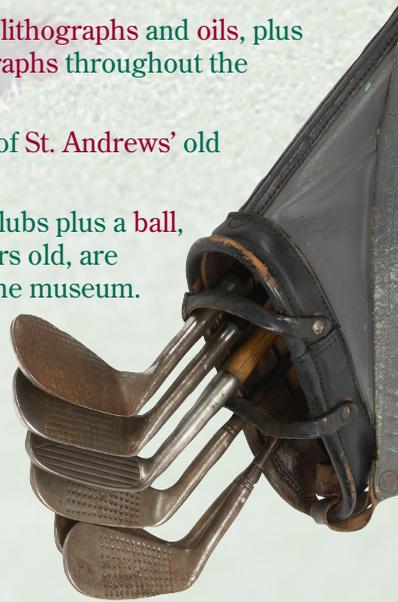


Highlights

at the Museum

- The oldest identifiable golf club in the world, **1790, Simon Cossar**. We have 500 old clubs.
- The **oldest** book in the world with reference to golf, **1566**. We have 1000 volumes.
- The **oldest** golf ball in the world, **1790**. We have 150 balls dating from 1790 to 1932.
- The largest **collection** of old, long-nosed wooden clubs in the world, **85**.
- **Two** of the six oldest golf medals, **1826** and **1838**.
- **Harry Vardon's** complete set of golf clubs plus his golf bag.
- The putter used by **Horace Rawlins** when he won the first U.S. Open in 1895.
- Three clubs used by **Bobby Jones** in his championship years, including the **Grand Slam, 1930**.
- Clubs donated by **Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead**, and many others.
- One hundred **lithographs** and **oils**, plus many **photographs** throughout the building.
- An 1836 map of **St. Andrews' old** golf course.
- Two **Kolven** clubs plus a **ball**, about 500 years old, are displayed in the museum.
- **Kolven** was a Dutch game played on ice.



Golf History

at the Museum

Perhaps the golfing great, **Arnold Palmer**, says it best in his foreword to the book **Par Excellence: A Celebration of Virginia Golf** when he writes that his daughter was attending The College of William and Mary, "...just up the road from what may be the **finest** golf museum in the world. It's located in the clubhouse of the James River Country Club in Newport News. There's plenty more about the museum on these pages. Suffice it to say that if you wanted to play a round with one of the oldest clubs and the oldest certified ball in the world, you would find both at the James River CC museum."



Irrefutably, it is the hard work and dedication of the curators, the people who have cared for the museum over the years, that has earned the museum such fine praise.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a curator as "**one who manages or oversees, as the administrative director of a museum collection or a library.**" The online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, defines this person as "**one who cares for a cultural institution's collections.**" It will tell you that a curator's role encompasses many duties, such as collecting objects, making provision for the effective preservation, conservation, interpretation, documentation, research, and display of the collection, as well as making the collection accessible to the public.

A Must See Attraction

at the Museum

The United States Golf Association made news recently by announcing its plans to buy Manhattan's world-famous restaurant, the former Russian Tea Room, and convert it into its future museum and history center. The association's museum is currently housed at its bucolic Far Hills, N.J. headquarters. *(Editors Note: Event did not happen)*

While that's wonderful news for history buffs, Virginians don't have to travel all the way to the Big Apple to see one of the world's greatest collections of golf artifacts and memorabilia. That's because the Golf Museum at *James River Country Club* in Newport News is not only one of the foremost collections, it's also the oldest in the U.S. In fact, the museum opened four years prior to when the USGA began collecting its own artifacts in preparation for its museum and archives opening in 1936. When the USGA decided to begin a collection, it even partnered with the Golf Museum to purchase certain artifacts.

The mission of the Golf Museum at *James River Country Club* is to display artifacts depicting the ancient and honorable history of the game. Most of the items date back to the pre 1930s, when manufacturing processes made the equipment in mass-produced fashion. Prior to 1930, clubs and balls were constructed by hand, and some of the greatest golfers from earlier centuries, Scotland's Tom Morris, for example, made their own clubs.

The museum has hundreds of golf clubs in glass cases around the perimeter of an 1,800-square-foot room in its own wing of the clubhouse. Included in that collection is the oldest identifiable putter in the world, made in 1790. The putter used by Horace Rawlins when he won the first U.S. Open in 1895 is also on display, along with the entire set of clubs and the bag used by the late great Harry Vardon when he captured the Open in 1900. Amateur legend Bobby Jones donated the brassie he used in 1930, when he won the four majors recognized

at the time, the U.S. Amateur and Open, and the British Amateur and Open, for a Grand Slam.

Don't expect to see any brassies from Tiger Woods, or any other contemporary player for that matter; a brassie is a 2-wood, rarely seen anymore. There are clubs donated by Sam Snead, Gene Sarazen and other legends. In addition, the display cases house the largest collection of long nose wooden clubs in the world.

Two maps of the Old Course at St. Andrews are among the unique artifacts. One map was drawn on a scroll in 1836, while the other is a relief map, displayed against the back wall of the museum. It's four feet high and 12 feet long, allowing visitors to see a scale model of golf's most hallowed ground. One of the museum's most recent acquisitions includes a set of 16 glass plates that are negatives produced with photography techniques dating back to 1900. The negatives were taken of Vardon during an exhibition round, the first photographs

captured at an exhibition, and he's pictured using clubs now owned by the museum.

