

EARLY TURFGRASS RESEARCH AND THE FORMATION OF MICHIGAN TURFGRASS FOUNDATION

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Early turfgrass work at Michigan State University was rather limited until the early 1920's. I can only relate to my experiences as I remember them as I do not have copies of all the early meetings.

My major at Michigan State was Landscape Architecture in the School of Agriculture under Professor C. P. Halligore - a Harvard graduate. Our instructor, Allen Mackay, was an Iowa State graduate who had worked summers for Stiles and Van Kleek - Boston Golf Course Architects with two offices - Boston and St. Petersburg, Florida. Our golf problems in the Junior and Senior year were handled by Mackay. One field trip of our class of sixteen was to the Groesbeck Public Golf Course being constructed for the City of Lansing. We saw a green being stolonized - a new process of that time. Up to this period seeding or sodding were the only known methods of establishing greens.

After three years in Florida, Georgia and Massachusetts I returned to Michigan in 1928. I met the Grand Rapids Greenkeepers and attended the local meetings of the Western Michigan group.

While in Massachusetts I was impressed with the fact that Professor Dickinson at Massachusetts Agricultural College had held a short course for greenkeepers in the winter. With the idea that we could do the same in Michigan I approached Dr. McCool, head of Soils Department at Michigan State College. I knew he was interested in golf, but nothing happened. Later, Dr. C. E. Millar was made head of Soil Science and I again approached with my suggestion. A fine reception. Dr. Millar explained that we should include lawn work and not hold the research work to golf courses alone, "Nearly everyone in the state has a lawn." To get started Dr. Millar asked that we set a date and appear as a committee to make an official request for research and a short course on turfgrass, the Greenkeepers to make up the committee.

Making the trip to Dr. Millar's office were Herb Shave, Willie Smith, Reuben Scott, John Grey and Ben Bertrand from the Detroit Association. From Western Michigan we had Clarence Strouse, John Dustin, Andrew Peck, William Phillipson and myself. The meeting was most enjoyable and successful. We discussed the work of the U.S.G.A. Green Section, the type of meetings our local associations were conducting, the newly formed National Association of Greenkeepers, the first turfgrass experimental plots constructed by Dr. James Tyson, and our desire for more scientific information in growing grass under our Michigan conditions on golf courses. Dr. Millar explained that the College would need help in financing research work. He outlined that we would invite participation from the Park and Forestry group, Cemetery Maintenance people, and anyone interested in lawns or turfgrass work.

Dr. Tyson was assigned to work with the group and arranged the first two day meeting and we were under way with what we call today our Annual Turfgrass Conference. Speakers were selected mainly from the various divisions of Michigan State College with many visiting professors from other colleges and universities. Dr. O. J. Noer of the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission was a very popular speaker, Dr. John Montieth, Kenneth Welton, and Dr. Fred Grau of the U.S.G.A. Green Section gave us great help. Our suppliers of chemicals, fertilizers and equipment were very co-operative in furnishing speakers. Our early meetings were in the middle of December and in the mid 1930's we changed to mid-March. Attendance has always been very good as we were the first in the Middle West to have a winter meeting of this type and there was great interest for further education particularly from

greenkeepers and park men.

Later Sod Producers became an important element. Dr. Tyson was very conscientious in his efforts to help education of greenkeepers. One year he arranged a six week winter short course for greenkeepers, and had 18 to 20 enrolled in the course. When he learned that most of those involved were Golf Professionals preparing to be greenkeepers he did not re-schedule the course. By the late 1930's we had a strong group participating in our meetings and we realized we were not contributing funds for research. In Western Michigan we formed a letter and asked our clubs to donate \$25.00 each for research. Andrew Peck and myself signed the letter as officers of our Greenkeepers Association. We had two replies, but no money. We needed stronger appeal.

The first request to form the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation was denied. Apparently the administration at Michigan State didn't want any more foundations. Dr. Tyson continued the request each year and finally in 1956 Dr. Hannah, President of M.S.U., sanctioned the formation of our Turf Foundation. Michigan State was recognized as having one of the fine Turfgrass Programs nationally with several graduate students who had established prominent places in the industry.

Dr. Tyson proceeded with the Articles of Incorporation of the Foundation and the writing of the By-Laws. Directors and officers of the first were elected at our March meeting.

W. BRUCE MATTHEWS, President
Manager, Green Ridge Golf Club, Grand Rapids
CLARENCE WOLFROM, Vice President
Golf Course Superintendent, Maple Lane Golf Club, Warren
DONALD ROSS, Golf Course Superintendent
Lansing Country Club, Lansing
HORACE GODWIN, Hiram Godwin & Son Inc., Redford
HAROLD PECK, Golf Course Superintendent, Battle Creek Country Club,
Battle Creek
WILLIAM MILNE, Golf Course Superintendent, Knollwood Country Club,
Birmingham
WILLIAM SMITH, Golf Course Superintendent, Red Run Golf Club, Royal Oak
NORMAN HALMICH, Norm Halmich Sod Farm, Warren
GEORGE PRIESKORN, Golf Course Superintendent, Burroughs Corp., Brighton
JAMES TYSON, Executive Secretary, Turfgrass Extension Specialist
Soil Science Department, Michigan State University

A meeting was necessary to adopt the By-laws. I asked one of my club members in Grand Rapids for help in preparing our brochure and the results were excellent, we received a fine piece of work from the Jaqua Company at no cost to the Foundation. In the summer of 1957 we had 34 paid members. We had a large group at the organizational meeting in March and seemed to have great support for the Foundation. We mailed several hundred brochures with a formal request letter signed by myself as President to all groups that had shown interest in the Winter meeting. We learned in the first few years that we had a selling problem that we had not anticipated. Some of the problems evident were:

- a. Some people will participate, but not pay unless forced to.
- b. The Midwest Turf Foundation at Purdue had established a fine program and much of our capacity for growth were members at Purdue. Other states - Illinois and Ohio - were having meetings so our best bet for members was mainly Michigan.
- c. Our greatest potential was in Southeastern Michigan, but our reception there was only fair. Eventually I was to learn that the Detroit District

Golf Association was asking each member to subscribe to the U.S.G.A. Green Section Service at \$125.00 a year. James Standish was President of U.S.G.A. and a sincere promoter of this new service.

Our membership gradually increased because of the great dedication and cooperation of the Officers, Directors and Committees with each person devoting his time and paying his own expenses. Dr. Tyson was an extremely dedicated turfgrass man giving most of his free time as well as much of each full day to our projects. Several times he lost the Experimental Turf Grass Plots where new buildings were erected on the campus.

I believe I can express the fact that each of us are proud of our part in helping to establish the Turf Grass Program at Michigan State University.