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***Golf in America* by James P. Lee published in 1895**

This tiny book is considered the first book published in the United States on golf. It was published one year after the formation of the U.S.G.A. in 1895. *Golf in America* by James P. Lee measures only 4 ½ inches by 7 inches with a green/yellow illustrated cover and has 194 pages. It also has 13 pages of period photographs, which are remarkable. The black and white photographs give a true sense of what the game was like at its early stages in this country. Two of the pictures in the book were taken at the first course established in the United States, St. Andrew's Golf Links in New York. The golfers are wearing clothing that would not be out of place on a safari. The grass appears to be in some places over six inches long. No disrespect intended in this description, but it literally looks like a cow pasture.



The book provides a great historical snapshot of the game in the late nineteenth century. The description of Shinnecock “starting from the teeing ground near the clubhouse, your first stroke will carry you over the windmill and your ball should fall upon favorable ground for a brassey shot. With the road cleared, an approach shot lands you easily upon the green.” The second hole, “a full iron shot will land him well over the hill and across a yawning bunker, into which many fall daily, and he will find himself upon the green close to the little bell tower built at the crossing of the railroad.” The course as it existed at that time criss-crossed the Long Island Railroad tracks. In addition it had no less than four roads running through the course (Tuchahoe Road, Saint Andrews Road, Raynor Road and Cold Spring Road). Although the original clubhouse remains, the windmill no longer exists and the course was rerouted and realigned closer to Peconic Bay and away from the roads and railroad. The book provides a fascinating look, however, at the original state of the course, including a map of the original layout.

The end of the book contains a list of the leading American clubs of the time, which is interesting from a historical perspective:

St. Andrew's Golf Club of Yonkers
Shinnecock Hills Golf Club
Newport Golf Club
Country Club of Brookline, Mass

Chicago Golf Club
Essex Country Club (Manchester, Massachusetts)
Morris County Golf Club (Morristown, New Jersey)
Tuxedo Golf Club (New York)
Meadowbrook Hunt Club (Hempstead, Long Island)
Golf Club of Montclair (New Jersey)
Myopia Hunt Club (Hamilton, Massachusetts)
Warren Farms Golf Club (Boston)
The Germantown Cricket Club (near Philadelphia)
Philadelphia Country Club
The Merion Cricket Club (Haverford, Pennsylvania)
Lake Forest Golf Club (Illinois)
Country Club of Colorado Springs (Broadmoor, Colorado)
The Richmond Country Club (Staten Island)
HoHokus Golf Club (New Jersey)

Note that two of the course names contain “Hunt Club” and two “Cricket Club” testifying to the fact that golf was in its early stages and often times grew out of affiliations with existing clubs set up for other purposes. The first five clubs were the founding members of the U.S.G.A. and remain vibrant courses today. Others have disappeared altogether or changed. The Richmond Country Club on Staten Island is described as a nine hole course and has disappeared. The Country Club of Colorado Springs no longer exists.

James P. Lee has an interesting pedigree. Harvard educated, he was a descendant of both General Robert E. Lee and Charles Carroll, who was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was also a member of Shinnecock Hills, which partly explains why Shinnecock is so prominently featured in the book. Lee’s writing style is rather dry and straight forward. There are chapters dedicated to the Constitution of the U.S.G.A. and the By-laws of the U.S.G.A. and the back of the book contains the rules. The subtitle of the book is *A Practical Manual* and the book remains true to form including a list of definitions and golfing terms in the back.

Despite Lee’s approach to the book as a manual, he does have moments of brilliance. We find it refreshing the fact that he actually spells out with simplicity the purpose of the game: “Starting, then, from the first teeing ground, it is the object of each player to get his ball into hole No. 1.” We can all take a lesson in this the next time we stress out on a golf course.

A slightly smaller un-illustrated edition was also published in 1895 by the same publisher Dodd, Mead. The title of this volume is *Golf and Golfing: A Practical Manual*.

The book has also been published in two reprint editions. The U.S.G.A. reprinted the book in 1986 and this edition was limited to 1,500 copies and was issued with a slipcase. There was also an edition produced by Legacy Golf in 2001 which was issued with a dustjacket and no slipcase.

We’ll leave you with a quote from the book that remains as true today as the day it was written one hundred years ago: “This game of golf certainly possesses a peculiar and

insidious fascination for the majority of those who take it up. Some there are who have abandoned themselves to it entirely. They leave their homes early in the morning with their faces turned towards the links. They are buoyed up by a certain feeling of confidence in their ability to lessen their scores to-day, which no experience of yesterday seems to obliterate. Within sight of the golf course they quicken their pace, and when once engaged in the game they are lost to the world in a maze of bunkers, approach shots, niblicks, and fozzles.”

The original first edition of Lee’s book is a true rarity among golf books, with very few in active circulation, although it will typically come up for auction once or twice a year. The original price of the book when published was \$1. It’s worth quite a bit more now.

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