While the glass negatives are not on display, prints recently made from those negatives are now part of the expansive art collection hanging both throughout the museum and the club. The artwork includes lithographs and oil paintings, as well as some of the earliest made photographs ever in golf.

Boasting a library featuring an array of more than 1,000 volumes, the Golf Museum includes the first known references to golf in print, a 1566 volume of Scottish laws called The Black Acts, and a 1597 update called The Lawes and Actes. Further, the first books published in the United States about golf are in the library. Meanwhile, two of the six-oldest golf medals are in the museum's cases. A gold medal was awarded to Alexander Sanson, Esq., in 1826 and made its way to Newport News, along with a silver proof of a medal presented to the Royal Perth Golfing Society by the Duke of Buccleuch in 1838.

The vast majority of artifacts are from the pre-modern era, but a few modern items are displayed if they have significance to the club. Club member

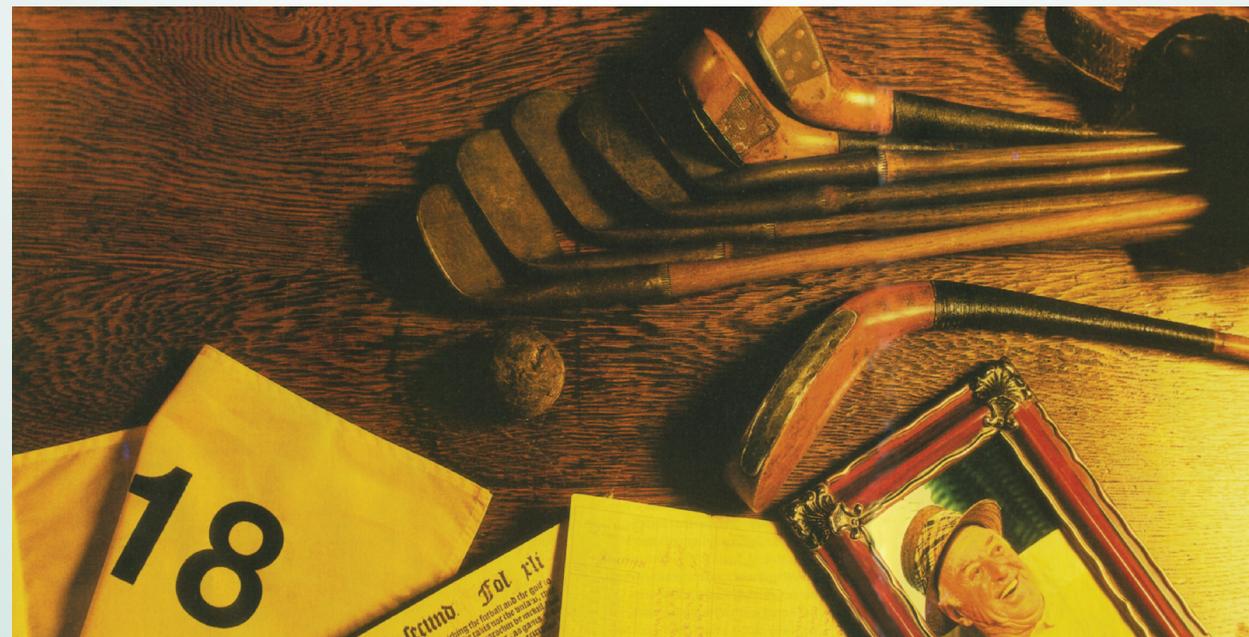
Curtis Strange is well represented, as are some of his contemporaries. In November, Strange, the 2001 United States Ryder Cup team captain, presented the museum a flag signed by the entire team.

The Golf Museum has loaned items to the Museum of Virginia Golf History at the VSGA Foundation-owned Independence Golf Club. Among them are the 1566 Scottish Acts of Parliament, the Hampton Roads Golf and Country Club championship trophy, a hand-hammered gutta percha ball, a long nose putter made by Tom Morris Sr., and an Allan Robertson feather ball, one of the oldest golf balls known to exist.

The Golf Museum is not owned by the *James River Country Club*, rather it is owned by a trust governed by a Board of Trustees and operated by volunteers. William S. Hargette is the current president.

The museum and the club have had a symbiotic relationship since the club was opened on July 2, 1932. The museum was founded by Archer M. Huntington, the principal owner of the Newport News shipyard in the first part of the 20th century. Huntington built the world-renown Mariners' Museum for the people of the Tidewater area, so he agreed to fund a museum of golf for the members of *James River Country Club*. The two museums are less than a half-mile apart, just minutes off Interstate 64 at the J. Clyde Morris Boulevard exit.

There is no cost to tour the museum, but museum curator Leroy E. Thompson, suggests calling ahead to ensure it is open. The country club hosts events in the room, so occasionally it will be closed to the public.



Christian Moody serves as editor for the Blue Ridge Business Journal and Roanoke Valley Sports Journal in Roanoke.