

DOC'S DUGOUT - An Inning From Our Past

By Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

I Bet You Didn't Know This - It All Started With A Pump!

I read recently that a special team successfully brought up the turret and parts of the famous Civil War ironclad ship-the Merrimac-from the murky waters of Cape Hatteras Bay. This was the famous ironclad that confronted the Monitor to a draw in the Civil War. Here is a little story about the Merrimac that has some connection with early lawnmowers.

When the Union warship Monitor slammed a relentless broadside into the Merrimac during the classic sea battle of the Civil War and water began pouring into the ship's hull, the Merrimac's chief engineer quickly made his way to the bridge. "With those two large pumps below we can keep her afloat for hours, sir," he confidently reported to the captain.

History records that the Confederate skipper kept his ship afloat until the Monitor withdrew from battle and thus protected the city of Richmond by blocking the mouth of the James River and keeping the Federal squadron at bay in Hampton Roads. That was March of 1862 and the pumps were Worthington pumps.



Worthington Model F and aerifier (restored 1975)

Eighty years later Worthington pumps again came to the rescue in another epic

naval battle when Japanese dive-bombers descended on the light cruiser Marblehead. The ship was flounder-



Worthington Model F (1973)

ing, afire and taking on water by the tons. The Marblehead seemed doomed but as 60 Worthington pumps worked unceasingly night and day, the crew nursed the battered vessel for 12 weeks some 13,000 miles across the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic to safety.

The man who really put Worthington pumps on the map was Henry Rossiter Worthington, the father of Charles Campbell Worthington. In the 1840s Henry launched a brilliant and pioneering career to propel his company into the world's largest maker of pumps. When Henry died in 1880 Charles became the President of the Worthington Pump Company. He formed the International Pump Company, merging Worthington with pump companies from England, France and Germany. But the Sherman Anti-Trust Laws went into effect and he was forced to dissolve the empire and retire. The famous Guggenheim banker had some important part in this affair but went down on the Titanic with various documents related to the transaction. The company took a new direction after the Pump

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Company was dissolved and sold to other investors.

In 1903, while still heading up the Pump Company, Charles Worthington manufactured six steam automobiles (the Worthington Meteor)

but production was curtailed in 1906 because Americans preferred gas driven engines. He then bought the rights to manufacture the French "Bolee" and the German "Berg".

This company was known as the Worthington Automobile Company.



Worthington Model F and gang mower

In the early 1900s most golf courses and recreational areas were mowed with sheep as well as single 30" horse drawn mowing units. Charles Worthington, being an inventor, wanted to speed up the process of mowing so he hired E.M. Sawtelle, his son-in-law, to develop a gang mower. In 1910 Sawtelle tried to persuade the Caldwell, Pennsylvania and Townsend Mower Companies, which made single unit horse drawn mowers, to build a three-gang mower. All three companies ridiculed the idea as impractical. So Sawtelle built a flexible 4" x 4" frame (with posts and brackets made by a local blacksmith) and Ransome cutting reels. This early company was known as the Shawnee Mower Company. A patent was awarded on the flexible frame and Worthington's friends urged him to build gangs for them. Charles Worthington built a plant in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania (3 miles from Shawnee) and gang mowers went into production. The 3-gang mower soon developed into a 5-gang mower that required two horses to operate it in cutting grass.

In 1914, Charles Worthington built the first experimental tractor. Each of the early Worthingtons used Model 'T' parts purchased from Ford and assembled to meet the special needs of the golf, athletic, recreational and estate grass care needs. By 1919, the Company developed a front wheel drive tractor using a Model 'T' Ford engine. The Company expanded rapidly and soon developed a rear wheel drive, in 1928 used the Model 'A' Ford engine and in 1932 the Model 'B' Ford engine. Both of these tractors furnished sufficient power capable of pulling a 7-gang mowing unit. In 1928, the Company designed a hands greens mower with detachable handle.

Three of these units could be used in gang formation-pulled by a two wheel, pneumatic tired tractor.

