

# Cran Cleek inventor first and foremost a metal forger

A Scottish apprentice from Aberdeenshire, James Cran came to the U.S. in 1896 to work with Spalding. Was he the first to make an iron golf club in this country?

By Wayne McGinnis

In an interview in 1909, James Cran stated, “I was one of the first, if not the first, to make an iron golf club in the United States, and I was one of the pioneers of the game.” (*New York Herald*, Feb. 21, p. 4, Lit & Art Sec.).

As Cran was referring to the first hand-forging of an actual U.S.-made golf iron, some background is naturally warranted to test the assertion.

Cran, born on a farm in Aberdeenshire in 1868, had by the age of 18 finished an apprenticeship in the small blacksmith shop of William Whyte (whom he celebrated as his mentor in a poem years later), where he remained for two years. Sometime around 1890 he ventured south to Anstruther to the forge of the very busy clubmaker James Anderson. Having started in the 1860s, Anderson was at that time operating 14 forges, at least by 1892 (*The Clubmaker’s Art*, Jeff Ellis, I, 126).

At first a novice, Cran learned quickly and before long was very proficient. Apparently he also worked at the forge of another club maker, possibly Robert Condie of



JAMES CRAN, photographed for “*Railway and Locomotive Engineering*” March 1914.

St. Andrews (himself once an Anderson student), before immigrating to America in 1896. Within the span of a few months he working for A. G. Spalding & Bros. (Spalding Manufacturing Co.) in Chicopee, Mass.

A second interview with Cran, also in 1909, offers more insight to the young smith.

“[In Scotland] I learned to make iron golf clubs, and in a short time got to be quite an expert at that work. On



THE CRAN CLEEK received a patent in 1897. The wood inlay was held in place by two screws from the back. A.G. Spalding & Bros. produced the club until 1919.

reaching New York the first thing I did was to take in the sights, and on passing Spalding-Bidwell’s store on Forty-second Street [Spalding-Bidwell Co.; Inc., 1895; five-story “Spalding Building” at 29-33 West 42 St., Spalding’s “uptown depot”] I noticed in their window some iron golf clubs which I had made in Scotland. I made bold enough to go inside and interview the man in charge, and was advised by him to go to the store on Nassau Street [headquarters at 126-133 Nassau St.]. This I did, with the result that about two weeks afterward I was employed by them for some time in New York. Later I was employed as foreman of the forging, grinding, filing, and polishing departments, which position I held for about four years. When various changes were made at the factory I looked for other employment. I was among the first, if not the first, to make an iron golf club in this country. (James Cran, “A Maker of Golf Clubs,” *The American Blacksmith*, March 1909, 133.)

**What Cran saw** in the Spalding-Bidwell store window may well have been an Anderson-made club, as Spalding advertised in the July 6, 1896 issue of *Golfing*, “We carry the largest stock of IMPORTED CLUBS in the country, including Forgan’s, Morris’s, Clark’s, Hutchinson’s, Park’s, Anderson’s, McEwan’s, etc., etc.”

These were advertised at the same price as “Our Own Make.”

Spalding’s use of the term “our own make” in mid-1896 throws some doubt on Cran’s claim to be among the very first forgers of exclusively American clubs.

In the May 1895 Spalding Golf Guide, editor L.B. Stoddard, himself a crack golfer, wrote that “A.G. Spalding & Bros. have been making clubs themselves now for over a year...”

That phrase places Spalding’s manufacture of clubs to 1894, perhaps even to 1893, when the company negotiated

for the plant of the Lamb Knitting Machine Manufacturing Company in Chicopee, Mass.

The Spalding ad (shown at right) on the first two pages of the 1895 *Golf Guide* further consolidates the idea of forged clubs made of that date, as it pictures not only a wood with the “single baseball mark” on its head, but shows what appears to be a cleek or putter with the description:

“Our iron clubs are all made of the best chilled steel, hand forged, and have been carefully selected as to pattern by skilled Golfing experts.”

The advertisement also mentions “Special Clubs in Wood or Iron made to order,” the existence of a repair department, and a full line of “foreign clubs” from Forgan, Anderson, and Clark Bros.

