



# COLLECTOR SPOTLIGHT: GEORGE PETRO

*Major  
Medals*

**A**t seven, George Petro was given a box of rocks for Christmas. Each was glued to a cardboard sheet and identified by mineral. Underwhelmed, he fired each of them out his bedroom window with a slingshot into the holiday snow. Later, for some long forgotten reason, he began to obsess about the collection that got away, those many colored and unique rocks. By late March he was rigorously sifting through the retreating snow. Three specimens were rescued.

"That's when I found out I was a collector," he says.

A career in geology was likely until George's parents talked him into med school. Still fascinated by minerals, in 1982 the new physician traveled, post-residency to the Tucson mineral show with the idea of building a renowned collection.

The high expense of certain prizes ended this dream and George began a more modest, but very satisfying, program of adding one or two affordable crystals each year. "If you walk through my front door all you'll see are rocks," he says.

For awhile, he took a liking to antique medical instruments, but while these fascinated his friends, they did not quite pull at his heartstrings like his minerals had.

In January 1992 at a Syracuse antique show, he met Gordon Page, a GCS member. Though he had taken up the sport, seriously, at 13, George never thought of "collecting" the game. That all changed pretty quick, and he left the show with a Hagen concave wedge, a Calamity Jane putter, and a copy of Olman's *Golf Collectibles*.

He returned the next day, 90 miles in a blizzard, for more. Page showed him Leo Kelley's mail-order catalog, which was duly obtained and from which George snared his first rare treasure, a Brown rake iron.

Kelley, in turn, suggested George look into Keven McGrath's spring sporting antiquities auction. George put in for a catalog, which was mistakenly sent to Owings Mills, Md. instead of New York. A last minute local search for a catalog led him to Dick Donovan who, as it turns out, lived only blocks away from George.

It was quick work to make a copy of the catalog and George drove all night to Andover, Mass., where, in the first hour of the auction, he proceeded to spend all his money. Not wanting to leave, a travel-worn and disheveled George, looking like he had spent the night in a bus station, asked McGrath for some credit. He was firmly denied.

The 1992 GCS Annual Trade Show in Atlanta, combined with a visit to GCS collector Wayne Aaron's home, were unforgettable to a now hopelessly hooked George, who was counting the days to the January 1993 Dayton trade show.

"There I encountered the most spectacular golf collectible, the 1955 U.S. Open medal, but it wasn't for sale," he says.

Rather, it was a teaser for McGrath's next auction, only three months away. With his eyes on the prize, George spent the three months building an auction reserve of cash and won the hammer for the medal, outbidding noted collector Dave



**GEORGE PETRO** stands by a case of some six dozen medals from Major and significant golf championships throughout the world. Above the case is the first printing of Charles Lees' painting *The Golfers*, which Petro uses for reference to players named on some of his earliest medals. The solid sterling club and balls is a representation of the Silver Club used by the Honorable Company in 1744.

Berkowitz (who doubled the reserve with his first raise of the hand) and representatives from the Olympic Club, the venue of the 1955 Open.

McGrath, who thought it was Berkowitz who won the item, was surprised to learn it was George. "The bum from Owings Mills?" he said. The two have since become good friends.

By the end of 1993 George had added Walter Hagen's 1921 PGA and Bobby Locke's 1949 Open Championship gold medals. Things stalled when he learned that a Japanese collector had purchased an 1897 U.S. Open medal.

"I wanted, not just to collect gold medals from the four Majors, but of the various styles of those medals, making that 1897 style crucial," he said.

Finally, in 2000, that medal came to a Christies auction in London. Nervous, George took his seat in the auction room, worried that he would be out-bid. Only a last-minute sale of several of his own items allowed him the range to purchase not only the coveted 1897 medal, but a couple of Harry Vardon's trophies at Sothebys two days later.

