



# GARY GALYEAN'S GOLF LETTER

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Dear Subscriber:

## Vermeer, Rembrandt & Macdonald The Acquisition of Art and Golf in America – 1910 & 1911

The hurried, almost frenzied emergence of Shinnecock Hills in 1891, after golf was discovered by a couple of New Yorkers visiting Biarritz, has been historically reconstructed on these pages more than once, with credit due and given David Goddard.

On the competitive sporting side, as opposed to the competitive social side, we have written the gripping story of John J. McDermott, Jr., who in 1911 was the first American-born winner—and still the youngest at age 19 years 10 months and 14 days—of the U.S. Open. He repeated his victory the following year. Two years later he entered a Norristown, Pennsylvania, mental hospital where he lived until his death in 1971.

These were also years when America was rolling toward greater wealth and stature on the world economic stage. Income tax was not levied until 1913. The rough and brutal industrialization of the country was creating stupendous wealth and, therefore, opportunity for the expansion of art collecting, architecture, infrastructure, and sport.

The affluence of America's untaxed industrialists put them in art gallery sales rooms with worlds of money to be spent that would transfer a significant portion of the artistic wealth of Europe to the United States. This was not done with animosity or violence. The British and European sellers of these notable pieces were only too happy to exchange them for large amounts of cash. However, it was competitive, and the competition was intense among the handful of Americans who had the inclination and

wherewithal to find, negotiate for, acquire, and display important European works of art. The notable art dealers of the day were predictably as much a part of the fray as the sellers and buyers.

The columns that follow are an attempt to historically bracket an important year, 1911, in the acquisition and transfer of European Old Master art to America with the simultaneous opening of what is America's most architecturally-influential golf course: The National Golf Links of America.

Setting the stage for all that was about to happen, it is useful to remember a few important details. By this time, Garden City (1899), golf (1902) at The Country Club, and Oakmont (1903) had been formed. Donald Ross, born at Dornoch in 1872 and immigrated to America in 1899, tied for eighth in the 1910 Open Championship at St. Andrews.

In 1910, Jack Johnson became the first black boxer to win the heavyweight title; the Union of South Africa was established; the Portuguese monarchy ended; Japan annexed Korea; Winslow Homer and King Edward VII died; federal spending totaled \$690 million; and the longer Haskell ball forced Merion Cricket Club's decision to build a longer course.

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ROYAL COUNTY DOWN'S EVOLUTION



Woman Holding a Balance  
Vermeer - 1662

Information on art sales comes primarily from *OLD MASTERS, NEW WORLD: AMERICA'S RAID ON EUROPE'S GREAT PICTURES* by Cynthia Saltzman [Penguin, 2008] – a fascinating, beautifully-written account of the art collecting and social history of the Gilded Age.

All the players, their chases, and transactions, are touched upon including Otto Gutekunst, Charles Carstairs, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Bernard Berenson, J. Pierpont Morgan, Henry Clay Frick, Harry Havemeyer, and Joseph Duveen - not to mention Rembrandt, El Greco, van Dyck, Raphael, Gainsborough, Vermeer and Velázquez.

In 1911, The National Golf Links of America opened at Sebonac Neck, Long Island, as did Interlachen in Edina, Minnesota. As noted earlier, Mr. McDermott became the first American-born winner of the U.S. Open. Machu Picchu was discovered in the Andes (the only place it could have been discovered); *Madame Butterfly* opened at La Scala; the Indianapolis 500 was first won (at an average speed of 74 m.p.h.); and Donald Ross won the second of his two Massachusetts Opens.

By the end of 1914, three years before the Bolshevik Revolution, the pinnacle of the Gilded Age's Old Master art collecting had been climbed when the Czar Nikolai II outflanked Joseph Duveen by exercising his option to purchase Leonardo da Vinci's *Benois Madonna* for a price of \$1.5 million (\$40.4 million today). Prior to the Czar's move, Mr. Duveen had offered \$5 million (\$135 million today) for the painting. That incredible price was supported by a market driven by the demands of American industrialists with an ocean of dollars. But we jump ahead.

