

# SPORTS

## History comes alive at the Foxburg Country Club

**The club hosted the 12th annual Foxburg Hickory Open**  
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### FOXBURG

History is always an undercurrent when discussing the Foxburg Country Club seeing as how the club is the oldest continuous use golf course in the United States but for one weekend each year, history leaps to the forefront at the old course.

Such a weekend just happened when the Foxburg Country club held the 2020 Hickory Championship Aug. 13 through Aug. 15.

Even though the history of golf was embraced and celebrated for the weekend, that doesn't mean the challenges of 2020 didn't have an effect on this year's event.

"This year because of (COVID-19) we just stuck with people who could travel locally," said tournament director Tom Johnson said. "There were probably 10 or 12 people who didn't come this year because our membership is older."

Twenty golfers took part in this year's event with champions crowned in six different classifications.

This was the 12th year the Foxburg Country Club has hosted the Hickory Championship.

The uniqueness of the Hickory Championship is that is one of three tournaments in the country where players play with clubs and rules of pre-1900s golf. The clubs have to have been



Dr. Bern Bernacki tees off at the seventh hole during the Foxburg Hickory Championship.

made before 1900 or be replicas that are certified to pre-1900 standards. In most cases, players use reproduction clubs because age takes a hard toll on the wooden shafts which are over 100 years old.

"These guys come here to play pre-1900s golf on a pre-1900s golf course," Johnson said.

According to Johnson, there are 45 other hickory events in the country but 42 of those events allow for

equipment and rules from after 1900.

One of the rules of pre-1900 golf in effect for the Hickory Open was no use of tees on the teeing ground as players had to use sand to prop their ball up for their drives. The stone tee markers used to hold the sand for the tees in pre-1900s golf are still on the course. The tee markers were taken off the course in the 1960s since they were no longer needed in modern golf but in the mid-1970s the stone markers were put back on the course. According to author John Crow Miller in his book "Foxburg Country Club: The Stonehenge of American Golf" the tee markers have been at the club since 1888 with five of the markers being put on the course in 1887.

The tee markers are 20-inches high, 33-inches long and 18-inches wide with a 144-square inch opening that is nine inches deep to hold the sand.

For the Hickory Championship the tees are moved up which shrunk the Foxburg Country Club's course length to 2,409 yards for nine holes.

According to Johnson, the biggest 'X-factor' when it comes to playing pre-1900s golf is the gutta-percha balls (commonly known as Gutter balls). There are two styles of Gutter balls; the line cut and the bramble. The line cut is more aerodynamic because of the lines but the lines also makes the ball shimmy and change direction. The bramble ball doesn't fly as well as the line cut but it has a truer flight path.



Cameron Henry of Augusta, Ga. eyes his pitch shot at the third green with intensity.

Golfers who take part in the Hickory Championship at Foxburg Country Club dress in period clothing to give the course more of a pre-1900s feel.

On hand for the Foxburg Hickory Championship was Golf Heritage Society President Dr. Bern Bernacki.

Bernacki's passion for pre-1900s golf grew out of a simple collecting hobby.

"About 25 years ago, I started collecting golf stuff from antique stores and here 25 years later, I am playing with them, I enjoy the beauty of the different variety items and the antiques," Bernacki. "The first thing I ever bought was a hickory shafted club. I bought a couple more later on and once you have three of something, you have a small collection. Then I found out there were people who played golf with these items which was known as the Golf Collectors Society. Now the Golf Collector's Society is known as the Golf Heritage Society and we are in our 50th year."

Just like any other pre-1900s golfer, Bernacki has had his ups and downs with the sport.

"I've shot 80 on this course and I have shot 99," Bernacki said. "It depends on the day and depends on how you play."

According to Bernacki, around three years ago, the Golf Heritage Society changed its membership qualifications to include more players, collectors and historians.

The Golf Heritage Society was supposed to hold its annual meeting in the fall

but had to postpone the event to 2021 due to COVID-19 concerns. The club plans on holding the event in Monroeville in late September of 2021 and is planning on playing a hickory club event on Arnold Palmer's home course in Latrobe.

"It made sense to hold back on our event this year and go at it hard next year," Bernacki said.

For more information on the Golf Heritage Society visit [www.golfheritage.com](http://www.golfheritage.com).

Even though pre-1900s golf can be challenging, Johnson believes it can be an enjoyable experience for any golfer.

"It is more fun to golf in this event than you can imagine," Johnson said. "It's not easier. But stepping back in the technology changes how the game is played."

The Foxburg Hickory Championship is scheduled for Aug. 13 and Aug. 14 in 2021.



Bill Reed of Des Moines, Iowa watches his approach shot to the green on the ninth hole.



Don Mirt of Pittsburgh watches his putt on the sixth green head toward the cup.



Mike Campella of Malvern, Ohio blasts a shot out of the sand on the par-3 sixth hole.



David Shultz of Portsmouth, Ohio pitches a shot onto the green on the third hole during the Foxburg Hickory Championship.