More "necessary" medals popped up over just a wide enough time frame to pursue them – the 1874 Open Championship, the 1927 PGA, the 1941 "original style" Masters, and others. Later, George added medals from the earliest golfing societies.

George says he'll go to the mat for certain medals but still works hard on a small but representative collection of clubs, balls, books, and ladies' items that portray a general story of golf. As with any collector, he relishes the big find, but says a successful collectors' event means "getting together with friends and sitting around sharing adventures and opinions while completely forgetting to eat for eight hours at a time. It doesn't get any better."

**TROPHY DISPLAY** – On the top shelf is a Masters Trophy commissioned by Augusta National as a 4X size trophy that was to be on display at the Augusta Golf Museum, but which never opened. The trophy was left in possession of noted Augusta photographer Frank Christian and eventually sold with the approval of Augusta National. To the right of the trophy is Craig Woods Masters' Gold Medal from 1941.

On the middle shelf is a Masters plaque of the updated style used from the mid-1970's through 1991. It was made for presentation to Fred Couples in 1992 but the prize was changed to the 3D Clubhouse, so was never awarded. To the left is a "day's low score" trophy won by Billy Casper on April 11, 1968. On the right is a Low Amateur Cup won by E. Harvie Ward Jr., 1957.

The lower shelf features the Silver Bowl awarded to Bobby Locke for winning the Goodall Round Robin Professional Tournament in record fashion in 1949. Inside the trophy is a page from Lockes' book with himself in front of the trophy surrounded by the other professionals. The ball on the left is a mint hand hammered guttie, while the other is a very rare original Haskell mesh ball.

On the right, a medal won by J.H. Taylor for his victory in the French Open of 1908. Frenchman Arnaud Massy won the inaugural and second French Open in 1907, but to the great dismay of the Triumvirate, he became the first non-Brit to win the British Open that year as well. The Triumverate traveled in force to France in 1908 to avenge the loss, which JH Taylor did with gusto. For the payback victory, Taylor added the large silver surround to highlight his medal (lower right).



**FROM 'CRYIT DOUN' TO THE BEST IN THE GAME** – George Petro has assembled a distinctive representation of the history of the game. Top shelf from left: The 1457 Scottish Acts of Parliament whose "Black Acts" banished gowf; a third edition of Thomas Mathison's The Goff, which is misidentified on the title page as the second because the printer was unaware of the 2nd edition. Much rarer than the 1st edition, it adds the 1793 dedication "TO ALL THE LOVERS OF GOFF, IN EUROPE, ASIA, AFRICA AND AMERICA"; a signed Robt T. Jones Jr. ball presented in 1935 at the Atlantic Rotary Club to a British exchange student; and the 1899 U.S. Amateur Program with 28 detailed pages about the competition and prizes, the USGA and each of its member clubs, including Owentsia as the host club. It also defined golf terms and etiquette for patrons new to golf. The lower several shelves feature a variety of early American men's trophies and medals.





**A SIGNATURE PIECE** – The album, above, was presented upon her retirement in 1921 to Miss Issette Pearson (later I. Miller) who organized the Ladies Golf Union in 1893. It features 35 pages of signatures from club members, including the famous golfing Leitch family, above right. Also in the album, ironically, are signatures on the same page from Horace Hutchinson and Blanche Hulton, first treasurer of the Ladies Golf Union, to whom Hutchinson had written in 1893 wondering whether ladies had the constitution for competitive golf.



**RARE CLUBS** – The "JNO Gray Iron," top, is from from the Harry B. Wood Collection. The reverse of Woods' card identifies it as club "18" in the "right centre" of his famous cabinet. The club was made by John Gray of Prestwick. The second massive club was part of the 1911 Glasgow exhibition. It was numbered "Item 149," and carried the label – "An early 18th century Iron." It was displayed in Case No. 1 on the north wall. Also in that case was Item 156, a set of old relics that now go by the name of "The Troon Clubs."