Spalding’s claim of using “the best chilled steel” also appears in an earlier ad in the March 1895 issue of *Outing* magazine. “Chilled steel” refers to the result of a special hardening process in the molding of steel. Such terms indicate that Spalding was forging golf clubs by 1895.

**To bolster our evidence** for Spalding club making as early as 1894, there is a Spalding ad in the September 1898 issue of *Golf (an Official Bulletin of the USGA)*, which finds the club maker saying it had “commenced making golf clubs four years ago.”

Also in this ad:

“In 1895 and 1896 we bought all the persimmon and dogwood suitable for the purpose which could be secured. . . . In the spring of 1897 we secured some of the best cleek blacksmiths in Scotland [Cran came in 1896], and we hand-hammer all our first-grade clubs [“Hand Forged” is impressed on the backs of “The Spalding” series clubs].

A die for a drop-forging costs about \$75; we will duplicate any iron for \$1.50, of any pattern.

This latter fact alone proves that they must be hand-hammered, i.e., \$75 is the cost of individual dies; J. H. Williams in Brooklyn was drop forging golf clubs perhaps as early as 1896 or 97, certainly by 1898.

Spalding’s claim that it secured “some of the best blacksmiths in Scotland” in the spring of 1897 implies increased production that year (when “The Spalding” series was introduced, including Cran’s “brassie cleek,” patent applied for April 21, 1897). Spalding’s *Official Golf Guide* of September 1897 contains the claim that “The Spalding” irons are “made by Scotch clubmakers and are entirely hand made . . . . The heads are all hand forged from the finest mild steel” (Ellis, II, 573).

According to Ellis, the 1897 Guide lists six cleeks, one Cran brassie cleek, one mid-iron, two driving irons, four lofters, two putters, one niblick, and eight mashies, one being a Ball Back Lofting Mashie (produced 1897 only). Most of these have become more or less “common” clubs



The advertisement for Spalding Iron Golf Clubs features a central illustration of a golf club, likely a Mashie, with a wooden head and a metal shaft. The club is positioned diagonally, with the head pointing towards the bottom left. Above the club, the text "Spalding" is written in a decorative script, followed by "IRON GOLF CLUBS" in a bold, serif font. To the right of the club, the words "Mashie", "Cleek", "Putter", "Niblick", "Iron", "Medium", and "Lofting Iron" are listed vertically. Below the club, the text "GUARANTEED HIGHEST QUALITY." is prominently displayed. Underneath this, a paragraph states: "Our Iron Clubs are all made of the best chilled steel, hand finished, and have been carefully selected as to pattern by skilled Golfing experts. The shafts are all riveted into the hose and the finish is of the finest." This is followed by the price "Any style club, \$2.00." Below this, there are two sections: "Special Clubs" which says "In Wood or Iron made to order, or any club leather-faced or altered to suit individual taste." and "Repairing" which says "This department is in charge of an expert, and all work of this nature will have prompt and careful attention." At the bottom, it says "Our Complete Illustrated Catalogue Mailed Free to any Address." and "A. G. SPALDING & BROS." with locations "New York, Chicago, Philadelphia." listed below.

for collectors, but certainly not the 1897 “Driving Niblick” or “Center Shafted Lofting-Mashie.”

Jim “The Spalding Man” Cooper catalogues some 23 different “The Spalding” clubs in his original pamphlet *A. G. Spalding & Bros. Pre-1930 Clubs, Trademarks. . . . with Addenda* (1985-1993; book, *Early United States Golf Clubs*, 1994). He also had access to Spalding’s *Spring and Summer Sports 1896 Catalogue 106* and pictures some of the “single baseball mark” clubs he says were therein (my own 1896 Catalogue doesn’t show them).

Cooper mistakenly, I think, believes that Spalding’s first production of clubs began in late 1894 in Chicago (their SMCo mark). He finds himself “in complete agreement” with H. B. Martin (*Fifty Years of American Golf*, 1936) that Spalding “made their first golf clubs in 1894,” which may well be, but not in Chicago.

