

HISTORY OF THE HEDGES

BY HELEN ANNE RICHARDS

Vince Dooley, the University of Georgia's athletic director, is sharing his corner office at Butts-Mehre Heritage Hall with an old friend. He even introduces visitors to his office mate — a 12-inch plant in a black plastic pot.

"Hedges II," said Dooley, pointing to the plant on a sunny window sill. "They are the sons and daughters, as we have called them, of Hedges I."

Hedges I or "The Hedges," the jewel of Sanford Stadium, encircles the football field like an emerald necklace. Trimmed to perfection for game Saturdays, the venerable and revered hedges tell fan and foe alike that they are playing Georgia football. After more than 60 years, however, the athletic department plans to remove the hedges to make way for an Olympic soccer field.

The playing field at Sanford Stadium, selected in the fall of 1993 as the site of the 1996 Olympic soccer finals, must be widened. Inside the hedges, the widest part of the existing field area is only 220 feet. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) has proposed a soccer field 210 feet (64 meters) wide by 344 feet (105 meters) long.

The length requirement poses no problem, but to accommodate the width of the soccer field, the hedges must be removed.

When Dooley broke the news on

April 1, 1993, that the hedges had to go, many Georgia football fans reacted with disapproval. Even Dooley's assurances that the hedges would be replaced with plants grown from the original did little to soothe some wounded loyalists.

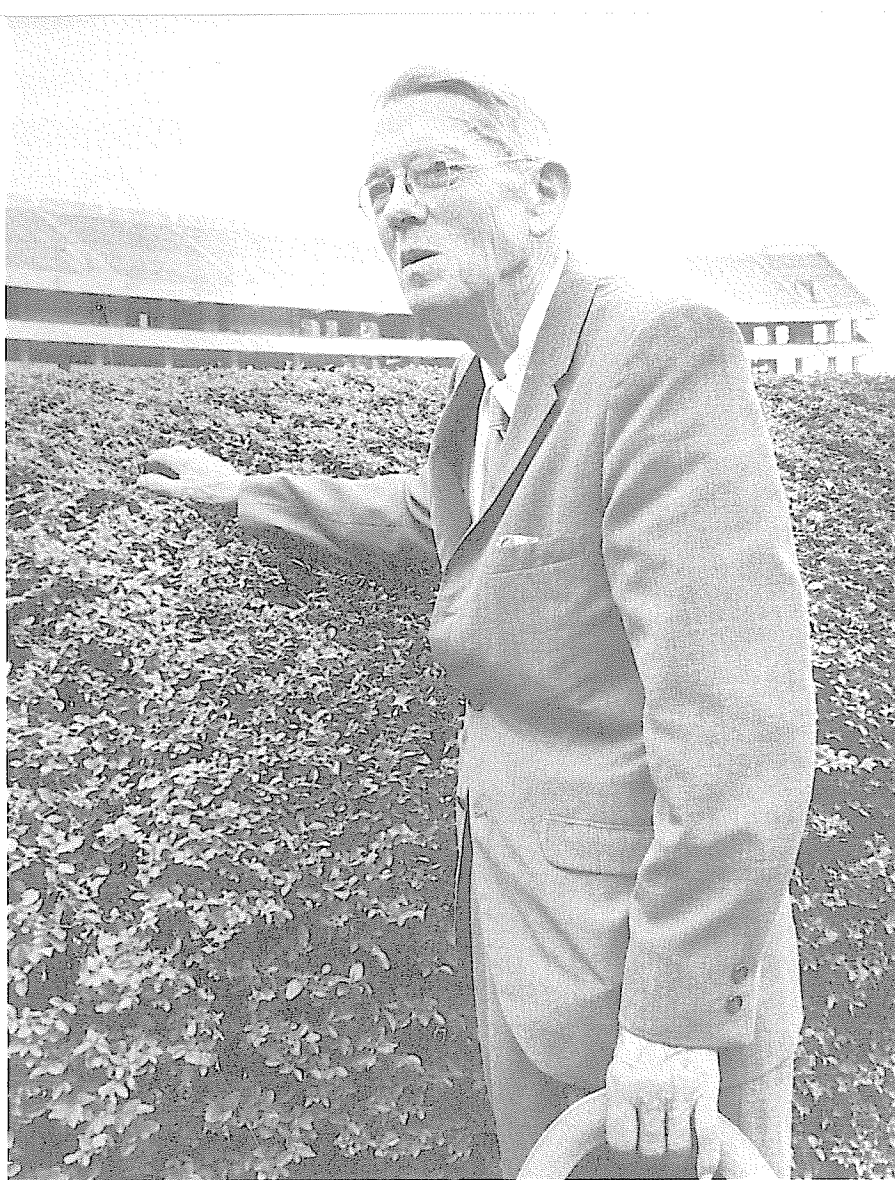
Glen M. Goodman, identified in an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article as a long-time Athens resident, former season ticket holder and publisher of a college football newsletter, was quoted as saying, "There are a lot of people who can't believe the casual dismissal of the sacrilege of pulling out the hedges. Georgia has been shamelessly goaded by Dooley and the local chamber of commerce."

