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GLANCES UPON AMERICAN GOLF HISTORY

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Part I

A TENDENCY towards the consideration of American golfing history has been noticeable of late; men of the game have been hunting in the backwoods and digging in the remote corners for historical specimens that they may place in the archives of a sport which has taken such a lofty place in the scheme of American things. This inclination towards the historical examination of our personal selves, an introspection of a kind, a looking back to origins and beginnings and all the romance with which further development was invested, comes upon individuals and communities at certain periods. When there is a crisis, an epoch, a halt, and when there is a new beginning to be made all over again later, the instinct for this historical self-examination asserts itself. The simple man himself in his own individual life thinks of the old home where he lived in innocence and happiness the days of childhood; the community, like that of golf, turns towards its own beginnings and wonders upon them. There is some pride, a little melancholy remembrance and a firm hope for all the future in the reflections that arise. It is indeed a

poor man and a poor community that can gather no inspiration from a contemplation of its own past, however humble it may be.

American golf has come to the end of what I think we may regard as its third era, and now there is a certain halt as there never was before, and as many thought—not without good reason—there never might be at any time. But war is war—as the Germans said at the beginning when they went careering through Belgium in their own ghastly manner, and as they are finding out now for themselves in a different way each day of their unhappy lives. The first era of American golf was that of a very slight and undeveloped movement, with just a golf club here and there and little known of it anywhere, yet with a few old enthusiasts, from Scotland chiefly, holding on to it anyhow. The second era was a short one; it extended from the establishment of the United States Golf Association, which marked a definite and organized beginning and indicated a future, to the victory of Mr. Travis in the amateur championship at Sandwich, which latter event not only gave recognition to American

golf in other lands but served to charge the game at home with a vast supply of electric force which sent it leaping on to popularity at a truly amazing rate. It started the great golf boom in America, and that boom has never stopped since. Even if there is a certain lull in the game at this moment, it could not be said that there is any real stoppage in the boom when so many preparations are in hand for the golf of the future. No. The third era, of course, is that boom period of which we are speaking. It makes a wonderful history. It is unfortunate that much of it has been lost and may never be found again, but here and there fine specimens are discovered from time to time, and some day they may be picked up into a romantic whole. Though I be not American, I have a fancy for discovering the origin and historical circumstances of golf in every land in which I have seen it played. Some little investigations that I have made in such places as Italy and Spain have shown what a warm colour of romance is wrapped round the efforts of the early pioneers of golf even in such countries as those. In the United States and Canada the subject glowed as nowhere else—not even in Britain, as it seemed to me. I searched in unsuspected places in New York, Boston and other cities, and made a few excellent discoveries. I cannot write a history of American golf, but I may set down some random notes which in different ways bear closely upon the subject, and which in their own minor effect are hardly less interesting to the American world and the world away than the veritable claiming of the American continent from the Indians for the pale-faced men.

The last remark sets us to a point at once. Having always insisted that

golf is a purely natural game, and that the hitting of a ball with a stick and the attempt to direct it towards a mark is a matter of primary instinct, or something very near it, I could never *give* the credit to the Dutch for having invented the game, or one something like it, that they called "kolf," which some of the other historians are disposed to do. What the Dutchmen were doing on the ice, as indicated in pictures and old tiles that have been handed down to us, was almost certainly done by other peoples in other lands, ages before, in very much the same way as far as the principle is concerned. What is there to invent in the matter of hitting a ball with a stick in a certain direction, and trying to hit it nearer to a particular mark than someone else could do? Nothing. People could not help attempting such things, and, in the full sense, I think that golf was never invented. Thousands of people have had their little bit to do with its elaboration—the old golfing societies in Britain, the Royal and Ancient Club with its shaping of the rules as we know them, and even the U. S. G. A. has had a little, for it established the Schenectady putter in the game and that is something to have done. But the simple principles of the game—they are too simple to have been overlooked, and all the better for that simplicity. The very earliest people must have practised them; I should be surprised to know that the children of Israel during their tribulations of which we read in the scriptures did not find some solace informally by recreation such as this, though now we shall never know.