### The hand forging vs. drop forging controversy

Cran’s claim to have been the first, or among the first, to have forged a golf iron in the United States seems dubious, given Spalding’s own literature. Cran also ventured onto contested ground over the public dispute in the early 1898 issues of New York’s *Golf* magazine about the merits of hand forged versus drop forged iron clubs.

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In two letters in the March (writing as “A Scott”) and the May issues (writing as himself), he takes a strong stand for hand forging. He finds that

“...there is just as much difference between a hand forged golf club and one that has been drop forged as there is between a fine oil painting and a cheap print, which may look just as good to those who do not know the difference, but still one is a work of art while the other is but the outcome of a mechanical operation. I think I am as able as anyone else to speak upon this matter, as I can say without exaggeration that I have handled more golf clubs in the year than either Mr.

Lee or Mr. J. D. Dunn has done in his lifetime” (*Golf*, May 1898, p. 48).

Lee, perhaps connected with the J. H. Williams Co., which was then advertising in *Golf*, was a proponent of drop forging. John Dunn, of course, was the famous professional and clubmaker, who, with Lee, had defended drop forging in earlier letters to *Golf*.

Drawing on his “considerable experience,” but unnamed as to place, Cran, sometimes sarcastically, counters the drop-forged argument for its uniformity and “consolidation” of mild steel with his stress on the artistry and expertise involved in hand forging each separate club.

While with Spalding he had invented and patented two clubs, the second an iron with a cavity for a moveable weight (Patent No. 645942, filed 11/29/1899 and granted 3/27/1900). Ironically, his second patent, for a club head with a moveable weight, notes, “The invention is particularly applicable to iron clubs, which are preferably made of soft steel and drop-forged, but may also be made of mal-

leable iron or other metal and formed in any suitable manner.” (Google Patents)

This bow to drop forging comes the year after his extolling hand forging in *Golf*. Perhaps the cavity design accounts for this.

## Cran’s Blacksmithing Career

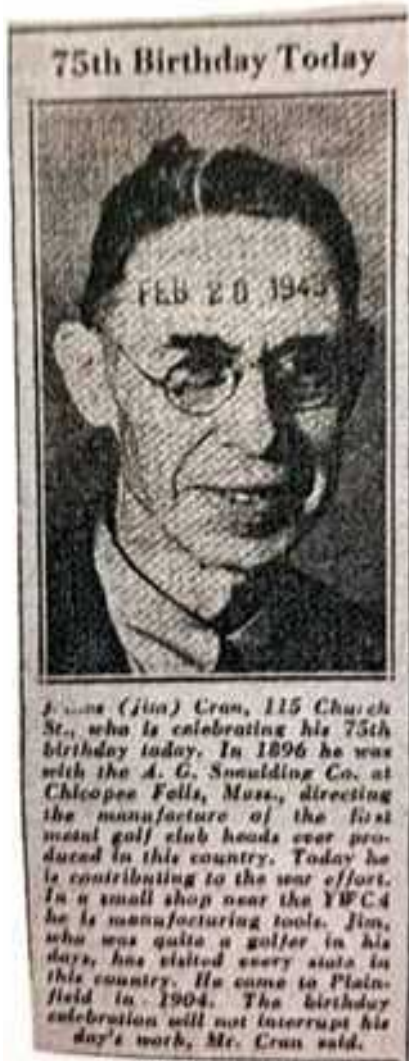
In 1900 Cran left A. G. Spalding and the making of golf clubs because of “various changes” in the factory, he writes in one instance. In the 1909 *Herald* interview, he explains that while at Spalding, “in my spare time I studied mechanical drawing and read all the literature upon iron and steel working that I could find. This caused me to look for a wider field than the making of golf clubs and forgings on other kinds of sporting goods, and I found it in machine forging. In 1900 I entered the employment of the Electric Vehicle Company of Hartford, Conn., as a machine blacksmith, and have followed that brand since then. The variety of work that has to be done by the blacksmith for the construction of different kinds of machinery is such that it keeps interest fresh, something new coming along all the time” (Feb. 21, p. 4).

The Electric Vehicle Company, where he apparently stayed for only a few months, was a partner in making the early Columbia electric automobile. From Hartford Cran traveled west to spend a year in Stockton, Calif. with the Holt Manufacturing Company, a company that eventually melded into the Caterpillar Tractor Company. In the interim, for another year he had worked as instructor of blacksmithing at Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan, Kan.

