

# The Present-Day Greenkeeper

By O. B. FITTS

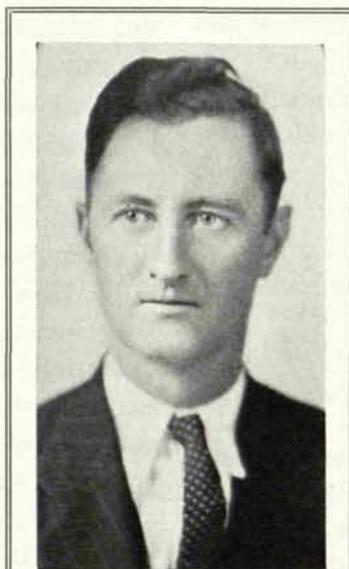
*Read at the 6th Annual Educational Conference of the National Association of Greenkeepers of America, held at New York City, January 19-22.*

HAVING been given the privilege of selecting the subject for this paper and knowing that there are speakers on this program who can talk much more intelligently on the subject of turf culture and its many attendant problems than I can, I have decided not to try to tell you how I think these problems should be dealt with, but to speak to you about the qualifications of the present-day greenkeeper. This subject, though not strictly educational in nature, is, I believe, of general interest to us all.

A general review of the ever-increasing responsibilities of the greenkeeper during the past decade has prompted me to use this subject. And it is my object to discuss, briefly, some of the newer phases of greenkeeping. That is: the responsibilities which have been added as a result of the modern trend of golf and its attendant demand for finer playing grounds, which the greenkeeper has been able to assume and accomplish, mainly, as a result of the various educational campaigns which have been carried on during the past few years for the purpose of preparing him to keep pace with the progress of the game.

## GREENKEEPER'S WORTH NOW RECOGNIZED

THE educational campaigns which have been conducted by the leading greenkeepers of the country and other agencies interested in the advancement of the standard golf course maintenance, have been successful in attracting attention to the true worth of a good greenkeeper and in gaining recognition of the importance of his position. This recognition has in turn resulted in the shift of many responsibilities to his own shoulders which



O. B. FITTS  
*Greenkeeper at the famous  
Columbia Country Club, Wash-  
ington, D. C. He was trained at  
the Green Section office of the  
U. S. G. A.*

formerly rested with the chairman of the Green committee, the golf course architect, the construction engineer, and experts and specialists in many fields.

It hasn't been so many years since the greenkeeper, as a rule, was recognized only as an overseer or foreman who must be capable of carrying out the instructions of the chairman of the Green committee whose duty it was to plan and supervise all except the merest of routine maintenance work on the golf course. In the case of construction work, alterations, etc., the work was planned by the golf course architect and executed under the supervision of a construction engineer.

In many cases a construction foreman was employed to direct the work of the greenkeeper and other laborers on a construction job. In the latter case the greenkeeper became a working sub-foreman. There were, of course, many exceptions to this rule, for even in those by-gone years there were men employed in this field who had the ambition, strength of character, and demonstrative ability necessary to force recognition. These men were appreciated and respected by their employers and were entrusted with positions of responsibility, while those without the important qualifications mentioned continued to struggle along in the subordinate capacity of mere foremen.

These leading men of yester-year are among our leaders of today. They are the men who visualized the possibility of raising the standard of greenkeeping to a recognized professional plane, and who had the courage to take the bull by the horns so to speak, and weave this possibility into a reality.

Outstanding examples of their efforts are the National Association of Greenkeepers and many local organizations of similar purpose, which have been formed during the past few years for the benefit of the greenkeeper and his profession.

The inception and success of these organizations are direct results of the desire of such men as Colonel John Morley and his co-workers to gain all the knowledge possible of the many intricate phases of golf course construction and maintenance and then to pass it on to others. The carrying out of this desire was a movement which evolved itself into an educational institution in which each active greenkeeper became an instructor as well as a perpetual student. I use the word "perpetual" because, once a man enrolls in the studies of greenkeeping he has begun that which no man will ever actually complete.

#### GREENKEEPER KEEPING PACE WITH GOLF PROGRESS

**I**N THE effort to provide for the preparation of the greenkeeper to keep pace with the progress of the game of golf, the agencies that have taken part in the development and operation of this institution and its subsidiaries have been most successful. Their success in the matter of assimilating information and knowledge and dispensing it to others, who were sufficiently interested to take advantage of it, has been far-reaching and has added greatly to the success of greenkeeping in general.

