfgrass management.

Golf has come a long way from the days of the Dutch Traders at St. Andrews. Even within our lifetime, we have seen the changes from the cleek, spoon and mashie to the numbered irons and woods. There is little resemblance between the implements and balls of the 1920's and those you see in play today. Nor is there any

resemblance in course conditioning. Today's golf course superintendent may not know how to shape a club head, wrap a grip or sew a feather ball, but he does know how to grow championship grass for golf. As you walk our golf courses today, take a moment to marvel at what the early Scots called "The Green"; that is the entire golf course. Golf Course Superintendents and Green Committees use the turfgrass knowledge of centuries to produce the best possible playing surfaces for testing today's contestants.

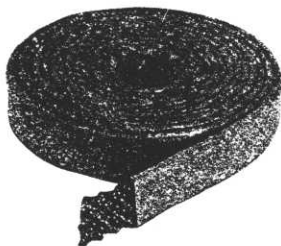
And after you have played our course or galleried at a Championship, surely you will look back at the excitement and drama of the play....and the memory of The Green.

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