

# Some Thoughts on Greenkeeping

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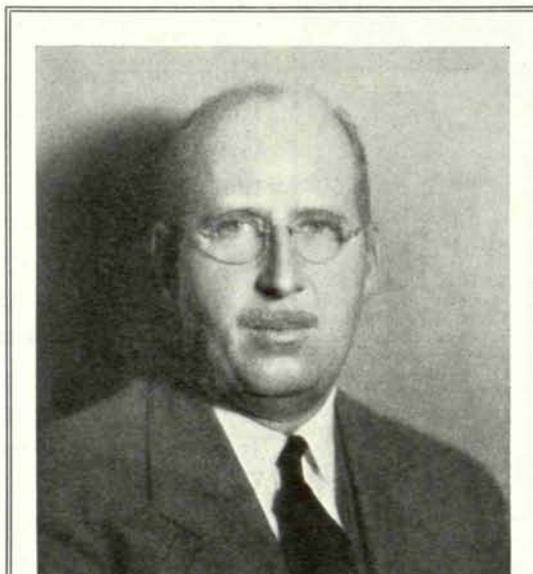
OUR president, Colonel John Morley, in inviting me to address this gathering, left the choice of a subject to me. My title may seem rather vague, but I have a few thoughts which I hope may be worth consideration if you will bear with me for a while.

In every profession there are certain outstanding events which mark the start of an era. That day in September, 1926, when some of our friends and benefactors met at the Sylvania Golf in Toledo and started the wheels turning on the vehicle which brings us here today is surely the start of the present era of the profession of greenkeeping.

All of us know that the day of trade secrets in greenkeeping practices is gone. I know there are individuals here today who, in the past, have been flatly told, "Find it out for yourself; I've had to and I'm not telling you." Today, thanks largely to the offices of this Association and the various District Associations and to the research and educational efforts of the United States Golf Association Green Section and the various state institutions, he who travels his path without help and inspiration regularly and in times of need has only himself to blame.

## GREENKEEPING NEVER AN EXACT SCIENCE

THERE still remains, in some quarters, a certain distrust of some of the before-mentioned activities. I hope that this will soon pass. Greenkeeping will never be an exact science in that it will be possible to predict and prescribe definitely for all eventualities. No set of experiments will answer all aspects of any one problem. There will always be a definite



M. E. FARNHAM

*Who combines his practical knowledge of greenkeeping with research experience of plant life. Mr. Farnham happily combines the theoretical and practical experience of his profession.*

role for the greenkeeper. Each of the various before-mentioned activities merely gives the greenkeeper an additional tool to use in getting to the root of his problems. As he becomes more successful and efficient in doing so, his place in the picture becomes larger.

The rapid development of the game of golf in this country is responsible for our most difficult problems. Look back at your own course ten years or less ago. Are golfers satisfied with conditions then obtaining? I don't hear many "ayes." Have the additional refinements required been in line

with what Nature likes to give us? Again the "noes" have it. What is the result? We are busy trying to work contrary to Nature and as most of us have learned to our distress we sometimes go too far.

I admit my inability to solve your problems in this line. I can tell you what I've done; when and perhaps why I've been successful; when and perhaps why I've failed. They've done this at Arlington, and that at State College or Chicago. Will the results be identical on your course? Probably not, although the results there form a basis for the start of your own experimentation.

There probably is no "best." At the last meeting of the Philadelphia Association the question was asked, "What is the best fertilizer program for fairways?" I think about the only definite answer which can be given that question is, "There is no best." Will the same program be the best for *Poa Annua* fairways, Kentucky Blue fairways, or fairways subject to Crab Grass infestation? I don't

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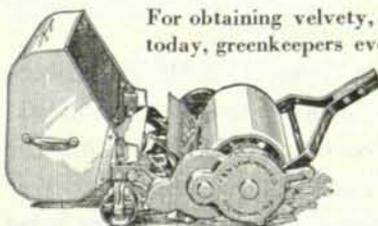
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think that even the most enthusiastic fertilizer salesman should answer, "Yes."