These units had long handles and



Worthington tractors (1973)

were capable of mowing 1,000 feet of greens per minute (the tires had to be deflated to 3 to 4 pounds per square inch to prevent pocking the greens). Sometime during this period the Shawnee Mower Company became the Worthington Mower Company.

With the outbreak of WWII, President Roosevelt proclaimed that "all lawnmowers and other nonessentials will cease production as of now!" At that time the Army Air Corps had a competitive test of

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all gang mowers for airfield maintenance. A new design patented by E. Ross Sawtelle (Charles's grandson) called the Airfield Blitzer easily won due to its ability to mow at speeds up to 20-25 MPH (the conventional golf course mower could not work satisfactory over 5 MPH). Worthington received a government contract and Blitzers were sent all over the world for airfield work. Although the Worthington Golf Chief, with the 6-cylinder Chrysler Industrial Engine, could operate satisfactory with 7, 9, or 11 gangs-the government used mostly jeeps and "weapon carriers" to pull them.

Charles Campbell Worthington died in 1944 at the age of 90 and his son Ross became president of the Worthington Mower Company.

In 1945, the Worthington Mower Company was sold to the Jacobsen Manufacturing Company of Racine, Wisconsin. Jacobsen had been producing small power mowers for many years but had no large tractors or gang

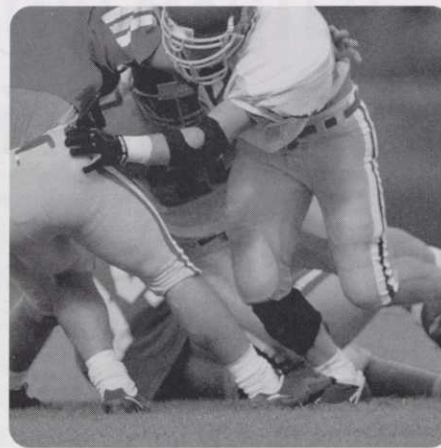
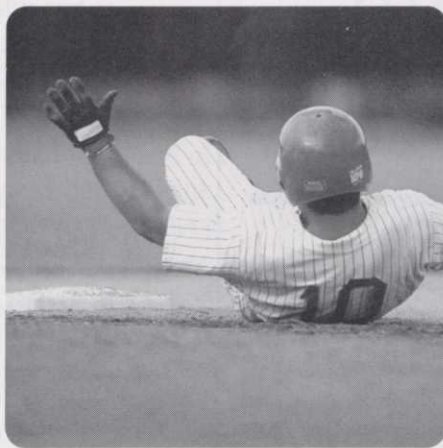
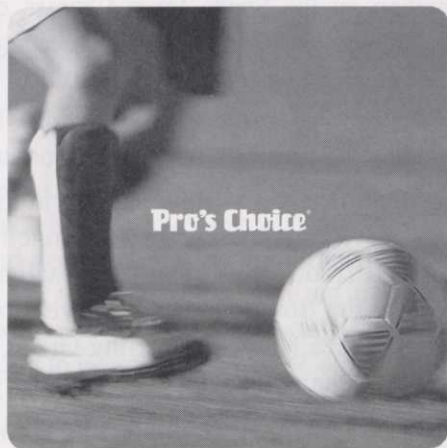
units. The production of Worthington tractors and gang mowers was phased out in the late 1950s and the Stroudsburg plant was moved to Racine in 1961. Jacobsen quit using the Worthington name sometime after this and similar units were manufactured using the Jacobsen name.

Ross Sawtelle became the temporary Vice President and Sales Manager for Jacobsen until 1948 but, when contrary views on policy arose, he resigned. He went to New England and joined his brother, Chester Sawtelle, to form a new turfgrass equipment company-Sawtelle Brothers. Ross died suddenly in 1964 and Chester continued the business until his retirement around 1980.

Much of this information was given to me by Chester (Chet) Sawtelle who turned 93 years old the last week of August. He lives in Marblehead, MA.



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