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Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector

Clare Briggs on Golf

Prior to the popularity of radio, newspapers were the primary source to disseminate information, with thousands of daily papers published. Even small cities often had multiple newspapers published with both morning and afternoon editions. Within this backdrop, the illustrator Clare Briggs emerged as an important and influential cartoonist with his works distributed nationally by William Randolph Hearst's sprawling coast-to-coast syndicate. A schoolmate and friend of Normal Rockwell, he was most famous for his Sunday cartoon "Mr. & Mrs."

Briggs was also a keen golfer and took up golf at the first public course in the U.S., Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. He was also a founding member of the Wykagyl Country Club in Westchester County.

To give a sense of how well known Briggs was, when he died in 1930, among the pallbearers at his funeral were Grantland Rice and Rube Goldberg. The posthumous accolades Briggs received were many, including one from the publisher of the *Herald Tribune* who said he was "undoubtedly one of the greatest comic artists that American journalism ever produced." The cartoonist Herbert Johnson said, "His work at its best possessed genuine artistic merit of a high order in a difficult field. Plenty of comics, but only one Briggs." Former president, then Chief Justice, William Howard Taft, even weighed in on Briggs death saying, "I've very much enjoyed his cartoons and am very sorry to hear of his death."



A copy of Golf: by Briggs with the rare cardboard slipcase

In 1916 Briggs published a book of cartoons related to golf titled *Golf: The Book of a Thousand Chuckles* (Donovan & Jerris B24460). Briggs tended to focus on the struggles of the duffer and his is an interesting look back at golf as it was played over a century ago. This was golf in the era of knickers, brassies and niblicks and before wooden tees. Golfers would place their ball upon a lump of piled up sand. The book features sand boxes on the teeing ground in many of its illustrations with the ball sitting atop a small sand hill. Child caddies were also prevalent at the time and are featured throughout the book. One of their customs at the time was to sell players used balls that they had recovered and this is also illustrated in a humorous light in the book. It is also a testament to how popular the young game was in 1916 that one of the full-page illustrations shows a golfer complaining about how he got up at 5:00am to get in line at a public course and how crowded it was already. The custom at Van Cortlandt Park in this era was that players would show up at the course and put down their golf bag (all the small bags shown are what we would today call a Sunday bag) near the first tee, which would establish the order of play. There are some nice illustrations of this highlighted in the 124-page book.

The book features both black and white and some color illustrations and was issued with a cardboard slipcase, which is increasingly rare to come by.



An illustration from Briggs 1916 work Golf

The book is a valuable one to have in the golfer's library because it is illustrated. It helps to visually bring to life what golf was like in its nascent stages and provides another detailed dimension to our understanding of the game beyond the printed word.

Claire Briggs also provided the illustrations to Grantland Rice's *The Duffer's Handbook of Golf*, (Donovan & Jerris R7720) an influential book published in 1926.

- John Sabino