

Museums and Media

Museums

United States Golf Association, Golf House, Museum and Library, Far Hills, New Jersey 07931-0708; Karen Bednarski, Museum Curator/Librarian 908-781-1107

Nestled amongst the rolling hills of north-central New Jersey on a 62-acre tract dotted with spruce, pine, maple, magnolia, oak, and dogwood sits a beautiful red-brick mansion which houses the United States Golf Association's museum and library. Known as Golf House since the USGA purchased it in 1972, this stately edifice of Georgian Colonial architecture with a white-columned portico was built in 1919. It was designed by John Russell Pope, the renowned architect of the National Archives Building, the National Gallery of Art, the Jefferson Memorial, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the American Battle Monument in France. One of Golf House's distinctive features is its elegant hanging staircase in the main hall. The building contains two floors of exhibit rooms depicting the history of golf from the fourteenth century to the present day plus an extensive library of 8,000 volumes devoted almost entirely to golf. Also located on the grounds are the USGA's administrative offices and Research and Test Center.

The entry foyer of Golf House contains an impressive display of large trophies and cups which represent the U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open, and the U.S. men's and women's amateur tourneys, all sponsored by the USGA. These four trophies are permanent fixtures at the museum with the names of the winners inscribed on them annually after each victory. Two other trophies, the Walker and Curtis Cups, representative of men's and women's amateur play between teams from the U.S. and Great Britain, are housed at the museum during the biennium following each American victory. Also on display in the entrance area are photographs and papers of the five charter-member clubs which formed the USGA in 1894.

Beginning with the room to the right of the entrance hall and following a circular path on the first floor, the visitor discovers paintings, prints, clubs, and balls that trace the origin of golf from its various precursors played in the fourteenth century through its evolution in Scotland to the modern game. Among the many eye-catching exhibits is the development of the golf ball from the feather ball to the gutta percha (rubber-like substance) which appeared in 1848, to the rubber-cored ball introduced in 1898. Complementing the golf ball exhibits are several that depict the transformation of golf clubs from wooden to



Golf House. Main Building of Museum.

metal shafts and the use of steel in the construction of clubheads. These exhibit rooms also contain displays of ceramics, glassware, silver pieces, cigarette cards, and decorative objects with golfing motifs. One case has molds for making ice cream in the shape of golf clubs and a bag, while another contains a slot machine that pays off in golf balls. Other cases display golfing garments used at the turn of the century with the cumbersome ankle-length dresses worn by women, later giving way to more comfortable clothing that enabled greater freedom in swinging the club. The back corridor contains a gallery of portraits of prominent golfers including Arnold Palmer, Ben Hogan, Gene Sarazen, Margaret Curtis, Patty Berg, and Mickey Wright. Completing the circuit, the visitor enters the Bob Jones Room located to the left of the entry foyer. It contains the 32 medals Jones won in various competitions, a photographic history of his triumph in the Grand Slam, his famous putter Calamity Jane II which is mounted below his portrait, and papers related to his career. This room also houses the rare book collection of Golf House's library holdings.

The exhibits on the second floor, for the most part, depict golf in its modern setting. Here the visitor finds one of the museum's most treasured pieces, The Moon Club, which astronaut Alan Shepard, Jr., used to hit a golf ball on the moon in 1971. There are also photographs and clubs used by all the winners of the U.S. Open, one of the thirteen tournaments sponsored by USGA. Another display shows the development and growth of women's golf, particularly in years following World War II. The aura of Babe Didrikson Zaharias is prominent here. There is a collection of memorabilia from the presidents who played golf including a painting of Dwight Eisenhower on the 16th hole at Augusta. In addition there are special exhibits on the evolution of golf rules; golf course architecture and turf maintenance; and a tribute to Francis Ouimet, the first



Bobby Jones Room. Golf House Museum.

American elected captain of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland. One room is reserved for changing exhibits. On display during my visit was a photo exhibit of some of the most picturesque golf courses in the world.

The Golf House library occupies the former ballroom of the mansion. Its 8,000 volumes is the most extensive collection of golf books open to the public. The collection has been organized according to architecture and art associations, club handbooks and histories, history, humor, instruction, poetry, records, reference, rules, travel, and turf. The library's most cherished holding is an original copy of *The Goff* a poem by Thomas Mathison, first printed in 1743. It is the earliest known book written exclusively about golf. The library's periodical collection is also superb, containing the major golf periodicals published during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with complete runs of *The American Golfer* which first appeared in 1909 and *Golf Illustrated* (British) which dates back to the nineteenth century. The Golf House archives has 50,000 black and white photographs which can be examined with special permission. Golf House will honor small requests for information from researchers via telephone or through the mail, but for anything extensive, the researcher will have to go there in person.

Each year USGA honors the book which has made the most significant contribution to the sport through its International Book Award. The prize is a trip to the U.S. Open and a golf memento signifying the accomplishment. Last year's winner was *The Saint Andrews Open* by R. A. L. Burnet.

There is a videotape collection at USGA which is not part of the Golf House holdings. Most of the tapes cover the U.S. Open Tournaments, the Women's Open, and the Seniors' Open, though some deal with etiquette and protecting

the golf course. *Golf's Greatest Championship* is a history of the U.S. Open from its beginning in 1895. There are no rentals, but videotapes can be purchased from the USGA Order Department, 1-800-336-4446. Prices range from \$19.95 to \$29.95.

A visit to Golf House is an enlightening and enjoyable experience. For serious researchers investigating the game of golf, it is a must, but for curious sport historians only peripherally interested in the history of the game, the visit will be fascinating and rewarding. Its location in Far Hills is no impediment, for it is less than fifteen minutes from either I78 or I287, two of the major interstate highways that criss-cross north-central New Jersey.

William Paterson College

J. Thomas Jable