I am not raising these points in an attempt to be confusing but wish to illustrate something of the problems of a greenkeeper today in growing turf.

#### CHANGING OFFICIALS CAUSES HARDSHIP

**T**HERE is another side of the greenkeepers' problems to which I wish to direct some attention today. Along with the development of higher standards for fine turf has come the development of Golf and Green committees. If they were all Golf committees in reality, it might not be quite so bad. We have with us, however, the Green committee. The Green chairman often takes the position because someone has to. You are all familiar with the hardship wrought club and greenkeeper alike by frequent change in this position. Much has been written and talked on this phase of golf course affairs. It is all very well to talk but actions speak louder than words.

In an active search for improvement of our technique in maintenance methods we should not lose sight of this other side of our job, both in fairness to ourselves and to our employers.

There are questions of policy on every course which are outside the province of the greenkeeper. That is where the Golf committee enters the picture. Inside of the greenkeepers' province the committee should pass out of the picture. This mere statement of the fact is no solution. I may meet with dissenting opinions but discussion is a healthy sign and need not involve personalities.

Like Topsy, many golf courses just grew. The greenkeeper's position, logically, grew correspondingly, or should have. Often it has not. Why? The answer would be the solution of a problem worthy of any scientist.

In the first place many unsatisfactory conditions have persisted under committee management which would not have existed long under a more business-like form of management. However, I can not look for a correction of conditions from this angle. The greenkeeper must add another to his multitude of activities. He must sell his abilities as well as be constantly enlarging them as are all of you here today.

In today's outstanding commercial enterprise—the automobile industry—ability is probably as richly rewarded as anywhere. However, the min-

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ute a man begins to slow up in his ability to carry on at top speed in that field of intense competition he passes out of the picture. In our field of working with Nature results can not always be guaranteed according to specifications. We can only be sure that we are constantly on the alert and open-minded.

The percentage of Green chairmen who, from choice, wish to dictate greenkeeping practices is relatively small. The percentage of chairmen who do, to a greater or less degree, dictate greenkeeping policies is larger than it should be. Undoubtedly this condition is due to a lack of knowledge of conditions and a lack of confidence in the greenkeeper. It is this condition which I view as one of the major problems of the greenkeeper.

GREENKEEPER HAS A THINKING JOB

*I* SAW a statement recently that few club members realize that in spite of their overalls greenkeepers are gentlemen. This is the source of one weakness. How many men in other branches of endeavor with as large an investment under their control list overalls among the requirements for their position? A man's value in what he can produce with his hands is strictly dependent upon physical limitations.

The greenkeeper's position and responsibilities offer opportunity enough to be well worth his salary for the work he can and should do with his head, except in very rare cases. When the overalls are in use, very likely, work is being done which proper supervision would see was done and other work is suffering for want of proper supervision. Furthermore, overalls or any similar raiment are not in keeping with what should be the status of a man who is responsible for the maintenance of an investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars, as is the greenkeeper.

The greenkeeper's position should be such that his recommendations be sought, rather than considered and often discarded. His results determine his success or failure in life. This does not hold for any Green chairman. Often the greenkeeper makes recommendations and sees them ignored for one reason or another. This should not occur. A recommendation should not be made unless it is essential and worth fighting for. Once made it should be actively supported. If, for due and sufficient reasons, it must fail it should be made a matter of record in writing for future reference.



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It sometimes happens that through frequent change in committees the greenkeeper loses the habit of working things out for himself in the face of the necessity to satisfy a succession of different individuals. His initiative suffers. This is a vicious condition, because the farther it progresses the worse it becomes.

I have encountered the feeling on the part of some greenkeepers that the procedure of writing recommendations to chairmen might be considered insubordination. This feeling should be corrected. All industries encourage and reward initiative. The illustrations of this fact are manifold. Any case in which this does not hold is certainly an unsatisfactory position to be in.