But we mentioned the Indians, and on the assumption we have just suggested it must be taken that the Indians were the first golfers on the

American continent. We must assume that. And as a matter of fact the assumption is backed by some crumbs of fact. Some time ago—many years—a magazine article was brought to my attention in which it was stated very definitely (it was not a golf article, and was very unprejudiced, with no special golfing claims being set up in it) that, some years before, a visitor to one of the Indian reservations in the States had found several of the red men playing golf of a kind, with real clubs and balls. "Purple Cloud" was the champion of those braves. In the autumn of 1903 another white traveller looked in upon the Indians in their reservation at Montana and reported that he had witnessed a very spirited game. Golf, he said, was far better suited to the Indian of to-day than his old game of lacrosse. He did not observe many subtleties in the game as played by these Indians. There was a long stretch of clear prairie in front of him when the champion "Spotted Horse" drove off. Only here and there was a shrub, and so the game consisted in little more than the mere chasing of the ball for a couple of miles and a return, the one who did it in the fewest strokes being the winner. The witness saw some really capital drives, and he thought that some of them must have been over three hundred yards. Perhaps he was mistaken, but still it is evident that the red men were doing some tolerably long driving at those times. It seemed to him that the only thing that was very new and characteristic about this red men's golf, as he saw it, was that the spectators made a most infernal row all the time that the play was in progress. A brave having taken his stance for a tee shot, this was looked upon as the signal for a perfect bedlam of yells

and howling. This kind of thing would have proved fatally disconcerting to most modern golfers, but it did not upset at all the brave red men. They clearly had the instinct for golf, and perhaps their ancestors had played it in the far-back ages. Truly indeed the instinct for such a thing was always there in the Indian, and well do we know that it remains there. We have seen the Indians in the National Open Championship, and they have forced the pale faces to their very best. But let us leave conjecture, however safe it be, and come to plain fact as we know it for certain.

SAVANNAH! It was for times regarded as the mother place of the true American golf. It had seemed to be the legendary home of the game in America, but latterly there have been discoveries, and not only does it now seem clear that it was not first played here, but the date of the first recorded playing is thrown farther back than the time at which it once seemed fixed. For the sake of coincidence it seems a pity, for a curious thing has happened. History is a rare joker in her way, and also has a fine sense of the fitness of things. She will perpetrate a wonderful coincidence, accomplish a throw-back, bring up a distant repetition for a reminder, and do all manner of strange facts for the bewilderment of people, and somehow there seems to be a meaning and a fitness in all of them. Here now for Georgia! There was the old story of golf having been played there by 1811, since in the middle of that winter Miss Eliza Johnston was bidden to the ball given by the golf club, and we have the names of the four very Scottish managers and the Scottish treasurer that were printed on the invitation. But, with that, all the golfing glories of

Georgia, whatever they may have been, seemed to have gone away for ever, and afterwards nobody thought of Georgia as a golfing place of any possibilities. Its fame seemed small. It might continue to grow its cotton, its pine forests might flourish; its Rome and its Athens might look less and less like the famous cities of the Europe of very long ago, but it could surely never build a reputation on its golf, save the historical one of old Savannah to which it might still cling. And lo! we have seen. From out of Georgia in the last year or two there have come the most wonderful prodigies of golfers, boys and girls, that the whole world of the game has ever known. There was young Bobby Jones at fourteen years of age to play to the fourth round of the National Amateur championship, and then only to be beaten by such a stalwart as Robert Gardner, who then reached the final, and the same year there was Miss Alexa Stirling, a Georgian girl winning the Women's National Championship, and winning it by golf at least as good as had ever been played by women in America. Also there was another seventeen-year-old youth, Perry Adair, who was showing something near to championship form. These prodigies were ripened under the Georgian sun at Atlanta, and there, it has been discovered, is such a nest of them as will yet make great history in the game. It seemed that old glories were being revived, that Georgia after more than a hundred years of golfer's sleep was coming to its own again. Those who have imagination enough to breed a little emotion for such circumstances and coincidences may think that this revival is a wonderful thing.

