



Member Profile

Gordon Beggs

Cleveland Heights, Ohio

As he walked along the edge of the Old Course in St. Andrews in his 50th year with nae golf, something must have stirred in Gordon Beggs' Scottish blood. The following year, when physical problems required that he find a milder form of exercise than long distance cycling, he turned to the auld game. As he came to golf later in life, the affliction was accordingly severe and was compounded when he scored an ace on a 204-yard hole the following year.

No expense was spared as he bought a set of knock off clubs, studied Jim McLean's 8-Step Swing, and began playing at Green Ridge and Highland Park, two Cleveland area municipal courses. Seven years later he had logged over 300 rounds and achieved a handicap of 18, a classic mediocre golfer in Harry Vardon terms.

Casting about for a new challenge, he chanced upon a surplus niblick for sale at the Western Reserve Historical Society. At home he researched the markings on the club – Joe Mitchell, Cleveland Ohio, and Hobesound FLA. Beggs' first love was history, having been deflected into public service law by the events of the Nixon presidency. (Beggs' full memoir is available on the Cleveland State University Cleveland-Marshall College of Law website at the link From Nixon Unto Nixon - the Tale of a Public Interest Lawyer). He was delighted to learn that Joe Mitchell was the first pro in Cleveland, serving at the Country Club in Bratenahl, and was John D. Rockefeller's golf teacher. Beggs enjoyed chipping indoors with club.

His wife, Marcie, observed this and bought him a set of hickories on eBay. The purchase was a misfire, but having recently seen the movie *Greatest Game Ever Played*, Beggs was inspired to open an account and began buying clubs. Initially he sought clubs having a connection with Ouimet, Spaldings and Stewarts, and was fortunate early on to purchase a Bee Line putter for a very modest amount from "Old Hickory" – Arlie and Barbara Morris. Their handling of the transaction signaled that there were some wonderful people involved in hickory golf.

As he read their listings, Beggs became aware that there was something called Oakhurst. In August 2007, he and Marcie travelled to West Virginia. They enjoyed the hospitality of Lewis and Rosalie Keller and played the course with vintage clubs and Oakhurst gutties, doing 9 holes on consecutive days. Beggs shot a 47 the first day and decided to "go after" the course the second round. He started bogey, par, birdie on the first three holes and sailed all the way around the course to nine where his tee shot found the fescue on the steep hillside to the left of the fairway. Several shots later Beggs finally accomplished an escape of sorts with a Mickelson style flop shot backwards over his head to the second fairway, contusing his big toe as he also fell back. The final score was not what he hoped for, but at 95, the manager of the course assured him it was within the range of what folks shot in the NHC and encouraged him to come back for the event.

That December, when Beggs celebrated his 60th birthday, his gift from Marcie was a suitcase packed with travel documents for a trip to Porterville Calif., where Arlie Morris generously gave him three days to help him test and select Oakhurst qualifying clubs. After a couple of additional purchases, including a spoon from Mike Just at Louisville Golf, and assembling some period clothing, Beggs returned to Oakhurst



Gordon Beggs and grandson, Leif, enjoy a late autumn hickory round.

for the NHC and a brutal lesson in antique hickory golf. Playing the Oakhurst equipment with a tournament setup and conditions, he shot nearly double his score from the previous summer. The deep fescue was particularly vexing, sometimes requiring 10 or more shots to escape. (The NHC unplayable rule is 1 club length and 2 strokes, so it was not particularly helpful).

That evening after the dinner he went to Pete Georgiady's room with a note to withdraw from the tournament. Pete met him at the door and encouraged him to finish, saying he had paid for the event and no one would care about how many shots he took so long as he played fast enough. Pete suggested he take accommodations if needed, but not turn in a scorecard if he did. Beggs returned the next day and with a few accommodations improved his score by 60 strokes. Had it not been for Pete's graciousness and a thoughtful debrief later by Arlie over the phone, NHC 2008 might have been Beggs' first and last hickory event.

Instead, he has continued to soldier on, generally en kilt, playing hickories exclusively and closing in on a thousand career rounds. He has played in 20 events, primarily with gutties, including a half dozen NHC's, five at Foxburg, and two All Americans, occasionally medaling in very small divisions. In 2011 he retired from clinical law teaching largely due to a progressive tremor in his left hand. While freeing up more time for travel and events, the bad hand also necessitated his switching to the left side for putting, making him a rare ambidextrous player. He judged the shift a success when he was able to sink three birdie putts totaling 125 feet and leave three more of similar length at distances ranging from four inches to three feet to help power his "dark horse" scramble team (with Trefilek, Nelson, and Bosman) to a two-stroke victory in the 2013 Michiana with a scintillating 64 on the University of Notre Dame's Warren Course.

Beggs reads extensively on golf history and technique. He has studied and copied from many of the all stars – Vardon, Simpson, Hutchinson, Park, and Barnes among others. He serves as SoHG mentor for Ohio and has helped new players get started in the game. He has also taught golf history from the perspective of equipment to First Tee players in Cleveland. He has contributed to the golf literature with course reviews, poems, memorials to absent friends, and a hickory mystery. He has also dabbled in club design with Mike Just. The baffing spoon in the Louisville Golf catalog was originally a custom order he requested to enhance play at Oakhurst. Beggs enjoys sharing the hickory game with his family – including his wife, daughters, and grandson – and playing with his friends at Foxburg Country Club in Penn., where he holds a long distance membership, and elsewhere.