The sale of two paintings by the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer illustrates the heat of the 1910 art market. In the autumn of 1910, Otto Gutekunst—representing the art dealer Colnaghi's in London—wrote to Charles

Carstairs—representing the art dealer Knoedler in New York—about Mr. Gutekunst's recent acquisition of Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* for Colnaghi's. "The Vermeer has come home and looks magnificent," Mr. Gutekunst wrote. Colnaghi's set the price at \$200,000 (\$5.4 million today) and put the painting on display in Bond Street. Just before Christmas, Queen Alexandra and the Prince of Wales came to see it. "Nobody has considered (\$5.4 million today) excessive up to now and everybody admits that our picture is one of the finest [Vermeer] painted," Mr. Gutekunst wrote Mr. Carstairs.

About this same time, Mr. Carstairs was visiting Henry Frick, 62, at his home at Prides Crossing, Massachusetts. This was prior to the construction (1913-1914) of Mr. Frick's home on Fifth Avenue that now houses the Frick Collection. Mr. Carstairs reported, "[Mr. Frick] is very much interested in the Vermeer, but seems to think the price frightful, that, however, was to be expected." Mr. Carstairs apparently surmised Mr. Frick to be interested enough that on Christmas Eve the painting was shipped to New York in hopes of further whetting the appetites of "Yankee vagabondi," as Giacomo Puccini described us in *Madame Butterfly*.

Mr. Frick declined the Vermeer. Mr. Carstairs then directed his approach toward Benjamin Altman, 71, whose burgeoning dry goods business would shortly occupy the entire block between Madison and Fifth Avenues, and 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> streets. Mr. Altman balked at the Vermeer stating that "he would have bought it a month ago if it hadn't been exhibited but he wanted to be offered pictures first". Mr. Carstairs countered in a note back to Mr. Gutekunst in London, "They are a rare lot these picture buyers."

Mr. Carstairs next moved his attention down the road to Philadelphia and Peter A.B. Widener, 77, who made his first fortune supplying meat to the Union Army during the Civil War. His son, Joseph, would become the founding benefactor of the National Gallery. On Jan.

11, 1911, Mr. Widener bought *Woman Holding a Balance* for a reduced price of \$175,000 (\$4.7 million today). This was a sum, according to Ms. Saltzman, that was 75 percent higher than what J. Pierpont Morgan paid for his Vermeer just four years earlier.

Three days after Mr. Widener's purchase, The National Golf Links of America became a member of the United States Golf Association. While the Club was incorporated in March

1908, construction and trouble with the first iteration of putting greens pushed the official opening to Sept. 11, 1911. It was Charles Blair Macdonald who envisioned a course comprised of design elements of Great Britain's greatest holes, studied those holes, raised the money, purchased the property, and oversaw the design, layout, and construction. Mr. Macdonald was a force in American golf such as will never be seen or felt again.

The National was his first design and the enormity of its success and influence played out during the same years that so many substantial art transactions were taking place. Bernard Darwin commented, "Those who think [The National] is the greatest course in the world may be right or wrong, but are certainly not to be accused of any intemperateness of judgment."

While early rounds were contemplated on the shore of Peconic Bay, Diego Velázquez's portrait *Philip IV* appeared at the gallery of M. Knoedler & Company in Manhattan on Feb. 20. Messrs. Gutekunst and Carstairs owned half the picture that had been acquired for \$415,000 (\$11.2 million today). Their hope was to find a buyer for \$515,000 (\$13.9 million today). After Mr.



The National Golf Links of America - Macdonald - 1916

Frick expressed his interest, the picture was moved to his New York residence for two days of his private consideration. During the last week of February, he bought the picture for \$475,000 (\$12.8 million today).

In May 1911, Mr. Gutekunst and Mr. Carstairs tried their Vermeer approach for a second time with Mr. Frick. They bought Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl* and then, heeding Mr. Altman's earlier comment about not being properly treated, gave Mr. Frick first refusal.