But for the accident of comparatively recent discovery, that old in-

itation card by which Miss Johnston was bidden to the golfers' ball on the last day of the year (when our great grandfathers and others were worrying with the Napoleonic wars in Europe, and the very serious difficulties were on foot that America, fighting for independence, had with England), might have been lost and the old fame of Georgia in this respect might have gone. It was a happy accident by which it was preserved, and it was only in comparatively recent times that its significance and importance were discovered. I have what I imagine to be one of the few copies in existence of what again I think is the oldest American golf book, and there is nothing in it about golf at Savannah, though there is an historical chapter. It begins with the St. Andrews Club at Yonkers, which was the beginning of the modern period. We are familiar, all of us, with that famous invitation. It was a printed form or card, with the name of the guest filled in. It was headed "Golf Club Ball," and proceeded "The honour of Miss Eliza Johnston's company is requested to a ball, to be given by the Members of the Golf Club, of this City, at the Exchange on Tuesday evening, the 31st instant, at 7 o'clock." Then it was signed with the names of George Woodruff, Robert Mackay, John Caig and James Dickson as managers with George Hogarth as treasurer, and it was dated in the corner, "Savannah, 20th December, 1811." There is the true evidence.

ELIZA JOHNSTON ! Never would she have guessed for what her name would count more than a hundred years after that ball, at which in gratitude for the scrap of history we have gained, we may hope in full sincerity she enjoyed herself to her heart's content and danced it merrily until the

new year had come to Georgia. In a provoking way one turns to curiosity about this damsel. What became of her? And is there nothing more to be known of the Savannah golfers save that Woodruff, Mackay, Caig and Dickson were the general bosses thereof, and that Hogarth had the key to the safe? Thanks to the indefatigability of a Georgian historian there is indeed something known, and curiosity may be satisfied. In very recent times Mr. William Harden of the Georgia Historical Society has set himself to go as far in local research in this matter as could possibly be done, and if his discoveries do not add materially to our knowledge of the golfing history in this state or elsewhere in America they are nevertheless of a dainty kind and make nice embroidery of the great circumstance of the printed invitation. For one thing we become more familiar with the gentle Eliza. Mr. Harden put himself back to 1811 among the newspapers and the old records that were to be found in the archives of Georgia, and he produced some results which minister nicely to our curiosity. He tells us that Savannah at the time of the ball that has become historic in a way—which would vastly surprise Woodruff, Mackay, Caig and the rest if they could know of it!—was a place of not more than twelve thousand inhabitants; but, though it was little, it had pretensions, it paid care to social and fashionable matters, and it cultivated sports. These indeed are fair deductions from that invitation to the golf ball. How did that invitation come to be so preserved through a century and more? It was half by design and half by accident in a particular manner that is not uncommon. One of the most certain ways of preserving a piece of paper is to put it

among the leaves of a book, and restore the book to an unfrequented shelf. The volume may often be moved, but the slip of paper has a fair chance of a century of life, and after that, when found, it may go to a museum. So it was with Eliza Johnston's invitation card. She put it nowhere else than between the leaves of the family Bible, and there, long afterwards, it was discovered. Nowadays it is in the possession of her grand-daughter. That ball at the Exchange must have had a special meaning for Miss Eliza, or she would hardly have taken such care of the invitation afterwards. And this idea is further supported by another of Mr. Harden's discoveries, which is that she married very shortly afterwards.

