



## Chester Mendenhall and The Trees of Mission Hills

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One of the most beautiful spots in eastern Kansas is the golf course of Mission Hills Country Club. Kansas City is blessed with the ecological conditions that permit the growing of beautiful trees, shrubs, and flowers and the rolling terrain adds greatly to the beauty of the landscape. Such gifts of nature comprise one of the added benefits of residence in Kansas City.

The beauty of Mission Hills is not solely the result of a beneficent nature, however. Chester Mendenhall retired recently after having served the club 31 years as golf course superintendent. During that period Chet paid particular attention to the tree population of the golf course. He weeded out the less suitable trees and he planted new ones. The overall effect today appears natural yet it is almost entirely the result of Chet's having fitted the many trees into locations

that appeared "natural" to him. Man-made designs are often clearly recognizable as such. How much more artistic ability is required to make a man's design appear to have "just grown that way!"

Chet's abilities are not confined to landscape pursuits. He is recognized by the members of his club and by his fellow golf course superintendents as one of the most capable men in his profession. He has served as President of the Golf Course Superintendents' Association of America; he was one of the founders of the Central Plains Turfgrass Foundation; and he is a long time member of the USGA Green Section Committee. He is one of those gifted superintendents who are able to maintain their golf course turf in fine condition, take part in the affairs of local and national professional associations, and then have the time and the foresight to create

through planning and steady progress a virtual aboretum on the golf course.

A great many years ago, Chet inventoried the trees on the golf course and he has updated the inventory as new trees are planted and old ones are removed. Today the golf course trees number about 2,700. During his 31 years at Mission Hills, he has planted more than 2,000 of them.

### Thinning Helps

Young trees, sparsely planted, make a rather weak impression. Therefore, in many cases, more trees were planted than were needed. As they grew older, many had to be removed. Such thinning permits the remaining trees to assume their natural shape.

It was also a practice at Mission Hills to intersperse the plantings of slow-growing, long-lived trees with some fast-growing short-lived trees. Thus the new plantings produced the desired effect in a relatively short time, but as the fast growing trees matured they were removed and the slower-growing, longer-lasting species were allowed to take their places. It may be seen that the development and maintenance of an area planted to trees is an

evolutionary task and the population is never static.

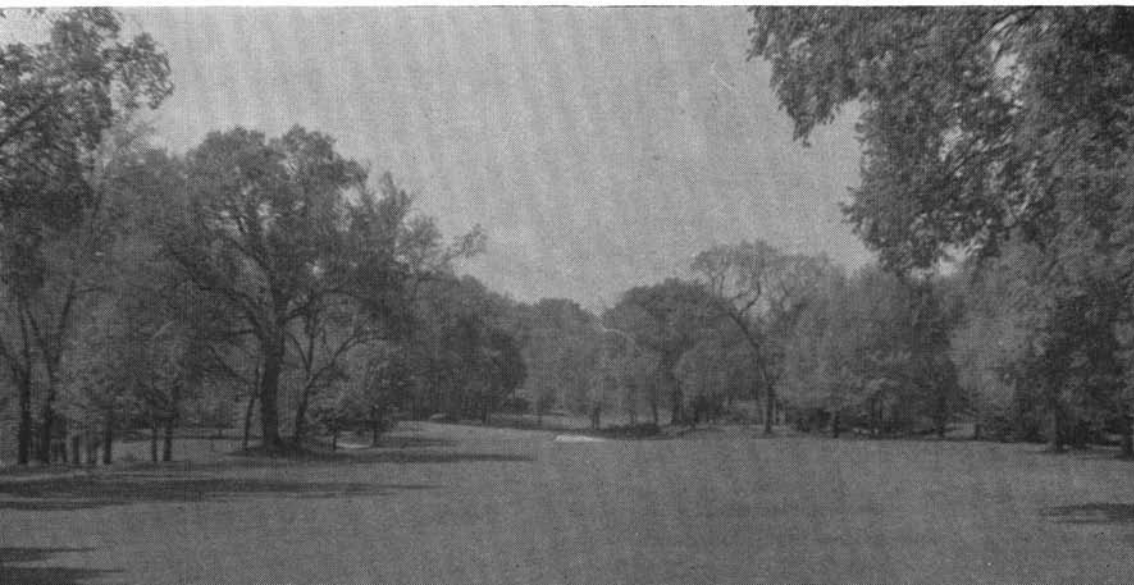
Chet Mendenhall's ideas about tree planting were influenced not only by the esthetic effect that might be created but also by the demands of the game of golf. The site of his handiwork is primarily a fine golf course and secondarily a place of beauty. Trees were fitted along the fairways in such a way that they would complement rather than interfere with the game.

