

# Steel Shaft History Told by First to Play Steel in Open

By HERBERT C. LAGERBLADE

**P**ROBABLY most of the records concerning the development of that revolutionary development in golf club construction, the steel shaft, have been lost or destroyed. More of the history of the steel shaft may get lost as many who were active in the earlier stages of the shaft have passed on or have retired from the golf business.

I call on my memory for some of the high points in the steel shaft's first chapters as the only material historical item I have convenient is an old newspaper clipping. Who wrote the story and where it appeared I don't know.

The newspaper piece tells of the sand wedge being under question by the USGA, then refers to the Schenectady putter, and finally to the steel shaft. The writer comments:

"I was just crawling out of bed in a room at the Oakland Hills Country Club, the first day of the National Open championship of 1924, when I heard the starter chanting:

"Herbert Lagerblade, using the first steel-shafted club ever swung in the National Open championship."

With that reference and my long association with the Horton Mfg. Co. among my credentials, I'll testify.

The shaft originally was patented in 1910 by Arthur F. (Bill) Knight, a General Electric Engineer who also invented the Schenectady putter which Walter J. Travis used in winning the 1904 British Amateur. Why a man named "Arthur F." was called Bill is still a mystery to me.

In 1920 the Horton Mfg. Co. bought the patent on a royalty basis when the patent had seven more years to run. Knight had been unsuccessful in trying to make the shaft. Up to that time no thin wall tubing of the required strength and lightness had been made in this country.

## First Shafts Were Brazed

I knew Mr. Knight and some other officers of G. E. and C. E. Treadway of Bristol, so in 1921 was asked to join the Horton company in the development and promotion of the shaft—the "Bristol" we called it.

The first of our shafts were made of thin strip steel folded into a tapered tube and hydrogen brazed by a new method General Electric had perfected. Horton paid two royalties for a number of years; one to Knight and another to G. E. for use of the brazing process.

The first production shafts were made about June of 1921 after hundreds of experiments. Everything about the brazing as well as the heat treating, size of shaft, weight determination, etc., was new.

Crawford, MacGregor & Candy Co., was our first customer. Then very soon came Wilson and Hillerich and Bradsby, after them was Spalding who had been experimenting with Allen E. Lard of Washington on a steel shaft with torsion but could not get the idea into a shaft.

## Barred in 1923

Sales of the steel shaft began in earnest in 1922 and we thought we had the world by the tail when wham!, the USGA early in 1923 barred the shaft from official play on the basis that it might be a mechanical aid. Until proved otherwise the shaft could not be used in USGA championships.

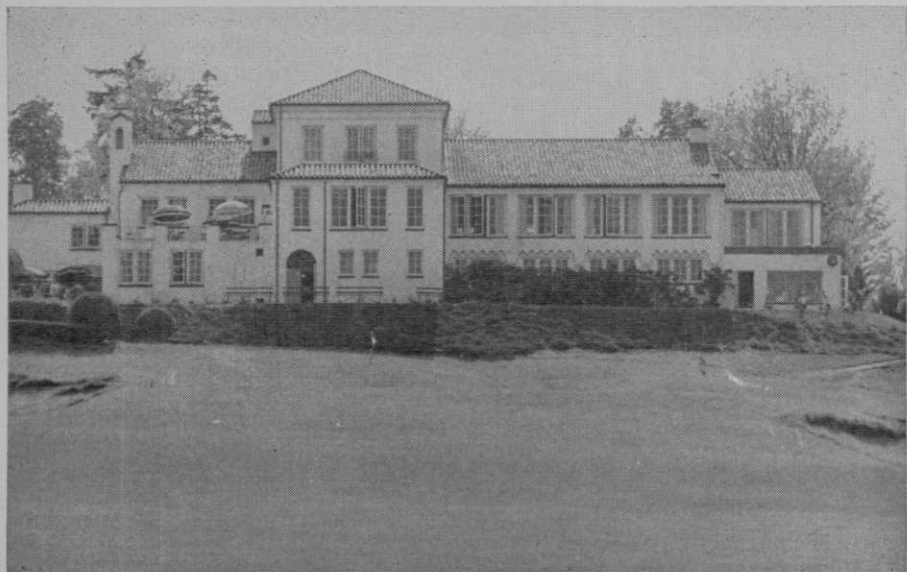
Through the cooperation of Joe Graffis we immediately got in touch with the Western Golf Assn., and Albert W. Gates, president; and "Gus" Allen, secretary, of the Western arranged for tests to be made at the Edgewater Golf Club in Chicago.

I'll never forget the great help Chick Evans and Bob MacDonald gave us at that time. The friendliness they and the Western Golf Assn. officials showed us and their attitude of research to help the game was most heartening.

## Three Slices No Aid

One of the testers was the new pro at Edgewater, Allan Gow by name, who had arrived from Scotland that spring. He stood on the first tee and promptly sliced three balls over the fence, definitely convincing the Western committee that the steel shaft was not a mechanical aid. At any rate, the WGA quickly approved the steel shaft for tournament play.