He would later return East, around 1905, and would work for 10 years as foreman for the Niles, Bemet, Pond Tool Company of Plainfield, N.J., where he stayed for 10 years, partially working on gun lathes for the government. During WWI he worked for Ludlum Steel Company, Watervliet, N.Y. as a testing representative; then on oil well machinery in the Southwest. In Norwood, Ohio, he worked for the Dalton Adding Machine Company, and later, until it folded during the Great Depression, for the Wadsworth Watch Case Company of Dayton, Ky., his most exacting smith work.

Some time in the early 1930s he returned to Plainfield, N.J., where he worked at his own small forge at 115 Church St., until about a year before his death in March 1949, at age 81.

We actually know so much about Cran and his early involvement in golf club making because of his avocation, artistic blacksmithing. About 1908 in Plainfield he became interested in designing metal flowers. An article of November 1917, in *The Art World* titled, “James Cran, Craftsman



**BIRTHDAY NOTICE.** From the “Plainfield [NJ] Courier News,” Feb. 20, 1943.



of the Forge” explains how Cran challenged himself to make a rose of iron in imitation of Louis Van Boeckel, a famous Belgian art smith of the time, indeed the most famous. Within a month, Cran had apparently made what was judged an even better creation than Van Boeckel’s, and thus began a side career than won him some fame. A number of articles of the time highlight Cran’s artistry, and in them he backgrounds his career beginning at Spalding in 1896.

### Writer and Editor

Cran enjoyed crafting words as well as iron and served as a writer and editor for publications in the world of blacksmiths and machinists. About 1910 he became associate editor of *The Crowbar: A Practical Journal for Blacksmiths, Horseshoers and Wagonmakers*, and also of *The American Blacksmith*. He became advisory editor of *American Ironsmith* and contributed regularly to *Machinery and American Machinists*, all according to information in his obituary in the March 22, 1949 Plainfield Courier News.

Searching the internet reveals that several publications by Cran can be found in reprint, namely *Machine Blacksmithing* (editions of 1909 and 1910) and *Blacksmith Shop Practice* (from 1910).

A pretty erudite article of his is “History and Development of the Anvil,” from *The American Blacksmith*, September 1914. As we might guess from his two golf patents, Cran was an ever curious and ever expanding practitioner in his field.

An article by John B. Mehl on Cran published in the *Plainfield Courier News*, Oct. 18, 1941, just before the war, describes Cran as “quite a golfer in those days” of his early life. “One of his favorite golfing spots was the Baltusrol course in Springfield.” We can conjecture that he played at what is called the Baltusrol Old Course (1895-1919) while working as a foreman at Pond’s in Plainfield. The course is about six miles north of Plainfield. As a foreman, he might have qualified as a guest at the private club. Less likely is that he golfed in his 60s during the Depression years.

### The author’s Cran club

I have something of a personal connection to James Cran in the form of a golf club, pictured at right, which I picked up years ago. The impression on this what-I-take-to-be driving iron, “Jas. Cran” in very small letters, and the cleek mark of an equally small lion rampant indicate to me that this club is one made for or by James Cran himself.

Although I suspect this club is the only one of its kind in existence, it is similar to “The Spalding” driving iron of c. 1897 to 1900, with a flat back, rather like the one pictured on pages three and five of J. M. Cooper’s first pamphlet (shown there as the 1897 “Spalding Special” in script).



THE AUTHOR’S  
Cran driving iron.

As for the small lion cleek mark, two possibilities come to mind. In their book *Cleek Marks and Trademarks on Antique Golf Clubs* (2000) Peter Georgiady and Patrick Kennedy cite on page 209 the same lion mark as belonging to Wright & Ditson (a part of Spalding during Cran’s time): “Some of the first clubs imported into the U. S. from Scottish makers were sold by Wright & Ditson after they had been stamped with their Lion mark. This tiny lion mark is from the mid 1890s.”

