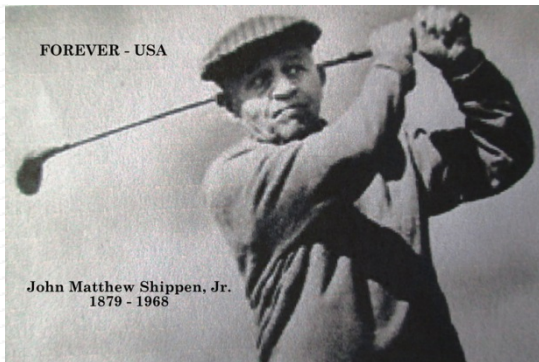


John Matthew Shippen, Jr.  
The first American-born, African American  
Golf Professional (1896)



John Matthew Shippen, Jr. (1879-1968) was born on December 12, 1879 in Washington, DC. Shippen was the fourth of nine children of John, Sr., and Eliza Spotswood Shippen. His father, a Presbyterian minister, held a degree in theology from Howard University. Shippen moved to New York at the age of 12, as one of his father's early assignments was pastor of a church on the Shinnecock Indian reservation in Southampton, New York. Two years later when a group of Southampton residents bought 80 acres in the area to build a golf course, Shinnecock Hills opened for play in 1894 as a 12-hole golf course, which was expanded to 18 holes. The owner, Scotsman Willie Dunn began to teach some of the local youth how to caddy and play golf. One of his star pupils was John Shippen, who under the watchful eye of Dunn became a fine caddy and an accomplished golfer. He was made an assistant, gave lessons to some of the club members, repaired clubs, helped out the maintenance crew, as well as serving as a starter for tournaments; all this at the age of 16.

In 1896, his golfing ability was so evident that members encouraged him to enter the second U.S. Open, scheduled at Shinnecock along with the English and Scottish golf professionals. With the club's support, Shippen entered and convinced one of his young friends, Oscar Bunn, a full-blooded Shinnecock Indian, to play also. This was a first for both races in the U.S. Open. It was not long before the nasty side of golf's elite reared its ugly head. Several of the English and Scottish professionals confronted USGA president Theodore Havemeyer and threatened to withdraw if Shippen and Bunn were allowed to compete. Considering the times, Havemeyer's response was one of a truly enlightened man. He informed the protesting professionals that the tournament would be played as scheduled, even if Shippen and Bunn were the only players. Everyone arrived for their assigned tee times when the Open started the next morning. Shippen quickly demonstrated his skill by carding a 78 in the first round, leaving him in a tie for first. The early Opens were contested over 36 holes and in the second round Shippen made the turn with a shot at the title. Then came hole number 13 where he shot an 11, stopping any chance for the trophy. Still, he finished with an 81, for a 159 total, 5th place, and a \$10 prize. Shippen said that hole haunted him his entire life. He just could not believe he took that many strokes on a hole he had played so many times.

However, it did not end that day at Shinnecock as Shippen played in the U.S. Open six times, ending in 1913. His best finish was in 1902 where he again finished fifth. Shippen returned to golf and worked for the National Capital Golf Club, a black club in Maryland and in 1924, he returned to New Jersey and became the golf pro at The Shady Rest Golf and Country Club, the first African American Golf

and Country Club located in Scotch Plains, NJ. He remained at Shady Rest until his retirement in 1960. He died in 1968 in a nursing home in Newark, NJ.

The history of African American golfers attempting to compete at the highest level is perhaps the saddest chapter in the game of golf. No African-American played in the Open again until Ted Rhodes in 1948. A suit was filed against the PGA in 1948 for its "Caucasians-only clause." While the suit was settled out of court, the PGA would change its tournament policy to that of "invitationals," effectively staying segregated. It was not until 1961 that the "Caucasians-only clause" was finally eliminated from the PGA's bylaws. In 1961, the Professional Golf Association (PGA) rescinded its Caucasians-only clause, which finally allowed African American golfers to play regularly on the tour. This solidifies Shippen as the first America-born golf professional and the first African American golf professional to play in a US Open Tournament in 1896. During the 93rd PGA Annual Meeting in New Orleans, The PGA of America bestowed posthumous membership upon three African American golf pioneers: Ted Rhodes, John Shippen and Bill Spiller - who were denied the opportunity to become PGA members during their professional careers.

A U.S. Postal Stamp to honor John Matthew Shippen, Jr. would be an inspiration to students, educators and the golf community throughout the world. It would also be a fitting tribute to African American history and their contributions to the world of golf. Since the Postal Services receive thousands of proposals recommending subjects for stamps, getting a new postage stamp suggestion accepted is a real challenge.

You can honor John Matthew Shippen, Jr. by writing letters in support of a commemorative stamp in his likeness. The letters can be sent to: ***Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 3300, Washington, DC 20260.*** Remember, the Committee only counts the number of letters received in support of a new commemorative stamp, not how many individual people submit a stamp design; therefore you can submit more than one letter. To assist in this very important undertaking, a letter has been completed for your convenience; just date, sign your name, print, stamp, and forward to the Stamp Advisory Committee. Please forward this email to friends, family, and co-workers; as well as posting on your Facebook page.

We thank you in advance for your support. For further inquiries regarding The John Shippen Memorial Foundation and/or The John Shippen Youth Golf Academy, please email us at: [ShippenFoundation@yahoo.com](mailto:ShippenFoundation@yahoo.com).

*Thurman P. Simmons, Sr.*

*Ruby L. Simmons*

Thurman P. Simmons, Sr., President  
The John Shippen Memorial Golf Foundation  
Founder: The John Shippen Youth Golf Academy

Ruby L. Simmons, Vice President/Scholarship  
The John Shippen Memorial Golf Foundation