Having seen it in New York, Mr. Frick asked that it be sent to Prides Crossing, where he usually spent the summer and early autumn with his art collection that traveled there with him. This time the dealers' approach worked. Mr. Frick bought the painting for \$225,000 (\$6 million today), which was close to ten times what he had spent in 1898 for Vermeer's *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*.

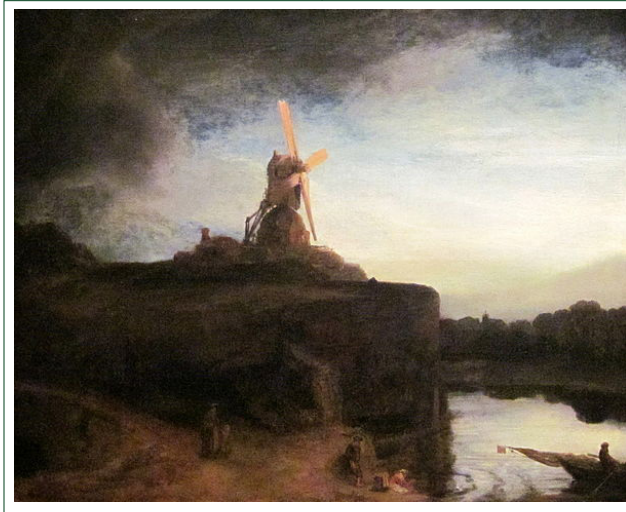
Ms. Saltzman makes the point that while Mr. Frick complained about rising prices he no doubt was simultaneously recalculating the value of his collection. Before the end of 1911, Messrs. Gutekunst and Carstairs tried a Vermeer approach yet again. However, the gringos had grown bored and *Girl with a Flute* was sold to an Amsterdam industrialist.

In the meantime, Mr. Widener set a new price record with his purchase of Rembrandt's *The Mill*. The previous record was set 10 years before by J. Pierpont Morgan's purchase of Raphael's *Colonna Madonna* for a price of \$400,000 (\$10.8 million today). *The Mill* was owned by Lord Lansdowne who loaned it to the National Gallery in London while also offering to sell it to the museum for \$475,000 (\$12.8 million today). When the museum could not raise the funds, the picture was touted elsewhere. Ms. Saltzman reports that Mr. Widener and his son saw the picture at the National Gallery in the summer of 1910 and asked Arthur J. Sulley, the art dealer, to arrange its purchase. Mr. Widener paid \$500,000 (\$13.5 million today).

As would be the case today, enormous public interest was ignited by reports of the sale price. Mr. Gutekunst wrote, "[*The Mill*] is still at the National Gallery attracting thousands; not by nature of its merits but through the huge price & sensational press utterances."

As 1911 came to an end, Mr. Macdonald's success at The National gained widespread recognition. Hence his work at Piping Rock and Sleepy Hollow were both underway. During the year, the U.S.G.A. accepted membership from 34 new golf clubs, including 5 in Illinois, 4 in Pennsylvania, and 3 each in California, Michigan, and Missouri. The game was expanding with the railroad network that was bringing distant communities in closer touch with the popular social trends of the East Coast.

While 1911 was a high point in the transfer of European art to America as well as the incubation of American golf course architecture, the year was but an intermediate stop in the pursuit of both. The sinking of *RMS Titanic* the following year would briefly dampen these interests. Mr. Morgan, Mr. and Mrs. Frick, Mr. and Mrs. George D. Widener, and the Wideners' son, Harry, all booked passage on the ship's maiden and final voyage. Mr. Morgan changed his plans. The



THE MILL - Rembrandt - 1667

Fricks postponed their crossing when Mrs. Frick sprained her ankle. The Wideners sailed and both Widener men died. Eleanor, George's wife and Harry's mother, was saved. Three years later, she endowed Harvard University's Widener Library in memory of her drowned son.

