

The Evolution of 'Hole Notes'

Part I: The First 44 Years

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We all have memories of how our profession has changed over the years. Some of our young members remember the days without computer-controlled irrigation systems. Others, just a little older, remember when greens were mowed only with power walk-behind mowers and bunkers were "raked by hand." Still older members remember when the night waterman was critically important to the health and playability of our courses.

What started with just a handful of members meeting whenever possible grew slowly as more clubs were formed and more "greenskeepers" came to the profession. For some years the "Annual Meeting" consisted of three days of meetings at the "Farm School" on the St. Paul campus where the professors lectured the "greenskeepers" for three days, then tested them and gave them grades. This took place during the first week of March whenever possible.

If you want to really understand where this began, many can spend some time looking in the archives of their club's memorabilia or look at pictures in the locker rooms or on the walls of the grill at some of the older clubs in the area and see photographs of a time that most of us find difficult to imagine. A time when fairways were mown with cutting equipment pulled by a team of horses. A time when gasoline or diesel engines were not even dreamed of. When a "push mower" was literally just that!

The ingenuity of some of the early members of this profession was incredible, as you see pictures of them designing and building tools to help them do their jobs better. In fact, the initial concepts of both the sod cutter and the aerifier of today are the result of Minnesota "Greenskeepers" and their search for improved turf maintenance tools.

There have been phenomenal changes in our profession, with many of them taking place just within the past few years. Most people "in the business" are aware of these to one extent or another. However, many members of MGCSA are not aware of how the Association has changed and, in particular, how *Hole Notes* has changed. That is the primary focus of this article, even though some reference is made that is more accurately "MGCSA history". Those two are so intertwined, that to understand one requires some reference to the other.

This is not intended to be a precise accounting of history. It is, however, offered as an approximate chronicle of events that took place and some of the reasons for those events. The author hopes that this article will inspire someone out there to record some form of a history of MGCSA while there are still some of the "oldtimers" around to fill in the voids and record the events that have taken place over the years. I know from researching background for this article that there are a number of members who have rather extensive files. Let's get this information centrally recorded so that files are not purged and all of this is lost.

MGCSA has gone through a number of name changes since it was organized in 1927. *Hole Notes* has not, although its form and substance have changed drastically over the years. Back in the early days, the Association's written communica-

tion was limited to a postcard mailing to the members telling them when and where the next meeting would be held. As the Association grew, so too did the need and desire for more extensive communication.

In 1960, MGCSA's communication vehicle underwent its first major improvement. The commitment was made to publish an official newsletter that would include not only the information that was previously provided via the postcard, but also personal and professional items of interest to the membership.

In order to accomplish this, the Association acquired a manual typewriter and a mimeograph machine. The official custodian of this equipment was the elected Secretary of the Association. It then became that person's responsibility (I'm sure this was not without assistance at home many times) to sit down monthly, accumulate this information, "cut a stencil," run off the necessary number of copies using the mimeograph machine, fold the one-page newsletter, stuff it in an envelope, seal and address the envelopes, lick the appropriate number of stamps and take this bundle to the post office.

Now most of you can probably picture this to be an absolute nightmare for the superintendent who was "elected", and thereby inherited this task. Remember, this was over 30 years ago! Most of us in the turf business were not English majors and had enough trouble spelling "typewriter," let alone using one! In addition to this, if you are old enough to remember mimeograph machines and stencils, you know that these were critters that had minds of their own more times than not, even when being used by professional secretaries. But, be that as it may, that was the price of being the Secretary in those days. As you might suspect, that position was not highly campaigned for by those willing to serve on the Board!

However, once the equipment and objectives were in place, the next item to be tackled was finding a name for this new publication. What better way than to have a contest to see who could come up with the best name? The winner of that contest, according to Carl Anderson, was Maynard Erickson. And thus, *Hole Notes* was born.

"What to write about?" became the next issue to be dealt with. Space couldn't be filled using pictures, so words were the only space filler that was available. The objective was to have a publication that would be both interesting and informative. How this was accomplished and what it included also was almost entirely left up to the Secretary.

We must remember that over 30 years ago, word processors and computers were not even dreamed of. We also must remember that, even today with these tools at our disposal, it is many times difficult to find the time to sit down, call around collecting news and then put it down in written form. You might especially try to picture finding the time to do this from about May through September. But to their credit, these dedicated Secretaries took the time to put together a means of communicating with their fellow members.

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This newsletter would include such “folksy” items as “Mrs. John Greenthumb just gave birth to their first son, John Jr., who will undoubtedly follow in John’s footsteps and take over City Country Club when John retires. Both Mary and John Jr. are doing well. We’re happy to report that John Sr. is also coming along fine!” Another item might have been, “John Greenthumb reports that he and his wife Mary had a great time on their vacation this winter. One of the highlights of the trip, especially for Mary, was when they got the chance to tour the new maintenance building that was just built at Southern City Country Club.”

Items similar in flavor to the above were included in nearly every issue. This gave the publication a very personal touch and was anticipated and enjoyed even by the spouses. In addition to the personal touch, business and professional items were included, such as “John Greenthumb, City Country Club, reports no breaks coming out of winter on the new irrigation system that he put in last fall. John now feels confident that he will be able to water all nine tees and greens in the same night if his waterman can stay awake that long.”

It was also about this time that technological advances and governmental regulations began to appear almost overnight *Hole Notes* became a much-needed vehicle for these types of communications to the membership.

It wasn’t too many years, however, before the task of publishing this newsletter was just too overwhelming to expect one person to accomplish it, particularly on a “volunteer” basis with little, or no, spare time. The Association was growing rapidly as were the demands placed on the Superintendent by the golfing membership. It became very apparent that a change had to take place to relieve the workload of all Officers and Directors, particularly that of the Secretary.

When the 1971 season was in full swing, this need could not be ignored any longer. The growth was too rapid, the pressures too great, the work load too large. Something had to change!

Next Month — Part II: The Next 21 Years

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