While the work is still in its infancy, so to speak, it has achieved many important objects. Among these objects, and by no means the least, is that of making earnest students of every ambitious greenkeeper. It has given him a better and brighter insight into the future and has taught him that if he expects to keep pace with the trend of his profession, he must familiarize himself with all the modern phases of golf course construction and maintenance and be prepared to cope with the many emergencies with which he is apt to come in contact.

If we may use the experiences of the past few years as indications of what the future may bring forth, we must expect a continued increase in responsibilities. The ever-changing trend of interest in golf, the introduction of new construction and maintenance methods and new types of equipment, and the possibility of new disease and insect pests putting in their appearance at any time may

be expected to add to our list of responsibilities and problems. The anticipation of these problems lends incentive to preparation for their solution that will furnish subject matter for study on and on through the future years just as have the changes and problems of the past decade kept us constantly on the search for knowledge.

We have gained a foundation however. We have learned how to go about the matter of securing information. We have a better knowledge of the numerous sources of information to which we may appeal for aid in the solution of our problems. Consequently, we are better prepared to meet and cope with whatever the future challenges us with, than we have been in the past.

During the five years that I was with the U. S. G. A. Green Section I had occasion to visit many golf courses in this country and on many of those visits, I found that some change or alteration was either in progress or under contemplation for the golf course. In most of these cases, especially if the alteration was to be of any consequence, the services of an architect had been or was to be secured for planning the work, and in some instances a construction engineer was also called into service. All of which was, in most cases in those days, the wisest thing for the club to do, for the average greenkeeper had not gone in for that type of work and was not qualified to handle it.

#### GREENKEEPER'S STORY IS DIFFERENT TODAY

**T**HE story is different today however, for the successful greenkeeper has made a study of the architectural and constructional phases of golf course work during the more recent years and has demonstrated his ability to execute any alteration in a manner that satisfies the whims of the golfer and at the same time simplifies maintenance problems more than the work of someone who is not as familiar with local conditions as he is. This knowledge and ability has made it possible for the greenkeeper to demand a better salary and at the same time effect a saving for his club.

Many of our leading greenkeepers have assumed, not only the designing and construction work for their own clubs, but have shown such ability in this work that other clubs have sought and secured their services for similar work and even for designing and constructing new courses. These fellows have attained this knowledge and ability through earn-

est and tireless study of the things that must be applied in such work.

For instance, in order to be able to design and construct a golf course or a golf hole, one must understand and be able to analyze the game of golf shot for shot, not only as it is played by the expert but by the average player and the dub as well. He must be able to apply these analyses in his design to such effect as to insure interest and a test of golf for the low scorers and still retain the characteristics necessary to the enjoyment of the game by those who are not so skilled in the art of shot making. He must be able to apply these characteristics of design in such manner as to conform with the natural environmental character of the site on which he is working, so that the finished product will possess the interesting and testing qualities as considered from the standpoint of golf; beauty and attractiveness as to landscape, durability, and simple and economic maintenance requisites.

He must understand soils and be able to determine the types best suited to the various uses in construction. He must understand drainage and

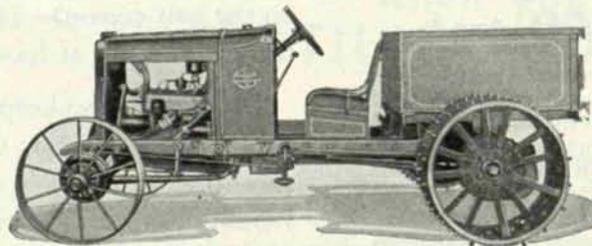
irrigation and be able to provide same according to the requirements of each particular unit of the job. He must be able to select the proper grass for each of the various uses on the course and to make judicious use of fertilizers and other materials used in construction. These principles apply equally as effective in making alterations of an established course. Therefore it behooves every greenkeeper to give them earnest consideration and thorough study.

#### GOLF COURSE IS ALWAYS ALTERED

**I**N spite of the fact that there will probably always be some opposition to alterations among club memberships, such work will continue to be done as long as men play golf. And this work will continue to become more and more a part of the greenkeeper's responsibility. There are numerous reasons why alterations are necessary. We must make changes in order to keep pace with improved methods of maintenance and to take advantage of constantly accumulating knowledge of the various factors pertaining to golf course construction, turf production, and turf maintenance. We must

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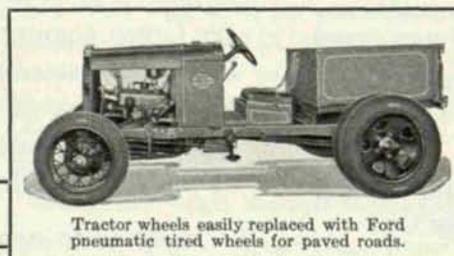