Wherever Georgia fans gathered, the battle over the hedges raged. Words like "tradition, sacred, sacrilege and shame" filled the commentary. The *Athens Daily News/Athens Banner-Herald* published editorials in early April 1993 supporting Dooley and saying the hedge was a small price to pay for Olympic fame.

Charles E. Martin, 79 years old at the time, stands next to the legendary "Hedges," which he planted in Sanford Stadium in 1929.

Many football traditionalists did not agree. R.M. "Mickey" Channell, speaking as a Georgia fan — not as state representative for the 111th district that includes Greene County — is a UGA graduate who has attended Georgia games since 1960. He is a devoted tailgater and ferries friends to games in a black and red airport limousine called the "Bulldog Buggy." He said, "There's nothing we can do about it (removing the hedges). I still don't like it, but we'll just have to hope they do it right."

Dooley attempted to soothe the faithful throughout the summer of 1993. He was quoted in an article after speaking to the Atlanta Area Bulldog Club meeting in August 1993, "It's so important to everybody. I mean, they are very sacred. It worked out as kind of a blessing in disguise is the way I summarize this thing. This problem





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was going to have to be addressed any-
way."

The problem: The hedges, victims of disease, age and stress caused by construction, had lost their vitality. In early 1993 Dooley asked Ray McEwen, athletic department facilities supervisor, to examine the hedges and report on their condition. McEwen consulted university experts in plant pathology and horticulture and the team agreed — the hedges were dying. Saving them meant replacing them.

Planted in 1929, the hedges have lived in Sanford Stadium since the stadium was built. Many writers have given credit to then-university president Dr. S.V. Sanford for planting the hedges, but Dan Magill, assistant athletic director and author of many books and articles on UGA athletics, remembers the man who actually planned and planted them — Charles E. Martin.

Martin, business manager for the athletic department, conceived the idea for the hedges following a trip to Southern California with the Georgia football team. "He was very much impressed by the Rose Bowl (in Pasadena), which had a hedge of roses around it," said Magill. "So that's what gave him the idea. He didn't have a Rose Bowl hedge, but the old, common English privet."

An article in a 1967 football program quoted Martin as saying, "Dr. Sanford talked to me a lot about his plans, but I'm afraid I didn't have much to offer except, of course, the idea for the hedge around the field." Sanford gave him the authority to go ahead.

The hedges, however, almost didn't make it to Athens, said L.G. "Lam" Hardman III, a Commerce banker with deep roots in Athens. Lam's father, Lamartine G. Hardman Jr., often told the story of his participation in the nighttime transportation of the shrubs to Athens from Atlanta.

In 1929 Hardman Jr. was a senior at UGA, a major in the Reserve Officers Training Corps and the unit's executive officer. The State of Georgia owned the only truck on campus and it was assigned to the ROTC. By sending ROTC personnel, Sanford hoped to avoid controversy about using the truck. So Hardman drove to Atlanta with H. L. "Sarge" Farmer, a member of the ROTC staff, to pick up the privet from an Atlanta nursery.

Hardman and Farmer picked up the plants and started back late in the afternoon, and the sun went down before they reached Athens. The truck had no

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lights and they finished the trip with Farmer standing on the running board shining a light into the darkness so Hardman could see to drive.

