



Member Profile

Rob Gilbert

Lynchburg, Va., USA

Rob Gilbert Sr. grew up in Lynchburg, Va., and has been playing hickory golf for about 15 years. He was first introduced to hickory on a trip to Oakhurst Links in West Virginia, and was enamored with the whole idea and feel of the game as it was meant to be played. He began to collect hickory clubs and memorabilia, and started to play with hickories and has always had them in his golf bag since. He has traveled to and played hickory golf on courses in Scotland, such as Musselburgh, The Old and Jubilee Courses at St. Andrews, Cruden Bay, North Berwick West Links, and Royal Dornoch, and Ballybunion Old in Ireland.

When Rob discovered the Society of Hickory Golfers, he joined immediately. He then found other hickory fans in Virginia, and was invited to an outing. Shortly thereafter, he became a founding member of the Virginia Hickory Golf Association (VaGHA).

“There is nothing quite like the feel and enjoyment of playing with hickory, and appreciating the history of the game of golf with other like-minded friends” Rob says.

Rob plays both “modern” hickory and ‘guttery’ hickory golf at every opportunity.

How often do you play hickories?

I try to play hickory once a week if possible, more if invited!

What’s in your play set?

I use and carry original clubs except for a driving brassie from Louisville Golf, and I currently have over 150 clubs that I mix into the rotation when I play. I carry period stove-pipe bags and have a number of those.

Traditional hickory:

Fancy face driving brassie
No-name brassie stamped “made in London, England”
Bulldog – no name
Walter Hagen driving iron
Aird of St. Andrews 2 iron
James Spencer jigger
Wright & Ditson St. Andrews mashie
Kroydon Larry Striley spade mashie
Hendry & Bishop Mitre Brand “Cardinal” mashie niblick
Berwick niblick
William Park putting cleek

Guttery hickory:

George Lowe bulger driver, c. 1895
Herd and Herd Champion bBrassie
Gibson cleek
J H Taylor mashie
Jock Hutchison lofter
Forgan niblick
Heathergems putter

Favorite club?

My favorite traditional is the Cardinal mashie niblick; it just feels good in my hands. For guttery, I’m fond of the Hutchison lofter and the Gibson Cleek.

What ball do you play?

I play the McIntyre Ouimet mesh ball for traditional hickory, and the McIntyre Vardon Flyer bramble ball for guttery.

Favorite course for hickories?

I have to say my favorite course for hickories so far has been Musselburgh, mostly for the history of it all.

Favorite hickory tournament?

Haven’t played in that many, so I will choose my last one. The VaHGA 2021 Guttery Gopher Tournament. Good friends and good fun.



Rob Gilbert poses for the camera during an outing with the Virginia Hickory Golf Association.

Any particular player or aspect of golf history you especially enjoy?

I’m a history buff anyway, so golf history is fascinating. Having played on some of the oldest courses in the world, I am constantly in awe of how the founders of the game scored as they did using the equipment they had. The impact that James Braid, Willie Park Jr., Old Tom, (and young Tommy) had on the early game, and the lessons we can still learn from looking at the swings of Harry Vardon, JH Taylor, Bobby Jones, Joyce Wethered, and others still apply to creating a fluid and effortless swing that still stands up today. From the evolution of club making to ball technology, the entire game is all-enveloping and fascinating to study.

Best thing about hickory golf?

The best things about hickory golf to me are several. The camaraderie of good friends tops the list. The enjoyment of the game itself as played in a more simplistic fashion is also great fun. The looks one gets from dressing up in knickers and a tie and the buzz it creates around a clubhouse or on the course also, I think, helps pass on and recreate a respect and reverence for the old style of the game.

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

Maybe regional meeting of clubs affiliated with the SoHG would be a nice thing. We all have to do a better job of getting the word out. If there were also a repository of golf clubs available for the occasional onlooker to try or fall into a scheduled event, that would create excitement as well. After all, the only thing it took for me to get bitten was the chance to pick up a hickory club, tee a gutter ball up on a pinch of sand, and swing away.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

I am currently reading On Learning Golf by Percy Boomer. I just re-read The Game of Golf by Willie Park Jr., and I believe this book is a must for anyone attempting to play gutter ball while using current swing techniques. His instruction on stance, grip, and swing has made a big difference in my own gutter game and the book also contains many great terms from the period that are fun to revive in playing conditions.