

FORMATION OF THE MIDDLE ATLANTIC PGA - The 1920s
By Harold C. Guy

When the Professional Golfers' Association of America formed in 1916, the charter members established seven regional sections. The Southeastern Section spanned Philadelphia to Atlanta. During the early 1920s three professional golf organizations emerged in what is now the Middle Atlantic PGA's territory: the District of Columbia Professional Golfers' Association, the Maryland State Professional Golfers' Association and an organization based in Norfolk. Little is known about the Norfolk group.

In an April 1924 meeting the District of Columbia Professional Golfers' Association membership elected Fred McLeod (Columbia) President, and Robert Barnett (Chevy Chase) and Leo Diegel (Friendship) the First and Second Vice Presidents. A.F. Bergman (owner of the "Spalding Sporting Goods" store) served as the Secretary and Henry Litchfield West, the Treasurer. At the time, West managed the "Washington Post" Sports Desk. The District of Columbia Professional Golfers' Association held their only Championship in 1926. Tommy Armour (Congressional) won.

In early 1924 the Maryland State Professional Golfers' Association elected William "Willie" Scott (Baltimore CC) President and Glenn Spencer (Green Spring Valley) Secretary. Charles Betschler (Mayland Country Club) succeeded Scott in 1925. They held a 36-hole championship in 1924 with twenty-two entries which Betschler won at Baltimore CC – Roland Park. That organization remained active through 1927 conducting regularly scheduled Pro-Ams and a Championship.

The MAPGA organizational meeting took place on March 2, 1925, at "Spalding's" and Columbia CC. Members of the District of Columbia and Maryland State associations along with some Virginians turned out. The attending professionals formed an organizing committee of Wilfred Thomson (Hermitage CC) and the Officers of the District of Columbia PGA and Maryland State PGA, namely Robert Barnett, Charles Betschler and Glenn Spencer. The immediate tasks included arranging an election of officers, promoting a Section Championship and conducting the PGA Championship Qualifier. The officer cadre included the President, First and Second Vice Presidents, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The Vice Presidencies would make up a succession line to the Presidency.

Attending the MAPGA's formative meeting were Charles Betschler (Maryland CC), James Roche (Elkridge), William Dunt (Sherwood Forest), Alec Taylor (Suburban), Glenn Spencer (Green Spring Valley), George Diffenbaugh (Clifton Park), Warner Mather (Rodgers Forge), and Henry Wanger (Maryland CC) from Baltimore. The District of Columbia delegation included Robert Barnett (Chevy Chase), Danny Horgan Chevy Chase), William Hardy Chevy Chase), D'Arcy Banagan (Columbia), William Malloy (Columbia), Arthur Thorn (Town and Country which became Woodmont), Ted Farr (East Potomac), Con Murphy (East Potomac), Albert Farr (West Potomac), and Ralph Beach (Burning Tree). David Thomson (Washington Golf), Robert McWatt (Hampton CC), Wilfred Thomson (Hermitage), Ronald Auchterlonie (CC of Virginia) and William Skelly (unattached, formerly Hermitage) came from the Virginia clubs. The group included head and assistant pros. Sometime during 1925, Fred McLeod and A.F. Bergman became the President and Secretary of the fledgling MAPGA. In March, McLeod had been in Florida playing in the nascent PGA Tour stops.

The newly formed Section planned an "Open" Championship. Leo Diegel won that inaugural Middle Atlantic PGA Open played at Burning Tree in October. The field included touring professionals Johnny Farrell, Cyril Walker and Joe Turnesa amongst others. Newspaper writers noted that MAPGA players James Thomson (Hermitage) and Glenn Spencer (Green Spring Valley), who finished tied for sixth, would hold a playoff for the "actual" MAPGA Section title. No record of a playoff exists.

Also in 1925, the MAPGA held its first PGA Championship Qualifier at Columbia. Ralph Beach (Burning Tree) and David Thomson (Washington Golf) led the field of 26 entrants.

In the spring of 1926, the MAPGA membership elected Robert Barnett their President. Charles Betschler and Arthur Thorn (Town and Country CC) garnered the First and Second Vice Presidencies. A.F. Bergman continued as Secretary. That year's PGA qualifier took place at Congressional with Jimmy Thomson and Fred McLeod earning the spots. As the 1926 year closed, Leo Diegel repeated as the Middle Atlantic PGA Open Champion held at Rolling Road.

The MAPGA membership met for the 1927 Annual Meeting at Columbia. They re-elected Robert Barnett as President and Charles Betschler and Wilfred Thomson the Vice Presidents. A.F. Bergman remained the Secretary.

Several Section tournaments took place for the first time in 1927. At the first Assistant Professional Championship conducted at Indian Spring CC, William "Brick" Wood (Washington Golf) won in a playoff over Frank Cunningham (Burning Tree). D'Arcy Banagan (Columbia) and Roland Mackenzie tied Glenn Spencer and Stuart Janney in the first Pro-Junior at Rolling Road. Dave Thomson and Alex Prescott won the first Pro-Senior at Indian Spring. Warner Mather (Rodgers Forge) and Effie Bowes won the initial Pro-Lady at Rodgers Forge.

Ralph Beach and Tommy Armour qualified for the 1927 PGA Championship at Five Farms with twenty-two entries. Earlier in the summer, Tommy Armour had captured the US Open at Oakmont in a playoff over Henry Cooper. The season ended with Leo Diegel and Fred McLeod tied in the third Middle Atlantic PGA Open at Indian Spring. Leo Diegel cashed the \$500 check after defeating Fred McLeod in a playoff.

The 1928 Annual Meeting took place at Columbia. Charles Betschler succeeded Robert Barnett as President and Arthur Thorn (Woodmont) and Warner Mather (Rodgers Forge) were elected Vice Presidents. The Section held its first "Match Play" Championship exclusively for their membership. Johnny Roche (Elkridge) defeated Glenn Spencer in the final match at Five Farms. Toney Penna (Congressional) captured the second MAPGA Assistant Professional Championship at Rolling Road.

Before the stock market crash sending the country into the "Great Depression" the 1929 Annual Meeting took place at Rodgers Forge. Arthur Thorn (Woodmont) succeeded to the Presidency, Warner Mather (Rodgers Forge) and J. Munro Hunter (Indian Spring) held down the Vice Presidencies. A.F. Bergman remained as Secretary and Charles Betschler became the newly created Treasurer position.

In the 1929 Section Championship final at Suburban, Robert Barnett bested J. Munro Hunter. Gene Larkin (Chevy Chase) won the Assistant Professional title.

An article in the Professional Golfer, noted that the MAPGA listed 71 members in 1929 when the "Roaring 20s" closed.