Founding of the Maryland State Golf Association

The Maryland State Golf Association was founded during a meeting at the Emerson Hotel in Baltimore on March 8, 1921. The founding clubs, which were said to represent 8,000 state golfers, were as follows:

- Baltimore Country Club
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- Rolling Road Golf Club
- Green Spring Valley Hunt Club
- Suburban Club
- Elkridge Hunt Club
- Public Parks Golf Association

- Hagerstown Country Club
- Cumberland Country Club
- Tome Golf Club
- Sherwood Forest Golf Club
- Naval Academy Golf Club
- Talbot Country Club
- Monterey Country Club

The Public Parks Golf Association was comprised of golfers at Clifton Park in Baltimore City. This Association had been organized during meetings in January, 1921 with William F. Smith becoming the first president. Located near Antietam Creek and in the general area of the current Hagerstown Municipal Golf Course, the nine-hole Hagerstown Country Club operated from 1908 – 1928, closing about four years after the opening of Fountain Head Country Club on the other side of town. Tome Golf Club was a prep school golf club in Port Deposit. The school overlooked the Susquehanna River and later moved to Northeast. Maryland Country Club, founded in the early 1900s near the Suburban Club, eventually met its demise during the Great Depression. The Washington Area clubs – Chevy Chase, Columbia, Bannockburn and Kirkside – declined to join the association because of their involvement with the Middle Atlantic Golf Association and District of Columbia Golf Association and also due to impending obligations to assist with the national open championship at Columbia Country Club.

As an aside, nine Washington Area clubs did join the MSGA in the early 1930s: Chevy Chase, Columbia, Burning Tree, Bannockburn, Indian Spring, Manor, Beaver Dam, Congressional and Kenwood. Bannockburn, originally located near Chevy Chase Circle (Connecticut Avenue and East-West Highway) moved to the Glen Echo area around 1910 and then was sold for residential development in 1946. Kirkside continued as the successor club to Bannockburn at the Chevy Chase Circle location. Indian Spring, which would later move to Layhill Road north of Georgia Avenue, was then located near the Four Corners area of Colesville Road and New Hampshire Avenue. Indian Spring closed in December, 2005. Beaver Dam in Landover later became Prince Georges Country Club and then, shortly after a move to Mitchellville in the early 1980s, was renamed the Country Club at Woodmore.

Monterey Country Club, less than one mile from the Mason-Dixon Line in Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, is a particularly interest case of a founding member club.
Monterey had one of the oldest golf courses in the country. Located approximately eight miles from Camp David and built prior to 1885, the club featured a wide range of recreational and dining facilities that were popular among Washington area visitors. In addition to golf, the sports of tennis and swimming were featured. Over the years, visitors included Presidents Wilson, Coolidge and Eisenhower. The eventual Duchess of Windsor, Wallace Simpson, was born directly across the road from the first green in Square Cottage. After the Battle of Gettysburg, the Army of Northern Virginia retreated through a swampy area that eventually became the site of Monterey Country Club.

The first officers of the Maryland State Golf Association were M. Tyson Ellicott, Baltimore Country Club, president; A.E. Marshall, Maryland Country Club, first vice-president; R. Marsden Smith, Rolling Road Golf Club, second vice-president; and Claude C. Madison, secretary-treasurer. Lieutenant F.L. Janeway of the Naval Academy Golf Club reportedly joined this group as the fifth member of the Executive Committee.

Originally, the 1921 Amateur Championship was scheduled for Rolling Road Golf Club and the Open Championship at Baltimore Country Club. Later the Open was moved to Rolling Road and the Women’s Championship was established and scheduled for Elkridge. At first there was discussion of a Baltimore City Championship to be conducted by the new state golf association. However, this initiative was soon undertaken by the Public Parks Golf Association at Clifton Park.

Based on Baltimore Sun reporting by Claude C. Madison, among the spurs to the formation of the Maryland State Golf Association was the exhibition match between Harry Vardon, Ted Ray and B. Warren Corkran at Baltimore Country Club during the summer of 1920. The year of 1920 marked Vardon’s last trip to the United States while Ray captured his sole U.S. Open Championship at the Inverness Club in August, 1920, where he edged Vardon, Leo Diegel and Jock Hutchinson by one stroke, with the 50-year old Vardon going six over par in the last six holes. The temporary chairman of the Maryland players who called for a state golf association was R.E. Hanson. Hanson sent the invitations for the organization meeting that was held at the Emerson Hotel. In the March 9, 1921 Baltimore Sun, Claude Madison reported that “R.E. Hanson, who fostered and originated the idea of a State golf association, was lauded in a resolution unanimously adopted, which expressed appreciation of his efforts to advance the game in Maryland. Hanson recently removed to New York.”

Golf developments in Maryland even attracted the interest of Grantland Rice, the foremost sportswriter of the era. In a letter to Claude Madison, Rice offered the following remarks: “The movement to form a State golf association should be supported by every golfer in Maryland. Golf is now on the way to an even-greater boom and the golf courses and players of Maryland occupy too high a place to remain outside the fold. The fact that the national open championship is to be held at Columbia Country Club will bring additional attention to Maryland golf. There is no question that
a State association can do a lot for the game, and at the same time the players get a lot of keen competition out of the organization.”

Interestingly, there was spirited competition for the hosting of the first championships. Representatives of Maryland Country Club, Rolling Road Golf Club and the Suburban Club were quite expressive in promoting their clubs. R. Marsden Smith, green committee chairman at Rolling Road Golf Club weighed in: “We think we can show the golfers of the State something unique in golf construction. Our course is adequate in every respect for entertaining the championship. The only possible objection would be the misapprehension that we might not be ready due to improvements in the greens. By the middle of June when the tournament probably will be held, Rolling Road will be in tip-top condition.”

Not to be outdone, A.E. Marshall, who chaired the Maryland Country Club golf committee, claimed that his club “is the logical course to entertain the championship. We have lengthened our course to championship distance. We are centrally located and we want the event.” The president of the Suburban Club, A.F. Weinberg, upped the stakes with the following pronouncement: “We have the greatest golf course in Maryland and, as this is to be a real championship contest, let’s play it on a real course.” (Claude Madison further noted Mr. Weinberg’s view that while the other two clubs have very decent courses, they “could not hold a candle to Suburban.”)

William F. Stone, representing Sherwood Forest, offered his club as a site for the 1925 Maryland Amateur. In the early 1920s Sherwood Forest was being developed by William F. Cochran as a private retreat on the Severn River. Cochran also offered a sterling silver cup for a club team competition during the Maryland Amateur.

-Written by Randal P. Reed, Former MSGA Director of Rules & Competitions