Happier news in that same year was the opening of Merion's new course in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. The course was a brilliant design by Hugh Wilson, 32, a Merion member who had never before designed a golf course. The inspiration for his work, which is another of America's and the world's finest, was to study the great British courses prior to beginning Merion. Mr. Wilson's method emulated Mr. Macdonald's approach at The National.

- In 1913 ... income tax was ratified by an amendment to the Constitution.
- Joseph Widener, Peter's third and youngest son, paid the record breaking price of \$565,000 (\$15.2 million today) for Raphael's *Small Cowper Madonna*.
- Arabella Huntington gave Mr. Duveen \$650,000 (\$17.5 million) for Velázquez's *Count-Duke of Olivares*.
- Pine Valley and Pebble Beach opened before the end of the decade.

Golf in the 1920s flowered with the work of Mr. Ross, Alister MacKenzie, and George Thomas while young Jackson Pollock studied sculpture and painting at

Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles ... but that's a kettle of fish of a different color.

### Royal County Down [Newcastle] Among the Best Seven in the World

Since 1889, the design of the course at Royal County Down a.k.a. Newcastle has undergone the attention of a dozen different contributors and various Club committeemen who produced 18 iterations before the course that is played today. Tracking the evolution of those changes is the thesis of Richard Latham's book *THE EVOLUTION OF THE LINKS AT THE ROYAL COUNTY DOWN GOLF CLUB*. This book brings together balanced measures of social, sporting, and architectural history creating a thorough understanding of the course that is among everyone's world top seven. Mr. Latham begins with the emergence of golf in Newcastle [Northern Ireland], moves to the arrival of Old Tom Morris, the course's maturity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its new layout in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its last significant phase between 1918 and 1930, and the changes made in 2006 to accommodate the 2007 Walker Cup Match.

In each instance, routing, hazard location, length, and hole names are recorded. To aid the reader's understanding of the design evolution, the course's layout - particular to a specific time - is superimposed on the layout as we know it today. This technique allows us to rely on what we know by playing it today and then visualize how it was in 1895, 1902, or 1927.

The fifth chapter focuses on the work of Harry S. Colt in 1925 - the phase of the last significant development. Mr. Colt and his partner Hugh Alison are, to this day, considered among the half dozen greatest architects the game has ever known. The Colt & Alison approach is described generally and its application at Newcastle specifically with a table of changes, some drawings,

before and after photographs, and another table of minor changes. An excerpt:

*The final development of significance occurred in 1925 when it was agreed that Harry Colt should be invited to give his opinion on further course improvements. One of the few criticisms of the course since the early 1900s had been the number of blindshots and the Club had worked hard to overcome this feature. Colt would have been instructed to review the whole course but there is no doubt that he would have been asked to give particular attention to the blind 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> holes. Colt visited the Club in the autumn of 1925 and gave a full report on both the long course and the nine hole ladies' course ...*

*At the Green Committee meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1925 Colt's report was presented. The first major alteration included splitting the long par 5 4<sup>th</sup> hole in two by creating a medium length par 3 followed by a medium length par 4.*

As a result of Mr. Colt's recommendation, the 4<sup>th</sup> became one of the world's greatest short holes and one of the most photographed.

All golf club histories seem to include boring, self-serving, hole-by-hole descriptions. Mr. Latham's sets a higher standard. Each description includes a view of the hole as it appears from the tee—no helicopter shots—just what you see standing on the tee; a description of the required drive follows; then a picture from the landing area to the green; and a description of that required approach. Finally, there is an aerial picture of the green with the primary putting slopes superimposed. The short holes include a satellite view directly over the entire hole.

Even if you have played Royal County Down 20 times or more, a greater understanding is had from these descriptions, maps, and images.

For S:



*"Muchachos, aim well."*

Maximilian I, brother of the Emperor of Austria-Hungary, just prior to his execution in 1867 following the unsuccessful installation of he and his wife as Emperor and Empress of Mexico by Napoleon III. He handed the firing squad gold pieces, pointed to his heart, and uttered these words.

Yours vy truly,

Gary A. Galyean  
Editor & Publisher

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