**SOCIETY MEDALS** – From left: The Honourable Company, 1794; Brutsfield, 1828; Burgess, 1831, Musselburgh, 1832; and the Glensadell North Berwick Club medal, 1832 (donated by John Campbell and retired by Sir David Baird, both in the featured group in Charles Lees painting The Golfers). Historically, the world's oldest is the Blackheath medal of 1792, while the earliest report of a medal was 1771 from St. Andrews, but that has never been found.



**MAJOR MEDALS** – George Petro is drawn, not just to the significance of golf medals from major competitions, but to their styles.

USGA, top from left: Joe Lloyd, Champion 1897; Women's Second Place, Margaret Curtis in 1900 (her three Gold medals were destroyed at Essex CC by fire); Women's Champion 1937, Estelle Page; enameled 1946 and 1955 Open Gold Medals of Lloyd Mangrum and Jack Fleck; and the 2005 USGA Mens State Team Championship, which is the current style. In 2012 a tribute to Jack Nicklaus was added to the reverse of this style awarded the Open winner. The smaller "pin" is the medal given to the 1937 Women's low qualifier, interesting because its enameling predates that of tournament medals not starting until 1946.

Middle: Open Champ. medals – oval 1874 of Mungo Park, oldest in private hands; 1949 of Bobby Locke, this circular style began in 1893.

Far right: Masters – the "original style" Masters medals from Craig Wood, 1935 runner-up and 1941 winner.

Bottom, from left: PGA Champ. – Walter Hagen 1921 winner, the first style; Hagen's fifth PGA in 1927, large style; obverse in silver from Al Espinosa, 1928; obverse of current smaller PGA; Gene Sarazen's rectangular gold Senior Championship, 1954.

**LADY MARGARET SCOTT** won the first three British Ladies Championships. Her father's request that the LGU give her their cup for the triple feat was denied. That was her last appearance. She was later given this replica cup. All future winners also received a cup and a medal like the 1913 Champions Medal, above at right, with its precise depiction of Lady Margaret at the top of her swing as seen in the small photo.



**C.H. SEELY TROPHY AND CLUB** – C.H. Seely was a top amateur American golfer. Between 1900 and 1915, the Metropolitan Amateur was won by Jerry Travers 5 times, Walter Travis 3 times and Seely twice, in 1905 and 08. He was a member of the Wee Burn Golf Club in Darien, Conn. Seely won the Connecticut State Championship three times. The club is a desirable "Seely Patent" forked hosel made by Spalding, c. 1912, developed to shift weight from the hosel to the center of the clubface. The tangs also added "resiliency," currently called low shaft kick.





#### HARRY VARDON TROPHIES

GCS member George Petro has created a stunning display that includes four of the largest trophies pictured in the photograph, above, of the legendary Harry Vardon taken during WWI with all of his significant trophies and medals.

Front right is a hammered copper trophy with silver trim and antler handles (in front of Vardon's chest in the top photo), inscribed *Presented by the guests of Poland Spring*

*Hotel, August 25, 1900.* This was after Vardon's 4-up defeat of the better ball of local pro AH Fenn and AH Findlay. Vardon entered the club's great hall to cheers that turned into the singing of *God save the Queen* and then *The Star Spangled Banner*.

Back left is the Bramshot Challenge Cup won in 1911 (center of Vardon photo).

Back right is the Rose bowl, which is hallmarked 1883 but presented by his home club, South Herts, for his unprecedented

6th Open win in 1914. The grid for holding flowers, seen in the Vardon photo, is missing.

Below left is part of an engraved tea set (bottom row of the Vardon photo) from South Herts for his 4th Open in 1903.

The old photo also displays Vardon's six Open medals, and his U.S. Open and German Open medals.

Vardon couldn't resist adding *Just had a tip* in the lower left of the photo, a priceless example of British understatement.

*See pages 10-13  
in this issue of the  
Bulletin for more  
of George Petro's  
outstanding  
collection.*