

# FEATHER BALL EQUIPMENT DISPLAYED IN "GOLF HOUSE"

By

PAUL R. MacDONALD  
USGA Executive  
Assistant

An exhibition of tools and equipment used in making the feather golf ball is on display in the USGA Museum in "Golf House," New York City.

The display includes a "lum" hat, two wooden feather stuffers, a three-cornered iron pot, two awls with wooden chest braces, two short awls and one leather ball-holder plus curved needle, waxed thread and goose feathers—all tools of the "feathery" trade.

The materials were contributed by Gilbert C. Tompkins, of New York, N. Y., a member of the USGA Museum Committee. They resulted from a trip abroad in 1953.

Visiting Carnoustie, Scotland, for the British Open Championship, he made the acquaintance of several golfing personages with the idea of collecting for the USGA Golf Museum authentic tools used in the making of feather golf balls. From Carnoustie he proceeded to St. Andrews, where he obtained permission from the Royal and Ancient Golf Club to reproduce certain tools from their collection. He was aided by Alexander Hogg, of Carnoustie, and Brig. Eric Brickman, Secretary of the Royal and Ancient, in obtaining authentic equipment.

The making of feather balls was a tedious and wearisome task, and most ball-makers could only produce about four specials a day. The best balls sold for up to five shillings (70c) apiece; in bulk, rarely less than a pound (\$2.80) for a dozen.

The process necessitated that the leather be softened with alum and water and cut into four, three or two pieces. These were stitched together with waxed threads and reversed when the stitching was nearly completed. A small hole was left for the insertion of the boiled goose feathers.

The ball-maker held the leather cover in his hand in a recessed ball-holder, and pushed the first feathers through the hole with a stuffing rod, a tapering piece of

## A Legacy

To respect the game of golf.

To see it whole; acknowledging its principles, recognizing its purpose and accepting its eternal challenge.

For it is the only game on the face of the earth in which man plays the toughest opponent there is: himself.

Whether he is alone on the course, walking on greens still wet with the new morning, or surrounded by 25,000 people during a major tournament, the golfer who hovers over a ball, a primitive club in his hand, is expressing man's ultimate faith in his own skill and in his own purity of dedication.

This dedication is greater than health, greater than wealth, greater even than friendship, and unworthy to be sullied by self-interest or something as shabby as a preferred starting time.

wrought iron sixteen to twenty inches long and fitted with a wooden crosspiece to be braced against the ball-maker's chest. When the stuffing iron failed, an awl was brought into play, and a volume of feathers which would fill the crown of a beaver hat eventually was inserted into the leather cover. The hole was then stitched, and the ball was hammered hard and round and given three coats of paint.

Feather balls were seldom exactly round. In wet weather they tended to become sodden and fly apart. They were easily cut on the seams. A player was fortunate if his ball endured through two rounds.

These tools, described here, form but one phase in the history and development of golf as depicted in the "Golf House" Museum.