Georgiady and Kennedy note the rampant lion mark as registered in the U.S. to John Duncan Dunn on Jan. 1, 1897, “the third golf mark trademarked in the U.S.” (p. 39).

The lion rampant is to be found on The Royal Banner of Scotland (or Lion Rampant of Scotland) and is of course associated with Great Britain as The Royal Standard of the United Kingdom. Cran’s “Cran cleek” patent application of April 21, 1897, begins, “Be it known that I, James Cran, a subject of the Queen of Great Britain, and a resident of Chicopee Falls . . .” Thus, the lion mark may be a nod to his home country rather than an affiliation with the Spalding family of cleek marks.

Whatever the case, this club has drawn me – together with the fame of the Cran Cleek – to investigate a man whose name is legendary in golf, and who, I hope it can be agreed, led a rather remarkable life. ¶

# James Cran at Chicopee Falls

*And a note about two contemporaries – James Dalgliesh and RG MacAndrew*



EARLY POST CARD shows the Oxford CC, a course with which clubmaker James Cran may have been quite familiar. It was in the vicinity of the A.G. Spalding manufacturing plant in Chicopee Falls, Mass.

Wayne McGinnis supplements his research into James Cran (*The Golf*, Winter 2018) with additional insights and a brief look at two of Cran's contemporaries. – Ed.

**By Wayne D. McGinnis**

In my article on James Cran (1868-1949) in *The Golf*, (V.2, Winter 2018, 20-23), I traced the history of this inventor of the Spalding Cran “brassie-cleek” from his arrival in the U.S. from Scotland in August 1896, where in New York City he was almost immediately employed by A. G. Spalding & Bros. and then soon sent to their plant in Chicopee, Mass. There he was “employed as foreman of the forging, grinding, filing, and polishing departments ... for about four years” (James Cran, “A Maker of Golf Clubs,” *The American Blacksmith*, 8.6 March, 1909). While at Spalding in Chicopee, he soon invented the Cran Cleek, patent filed April 21, 1897, and granted June 8, 1897.

Since writing this article, I have learned more about Cran's stay in Chicopee Falls (where he primarily lived) and about some of his fellow Scots employees of the Spalding Manufacturing Company. Perhaps most interesting is his association with the Hampden County Golf Club in Chicopee Falls, where he was on the three-man governing committee in 1898 and 1899. Local historian Stephen R. Jendrysik, in his book *Chicopee* (Arcadia, 2005), writes of this club, which sometime after 1902 became known as the Oxford Country Club:

*“[It] was one of the oldest golf courses in the United States. It was first organized in 1889 by a small group of Chicopee sportsmen who were intrigued with the game of golf. The 1889 layout was on the south side of East Main Street, where nine holes were crowded into a small area of rugged land that had been cleared of dense brush and trees. . . . In 1895, the country club purchased the Warner farm on the north side of East Main Street. The farmhouse was converted into a clubhouse, and the course was enlarged and realigned along the Chicopee River.” (59, 60).*

This description puts the club in the ranks of St. Andrews in Yonkers, N.Y.; (1888) and other equally old claimants such as Foxburg, Pa. (1887), Oakhurst Links (1884), Dorset Field Club, Vt. (1886), and Louisville, Ky., Golf Club, also dating to 1886.

Hampden County Golf Club was, according to Josiah Newman's *The Official Golf Guide for 1899*, “chiefly supported by employees of the Lamb Manufacturing Co., who send golf clubs all over the world” (157). The Lamb Manufacturing Company was originally the Lamb Knitting Machine Manufacturing Company, until the plant was purchased by A. G. Spalding in 1893. The Lamb name was apparently interchangeable with “Spalding Manufacturing Co.” for some time. We can perhaps imagine Cran testing out his newly developed cleek on the grounds of this golf course.

## **James Dalgleish**

Newman's 1899 and 1900 *Official Guide* also lists Cran's fellow Scot and Spalding employee, James Dalgleish, as Captain of the Hampden County Golf Club and holder of the “remarkable” professional record of 27, recorded on July 4, 1897. Dalgleish (1865-1935) is the inventor of the ridge or barrel-sole brassie named after him, the patent assigned to A. G. Spalding & Bros., filed Nov. 29, 1899 and granted on March 27, 1900. (These dates happen to duplicate the ones for James Cran's second patent with Spalding, a patent for an iron with a weighted back cavity, apparently never produced.)

