

Former Minnesotan Bob Feser Praises Larry Vetter's Articles, Adds More Historical Data

To: Editor of Hole Notes:

Larry Vetter's articles on *Hole Notes* were interesting and amusing. Here are a few items that might add to the history of *Hole Notes* and your area of wonderful golf courses.

The average attendance of the Minnesota Greenskeepers Association prior to and through WWII was only 12 or 15 members. A three-cent postcard was sent out to inform members of monthly meetings.

After WWII Roy Nelson became Secretary and held the position for nearly 10 years. He was Superintendent at Golden Valley C.C. His father, Ludvig Nelson, made the best sod cutters in the country; they were the kind you kicked and pushed by hand. Ludvig worked for Minikahda for years. In the mid-to-late '50s Roy left the Minnesota area and took over the job at Ravisloe Country Club in Chicago.

At that time I took over the job of Secretary and decided that our organization needed a monthly news bulletin. As Larry mentioned, we had a mimeograph, but we also purchased an addressograph machine which alleviated the work of sending out the bulletin. This really was the beginning of what later became *Hole Notes*.

Ray Hall, (Greenhaven, Anoka) took over a couple years later as Secretary and editor of the monthly newspaper. He did a very competent job and, as I remember, got a lot of help from his wife, Betty. After Ray, Carl Anderson took over. He was probably the best of the three of us. His newsletters were folksy, newsy and interspersed with good humor. Ray and Roy were both WWII combat veterans in the ETO. Carl was Superintendent at Woodhill after having been at Nemadji Club in Superior, Wisconsin. Carl, as you all know, became known as "Mr. Woodhill."

My own connections with Woodhill were long and deep. As you approach Woodhill Country Club, the hill up on the right is the site of my great grandfather's farm. He was a Kentuckian who fought for the Union in the Civil War. He was mustered out after being wounded at Resaca, Georgia during Sherman's campaign to take Atlanta. He moved to Minnesota after the war and built a two-story log cabin on that hill. One of his sons was my grandfather, Charles Ice, who hunted and fished as a boy on what is now Woodhill. An article in the November, 1913 issue of *Sports Afield* magazine told of an earlier hunting and fishing expedition (1888) to the Woodhill area. It sounded like a sportsman's paradise. My grandfather became the village blacksmith in Wayzata and later Excelsior.

The hill up on the left as you approach Woodhill belonged to Albert Crosby. Mr. Crosby financed the massive evergreen plantings undertaken at Woodhill during the '20s and '30s since the membership felt it was too expensive a project. Albert Crosby was a member of the Washburn-Crosby Company which later became General Mills. For the information of you younger members, WCCO Radio & TV got their call letters from Washburn Crosby Company.

My dad, Leo, was superintendent at Woodhill for 30 years. I can remember being a small boy and seeing the draft horses work, three teams of them. In the winter the Woodhill

crew used those teams to help harvest ice from Lake Minnetonka. Dad also had about 75 sheep at Woodhill. My sister and I always had lambs to care for when we were little. The horses belonged to the company, but the sheep belonged to my dad personally. They helped graze the rough areas and were kept in the barn in the winter. All the manure was composted and used on the greens as topdressing. The compost piles were located just below the shop (then a barn) on the edge of a marsh where the skating pond is now. During the '30s wool brought less money than what it cost to take it to market and the sheep were done away with.

Woodhill's barn burned down during the '30s. When this happened the horses were sold and replaced by Toro tractors. The grass on the steep sidehills was kept cut in those days with scythes. I remember well the two men who did this at Woodhill. They were Sam Lundgren and Martin Donlin, both bachelors who lumberjacked in the woods of northern Minnesota during the winter and swung scythes on the golf course in the summer.

My dad built Orono Golf Course and opened it in 1926. It was a sideline business and secondary to his main occupation as superintendent at Woodhill. The Greenskeepers' picnic was held annually at Orono for many years. My sister and I as little kids became acquainted with other "little kids" whose folks were in the golf or golf-related business. They included, among others, Paul Miller's kids, Gordy, Don and Marilyn, and Carl Anderson's kids, John and Miriam. Orono was the first public golf course in Minnesota to have grass greens. The Minneapolis municipal courses converted from sand to grass greens in the early '30s. Incidentally, Woodhill and Interlachen were the first golf courses to try bent grass greens and not too successfully either. Charlie Erickson was the dean of Minnesota Greenskeepers in the '20s and his Minikahda course was the first to use power mowers (but they were pulled by horses).

World War II raised havoc with the golf industry. At Orono, we grossed less than \$500.00 for the whole year of 1944. The first weekend after VJ Day in August, 1945, we took in \$500.00 each day. Gas rationing had been taken off the day after VJ Day and people in Minnesota were ready to play golf and they did. I started working on the golf course at the age of 12, the first full year of the war. The neighbor boy and I mowed greens together the first couple of mowings of the spring when the pushing was hard. Yes, we pushed them then, in our case, one pushing on the left handle, the other pushing on the right handle. I've been behind or on a greensmower nearly every year of my life since then. I'm presently a superintendent of a resort golf course in the mountains of western North Carolina. My younger brother, Dave, is a superintendent of a new course in Gainesville, Georgia. Between my dad, my brother and myself, we have put in over 125 years as superintendents or in other golf-related positions.

As an expatriated Minnesotan, I'd like to extend greetings and best wishes to all of you in the golf industry and especially to my old friends and acquaintances.

—Bob Feser