

Pioneer Milorganite Promoter C. L. 'Jim' Graham Dies

By Jack Kolb

(Editor's Note: This article was printed in the June 1995 issue of Hole Notes but we felt it was worth publishing again because of the generosity of Clarence L. "Jim" Graham. Upon his death on January 14, 1997, Mr. Graham donated \$2,500 to the MGCSA Turf Scholarship Fund.)

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Back in 1926—1929 there was a young college student by the name of C.L. "Jim" Graham who was struggling to get through medical school at the University of Minnesota. Like many college students, Jim looked for summer work and because of his close association with the Feser boys, he prevailed upon Leo Feser for a summer job on a golf course.



Jim Graham

Being a medical student, Jim was very learned in chemistry so Leo Feser would quite often consult with Jim about the role of certain products and their relationship or interaction with the management of turf. One summer a gentleman by the name of Dr. O.J. Noer stopped by. O.J. Noer was a Ph.D. who had left the University of Wisconsin Soils Department to promote a by-product of the Milwaukee Sewage Commission.

Young Jim Graham was fascinated by this man (Dr. O.J. Noer). After the formal introductions, Leo assigned Jim the job of monitoring the many test plots laid out on Woodhill Country Club by this vigorous and most enthusiastic soil scientist (turned salesman) from Milwaukee. As time went by, it became apparent to Dr. O.J. Noer that in order to cover all the potential sales of Milorganite in Minnesota it would be necessary to expend a considerable amount of his time. This would be true for the other populous areas of the country as well!

In order to take the load from his shoulders, Dr. O.J. Noer asked Leo Feser to become a distributor. Leo Feser felt his first love was with Woodhill Golf Course, and probably even at that time Leo was thinking of developing Orono Golf Club.

Stepping forward to offer his abilities was the young college student, Jim Graham, whose largest obstacle was finances. You might think that the goal of *Doctor of Medicine* could not be cast off too lightly, but after the last quarter of "Cadaver Carving 101" Jim was ready to toss off his laboratory coat and aim for the fresh air of the Minnesota countryside.

There were many interesting stories related to the promotion of Milorganite. Those who are old enough to remem-

ber will testify that O.J. Noer was a stirring speaker and a hands-on lecturer. Slide projectors were not very popular back then, and O.J. held court out on the fairways and greens of the particular course that he happened to be working. His knowledge of soils was infinite, and traveling as he did from course to course gave him a practical approach to many problems. For instance, Leonard Bloomquist, who at the time was Superintendent of Brookview Golf Course, had a problem with No. 10 green. The green was virtually top-dressed with Milorganite. O.J. took one look around the periphery of the green, pulled out his trusty knife and cut a large plug. O.J. knew with his first look that the Elm trees which were 60 to 70 feet in radius from the

green had invaded with their roots.

Being young and dramatic, Jim Graham had some original ideas on how to promote his product. As you should know, the Twin Cities of that day were quite different than today. Most all of today's suburbs were farms back then. Jim would pick a site, usually a hill along a main artery such as Lyndale Avenue or Highway 12, get permission from the owner (which was usually a farmer) and spell M I L O R G A N I T E using copious amounts of the product. A popular columnist of that day, who later became a legend in radio and television, was a man by the name of Cedric Adams. Cedric noted *those green messages* along the highway and his curiosity caused an investigative inquiry. He then wrote an article in the Minneapolis paper. According to Jim this made the product a "Household Word" and the sales began to climb. Shortly thereafter Woodhill and The Minikahda Club were using carload lots of the material.

One sales promotion that did not work was a little perk devised to move more material without first increasing the demand or consumption of the product. Jim was told by the manufacturer (Milwaukee Sewage) that for each ton of product ordered the customer was to get "one ton in addition at no extra cost." Jim worked his heart out and recorded record sales. That was in 1932. In 1933, when Jim started his round of sales, each and every customer had carried over just enough or the exact required amount of material that he would need for the 1933 season. The young entrepreneur had a very lean profit for the 1933 season.

Graham's company was known as Minnesota Milorganite and continued to operate until Jim's retirement in 1970.