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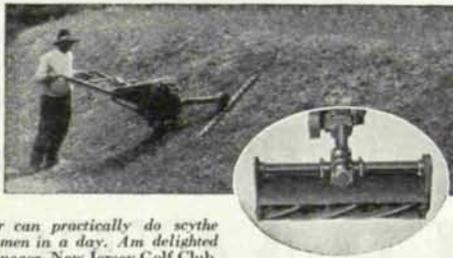
also make changes in order to maintain and encourage the interests of the golfer.

Just as the automobile manufacturer finds it necessary to change the model of his car year after year, so does the greenkeeper find it necessary to change some portion of the golf course occasionally. The automobile manufacturer makes these changes and improvements for the purpose of holding the interest of the automobile purchasing public and keeping abreast with competitive industries, because the success of his business depends largely upon his ability to do these two things. We make changes and improvements in the golf course in order to hold and stimulate the interest of the golfing public and to keep pace with other recreational interests and facilities. Because the success of the game and of our profession depends to a great extent upon our ability to accomplish these objects.

One of the greatest responsibilities which the rise in the standard of greenkeeping has placed in the care of the greenkeeper is that of purchasing equipment and supplies for the golf course. Not so

many years ago practically everything for the golf course was purchased through the secretary of the club at the request of the chairman of the Green committee or some official of the club. All advertising matter was sent to these officials, and when a salesman visited a club for the purpose of interesting it in the products of his organization, he called on these officials. The result was that the greenkeeper knew what he was getting to use on the golf course or to work with, only when the delivery man arrived with it.

The greenkeeper has probably always had the privilege of asking for what he wanted or needed but that was about the extent of his privilege and in many cases he never exercised that privilege, because the acknowledged subordinate standard of his position placed him in a constant state of intimidation. There were exceptions to this rule of course, just as was the case in those previously mentioned, but there were fewer exceptions than adherents to the rule. It would be difficult to picture the successful greenkeeper of today having to stand back and wait for his chairman to decide what he needed or what he should use on the golf course.



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### GREENKEEPER NOW SELECTS HIS EQUIPMENT

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"Why the greenkeeper?" you may ask. Because it is he who has made the most thorough study of the needs on the golf course and it is he who has familiarized himself with the practical particulars of these products to such an extent as to enable him to make a more intelligent selection than the average Green committee chairman is able to do. He has demonstrated this ability to his chairman who in recognition of his interest and ability has responded by intrusting him with the major portion of this responsibility.

In order to qualify for this responsibility, the greenkeeper must have a thorough working knowledge of the articles used on the golf course and

must be able to intelligently compare prices based on quality and practicability. In other words, he must be a sound business man and a prudent purchaser with a mind open to reason rather than closed in egotistical ideas, yet never so liberal as to be swayed by mere sales talk, personal feelings, or temptations. The principles involved in this phase of the greenkeepers' work are very important and should be given serious consideration.

I would like to state here that I know of no better opportunity for making a study of these principles than is offered at these conventions. With the display of golf course equipment and supplies found here and with the representatives of the various manufacturing and distributing organizations present to explain the details concerning their products, one may, if so inclined, learn more in a few hours than would otherwise be possible in months or even years.

#### GREENKEEPER MUST BE A SALESMAN

**I**N addition to being a judicious purchaser, a successful greenkeeper must be a good salesman. The importance of this qualification may be questioned

by some, but, in my estimation, it is one of the most important essentials to success, not only in greenkeeping, but in all lines of endeavor. If we are to attain success as greenkeepers, we must be able to sell ourselves, our ideas, our ability, and our disposition.

First we must convince the chairman of the Green committee and other club officials that we are capable of handling every phase of greenkeeping to the best advantage for the club and that we are honest and industrious enough to be intrusted with the responsibilities of the position. These men are usually business men who are quick to recognize worth-while qualities in the people with whom they come in contact. Consequently an honest and resourceful greenkeeper has comparatively little trouble selling himself to them.

There are other important sales to be made however. We must sell our ideas and our services to the golfing membership of the club. That is, we must apply ourselves in such a manner as to please as many of the members as possible. Our position is, in a sense, a political one and we must have the en-



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dorsement or support of the majority of those in whose service we are employed in order to keep in good standing. To do this we must study the temperaments, the likes, and dislikes of the various members and strive to do our work in a manner best calculated to gain favor. This aids, not only in the longevity of our employment, but in gaining the feeling that our efforts are satisfactory and pleasing to the members, and this feeling adds encouragement and incentive to our work.