In 1923 I had the pleasure of playing



### HOST TO WESTERN AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP, JULY 19-25

In the beautiful clubhouse of Broadmoor GC at Seattle, Wash., the contestants in the 52d Western Amateur championship will celebrate their joys or forget their defeats, during the week of July 19-25. Pro George Howard's shop is in the basement of the building, behind the 18th green in the foreground and to the left is one of the most interesting practice putting greens on which many lively competitions are played.

steel-shafted clubs in the Western Open at Memphis, the first big tourney in which steel shafts were allowed.

Many pros were a bit antagonistic to the steel shaft at first, being afraid it might cut into their club business but they soon learned that it helped business. There is no doubt the steel shaft was largely responsible for the introduction of matched sets as with hickory shafts matching sets of clubs was an extremely difficult problem.

We advertised in the Saturday Evening Post that we would present a steel-shafted club to anyone making a hole-in-one if they would send us properly attested cards. This one ad brought us more than 700 attested cards.

When the USGA barred the shaft we wrote to these golfers asking them to write the USGA their opinion of the shaft as the governing body of U. S. golf had announced it would seek the opinions of golfers on the steel shaft.

An amazing response was accorded our letter. My recollection is that more than 600 complied with our request. The association wrote us asking what influence

we had exerted to produce so many favorable letters.

Then, early in 1924 the USGA approved the steel shaft and I had the happy experience of being announced as the first user of steel shafts in a major championship. In that event which Cyril Walker won, I must have proved that the steel shaft, if a mechanical aid, certainly didn't aid my game enough to have me scoring among the leaders.

As I recall "Wild Bill" Melhorn used steel shafts in his woods in that Open championship and Bill finished third; a stroke behind Bob Jones.

#### Shot Heard 'Round the World

When I hit my first drive in that championship I felt as though the whole future of the steel shaft depended on that shot. I still have a nervous memory of my knees knocking together and barely being able to see the ball. I said a little prayer and lo and behold, the ball went out straight and far. So the business was saved.

After the USGA approval the steel shaft rapidly displaced wood. It is a shock for a veteran to realize that golfers such as Byron Nelson and Ben Hogan probably

never used wood shafts, except, possibly, in an occasional putter.

In 1927 the Union Hardware Co. came out with a steel shaft and in 1928 the American Fork and Hoe Co. produced its True Temper shaft. A few years later the Heddon company produced their shaft.

It's my memory, subject to confirmation or correction by whoever has the official data, that the Royal Canadian Golf Assn. approved the steel shaft in 1923. We went up to Canada shortly after the Western tests and approval and received a most interested and pleasant reception.

The Royal and Ancient approved steel shafts in November, 1929 with the statement: "The Rules of Golf Committee have decided that steel shafts, as approved by the Rules of Golf Committee, are declared to conform with the requirements of the clause in the Rules of Golf on the form and make of golf clubs."

Early in 1930 we sent them a steel shaft which was promptly approved.

From that time on steel shafts became standard equipment.

**PAGES 77-78 ARE THERE TO HELP US SERVE YOU BETTER. USE THEM!**

## The Jaycees Show Golf How To Get Work Done

By DON L. NEER

FROM BANGOR, ME., to San Diego, Calif. and from Wenatchee, Wash. to Starke, Fla., the energetic young civic leaders, the Junior Chamber of Commerce members, are building golf courses or staging some of the nation's best-run PGA tournaments.

These promoters of community progress are age 21 to 35 when they won't take "no" for an answer. The Jaycees, as they are best known, make the tough jobs look easy. Among their tasks this year are the financing and reception of the PGA championship in St. Paul, Minnesota July 21-27 and keeping in circulation throughout the country 100 prints of LIFE-PGA's excellent film "Keep 'Em In the Fairway."

With their far-flung membership of 200,000 in 2,700 communities, the Jaycees have built their junior golf tournament into one of the world's greatest golfing events with a starting field of over 20,000 entrants. This year's 9th annual International finals will bring together North America's best 200 junior golfers from

Here's the **NEWEST**

## Chesterfield

pro shop

## Sweater Success

SOFT • LIGHT • SMART

*Loomed of the finest imported zephyr*

Your women golfers will be quick to recognize these new Chesterfields as exceptional values. Wool is the finest Australian blend zephyr with every sweater custom finished to exact size.

Sizes from 32 to 42

To sell under \$15

**Speaking of Pro Shop Success:** Every professional who has sent us a trial order has reordered!



### Ideal for Golf, Sports, Casual and Dress

No. 1002 SS—at left, navy blue, white stripes on crew collar, excellent quality ornamental buttons. Pocket emblem of golf bag, clubs and ball. Also No. 1002 LS—long sleeves.

No. 2002 SS—at right: same model as 1022 SS, in white with navy stripes and Johnny collar. Also No. 2002 LS. These same styles available with tennis emblem at \$1 extra.

For attractive prices and samples write direct to:  
**CHESTERFIELD SPORTWEAR CO.**

1133 Broadway

New York 10, N. Y.