

# **WMSGGA: Looking Astern**

## **1926-2017**

*by Past President Helen Doherty Plourd*

As I reflect on the past decades for our Women's Maine State Golf Association, the mission has always been *to promote interest in golf*. I believe that players would agree that this mission has been met, as evidenced through an active and enthusiastic membership and a women's amateur that has attracted growing numbers of junior participants, with ten playing at Penobscot Valley last year (2016) and nine at Martindale this year (2017).

Shortly, we will merge with the Maine State Golf Association under one state umbrella as part of a national system overseen by the United States Golf Association. This merger will provide a myriad of benefits to women golfers in Maine.

### **The Early Years**

The WMSGGA was formed in 1926, and its first president was Mrs. Richard C. Payson from Portland Country Club. The association was inactive during World War II (1942-1946). Some of the influential presidents that I remember as a teenager are Mrs. Keene (Evolyn) Morison from Wilson Lake, Mrs. Howard (Henrietta) Mayo from Bath, Mrs. John (Alice) Baxter from Lakeview, and Mrs. John (Lid) Cipriano from Willowdale. These mentors were organized, well spoken, and called a spade a spade, traits that were imperative when at the helm of six hundred members. I was fortunate to work my way up the ladder to lead the organization in 1979-1980. Some years after my presidency, Linda "Birdie" Pearse took the office and, even as a novice to the position, embraced the same approach to the job as her predecessors.

In 1930, the WMSGGA boasted only five member clubs but grew to eight in 1938. Today we have about 60 member clubs. A handicapping system was approved in 1937, and, following that, the WMSGGA used the slope handicap system that was required by the USGA for all competitive play.

In the past, WMSGGA members had a state handicap and a local handicap. The state handicapper had to rush home after a tournament, figure everyone's handicap, and mail out new cards to members before the next Tuesday tournament. Guess what? Those handicappers didn't have the technology we have today where a mere push of a button calculates all member handicaps for you. Some of the early handicappers include the late Margaret McClellan (Riverside), Gertie Hooper (Penobscot Valley), Del Winslow (Riverside), Betty Baker (Hermon Meadow), Hazel Clifford (Lakewood), Janet Drouin (Natanis), and me: Helen Plourd (Rockland). A separate New England Women's Golf Association handicap card was required for competition in New England. Eventually having two handicaps was nixed, but it had served its purpose. The system exerted more control on members' handicaps and prevented players from posting only high or low scores. The handicapper had the power to

revoke any member's card for an invalid handicap and for not complying with the USGA handicapping system. We were ahead of our time with this philosophy since today every club must have a designated handicapper.

In the early days, to become a member, a woman filled out a written application and sent it to the secretary. Membership was available to those women who were fully paid members of golf clubs that were members of WMSGGA. No person was accepted as a member if she did not belong to a club or golf association.

Individual and club memberships were \$10. An independent membership was also available for \$10 along with a handicap card for \$5. Originally there were four flights A, B, C, D, which later became four handicap divisions: Division A1 (0-20), Division A2 (21-26), Division B1 (27-31) and Division B2 (32-40). The A division was scheduled to play one course and B's another. The entry fee was \$6, with \$3 going to the club. A small green fee was developed by privately owned golf clubs, and Mr. Browne from Natanis and Mr. Hamel from Springbrook were the men who were instrumental in instituting a user fee. The user fee today still stands only at \$17; we have been fortunate to play Maine's beautiful courses at this give-away fee.

On game days, as soon as eight players arrived at 8 am, a drawing was held and two foursomes were off. Scores had to be posted hole by hole and signed by all competitors. If a competitor was not able to meet the deadline to register, she could call ahead and start in the last group of her class. If she arrived late, she could follow the entire field but not be eligible for prizes. Volunteers worked the boards, and vouchers were given to players to redeem right on the spot. The pros really enjoyed this system, and it certainly presented less paper work.

