

Where are they today?

# GILBERT FOSTER

By JACK KOLB

Have you ever felt like an anthropologist who has just discovered a species of man that the whole world thought no longer existed?

That was my feeling as I probed the archives for a subject that I was sure had long passed on to the "Eternal Green" where 100-yard putts are gimmees. This gentleman is a virtual dinosaur in the turf industry. The name **Gilbert Foster** will register only with those of you who have been around since the years immediately after World War II.

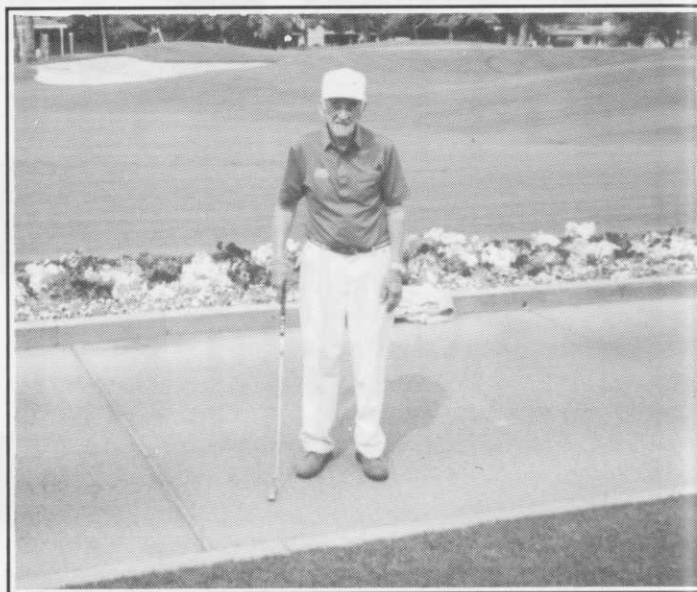
Gil Foster attended the old "Agriculture School" which was located on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota. This was back in 1928, with succeeding years of stock market crash and depression.

To have a scientific background in those days was to be a "Rare Bird." In peddling his knowledge he was befriended by a gentleman "Greenkeeper" at Keller Golf Course in St. Paul by the name of Harold Stodola. So Gil worked for Harold learning the intricacies of "greenkeeping" until 1936 when the head pro at Town and Country Club, Jock Hendry, was casting about for a knowledgeable "Greenkeeper."

Gil Foster labored at Town and Country Club for 17 years. Many changes took place during those years. The U.S. had gone to war as did many of the club's members, money was directed toward the war effort, budgets shrank, equipment was impossible to buy, tires were allocated on agricultural need, which left many a tractor set on blocks. Gasoline was rationed and that meant golf courses would have to go back to horses if they were to remain operating.

War's end came and in 1946 some of the chemistry developed during wartime was released to the civilian population. Town and Country Club, with Gil's supervision, was to benefit from one of the earliest uses of 2, 4-D which was used to eliminate weeds from its fairways. Equipment manufacturers such as Toro and Jacobsen started manufacturing "Power Greens Mowers" both of which demonstrated their first models during Gil Foster's administration. Ryan Manufacturing Company came out with the first "Sod Cutter." Herb Cohrs had made the first "Greens Aire" (Airi-fier), also demonstrated at Town and Country Club in St. Paul.

In interviewing Gil Foster he kept reminiscing about the venerable people that worked in the industry such as Paul Miller, Scotty McLaren, Leo Feser, Emil Picha, Jim Graham, Joe Rush and many others. Some day maybe we can elaborate on each of them in another story. Gil was Secretary of the Association in 1948 and President of MGCSA



**Gilbert Foster at Phoenix Country Club** is ready to tee-off. Gil has golfing privileges here as the result of many years of dedicated service.

in 1949.

In 1953 Harold Stodola moved from Keller to Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio, thus leaving a vacancy that was filled by Gil Foster. In this capacity Gil began to expand his horizons. He was now in charge of both Keller and Goodrich golf courses. Gil also had bought a farm in Gem Lake Township near White Bear, Minnesota and began to develop what became Gem Lake Golf Club. He also became the first Bent Grass Sod or Stolon grower in the area, growing certified grasses such as C-1 Arlington and C-19 Congressional bent. Several golf courses were converted from sand greens to Bent grasses at this time which included Goodrich Golf Course in St. Paul.

There are many old stories that Gil would love us to tell. We neither have the room nor space for them in this article, and I have been privy to some of the lesser escapades that he referred to.

The Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association should be proud of this man, who probably is the closest (by a couple of years) living person to being one of the original charter members of our organization.

Gil now lives in Phoenix, Ariz. He plays golf regularly with daughter Susan. He is in his 87th year hale-and-hearty and is looking forward to coming back to the Twin Cities to visit another daughter and whatever old friends that are still around. "Play on through, old buddy!"