Once the plants reached Athens, Martin supervised their planting. Old photos catalogued by Roy Gatchell, archivist for the athletic department, show the individually staked, foot-tall plants surrounding players at the Yale vs. Georgia game.

Martin was quoted in the 1967 football program, "I didn't think it (the hedge) would live through that first game in 1929 - the Yale game - but it did and I've been real proud of it ever since." That year UGA defeated Yale in a 15-0 upset.

Players were given room and board and \$2 a month for laundry in 1935-36 when Gatchell played as a tackle. "But that was during the Depression and \$2 was hard to come by," Gatchell said. The team lived in New College and word spread quickly when Martin was in the building: His presence meant laundry money.

Gatchell said months would often go by before they were paid. "Sometimes they'd owe us \$8 and we'd get six or two," he said, adding that their money came from pledges made by football supporters.

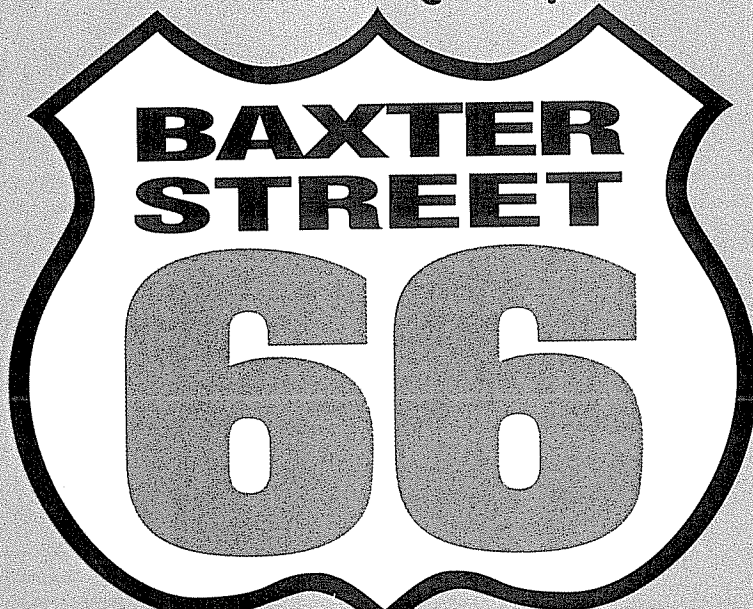
Martin was a "flamboyant man," according to Gatchell, who "had a slap on the back for everyone." Martin publicized the stadium's inaugural game between Yale and Georgia and attracted 35,000 fans, a Southern attendance record and 5,000 more than Sanford Stadium would hold. Gatchell said people sat on the steps when the stands were full.

Magill watched the first game from the sidelines, thanks to Martin's generosity. Martin worked with Magill's father, Daniel H. Magill Jr., at the *Athens Banner-Herald* newspaper. Magill said, "They had sold all the tickets and I wanted to see the game. I was eight years old. He (Martin) told my father that he would just pass me in the gate, the main gate, which he did. I was in my football uniform."

As President Sanford's assistant and business manager, Martin was involved in the details of financing construction of the new stadium. The final price was \$360,000, half of which was borrowed from Trust Co. of Georgia in Atlanta.

Martin was one of the original guarantors of the loan. An undated letter to the guarantors from the dean and faculty chairman of the athletic department outlined the repayment plan for the stadium note. The Athletic Associ-

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ation of the University of Georgia agreed to pay the principal and interest in five yearly installments of \$36,000 beginning in 1929.

Georgia made enough money from the inaugural Yale-Georgia game to pay the 1929 and 1930 obligations.

Football remained an enormously popular sport at the university. In the 1960s, over 30 years after the hedges were planted, sportswriters began referring to the home games as being played "between the hedges." Dooley, then head coach, compiled an impressive record of home-game wins and added to the mystique of the hedges. The team chaplain even gave clippings of the hedges to the players before each away game.

Maintaining the hedges became the mission of the athletic department groundskeepers and horticulturists from R. A. Dudley Nurseries Inc. in Thomson. On a summer morning in 1993, they filled a pickup truck bed with cuttings from the hedges and packed them in ice for the trip back to Thomson. Later that day, nursery workers planted the clippings in small pots.

