

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past -

Dr. William H. Daniel: Man, Innovator, Scientist, Friend - Part I

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

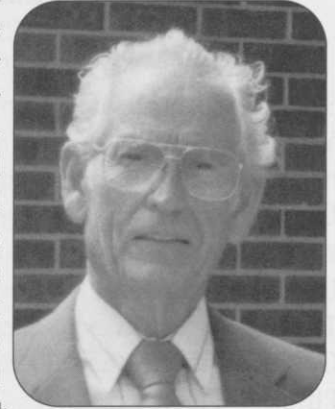
The Sports Turf Managers Association owes the late Bill Daniel and his legacy a big thank you for his assistance in getting STMA off the ground in the early 1980s. This series will focus on Bill as a young man, his contributions as a scientist, educator, innovator and friend to STMA.

Bill's Early Years

Bill was born on January 31, 1919 in Sparkman, Arkansas, the youngest of five children. He was raised on a farm where his family grew cotton for cash and all the work was performed with animals. His intention was to return to the family farm after World War II but fortunately for the turfgrass industry he never did. He received his BA degree in social science from Ouchita College in 1941 and then served in the Air Force as a pilot. Following the War he returned to Arkansas and completed a BS degree in Agriculture at the University of Arkansas in 1946. He received encouragement from friends and a scholarship to pursue graduate studies at Michigan State University in peach tree fertilization and received his MS in 1948. Two years later, assisted by the GI Bill and a Fellowship in turfgrass, Bill completed his Ph.D. at Michigan State University.

While attending college in Arkansas, Bill met his future wife Gwen who was a big part of his life. It was her support that

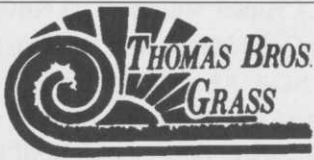
was a giant factor in Bill's happiness and success. He always talked about his life as "we" rather than "I". Gwen looks on their years together with pride and satisfaction. She remembers the hard times, the war years when Bill went into the service. They were married just before Bill finished his tour of duty as a pilot. Throughout their years together, when Bill was busy with teaching, research and consulting, Gwen was busy with



numerous community organizations. They spent a great amount of time together, they enjoyed their work but vacations were always built around work. They were an inseparable and wonderful team for many of Bill's students and industry participants who attended the turf conferences and field days at Purdue University.

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where Purdue University is located. In 1945 the Agricultural Experiment Station (now known as the Office of Agriculture Research Programs) began a turfgrass research program. Also in July of 1945 the MRTF was incorporated to support turf research projects. The MRTF was composed of individuals from sports fields, schools, golf courses, and cemeteries in Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin.

One of the first actions of the MRTF was to send \$ 1,500 to Purdue University's Agronomy Department to pay the salary of a research assistant to breed turfgrasses. The MRTF then teamed up with the Indiana, Indianapolis District, and the USGA to fund a second turf research assistant's position. These actions began a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between the university and the turfgrass industry. It was one of the firsts, it was successful and other states imitated the concept.

In those early years of the MRTF Purdue University researchers began developing grasses that could easily be propagated by seed, started analyzing the response of bentgrass to fertilizer, investigated and recommended the use of bentgrass on golf course fairways and found that certain pesticides had detrimental effects on turfgrass even at recommended rates. The results of the Purdue research investigations impressed the MRTF so much that in June 1950 they funded half of the salary of a full-time turf specialist. Purdue University funded the other half of the salary and they hired Dr. William H. Daniel.


In 1951, Bill commented on the benefits of collaboration with the turfgrass industry in a report to the MRTF. Bill noted that he made over thirty trips to participate in meetings and to observe and advise on turf problems. He commented that the information gained by Purdue

researchers made his research efforts much more effective since they were able to study industry problems. He also stated that his research was aided by the willingness of the MRTF members to try new methods or materials in limited amounts under conditions found in the "real" world.

By 1953, Bill Daniel and his coworkers had tested turf in Purdue's lawns, fairways, grass-breeding plots, an experimental putting green, and turf around airports and local highways. The researchers and an ever-growing number of students focused on improving varieties of grasses and preventing turf diseases.

Bill Daniel was truly one of the pioneers in turfgrass science in the United States as he began his career during the 1950's. He was one of a handful of people across the country working with turf as this was not a subject area or curriculum offered at that time by colleges and universities. Bill was also a man before his time with ideas and innovations that were criticized by many of his peers, yet today these ideas are a vital part of our turfgrass world and the field of sports turf management.

(Next month we will take a look at Bill Daniel the researcher, innovator and teacher - and the strong connections as one of the founders of STMA.)

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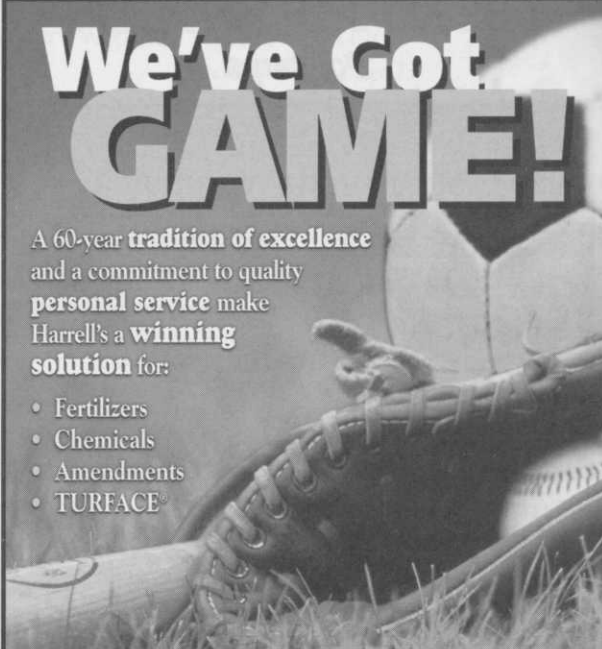
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