

# Greenkeeping as a Profession

By PROFESSOR L. S. DICKINSON

Massachusetts Agriculture College, Amherst, Mass.

Speech delivered at the National Greenkeepers Convention at Buffalo, Feb. 15, 1929

(*EDITOR'S NOTE:* These words were presented more than thirty-three years ago. The thoughts contained are just as applicable now as then. Professor Dickinson was chosen to receive the Green Section Award in 1962. (USGA Journal, Feb. 1962.) The 1929 speech is one small part of the teachings of this gentleman, but it is illustrative of the philosophy that has endeared him to so many students. To those who have not known him, it will give some small indication of the quality of his teaching.)

First I want to express my appreciation for the honor your association has conferred upon me by inviting me here to speak. I feel it is an honor to be considered as having done something which has merited your recognition. Also! I am grateful for the two days of education I have had by talking with you gentlemen. I have learned new methods of greenkeeping, and have added greatly to my collection of experiences.

No one appreciates more than I do, the delicacy of the subject I have been asked to speak upon, "The Education of the Greenkeeper." However, whatever general opinion is, I believe one should speak with the conviction of mind, and let others judge the merits.

I will begin with a story. It does have a point, but you may not even laugh at it, yet unlike some of the other stories, it can be applied directly to the subject of the lecture. "Little Tommy was asked by his uncle, what he learned in school that day. 'I learned lots of things,' replied Tommy, 'And one of them was that this world is round and turns on a swivel thing like the great globe in the schoolroom.' 'Did you,' asked his uncle, 'What do you think of that.' 'I think,' said Tommy after pondering a while, 'that teacher is asking me to believe a good lot for a small boy.'"

Tommy's answer showed that he had not been properly prepared for the phenomenon or he would have accepted

and understood the fact without doubt. He believed it, because of faith in his teacher. A demonstration would have given him more confidence, the teacher, however, had a complete understanding of the child's mind, his handicaps, and joys, and with such an understanding created the confidence. Later on in life "Tommy" learned the scientific principles involved.

The turf expert's advice in many instances obviously seems a "whole lot for me to believe." The Greenkeeper believes the advice either because he has faith in the expert, or because he can think of no counter argument, or because the chairman tells him to believe it. If the advice works, faith in the expert is increased and all is well. If for some reason the advice fails, such as poor manipulation, carelessness, or because the expert failed to have a complete understanding of the whole situation, faith is weakened and confidence lost. Who is at fault? The expert as much as the greenkeeper, for a complete understanding by him would have instilled confidence into the greenkeeper and made him realize the necessity for proper technique and carefulness.

## Who Is Qualified?

The next logical question is, "Who is qualified to be a teacher to educate the greenkeeper?" This should be decided upon before any educational work is undertaken. A most important qualification is that the teachers must be none but those who can actually "feel" the greenkeeper's part. The sorrows, joys, disappointments, and praises. The teacher must have felt the workman's emotions. He should have had actual experience with pick, shovel and mower. Those are the first set of requirements for a teacher.

The second set requires that the teacher should have had practical experience in handling men, especially small groups of men, for I think it is more difficult in many ways to successfully boss a gang of twelve men than five hundred.

The teacher must also have technical training, all he can get, and in as many lines as possible. Don't belittle the value of technical training. But, the teacher must use the technical training only to the point of its practical application to the work at hand. That point of practical application varies on every golf course and with every greenkeeper. If the teacher goes too far beyond that point he loses the confidence of the practical mind.

Accepting these qualifications or specifications for a teacher, where are you going to get them? There are very few men available because of the present condition of the golfing universe. The greenkeeper who started 20 years ago is the logical man, and will well qualify. But are you going to leave your position to become a teacher at a salary of three-fifths or two-thirds your present wage? Of course you are not; so you are automatically eliminated by the attractiveness of your present position.

The college man who has been on the job for three years qualifies well in all ways but the first requirement, that of complete understanding; he also lacks experience.