In those early days, we honored not only the low average scored for the season, but also the low differential scores. Known as Best Gross Differential Scores, the award was arrived at by taking a player's ten best scores and subtracting the course rating. Playing only the easiest courses might do miracles, but beating the figure formula was considered unlikely. The idea was to recognize the season's medal champion, one whose scoring reflected consistency over a variety of Maine courses.

I led all winners of Best Gross Differential Sores in 1975 with a 13.52. Second and third went to Lucille Brooke of Wawenock with 18.21 and Dot Milliken of Portland with 18.55. Other scores were past presidents Esther Pattershall from Augusta and Betty Rodriguez from Waterville with 19.47, Anna Sorrent from Rockland with 25.21, and Nancy Williams from Boothbay with 25.88. In 1979 I was again the seasonal statistical winner with 11.57, followed by Bev Davis of Meadow Hill (later Kennebec Heights) with 14.45, Peg Widdoes of Augusta with 16.38, and Betty Rodriguez with 19.47. The award was voted out in 1979. We continued to honor the golfer with the best ten net average. Some winners were Jerry Lounsbury of Hermon, Charlotte Connolly from Gorham, and Dot Berry from Augusta. Dottie Reed from Augusta lowered her handicap the most from 36 to 28 according to handicapper Widdoes and assistant Norma White from Piscataquis.

Always cognizant of the future of the organization, the WMSGGA started early on to create opportunities for junior golfers. The late Evelyn Grant was instrumental in chairing a junior

committee, and under my guidance held a junior championship at Rockland with silver bowls for the winners. Our junior chair today, Sue Wootton, has been fierce in her dedication to junior golf, and participation has grown markedly under her leadership. Some juniors to watch in 2018 are Bailey Plourde (Samoset), Erin Holmes (Val Halla), Stephanie Rodrigue (Fox Ridge), Jordan LaPlume (Dunegrass), Ruby Haylock (Turner Highlands), and Mia Hornberger (Turner Highlands). Elsewhere in the state, Junior Golf of Maine, a program developed by the Maine State Golf Association, offers a tournament schedule and other junior events. Junior programs are also strong at many Maine courses.

The association printed two books each year, books that set forth our constitution, by-laws, and tournament rules. These were eventually consolidated into one book with tournament applications printed in the back section. In later years, I suggested a sponsor page to help bankroll the printing of the book while giving credit to generous members and clubs. The book was our referee with no gray areas. It was the president's responsibility to make sure the organization adhered to the rules and regulations as they were printed. Past presidents and champions were listed in the book, a piece of history that members seemed to relish and which can now be found on the WMSGGA website.

The organization has evolved from governance by representatives from member clubs to governance by an executive board in charge of day to day operational expenses. I believe that most members would agree that the change was necessary as the needs of our organization mushroomed and the number of volunteers dwindled. The board is responsible for hiring an association assistant and a consultant for our finances.

### **Championships & Notable Achievements**

The Senior Championship, which began as an eighteen-hole tournament in 1982 and then was run as a tournament within the state championship for fifteen years starting in 1995, has gone back to a separate tourney. This change has been received by the senior membership in a positive way. Because of health issues and the aging process, some competitive women were finding it difficult to play three days of championship golf. Sixteen different women have captured the senior championship. Some notable champions were Pennie Cummings, who captured the title eleven times, Bev Davis, Audrey Gunn, Jane Diplock, Evelyn Grant, Martha White, me (Helen Plourd) and this year (2017) Kristen Kannegieser with a 69 at Rockland Golf Club.

During our sponsored tournaments sixty-one players have recorded holes in one. They all are listed on the WMSGGA website, but a few I remember are Marie Stone, Dolores Winslow, Sharon Dauphinee, Norma White, Betty Farrand, Jan Hawthorne, Dale Hannon, Janet Drouin, Ann Lang, Bobbi Berry, Madeline Kilmister, Diane Pooler, Rosemary Lyons, Sandy Meehan, Jody Lyford, Marilyn Hughes, and me. The WMSGGA has developed a heart-warming tradition for those special moments where every competitor gives the player who has snagged an ace a dollar to honor her accomplishment.

