

Dr. George T. Grant

“Invented the Golf Tee in 1899”

“It took a long while for Dr. George Grant to get credit for his invention... in fact nearly a century. But he was definitely the first person to patent the golf tee.

Dr. George Franklin Grant was an avid golfer, but his skill was at question. But in the 19th century, teeing it up didn't mean sticking a peg in the ground to hold the ball. At least not until Dr. Grant invented the tee itself.

Grant -- born in Oswego, N.Y., in 1847 -- worked for his hometown dentist as a youngster, initially as an errand boy and eventually as an assistant in the lab. At the age of 19, determined to make his own way in the world, Grant left Oswego for Boston, but his funds were certainly no match for his determination.

He found work as a dental assistant and two years later earned a spot in the new Harvard Dental School. In 1870 Grant graduated with honors, becoming just the second African-American graduate of the Dental School.

The Dental School hired Grant upon graduation and he stayed for four years, specializing in his work with patients with defects on the roofs of their mouths. Grant formed individual inserts for those with cleft palates, which greatly helped those suffering in both speaking and eating. His patented oblate palate made him a forerunner in the

field, well-known in the dental community both nationally and internationally as he left Harvard to begin his own practice.

His hobby and passion became golf in that time. His daughter, Frances, recalled caddying for her father in the 1880s in the Boston suburb of Arlington Heights, where her father had built a meadow course next to his country home. The family moved to Beacon Hill, but Grant took back to Arlington Heights in his free moments, golf clubs in hand.

He and his playing partners were among the first African-American golfers in post-Civil War America. And his partners were also among the most acclaimed in Boston -- civil rights activist Archibald Grimke, noted restaurateur Howard Lee, and Butler Wilson, an 1884 Boston Law School graduate.

Dr. Grant was unhappy with the mess that came with the tee shot. The process of teeing the ball up involved pinching moist sand to fashion a tee. Doing that 18 times a round was enough to annoy Dr. Grant, so he came up with an invention that would forever have an impact. On Dec. 12, 1899, he received U.S. patent No. 638,920, the world's first patent for a golf tee.

But Grant was an inventor not a businessman and he never marketed his golfing innovation. It would be hard to imagine that any piece of sporting equipment has been used more often, but Dr. Grant had them manufactured locally and simply gave them, by the handful, to friends and playing partners.

His daughter remembered playing with the tees as a child and many were left when Dr. Grant died of liver cancer in 1910.

Yet, because his invention reached a small audience, he was not recognized for it for several decades. Another dentist -- Dr. William Lowell of Maplewood, N.J. -- popularized the tee in 1921, when he manufactured the 'reddy tee,' which was painted red.

In 1991, nearly a century after his patent, the United States Golf Association finally gave Grant recognition for his contribution to the game of golf.

— Brett Hoover”

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