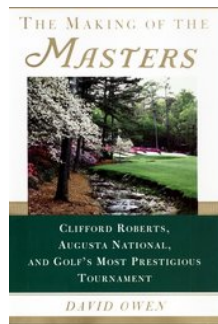


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The Making of the Masters

We all know Bobby Jones co-founded Augusta National. But what do we know of his partner Clifford Roberts? *The Making of the Masters* provides extended insight into this lesser known golf god.

Roberts was the chairman of Augusta for an exceedingly long time: from its founding in 1931 until shortly before his death in 1977. *The Making of the Masters* was published in 1999 by Simon & Schuster and was written by David Owen. Following in the footsteps of one of golf's greatest writers, Herbert Warren Wind, Owen writes for *The New Yorker* and is a worthy successor. When writing the book he was granted access to the archives of Augusta National, which is rare, and thus the book has an unusually detailed look behind the scenes.



Although the book's title is *The Making of the Masters* it is really more of a biography of Roberts, since he is so intertwined with the club. Augusta's records include Roberts' letters and the book makes clear that there are many historical inaccuracies about Augusta that have been perpetuated over the years. Owen points these out quite often, although not in an obnoxious way.

The book is filled with hundreds of fascinating facts about Augusta. The original business plan called for 1,800 members. Today there are about 300. The club had an extremely difficult time staying afloat and getting members in its early years due to the Great Depression. Tens of thousands of membership forms were distributed by Roberts and Jones in the early thirties. All that an invited recipient had to do was fill out the form and send it back. Today this is unfathomable, but at the time, there were virtually no takers.

Like Charles Blair Macdonald, Cliff Roberts was a Wall St. Stockbroker (a partner at Reynolds & Co.), although he started out from modest beginnings. He dug potatoes for

money to buy schoolbooks and at one point was a traveling salesman. He struggled early on and had serious financial difficulties as they were building the club. It is commonly believed that Jones conceived of the club and Roberts financed it. Owen shows how it was virtually the opposite. It was Roberts who suggested Augusta, Georgia as the location of the club and it was Jones who helped raise money to build the course.

The first chapter is entitled “The Benevolent Dictator” and that is certainly Roberts’ reputation. Owen provides a more balanced view of Roberts, who actually comes across as a decent, generous and loyal guy, although quite stubborn and with a wicked temper. He was also one of President Eisenhower’s closest friends. Not only did he manage Ike’s personal money, but visited the White House so often that there was a bedroom reserved for his exclusive use.

When the overall master plan for Augusta was drawn up by the Olmstead Brothers the course was to be surrounded by housing, although with one exception they were never built due to lack of demand. One house was built behind the first green and there is a picture of it in the book. The club acquired it years later and in one of Roberts’ last acts he made sure it was knocked down.

During the Second World War Augusta was used to graze cattle and raise turkeys when it wasn’t open for play. German P.O.W.’s were used to help restore the course before it opened in 1944. The P.O.W.’s were engineers from Rommel’s Afrika Korps. This little story seems fascinating enough that it could be an entire book. Imagine being captured on a desert battlefield in Egypt and then shipped to Fort Gordon in Augusta. One day your camp commander tells you you’ve been hired out as a day laborer to build a bridge over Rae’s Creek on Amen Corner. It is such a bizarre turn of events that it boggles the mind.

As Peter Dobereiner correctly observed about Roberts, “Everything about Augusta National Golf Club and the Masters had to be the best, and if it was not the best then it would have to be improved every year until it was.” This is Roberts lasting legacy and the reason why we adore everything about the Masters. My own personal thanks go out to Roberts for ensuring that the pickle and pimento sandwiches are still inexpensive today and for the minimal commercial advertising the event still has. All these little things cumulatively add up to make the Masters the greatest sporting event in the world. They are pure genius and the book makes clear that Roberts was the driving force behind them.

After a long and debilitating illness which included dementia, Roberts shot himself near the par three course at Augusta in the middle of the night in September 1977.

Most of the books we write about are rare, scarce or collectible. This book is none of these. It is widely available for \$10, but is worthy of being proudly displayed on the collector’s bookshelf. Owen’s writing continues to prove George Plimpton’s observation about sports writing: the smaller the ball, the better the prose. There have been many books written about Augusta. This is one of the best.