Each golf hole was studied individually. On long par 4 holes, the trees were kept at greater distances from the fairways, whereas on relatively short holes, the trees were brought nearer the fairways. On holes where doglegs depend upon trees, larger, taller growing species were planted.

One of the problems brought about by trees on a golf course is that of reconciling trees and turf. In many cases the effects of shade and the competition for moisture and nutrients are serious draw-backs to the development of turf.

At Mission Hills, an attempt is made to keep all newly planted trees

*Another scene from Mission Hills. Note the variety in foliage, in age of trees and in density of planting.*



at least 60 feet away from putting surfaces. There are a few older trees on the course which are closer to the greens and these have been the source of some problems. In the case of bermudagrass or zoysiagrass tees, it is well to keep trees some distance away. Neither of these grasses does well in shade.

### Many Elms

Types of trees used are chosen after considering a great many factors. Approximately 60 percent of the trees at Mission Hills are elms. The American elm is one of America's most excellent shade trees and it is the most widely used single species. The spread of the Dutch elm disease in recent years poses a serious threat to this magnificent tree. It is to be hoped that the apathy of Midwestern citizens can be dispelled soon enough to bring about protective measures. Inasmuch as the disease is spread by the elm bark beetle, intensive communitywide insect control programs have been effective in checking the spread of the disease. However, a single diseased tree allowed to stand too long can be the source of infection for a tremendous area.

Chet has also made use of a number of Chinese or Siberian elms. These are very rapid-growing trees which produce quick effects. Consequently they are pruned rather heavily and are removed when they get "out-of-hand."

For variation in color and texture of foliage a great many oaks and maples have been used. These two species are among the most colorful in autumn. Further variation has been introduced by the use of sycamore, ash, linden, gum, and willow.

Evergreens have been used for such purposes as background, screening and color contrast. Among the evergreens are varieties of pine, spruce,

fir and arbor vitae. These trees are always planted well away from play areas so that low hanging branches will not affect play.

In the spring there is a display of color from flowering crab apples, red-buds, purple leaf plums, flowering peach and similar spring flowering trees. Among the trees that are not commonly grown in the Kansas City area are the ginkgo, the horse chestnut, golden rain, and Chinaberry.

For winter color and contrast the white bark of birch and sycamore against a background of evergreens is a beautiful sight. Judging from comments of club members, Chet feels that the most popular trees he has planted are the golden rain trees and the flowering crab apples.

### Plan Ahead

Trees are such relatively slow-growing plants that one must be able to foresee the effects of his planting some 20 years hence. Mendenhall contends that one must look ahead 20 to 30 years in planning a tree program. Unfortunately there are relatively few men endowed with the foresight and the concern necessary to plan so far into the future.

The members of Mission Hills Country Club and their children will for many years benefit from the plans and the plantings that have been taking shape for the last 31 years at their club. Their legacy derives from the services of a man who has been devoted to his club, who recognizes beauty in Nature, and who has the foresight and the skill to combine his devotion and his artistry into an outstandingly beautiful landscape.

Anyone who walks the fairways of Mission Hills must have his enjoyment increased because of the years that Chet Mendenhall managed this golf course.