James Morrison was the man. The chances are, one supposes, that he was a golfer, and let us hope he was a good one as Savannah golfers in those times went, and that from the tee he could flick a ball that went sure and far. The winter had just run its course, and the Georgia spring was beginning to shine again, when the following notice appeared in "The Columbian Museum and Savannah Advertiser," on Thursday, April 30, 1812—"Married, on Thursday evening, the 23rd instant, by the Rev. Mr. Kollock, James Morrison, Esq., to the amiable Miss Eliza Johnston, of this city." I like the way they made their announcements in the old days of life and golf at Savannah; it was pretty to say that Miss Eliza was "amiable." But Mr. Harden has seen a picture of her, and though in the marriage notice she is perhaps called "amiable" just in the way of the ordinary form of courtesy of the period, he says she must have been a very beautiful woman. She was a belle of Savannah. Her father was Colonel James John-

ston, one of the leading citizens, a man who had held various offices of account. He was a merchant, he was colonel of the First Regiment of Georgia Volunteers, and for six years he was a trustee of the Exchange. And on her side also Miss Eliza was well born. Her mother was Ann Marion, daughter of Sir George Houstoun, Baronet, and the father of this Sir George, and therefore the great grandfather of our Miss Eliza was Sir Patrick Houstoun, Baronet, who was President of His Majesty's Council of Georgia in 1754. All this may appear to have little to do with the putts you missed so frequently the day before yesterday, or your constant perplexity as to how a little more of the necessary length may be added to your driving. There is nothing practical about it. But these are days when the intensely practical in such affairs seems to matter a little less than it used to do, and things which seem to lean more to the sentimental and spiritual sides, as do some historical affairs, count for more. And after all, as Miss Eliza Johnston is the very first American lady of whom we know as having had anything to do with the game of golf, it is right that we should inquire fully upon her and pay honour to her memory.

The indefatigable Mr. Harden has made some further discoveries. He set himself to work upon piercing so far as possible the hidden mysteries of the old Savannah Golf Club. He could, however, find no list of members, as he had hoped. He could only discover the names of the Treasurer and of the Committee or Managers, as indicated on the famous invitation. He thinks it is very remarkable that they were all Scotchmen, but perhaps it was not so remarkable as he thinks, for he should remember that in

Britain the game was only played in Scotland at that time with one solitary exception, namely Blackheath near London, and even at the latter place the players were almost all Scots. Practically all the golfers in the world a hundred years ago were Scots; one who was anything else was something of an accident. These managers of the Savannah club were men of some importance in the life of the place. George Woodruff was a merchant of the firm of Woodruff and Brant, and one year he was treasurer of the Chatham Academy, an educational institution chartered in 1788. In 1803 he was an alderman of the city. Robert Mackay belonged to the firm of Mein and Mackay. He married Miss Eliza McQueen, daughter of Mr. John McQueen, and their descendants are prominent people in Savannah even now. John Caig belonged to the firm of Caig and Mitchel, and in 1811 he was a commissioner of the Planters' Bank of the State of Georgia. James Dickson appears to have been one of the oldest survivors, and when he died in 1835 he left no will and no heirs. Such is the little that we know of the very first golfers in America whom we can call by name.

Mr. Harden further tells us that searching through the old files of "The Columbian Museum," one of the only two newspapers published in Savannah in the early years of the last century, he came upon this notice dated November 25, 1811—"Golf Club.—The members of the Golf Club are requested to meet at the Exchange this evening at 7 o'clock. November 25." There is no intimation as to why the members were summoned to general assembly at the Exchange on that November night. They had their own

worries no doubt, even those very early golfers. It is unlikely, anyhow, that they gathered together to discuss the stymie question or the definition of an amateur. Such fine polemics were reserved for a later period.

For a last word upon this old Savannah with its golf, let it be said that the Exchange where Miss Eliza Johnston danced and was happy and admired is no longer in existence. It was pulled down a few years ago, and the City Hall was built in its stead. It had done good service as the great centre of many Savannah activities

from the time that it was built in 1709.

Thus far all the honours appear to be with Georgia and its Savannah; we have not disputed them, and Mr. Harden, the historian of the state is in full confidence that his own splendid part of the country was the first in golf history. But the time of reckoning has come, and we are judges now. There was South Carolina and there was Fort Orange. We shall see anon how they are situated in the history of American golf.

(To be Continued.)

The logo for the LA84 Foundation features a stylized, multi-colored wave or flame shape. The colors transition from light blue on the left, through pink, green, and yellow, to a light orange on the right. The shape is composed of several overlapping, curved bands.

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