



Member Profile
Steve Simmons
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Maybe it was a premonition. As I drove from back to my home in New York State after my sophomore year at college in June 1966, I hatched the idea of acquiring some hickory golf clubs. I just wanted to see what it would be like to play with them. I had read Bobby Jones' book *Golf Is My Game* and was captivated by his descriptions of the game as it was played during the hickory era. I wanted to know more.

When I arrived home, I put an ad in the local paper offering to purchase some "wooden-shafted clubs," and was soon contacted by a man who said I could buy "a whole bag full of 'em" for 20 dollars. I seized the opportunity. Later, as I inspected my trove, it wasn't entirely clear what I had acquired. There were two women's clubs, one child's club, and all of the clubs seemed to be quite old and frail. I decided that they were too weak to play; that turned out to be an erroneous conclusion.

Still, I enjoyed taking out those hickory clubs on occasion and admired their lines and workmanship – and I imagined what they must have been like to play when they were in their day. They subsequently went with me everywhere that I've lived since that summer of 1966 – to Indiana, Wyoming, Colorado and Minnesota.

For about 20 years during the middle portion of my adult years, I didn't play much golf. My family and career responsibilities came first. After retirement in 2008, however, I decided to come back to the game and my brother, an avid golfer, encouraged me to update my equipment. So with his guidance I purchased a modern, state-of-the-art set of clubs. For a while I was satisfied with those and encouraged that I still could play golf at a fairly high level. Yet something was missing. As a personal essay writer, I found myself writing nostalgically about the game, as I had known it in the 1950s, '60s and '70s when persimmon clubs were still the norm.

Then in 2013 I learned about a small cadre of golfers who were playing the game with original and/or replica clubs from the early-1900s hickory era. Something clicked – or maybe it was that something came back to me. I made arrangements to visit the Louisville Golf club shop in Kentucky, owned by Mike Just, and which still makes replica hickory clubs.

I thought the visit might lead to an article about this "throw-back" approach to the game. I still wasn't considering actually playing with hickory clubs myself. After touring the shop with Mike, I purchased a replica 1922 mashie, which I regarded as a simple souvenir of my visit.

Within a short time, however, that Louisville club was in my play bag and working its way into my heart. I used it around the greens for pitch and run situations. Another year passed as I continued to play my modern clubs, and my one replica hickory mashie.

In 2014 my brother – my golf "coach" – died of cancer. I'd learned even more about hickory golf by then, and about the Society of Hickory Golfers. I revisited the Louisville Golf website and purchased a "starter set" of four replica hickory clubs, which I combined with my "souvenir" mashie and one of the original putters that came from that batch of hickory clubs I'd bought back in 1966. I was on my way!

My play set has changed somewhat over the past two years, although that Louisville replica mashie is still in my bag. It will remain there for a long time since it was the "doorway" through which I entered the hickory game. None of the clubs I acquired in 1966 are still in my post-1900 bag, but two of them, a cleek and a lofter, are central components of my pre-1900 play set, which is my latest elaboration in the hickory game.

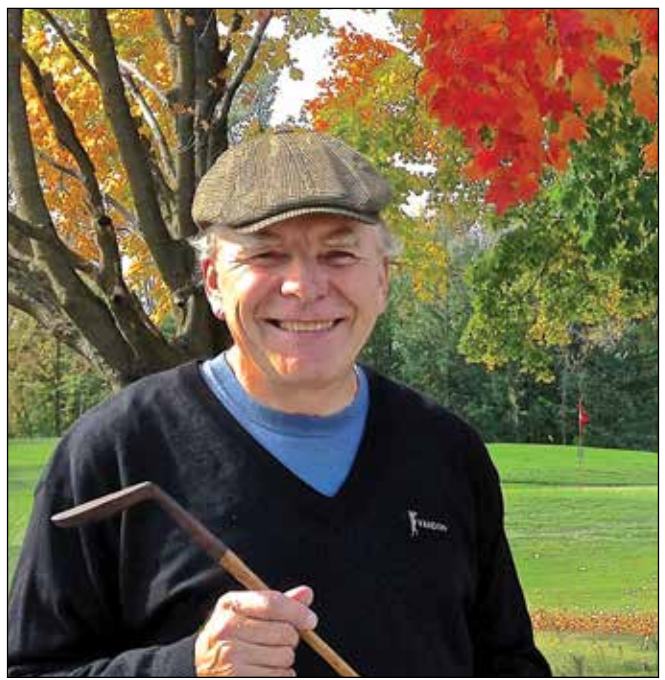
I have crossed the Rubicon and I'm not going back. I've never before experienced as much satisfaction with the game of golf as I have in these past two years of playing hickories. Last fall I had an opportunity to take my clubs to Scotland to play some of the historic links courses there. They were right at home, and I played the best golf of my life.

How often do you play hickories?

I only play hickory clubs now. My modern clubs are for sale.

What ball do you play?

I sometimes play Wilson 50s balls for recreational rounds, and I use the McIntyre Ouimet ball for post-1900 tournaments. I use the McIntyre Braid ball for my pre-1900 play.



Steve Simmons poses with his putter, a Brown-Vardon, at his favorite golf course, Orono Public GC, in the western Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area.

What's in your play set?

I have no problem playing with replica clubs. As I noted earlier, they are the doorway through which I've entered the hickory game. I might not have found it without them. I am, however, selectively bringing original clubs into my bag. Here are the clubs in my current play set:

Post-1900 play set

- Brown/Vardon original putter
- George Nicoll original jigger
- George Nicoll original Zenith mashie/niblick
- Louisville replica niblick
- Louisville replica mashie
- Louisville replica "Jeanie Deans" driver
- Louisville replica spoon
- Louisville replica wooden cleek

Pre-1900 play set

- D. Anderson (St. Andrews) original putter
- Yonkers S. G. & N. Co. (New York) original cleek
- Yonkers S. G. & N. Co. (New York) original lofter
- Louisville replica transitional driver

Favorite club?

I most enjoy playing my George Nicoll original jigger. I have always enjoyed the pitch-and-run game and I especially like looking down at the dot-punch pattern on the face of this club. It REALLY liked being on the links courses of Scotland – and got lots of use there.

Favorite course for hickories?

My "home" course – and favorite course for hickory play – is the 9-hole 1924 Orono Public Golf Course on the western edge of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. I've even written an essay about that course that explains some of what makes it so special to me. That essay is titled A Good Land and can be accessed at: <https://steverobert.wordpress.com/a-good-land/>

Favorite hickory tournament?

I haven't had much hickory tournament experience yet, but I've especially appreciated playing in the Iowa Hickory Classic in Des Moines the past two years.

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

Bobby Jones and Harry Vardon are my principal inspirations in my hickory game. I play with a replica "Jeanie Deans" (Bobby Jones) driver and an original Brown-Vardon putter.

Best thing about hickory golf?

Hickory golf has opened my eyes to a whole new perspective on the game. It is, for me, tapping into something deep, something that traces back to that original urge I felt when I acquired those initial hickory clubs back in 1966. It also feeds my interest in the history of the game and my love for classic courses that are, unfortunately, slowly disappearing. I may never understand all that attracts me to hickory golf, but I still can enjoy the journey!

Most recent book on golf that you read?

I recently read Glenna Collett's 1929 autobiography titled Ladies in the Rough. I also have re-read Bobby Jones' Golf Is My Game, which began my hickory journey over 50 years ago.