

In Tribute to Marvin H. Ferguson



EVERY PROFESSION, to be worthy of the designation, must surely develop its own traditions and values, its own heroes, and its own ties with the past. In golf in the United States, particularly in the art and science of growing grasses for it, Marvin Ferguson possessed an abundance of those qualities we would all emulate.

It began in 1940, when Dr. John Monteith offered Ferguson, then a young Texas A&M graduate, his first job, laboring in the fields of the old Arlington Turf Gardens, in Arlington, Virginia. Here the USGA and the United States Department of Agriculture carried on cooperative studies in turfgrass research. It soon became necessary to move hundreds of grass selections from the old gardens (the Pentagon was to be built on this site) to the new USDA Plant Industry Station, in Beltsville, Maryland, and Ferguson was to select the specimens to be saved and transferred. Among those selected was one to be later known as Merion bluegrass and another as U-3 bermudagrass.

Marvin Ferguson went on to earn a Ph.D. degree (University of Maryland, 1950) and to become the National Research Coordinator and Mid-Continent Director (1952-1968) of the USGA Green Section. His office was on the campus of Texas A&M, where he also served as a professor of agronomy.

During those years Dr. Ferguson became intrigued with the problems of poor soils and drainage on putting greens. He reasoned that, based on their physical properties, different sands, soils, and organic matter might be mixed in certain combinations to provide the right permeability and pore space distribution to alleviate problems of compaction, drainage, and management. He built his own laboratory equipment and established procedures for testing such mixes. Combining his physical soil analysis techniques with the phenomenon of soil-water movement through textural soil layers, as shown by Dr. Walter H. Gardener, of Washington State University, Dr. Ferguson became the driving force behind the development and publication of the USGA Green Section Specifications for Putting Green Construction, in 1961.

In 1964, he was elected a Fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He edited the GREEN SECTION RECORD and was a member of the editorial board of the H. B. Musser book, *Turf Management*. He was the first to show the damaging effect of spiked golf shoes on soils and grasses. His influence on students at Texas A&M brought many new practitioners to the field of turfgrass science.

In 1968, after 22 years of Green Section work, he left to start his own business, Agri-Systems of Texas, Inc., a consulting and soil-testing laboratory service. He was soon designing and building new golf courses, and he became a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. In recognition of his contributions, he received the USGA Green Section Award for Distinguished Service to Golf Through Work with Turfgrass, in 1973.

IN HIS QUIET, soft way, Marvin Ferguson continued to labor on behalf of better turf and was a member of the USGA's Turfgrass Research Advisory Committee. "A good researcher," he was known to say, "first asks, 'Why?' The what, when, who, and where answers will always follow!"

He consulted and advised in soils and turfgrass matters from New Zealand to Iceland, from Hawaii to the Azores.

"I have had a varied and satisfying career," he said as he accepted the Green Section Award in 1973, "and have felt blessed more than most men. My work now involves my son, my daughter and my wife, Floy. With a close-knit loyal family, friendships and work I enjoy, what more could one ask? My cup runneth over."

Many years ago in St. Andrews, Scotland, Joseph C. Dey, who was then Executive Director of the USGA, found this poem inscribed on a tombstone in the old graveyard at the cathedral of St. Andrews:

*"Then seal away,
Give little warning.
Say not good night,
But in some higher clime,
Bid me good morning."*

Dr. Marvin H. Ferguson, on January 10, 1985, died suddenly in his home town of Bryan, Texas.