Tommy Dudley, owner of the nursery and a UGA graduate, said the

shrubs will be transferred from the small pots to ten-gallon containers and then to the stadium. "Privet grows so quickly," he said, "it will be tough to keep it back." He estimates he will prune the plants 16 times before they are planted in Athens.

The old hedges will adorn Sanford Stadium until the end of the 1995 football season, when all the plants will be removed from the field to make room for the soccer field. The hedge will be replanted in August after the Olympics end and before the 1996 football season. Dudley doesn't see a problem after the plants are in the ground.

"They've got irrigation out there in the grass," he said. "They'll have to be watered individually for a while. That's a tough time of year to plant, during August, but they (the athletic department groundskeepers) know how to do it. They'll be watering them."

Dudley said he is planning ways to shape the plants for the best presentation in 1996. He wants the plants to conform to a certain size, about four feet tall by two feet wide, even if that means lining them up and pruning them exactly as they will be planted. He explained that the first season the new shrubs are in place, the plants will

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not "mesh together," but should within the first year or two.

As a protection against cold weather, a nursery is also growing clippings near the farm where the Florida State mascot — a horse — lives, but officials are not distributing road maps to the site. Dudley said having plants in two locations also lessens the threat of vandalism.

He worries primarily about fraternity pranks. "I'm concerned about that," Dudley said. "You know, kids will do anything. When I was in school, I went to the Kappa Alpha house — I was a KA — and I stole the composite (collection of photos of the entire fraternity membership). That's just part of what kids do."

Chris Carr, 1993-94 president of the UGA Interfraternity Council, responding to Dudley's concerns, said, "I think it's pretty ridiculous to think that Georgia's fraternities would do that. (The hedges) are a sacred tradition of Georgia football." Carr said he believes students at other schools would also respect the hedges and leave them alone.

Apparently Sanford had similar worries in 1929. According to a calendar in the 1930 UGA yearbook, *The Pandora*, on September 30: "Dr. Sanford hires guards to watch the new stadium by night; too many moonlight lawn parties ... might spoil the grass before the Yale game." On October 11: "Tomorrow is day of Yale-Georgia game. Half of student body has already passed out. Dear old alumni arriving at all hours." And finally, October 12: "Georgia whips Yale: Maybe Dr. Sanford will come down to earth now that that's over."

The athletic department is working on a marketing plan for the old hedges. Dooley said the plan will allow supporters to have pieces of Hedges I. Healthy clippings will be used in plaques, desk sets or small cuttings. He hopes the healthy plants may be sold to individuals, with plants from the end zone commanding the highest prices. Sale prices have not yet been set.

"There may be people out there who want to own one of the original hedges," Dooley said. "It is a piece of history."


For now, history sits in a sunny window in Dooley's office and in a nursery in Thomson, but the 1996 football season will see the new hedges — healthy and ready for the next 60 years. □


Helen Anne Richards, great-niece of Charles E. Martin, is a freelance writer living in Athens.

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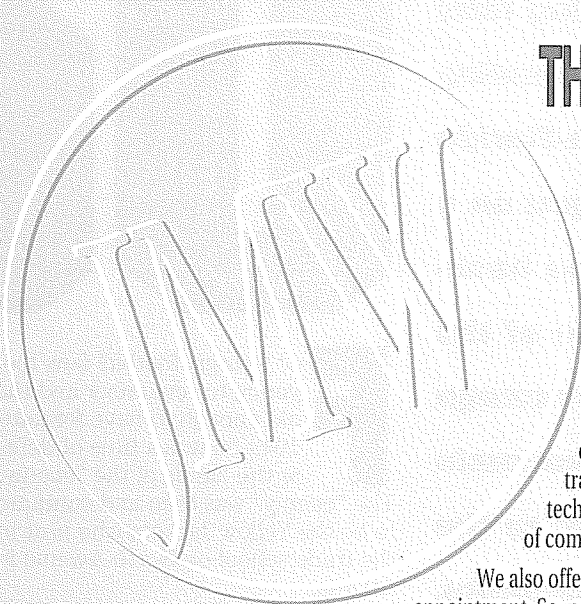
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