Playing hickory in the Old World

When Dr. Michael Hurdzan goes to Scotland or Ireland he feels of what links golf was all about. A lot of times I play with wooden-shafted clubs. You can enjoy the game with whatever equipment you have. Secondly, it gives me that feel of what links golf was all about. A lot of times I play with wooden-shafted clubs. You can enjoy the game with whatever equipment you have. When I played St. Andrews I learned to keep the ball down. When Dr. Michael Hurdzan visited the Nichols company and asked an old clubmaker about his collection — signed by Jones and by Rulewich, who had sold for $375. A short time later, Hurdzan received a packet in the mail from architect Roger Rulewich, who had ripped a page of one of Hurdzan’s books while photocopying. The packet contained the Jones book — signed by Jones and by Rulewich, who wrote: “For someone who collects rare treasures from the history of golf from someone who only manages to destroy them.”

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Hurdzan Collection

Continued from page 37

“As it ended up, they probably both came out of Mac’s own library. Golf in America has his signature and personal stamp in it.” And the value of Scotland’s Gift today? “A thousand dollars.”

- Then there’s a little paperback written by Robert Trent Jones Sr. The booklet was to be auctioned and Hurdzan wanted it so badly he bid $95. “The auction results came out and I didn’t get it. I was stunned.” A friend who bid $225 himself told Hurdzan it had sold for $975. A short time later, Hurdzan received a packet in the mail from architect Roger Rulewich, who had ripped a page of one of Hurdzan’s books while photocopying. The packet contained the Jones book — signed by Jones and by Rulewich, who wrote: “For someone who collects rare treasures from the history of golf from someone who only manages to destroy them.”

- In the realm of clubs, Hurdzan has many sets, but perhaps none as special as the wooden-shafted set made by George Nichols Co. in Scotland. While in Scotland, he visited the Nichols company and asked an old clubmaker about his clubs. The man couldn’t believe a set still existed intact, but when Hurdzan showed them to him, the clubmaker "broke down and cried," Hurdzan said. "He remembered those particular clubs.

- There is a world of clay pipes — you know, the kind you see the Wills character smoking in "The Recluse." "I remember seeing an exhibition of clay pipes," Hurdzan said. "It was a world of clay pipes — you know, the kind you see the Wills character smoking in "The Recluse.""

- Then there’s the rare Braille Book for Golf, printed 1935. The greatest treasure of all is a Rembrandt print, The Cloven Player, sometimes called The Golf Player. In retrospect, it is a second-state printing of a man golfing.

- Club-fitting and teaching devices, scores of wood-shafted clubs. "I would buy any wood-shafted club for $10. I’ve got thousands of clubs I’ve bought for $5, $7, club buttons dating to the 1700s, an array of unique clubs — Hurdzan has them all.

- "Among new items, I usually look for something that’s not going to be on the market long — that I know is weird, or so ridiculous it won’t be around long," he said. "Like the putter with a level on it, which you can hide with a shutter. How many of those will sell? Not many. But my son 50 years from now will have an oddity.

- On the one hand, Hurdzan said, "I’ve overdone it here. I collect everything. There isn’t anything on the market that I wouldn’t try to get some of." But on the other hand, "I get dupes to trade, but I never sell anything.

- Hurdzan laments that golf collecting has become a business, and, today it is "buyer beware." "A lot of people now are in it for the money, unfortunately," he said. "When I started, it was just collectors. And it was inexpensive. You could amass these things. A book like this that I bought for $50 is now $600 or $700. And, not only is it a business, but there are forgeries. You have to be very careful.

- His advice for collectors beginning today? "You have to decide: Are you collecting as an investment, or for something that you love. If it’s for something you love, pick what you like — if it’s books, stick with books. Then isolate yourself to instruction books, architecture books, travel books, whatever.

- Other advice:

  - Least expensively, a person can collect bag tags, pencils, tees, scorecards, balls, glassware.

  - Try to get the patterns to the golf clubs.

  - "When I started out, if I could buy two editions versus one first edition, I would buy the second editions. In retrospect, I should have bought the first editions."

  - Join the Golf Collectors Society, which has regional and national meetings. "There are tables and tables of things for sale or trade. They have regional meetings as well."