After all, it is the duty and the object of our position to provide pleasant and enjoyable conditions for those who play golf as well as exacting, yet fair conditions, effective from the standpoint of the game itself.

#### MANAGING LABOR IS IMPORTANT

**T**HE greenkeeper must be a competent manager of labor. He must have the ability to gain the confidence and respect of his men, he must formulate a concise set of working rules and convince each individual on his force that these rules must be complied with—without exceptions. He must never tolerate insubordination on the part of any one of his men, or give any one reason to feel that he is exempt from the fullest exercise of his authority. He must recognize the ability of each man to adapt himself to the various jobs under his supervision and apportion the work among the men in such a manner as to obtain the greatest amount of efficiency from each man.

He must be able to adjudge efficiency and should rate his men in the matter of compensation accordingly, as nearly as the rules and wage stipulation of his club will permit. He should make a special effort to keep his men satisfied and interest-

ed in their work, because men must be satisfied and interested in their work if they are to be expected to render efficient service.

Another qualification which applies to the general business man as well as the greenkeeper is that of being able to take a licking and to accept it only as a matter of past consequence while he comes back and begins all over again with renewed courage and determination. The defeats or setbacks encountered by the greenkeeper, during an unfavorable season like the summer just passed, are sufficient cause for one to lose heart and courage if he is the least inclined to weakness.

When a set of beautiful greens, the result of diligent and tireless effort, are forced to succumb to the ravages of disease and insect pests and to the uncontrollable conditions of nature, one must possess more than mere courage in order to pitch right in again and go through all the tedious and patience-wrecking course of treatment necessary to bring them back to their former state of excellence. One must have that necessary desire to conquer, and an unflinching love for the beauty and fineness of quality which he expects to restore to his disease-ridden and insect-infested turf.

#### GREENKEEPER MUST NOT BE A QUITTER

**T**HE successful greenkeeper has trained himself in these qualifications and, though he may be somewhat downhearted at times, he never quits. This qualification has not been made essential through entirely new responsibilities but I feel that it should always be encouraged, and especially during such trying periods as last summer.

Many of the articles which have appeared in the NATIONAL GREENKEEPER from time to time have



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been very helpful and encouraging to the trouble-beset greenkeeper. I might refer to one which I thought was especially supporting. I refer to Mr. James A. Smith's article which appeared in the October, 1931 issue. I wish to express, in behalf of the greenkeepers in general, my appreciation of such articles and I hope that the publishers will be able to give us just as many next year as they did last.

The object of this discussion might be misconstrued to imply that the greenkeeper no longer needs the help of the experts or specialists of the various fields in involving golf course work, but I wish to assure you that this is not true by any means. It is my sincere belief that the present high standard of greenkeeping would never have been achieved except through the cooperation of these men who are especially trained in their respective fields. I also believe, just as sincerely, that we must have the cooperation of the Green committee men, the golf course architect, the construction engineer, the scientist, and the trained investigator, if we expect to continue progressively with our profession.

We have learned the very important lesson of how to cooperate with these men in such a way as to get the greatest benefit of their knowledge. And having learned this lesson we must never underestimate their indispensability to our success.

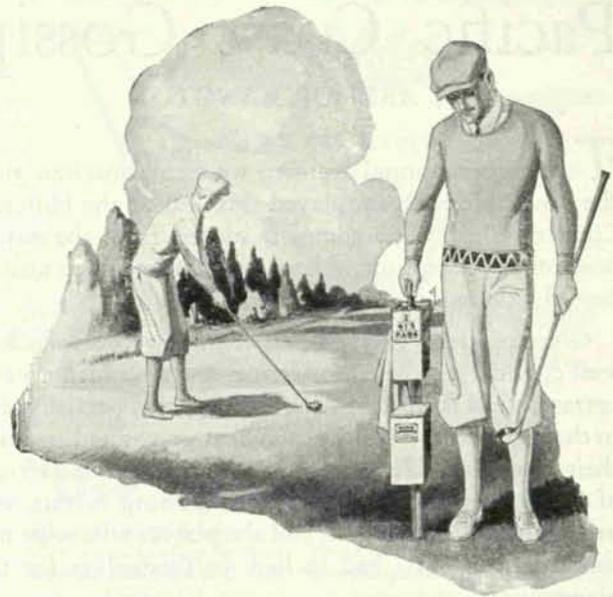
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