Jeff Ellis, in *The Clubmaker's Art* (I, 315), supplies an interesting background on Dalgleish, taken from the British publication *Golfing* (March 11, 1896: 8):

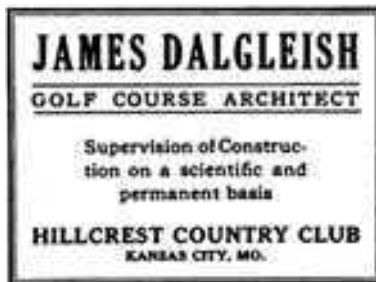
*James Dalgleish, the professional of the Glasgow Golf Club at Gables, has decided to go to America, and sets out early next month, his destination, in the first instance,*



being New York, in connection with which, it is well known, there are a large number of golf clubs. Dalglish will be an acquisition to the ranks of the professionals there, for he is a steady, reliable man, a first-rate clubmaker, and though not in the first rank as a golfer, he plays a good round, while having a thorough knowledge of the game both theoretical and practical. He is a good coach. He learned his trade and his golf with A[ndrew]. Forgan, Glasgow, and prior to his connection with Gales was connected with Alexandra Park [a Glasgow golf course]. There seems to be a good opening in the United States for such men as Dalglish, and with his knowledge of all that pertains to the game of golf, he cannot fail to get an opportunity for the exercise of his talents.



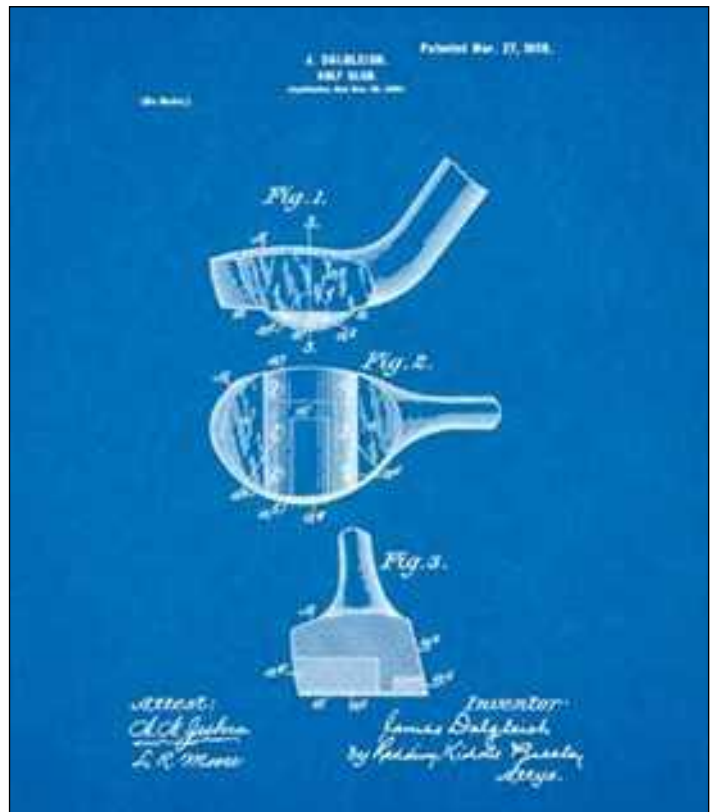
**JAMES DALGLEISH** was a clubmaker and professional from Glasgow who also worked for Spalding and later moved to Kansas City, Mo., becoming known as the Dean of Kansas City Golf Professionals. Below, an ad from a 1921 golf magazine.



This glowing account rather presages his first being listed as employee, then as a foreman at the Lamb Manufacturing Co [i.e., Spalding Mfg Co.] in the *Chicopee Directory*, 1897, 1898 and after (Price & Lee Co., Springfield, Mass.). Interestingly, he wasted no time upon his arrival in the U.S., in April 1896 entering the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills in July but playing only one round (he is listed as affiliated with Shinnecock Hills). His brother George was a long time employee of Spalding, which was fond of advertising its clubs as fashioned by “expert Scotch club makers,” and was part of the governing committee of the Hampden County Golf Club in 1898 and 1899. In 1903 James Dalglish left for Kansas City, Mo., an area in which he eventually designed a number of golf courses. In a long career he became known as the Dean of Kansas City Golf Professionals.