The elimination of these two men places the responsibility to furnish teachers upon the colleges and the men must come from their staffs. There are many practical men on college staffs.

Perhaps you have raised the question, shall or should the greenkeeper be taught or educated, whichever you may call it.

Your answer is—"Certainly greenkeeping is a profession", (it most certainly is). Men are educated in the other professions.

Business concerns that spend \$20,000 annually employ trained men and a greenkeeper spends at least that amount.

### Has Many Facets

Greenkeeping is comparable to farming, fruit growing or floriculture and men are taught to become farmers, pomologists and florists.

Your arguments appear sound, but I believe greenkeeping should not, at least at the present time, be taught. In other words, one cannot teach greenkeeping. The accepted meaning of teaching is "to tell how." A teacher of greenkeepers cannot do that, too many influencing factors that are unknown to the teacher are involved.

If it cannot be taught, what can be done? Greenkeeping should be acquired. Assimilated might be a good word. The broad meaning of the word teaching should be used. That broad mean-

## SUBSCRIBERS TO THE USGA GREEN SECTION VISITING SERVICE

### EASTERN REGION

- Conn. Ridgewood Country Club
- Fla. City of Ft. Walton Beach Municipal  
Golf Course  
Rivera Country Club
- Mass. Cohasset Country Club  
Walpole Country Club
- N. Y. Dutchess Golf & Country Club  
Saratoga Springs Reservation
- N. C. Quail Hollow Country Club
- Pa. Range End Country Club
- S. C. Country Club of Charleston  
Donaldson AFB Association
- Vt. Rutland Country Club
- Va. Hidden Valley Country Club

### MID-WESTERN REGION

- Ill. Coal Creek Country Club
- Ind. Morris Park Country Club
- Kans. Topeka Country Club
- La. Bayou Country Club
- Minn. Midland Hills
- Miss. Colonial Country Club
- Ohio Ridgewood Country Club
- Texas Brookhaven Country Club  
Sandy Lakes Country Club  
Singing Hills Country Club

### WESTERN REGION

- Idaho Coeur d'Alene Country Club
- Nev. Stardust Golf Club
- Utah Riverside Country Club

ing is "to give intelligence concerning." To use my pet phrase, "Our course at the Massachusetts Agricultural College is for greenkeepers and not in greenkeeping."

I had a very flattering letter the other day from a chairman who wanted a greenkeeper. He wrote "I understand that you give a course which considers the greenkeepers' problems." A course with that idea will be successful. It certainly is at M.A.C.

To whom shall the opportunity to receive education be given? Any one? NO! Absolutely no! Because the education for the position of greenkeeper is just starting, and now is the time to make careful and strict prerequisites. If that is done and continued the supply of qualified graduates can be controlled as to quality and numbers.

Three groups appear qualified. 1. The active greenkeeper and assistant greenkeepers. The majority should come from this group. A school for these men must of necessity come in the winter.

2. Caddies, sons of chairmen, sons of greenkeepers, and professionals. Young men who have not had much experience as workmen on a golf course, yet who have been reared in a golfing atmosphere. A different course can be offered these men. Should they have four years of college? Yes, if they can afford the money and time. They will be broader visioned men if they do take it. Do they require four years of college? No, a two year course can be made sufficient, providing the first summer of such a course is required to be spent working on a golf course under a successful greenkeeper. Such a method is practiced at the Massachusetts Agricultural College.

### Need Love of Soil

The third group, new men or new blood. This should be the smallest group in numbers but is very important, for new blood is always healthful. It is poor practice to inbreed. These

young men should be picked from applicants who are attracted to the profession because of the love of the soil and a sincere desire to become greenkeepers. They should be discouraged by all the doleful tales possible, told of all the trials and tribulations of a greenkeeper, and then, if they still desire to come, take them for they will make good greenkeepers.

