

When Eight Clubs Were- a Bagful

The first USGA Championships were played at Newport, R. I., in October, 1895, but as early as June of that year observers were viewing with dismay a tendency of golfers to carry too many clubs. This additional evidence that there is nothing new under the sun is revealed in a scrapbook of old newspaper clippings recently presented to the USGA Museum by Frank W. Crane.

Mr. Crane, who is 81, joined the *NEW YORK TIMES* in 1894 and believes he was the first golf writer in the United States. He also believes he wrote the first editorial on golf in this country, on the occasion of Walter J. Travis' victory in the 1904 British Amateur Championship. His gift of a reference book of clippings covering the first years of golf in the United States was reviewed in the June issue of the *USGA JOURNAL*.



Among the clippings is a story in the *NEW YORK HERALD* of June, 1895, titled, "Hints to Young Golfers" and emphasizing "above all things, avoid the use of needless clubs. It would require a horse and wagon to lug around the green the numerous recent inventions. The finest players use few clubs, seldom carrying more than eight or ten and often not half that number, and the bulk of the work falls on three or four clubs. Many a line round is made by a professional with but a 'cleek, or with a 'cleek,' 'iron' and 'driver.'

"There is a record of a professional playing an amateur, and winning, too, at that, 'niblick' against everything; and in the minute books of one of the Scottish clubs (Aberdeen), there is note of a wager between two members whereof the one thought so little of the other's prowess as a golfer that he undertook to beat him

with a champagne bottle and ball as against a stock of clubs.

"But it should be said that this wager was recorded in the minutes as 'of jest' and was probably made in the sma' hours of the morning when bottles and brains were alike light."

Miss Margaret Curtis carried only four clubs when she played in her first USGA Women's Amateur Championship in 1897 at the Essex County Club, Manchester, Mass.

Only 13 years old then, Miss Curtis played with a brassie, cleek, mashie and putter. She used the same four clubs in her second Championship at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club, Long Island, in 1900.

Incidentally, Miss Curtis' brother, Greeley Stevenson Curtis, stamped numbers on each of her clubs. This was an unusual practice at the time, and it may be that Miss Curtis used the first numbered clubs in history.

In addition to interesting data about early clubs, Mr. Crane's clippings shed intimate light on results obtained with them—and the old gutty ball-and other accoutrements.

A story in the *NEW YORK HERALD* of November, 1895, reports that Mrs. C. S. Brown of New York, in winning the first USGA Women's Amateur Championship at the Meadow Brook Club, Long Island, "wore a gray dress, with scarlet blouse, black necktie and hat, and a cape with Tartan plaid lining thrown over her shoulder."

Presumably Mrs. Brown was too encumbered by her cape to set any long-driving records, because "the longest drive was made by Miss Harrison of Shinnecock Hills," the *NEW YORK SUN* reported. "Charles W. Barnes, her scorer, paced the distance from the tee to the ball and found it to be 128 yards."

All was not serious championship play in those days, however. In November, 1895, Ransom H. Thomas, vice-president

Public Links Golf in 1899



Courtesy of H. B. Martin

Van Cortlandt Park, in New York City, was the first municipal golf course in the United States and still serves New York's millions. Here is a scene in a tournament for the NEW YORK HERALD Cup in 1899. Raynor Godwin is missing a putt for a half on the 15th hole in his match with H. E. Brown. The picture appeared in the HERALD of November 5, 1899.

of the Stock Exchange, and his rival, Alexander H. Tiers, played an informal match at the Morristown Golf Club that was given a column of type in the *TIMES*.

J. B. Dickson, in behalf of their many friends, offered a cup to stimulate their rivalry, and interest was so great they had to tee off early to evade the arrival of a gallery and brass band which appeared after Thomas had won by six holes. The gallery missed seeing the two play around in the rain in hip rubber boots and red coats but was privileged to attend the unveiling of the cup.

It proved to be "made of tin, a conglomeration of breadpans, wash tins and other useful articles, soldered together, making a cup with all sorts of curves and twists. It was graced with three funny little handles and further decorated with green ribbons and yellow chrysanthemums. ...

"Mr. Tiers felt so badly at losing the trophy that he immediately challenged the owner to play for it again, and Mr. Thomas smilingly complied, saying he could beat his rival, even out of his long, hip boots,

any day. Mr. Tiers said he couldn't and there they stand, waiting to meet some other day."

Among the clippings is a story on, apparently, the first inter-city team match, a precursor of the Lesley Cup play which started ten years later. The 1895 clippings show that the St. Andrew's Golf Club defeated The Country Club, Brookline, by seven holes on August 24 at St. Andrew's and lost a return engagement at Brookline by eight holes.

The victory of C. M. Hamilton in the first public golf tournament at Van Cortlandt Park, New York, on November 28, 1896, is described. Hamilton led a field of 38 players with a score of 52-47-99 and won a cup donated by the members of St. Andrew's.

The course, owned by New York City, is called the first public links in the United States. In another report on the course there, Mr. Crane expressed dismay at the caddie fee of 25¢ a round since, at private clubs, "fifteen cents is the usual rate."