

EARLY HISTORY OF GOLF

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Early last September a number of veterans took part in a Golden Jubilee Tournament at French Lick Springs, U.S., to celebrate the 50th anniversary of golf in the United States.

This half century was based on the formation of the historic St. Andrews club at Yonkers, New York in 1888 the founder of this club being the late John Reid, a Scotchman, whose son Archie, is the present president of the United States Golf Association. By common consent the pioneer honors were, for a number of years, given to St. Andrews. I was of this belief, getting my information from the late Tom Bendelow, who laid out the course. Tom at that time was a printer in New York. He had played in his native city of Aberdeen, Scotland, and so was glad to help in planting the seeds in his adopted country.

Meanwhile, nestling in the hills of West Virginia, was a nine hole course which had been built in 1884 and operated by the Oakhurst club. As was the case at St. Andrews, so the Oakhurst club owed its formation to the Scotch influence. George Grant, who lived in White Sulphur Springs, came from the land of the kilt and the bagpipes. His nephew Lionel Torrin, who had been a tea planter in Ceylon, retired temporarily and came to White Sulphur to visit his uncle.

It is said of the Britisher that wherever he goes he carries his sports with him, and so we have no doubt that included in Mr. Torrin's luggage, were his beloved golf clubs. His coming led to the formation of the Oakhurst Golf club and the course was built on the estate of Russell Montague, a New Englander, who lived at Richmond but owned an extensive estate at White Sulphur Springs. It was 2500 yards long and veered back and forth over the same kind of terrain as the two fine modern courses of the Greenbrier Hotel. Mr. Montague, now 86 years of age, still is living at Richmond. For nine years the course continued and then as some of its early members returned to Scotland, it fell into disuse, but the site is there with some of the cups still in the ground.

Thus it is evident that the pioneer course and club of modern times antedated the formation of the St. Andrews club of New York by four

to five years and that modern golf in this country is 54 years of age.

Golf historians have told us of golf dating back over 250 years in Albany, New York and at Savannah, Georgia, and the archives of those cities show beyond a doubt, that golf of some kind was played in both those places.

The New York evidence can be found in records at Albany dated Dec. 10, 1659. Albany then was known as Fort Orange and the Commissioners, in response to complaints made by the Burghers that windows were broken and the citizens exposed to injury by the golfers, forbade all persons from playing golf along the streets on pain of forfeiting 25 florins, a florin being about the equivalent of 50 cents.

A reference is made to golf in the city ordinances of Savannah, Ga. 150 years ago. Possibly Bobby Jones may have inherited some of his talents from some of those early players. It is interesting to note that Scotch influence had much to do with the start of the game in the midwest as the late James B. Forgan, and David R. Forgan, noted Chicago bankers, are sons of Robert Forgan, the famous club manufacturer of Scotland, and active in the establishment of the Chicago Golf Club at Belmont, Illinois, a Chicago suburb.

This club received its first impetus on the arrival of Sir Henry Trueman Wood, British commissioner to the Columbian Exposition of 1893. He brought his clubs to Chicago and with the aid of the Forgans, J. Carolus Stirling, another Scotchman, Charles B. Macdonald, a Chicagoan, who learned the game at school in Scotland, and the late Herbert J. Tweedie (father of Douglas J. Tweedie, former Vice President of A. G. Spalding & Sons), a Liverpool Englishman, and several other Britishers, formed the Chicago Golf Club which a year later acquired its present site at Wheaton.

Another Scotch pioneer was J. Hamilton Gillespie who laid out a six hole course on his property at Sarasota, Fla., in 1885. In later years this course was enlarged to 18 holes.

History tells us of something akin to golf played by the Dutch some centuries ago, but as far as this country is concerned it must thank the sons of Auld Scotia for giving us the game of golf which now rates as one of our national pastimes.