#### GREENKEEPER MUST HAVE INITIATIVE

**I**N THE absence of initiative on the part of the greenkeeper the chairman's responsibilities are multiplied and the position of the greenkeeper becomes less and less satisfactory. I think this is self-evident and the correction of such conditions is certainly one step toward more satisfactory conditions.

Another phase of present-day developments viewed with considerable concern by many is the General Manager proposition. Fundamentally that development is sound. Any successful business is based on properly distributed responsibility among

qualified employees. There is no reason why such procedure should not be successful in the club business. It would unquestionably stabilize conditions and cure some of our present ills such as frequent changes in personnel.

It should, however, be kept in mind that such a development must contemplate displacement of no employee now in the picture. It does contemplate replacement of committee management by a properly qualified individual to serve primarily in matters of policy and financial detail.

#### WEAKNESS OF THE CLUB MANAGER PLAN

**T**HE weakness of such development lies in two directions. In the first place, many clubs cannot afford a properly qualified man for such a position. This being the case the development becomes dangerous in that an unqualified manager is worse than none at all. On the other hand, a qualified man not satisfactorily remunerated would profit at the expense of others. In the second place, there is a dearth of qualified men for such positions.

It sometimes happens that a golf course which has profited by exceptionally favorable conditions or circumstances becomes the envy of all members of other clubs who may play or visit it. Comparisons with the home course are made with no consideration being given any of the contributing factors. The favored greenkeeper, architect, or what have you, seems the logical individual to solve all the problems of the home club.

Here we have a problem developed which should receive some consideration. It is a question of ethics to which we must give some thought if our profession is to grow as it should. Unfortunately, the question of financial reward enters the picture and none of us are affluent enough to disregard entirely such aspects. However, they must be forgotten, in this type of case, unless untold harm is to be done.

In the medical profession consultation is requested of another physician by the doctor on the case. No man of standing accepts a call to a case in another man's hands except on his request or with his approval. This is as it should be and I do not see why it should be any different in the greenkeeping profession.

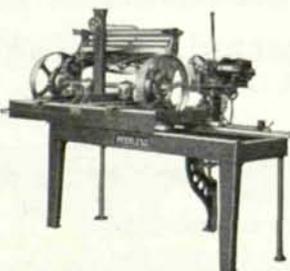
In the same line of thought, a man looking for a position has certain definite procedures open to him. For him to solicit employment indiscriminately in the absence of known vacancies seems to

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me a very unethical practice. This type of problem will become less prominent as we become stronger individually but there does seem to be opportunity for some collective action in setting up professional standards.

As heretofore outlined developments in the field of fine turf maintenance tending to give the greenkeepers added knowledge as to how to meet various problems which may arise are encouraging. The opportunities to meet and compare experiences have multiplied rapidly in recent years, so that there seems reason for considerable optimism for the future of our efforts in fine turf production and maintenance.

There remains, practically unconsidered, the development of better working conditions. The present status of things has been a development largely of necessity. While it is undoubtedly often unsatisfactory in many details none of the interested parties are blameless.

INDIVIDUALS MUST IMPROVE CONDITIONS

**I**T IS purposeless to rave against conditions and make no effort to improve them. I feel that much can be done, not by any collective action or activities, but by the individual actions of each of us. We are all interested in raising the standards of our profession, if only selfishly, because what benefits the group benefits the individual therein. It is useless to attempt to climb the ladder of success and pull someone along up too. We must each one of us go up because no one stands still. We must either go up or down, and as Wm. L. Brownell has said, "The ladder of life is full of splinters, but they always prick the hardest when we are sliding down."

I have tried to suggest some thoughts which have been somewhat neglected in the face of our constant striving for improved maintenance conditions but which seem to me just as vital for success in our undertakings as the maintenance of good turf on our golf courses.

It all seems to resolve itself into the fact that it is essential for each one of us to sell himself more thoroughly to his employers as well as to keep the course in good turf. The sale having been made I know that much of the dissatisfaction with the present scheme of things will disappear. Committee management will become less of a problem with fewer changes in committees and even those changes will be of increasingly less importance.



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