Our state championship used to be a three-day match play event. It featured a championship flight comprised of sixteen players with the lowest handicaps. The second flight was

determined after the first round of play and made up of the eight players from the championship flight who lost in the first round. Other flights followed. For that to work, the first day of play required players to play thirty-six holes to determine all flights. Match play championship was discontinued since it tied up courses for too long right at the busiest time of the season. Some notable winners of our match-play championships were Martha Page White and her sister Pennie Page Cummings, Mary Ouellette, and Deb Graffman Gardner. The championship entry fee was \$8 with no refunds allowed. Imagine that?

Eventually, the state championship was changed to a fifty-four-hole stroke play event and held at championship caliber courses around the state. The entry fee was \$15 and was open to all members of the WMSGGA who were legal residents of Maine and who had participated in at least three WMSGGA tournaments between the preceding championship and the deadline date for filing applications. Players went out in threesomes of like handicaps with no two competitors from the same club paired together. A junior championship was also contested when at least two players under the age of eighteen entered the tournament. Notable junior champions include Missy Williams (now a PGA golf pro), Abby Spector (now a PGA golf pro), Megan Angis, Whitney Hand, and the 2017 winner Bailey Plourde from the Samoset.

In 2012, the SMWGA and the WMSGGA came together to offer a new state championship known as the Maine Women's Amateur. It continues to be a fifty-four-hole championship with the field divided into flights by handicaps. With the merger, I hope that the championship will continue for years to come and draw large numbers of women and juniors. And this year (2017), we benefitted from electronic scoring; we could check hole by hole scores on our phones soon after players finished their rounds. Never in my wildest reverie would I have thought scoring would make such advances.

One rule that has not changed is the honorary membership that may be conferred on any individual who has contributed to the advancement and promotion of golf in the state of Maine. The honor is bestowed by a unanimous vote at any annual meeting of the association. The current honorary members are Vern Putney and Joni Averill. The only lifelong membership voted by the association is me... Helen Doherty Plourd.

Eleven members of the WMSGGA have been inducted into the Maine Golf Hall of Fame. They are contributor Evelyn Morrison and players Evelyn Grant, Deb Graffman, Jane Diplock, Mary Ouellette, Abby Spector, Helen Plourd, Cindy Choate, Laurie Hyndman, Leslie Guenther, and Liz Wiltshire.

## **In Closing**

Needless to say, there is no way I can summarize the history of the Women's Maine State Golf Association in this short narrative, but I did seek to pinpoint some exemplary golfers and their accomplishments and to share my memories. I would be remiss not to mention a few outstanding golfers who played during my tenure of 64 years: Jane Diplock, Evelyn Grant, Martha White, Pennie Cummings, Debby Gardner, Cindy Choate, Mary Ouellette, Abby Spector, Julie Green, Peggy Widdoes, Audrey Gunn, and Bev Davis.

This WMSGGA journey of mine will soon end and be replaced with a new adventure that will join the WMSGGA with the SMWGA and MSGA come January 2018. Though change can be difficult, this merger should bring new and better avenues for all associations. As this chapter comes to a close, may all Maine golfers relish the new goal of supporting golf for both sexes across the state.

One aspect of this organization that will not change is the continued involvement from members who will always promote women's golf in Maine. They will serve on committees that will influence and impact everyday operations of the new association. All our members are encouraged to participate on committees that interest them.

In closing, I offer a big thank you to Vicki Lindquist for her leadership the last two years. Amid many challenges, she has successfully prevailed for the benefit of the WMSGGA. Also, thanks to Maddie Kilmister, our treasurer; Linda Morin-Pasco, our secretary; and Sherrie Thomas, our administrative assistant. And thanks to all the executive board members, presidents, and WMSGGA members who have supported the WMSGGA over the years and have made this organization what it is today. We will move forward as a new organization dedicated to making women's golf in Maine stronger and to continuing our mission to promote interest in golf.

*edited by Sherrie B. Thomas*