Training for this group should be two terms in college studying general maintenance problems, such as roads, walks, shrubbery care, and fundamentals in soils and grasses. These two terms should be followed by six months training on an approved golf course. The greenkeepers taking these men should be entirely in sympathy with the college idea and should endeavor to give the boys as much practical training as possible. However, the boys must not be favored in any other way than being given a variety of jobs. If they fail to satisfy the greenkeeper fire them from both the course and college. If they live through the ordeal, they should be required to return in October for a full college year of technical training.

The responsibility for the selection

## COMING EVENTS

- August 7-8**  
Rutgers Turfgrass Field Days  
August 7 — Lawn and Utility Turf  
August 8 — Golf and Fine Turf  
Rutgers—The State University  
New Brunswick, New Jersey
- August 20-23**  
1962 Annual Meetings of  
The American Society of Agronomy  
and the Soil Science and Crop Science  
Societies of America  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, New York
- August 28-29-30**  
Florida Turfgrass Conference  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Fla.
- September 10-11**  
Midwest Field Days  
Purdue University  
Lafayette, Indiana
- September 26-27-28**  
Northwest Turf Association Conference  
Washington State University  
Pullman, Washington

of this new blood should be equally divided between the colleges and the greenkeepers.

What are the duties of a teacher, or what shall be taught?

The winter school for active greenkeepers is an intensive course. The men work in class room or laboratory eight hours a day, five days a week. The subjects studied are motors, water systems, equipment, grasses, grass seeds, soils, fertilizers, landscape arrangement, cost keeping and analysis, (you know your costs are not worth much unless they are analysed) and managerial problems. Every bit of the work is done with the practical results in mind.

In the two year course, the men are given enough golf architecture to make them appreciate their unfitness to become golf architects (that is a profession of its own) and to also realize how golf architecture and maintenance costs are allied.

### **No Hard, Fast Rules**

Should there be any hard and fast rules given by the instructor?

NO! Of course there are chemical formulas that are fixed, and mechanical laws that cannot be broken, and all the fundamentals of the various subjects should be given as hard facts.

Why? Because every tee, every fairway green, every trap on every golf course presents an individual problem.

Every possible condition should be noted for each general problem. In other words the instructor must be the "Pros" if the "Cons" are the students and the "Cons" if the "Pros" are to be educated. Such training will permit the greenkeeper to be better able to diagnose his turf, machinery, cost, or water system trouble, and properly prescribe for the particular problem.

In the study of equipment it is particularly necessary for the instructor to refrain from any influencing talk, yet, he must see that every good and bad feature of a machine is discussed.

I want to say here that if it wasn't for the help and cooperation given us by all equipment manufacturers, seedsmen and all the departments of our college, we could not possibly do the successful job that is being done now.

With such a training as I have briefly described, given in a practical atmosphere, the greenkeeper will be able to meet the problems with intelligence and confidence.

Gentlemen: In closing I'm going to quote from Elbert Hubbard because I think he sums up the whole situation:

"The only time a man grows is when he is green. The moment he thinks he is ripe, he starts to get rotten." Who wants to be rotten?

---

### **Henry H. Russell Chairman**

Henry H. Russell of Miami, Fla., has been appointed Chairman of the USGA Green Section Committee by John M. Winters, Jr., President.

Mr. Russell succeeds William C. Chapin, Chairman since 1957, who was killed in an airplane accident in May.

### **Reminder to Players**

The Rogue Valley Country Club, Medford, Ore., has two methods to implore its members to take care of the course. In the bulletin it printed, inside a 2½ inch by 5½ inch box, these words: Golf Course Closed — May, June, July — For Re-Seeding unless you-you-you and YOU start replacing your divots! Stapled inside the score card is another reminder: It's Getting Bad! You are forgetting to repair ball marks on greens and not replacing divots.

### **Grass Like A Beard**

From the Eastern Turfletter of the USGA Green Section:

One Superintendent to another: "The drought sure has kept the grass short and stubby this year."

The other: "Short? Say, if we don't get a rain soon I'll have to lather mine to mow it!"