### R. G. McAndrew

In an advertisement in the September 1898 issue of *Golf* magazine (New York), the Spalding Company notes that it had “commenced making golf clubs four years ago [i.e., 1894]” and further states, “In the spring of 1897 we



PATENT DESIGN for the ridge or barrel-sole brassie by James Dalglish.

secured some of the best cleek blacksmiths in Scotland.” This claim necessarily brings up the name of another Scots blacksmith and cleek maker, Robert Grieve McAndrew [also, more aptly, MacAndrew, and, mistakenly, McAndrews or Andrews; we will use *McAndrew* in this article].

R. G. McAndrew (1869-1951) came to the Spalding company from prior experience at St. Andrews, Scotland, where he had made clubs (a cleek is pictured on p. 207 of Pete Georgiady’s *Wood Shafted Golf Club Value Guide*, 8th ed.). According to his great-granddaughter, he was called over to America by Spalding in 1897, and he did indeed play in the third (1897) U.S. Open in September in Chicago, affiliated with “Hudson” and finishing tied for 21st. An ad by him in *Golf* (N.Y.), 1898, states that “R. G. McAndrew, late of St. Andrews, Scotland, can now supply any of his late customers direct with first-class iron heads” and lists his address as Nantasket Beach, which is south of Boston. His best golf showing was in the 1898 Open at Myopia Hunt Club, where, playing out of Cohasset, southeast of Boston, he finished tied for 8th. In 1900 in Chicago he tied for 23rd, then tied for 40th in 1904 at Glen View, and in 1905 he was cut at Myopia.

*The Chicopee Directory* for 1898 lists McAndrew as an employee of the Lamb Mfg. Co., but a later directory, possibly for 1900, lists him as “rem [removed to] Kentucky.” His great-granddaughter, Terri MacAndrew (*electricScotland.com*: Scots Around the World: A Family of Golf Pros), says

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that in 1900, when his whole family finally came over to America, he moved to Dayton, Ohio, to work for Crawford, McGregor & Canby, but another source, *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* (UP of Kentucky, 2000), states that at the Louisville Golf Club, Scot Robert White “in 1899, formed a partnership with another of his countrymen, Robert Andrews. The two opened a blacksmith’s shop across the road from the course, where they produced ‘hand forged’ irons that were shipped throughout the nation. Gilbert Nichols, David Ogilvie, and Alex Smith were among the golf professionals who were known to play with ‘McAndrews’ [sic] Irons’” (343).

In fact, *Golf* (N.Y.), from March to the end of the year 1899, ran an advertisement by McAndrew & White of Louisville promoting their clubs, including gun metal putters and putting cleeks. Pete Georgiady’s *Value Guide*, 9th ed., does indeed picture a mashie labeled “McAndrew & White/ Louisville.”

It is known that in 1901 and 1902 McAndrew was the original designer and greenskeeper and then professional at the new Nashville Country Club. In 1902 he supervised building the course at Fort Worth Country Club, its nine holes completed in 1903. In 1904 he became professional at Wollaston Club in Milton, Mass. His four sons, Jim, Bob, Jock, and Charles, all eventually became golf professionals themselves, ensuring a long span of McAndrew golfers.

These three early contemporaneous Spalding employees – Cran, Dalgleish, and McAndrew – all born roughly at the



IRON made by R.G. McAndrew

same time in Scotland, went on to have productive careers, two of them as professionals and one, Cran, as a talented artist in iron. Perhaps, not coincidentally, during their time at Spalding some of the more exotic Spalding clubs were produced, such as the ball back lofting mashie, the center shafted lofting mashie, and the oval-headed driving niblick, each produced in 1897 with the new “The Spalding” model name, as was the Cran cleek.

In looking at their whole careers, it can be safely said that each of these men contributed significantly to the early history of golf in America. ¶

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