



Did You Know?



Arlington Turf Gardens

Golf Journal is the “Official Publication of the USGA”. In the Fall 2020 edition you may have noticed an article titled “Centennial Salute” (pages 6 and 7) that included a picture captioned “The Arlington (Va.) Turf Gardens , shown here in 1940, yielded important advances in turfgrass quality”.

Arlington Turf Gardens

The following is taken directly from the USGA website:¹

“In 1906, Dr. Walter S. Harban, an officer of the Columbia Country Club in Washington, D.C., contacted USDA Division of Agrostology² scientists Charles V. Piper and Russell A. Oakley, seeking their advice on problems at the club's putting greens.

In 1908, Charles B. MacDonald, the architect designing the National Links at Southampton, Long Island, contacted the USDA for help due to the problems he was experiencing establishing turf on the sand dunes there.

In 1915, the executive committee of the U.S. Golf Association met with Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston, to ask for help in solving "the problems of greenskeeping," which at the time involved an estimated \$10 million investment per year on by golf clubs in the United States.

The result was the creation of the Arlington Turf Gardens in 1916, where Piper, Oakley and other USDA scientists grew, evaluated, and selected improved grasses for putting greens.

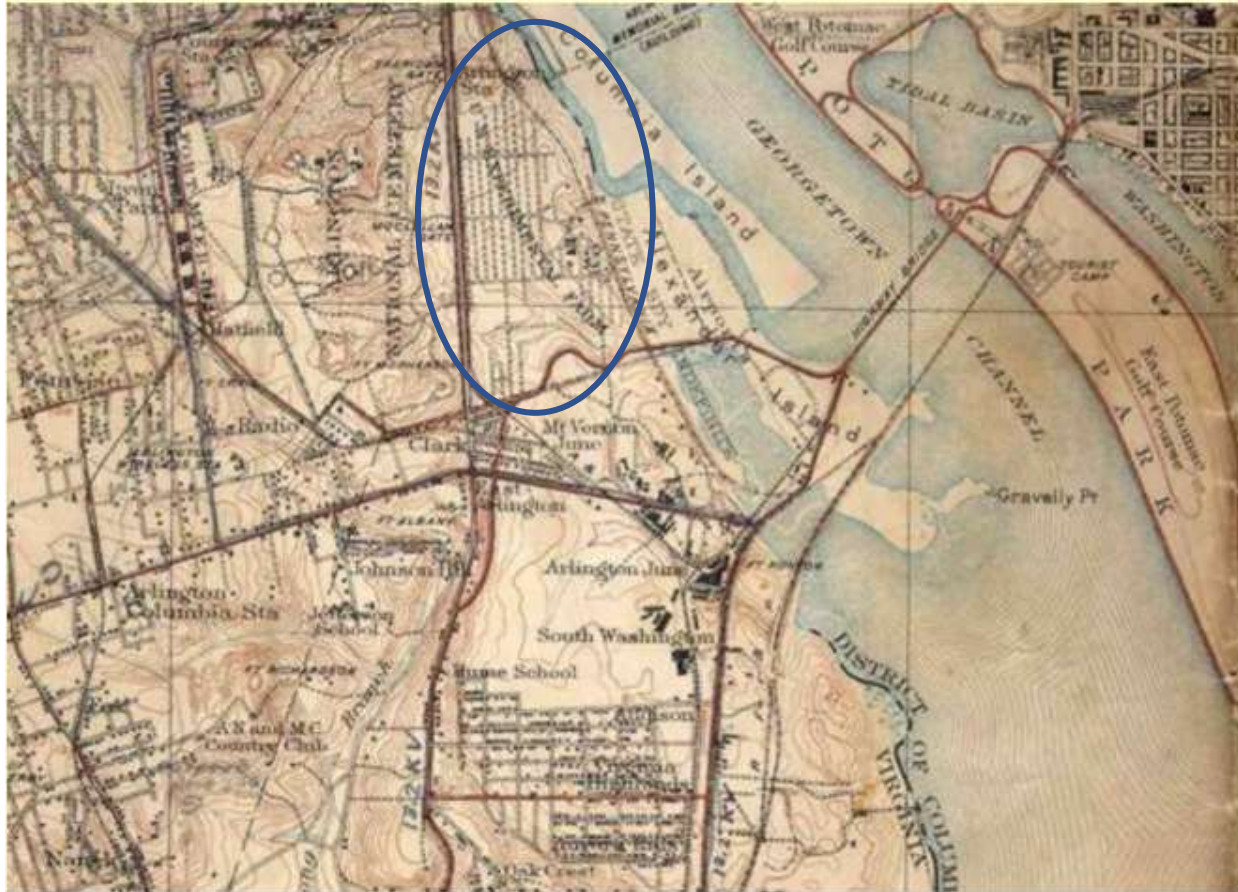
Early research at Arlington yielded important contributions to the field of turfgrass improvement. Experiments included study of mercurials for control of turfgrass disease, earthworm control, comparisons between sulfate of ammonia (acid residual) fertilizers and nitrate of soda (alkaline) fertilizers for weed control, and selection and vegetative propagation of bent grasses.”

The Turf Gardens were located on the United States Experimental Farm which had moved from the Washington Mall to Arlington, VA in 1900. The Arlington Experimental Farm was located

¹ <https://www.usga.org/content/dam/usga/pdf/imported/Arlington.pdf>

² Agrostology: The scientific study of grasses.

between the Arlington National Cemetery and the Potomac across from the Tidal Basin, most of which today is Pentagon North Parking. See below map.



In the 1930s The Experimental Farm began moving its research to the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research in Beltsville, Maryland. Today turf grass research is primarily the province of universities such as Rutgers³ and Michigan State.

The potential ANCC connection? John S. Connolly was the head greenkeeper at ANCC from 1932-1936. Prior to being hired by ANCC he was employed as a USDA agronomist⁴. Although definitive proof is not available, it logically follows that he was employed at the Arlington Turf Gardens.⁵ Connolly left ANCC in 1936 to take a Worthington Equipment dealer franchise in

³ The bentgrass fairways being introduced at ANCC Fairfax are Rutgers 007 Bent.

⁴ *Army Navy Country Club Historical Review 1924-1989*, Page 27, "John Connolly was an agronomist who severed his employment with the Department of Agriculture to accept a position as the ANCC greenskeeper..."

⁵ Per the 1940 Census, John S. Connolly was born in 1910 which would have made him 22 years old when he was hired as the ANCC head greenkeeper. Given his youth and inexperience as a greenkeeper, the author believes that the only realistic scenario for Connolly to have been deemed qualified for this job would have been through the type of experience and exposure he would have received as a USDA agronomist working at the Arlington Turf Garden in ANCC's "backyard".

Bethesda, Maryland. In 1939 Connolly bought 199.77 acres near Fairfax, Virginia to develop his Fairfax Country Club, today's ANCC Fairfax.



Arlington Turf Garden as Viewed from the Air.

Photographed in August 1927

“The central portion, 224 by 128 feet, is used for experiments with grasses kept at putting green length. At the right of this area are nursery rows of some of the most important strains of creeping bent, which are propagated for distribution of material to member clubs of the (USGA) Green Section. At the upper right are rod rows of various selections of grasses. The area at the upper left is now used for lawn experiments.”⁶



⁶ *USGA Green Section Record*, Vol. 8, No. 12, page 244, “The Arlington Turf Garden”, by John Monteith, Jr. (Note: Dr. Monteith served as a compensated turf grass advisor to ANCC for a number of years, apparently ending in the early 1950s.)