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# 100 YEARS OF THE CPGA

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*Ralph Miner, Inaugural Carolinas PGA Professional Championship Champion*

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## **The Roaring Twenties**

**by Lee Pace**  
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The Carolinas PGA was founded in May 1923 and immediately launched its flagship events that have been contested for a century.

The Carolinas PGA Professional Championship is the competition restricted to the professional golfers of the two Carolinas. Ralph Miner of New Bern collected the inaugural title, and over the next 99 years, players the likes of Johnny Palmer, Bobby Locke, Clayton Heafner, Julius Boros, Jim Ferree and Mike Souchak have snared first place.

The Carolinas Open was launched the same year and, as its name suggests, includes pros as well as amateur golfers. Harold Woodman won the inaugural tournament, preceding giants in golf like Henry Picard, Orville White, Purvis Ferree, Davis Love Jr. and P.J. Boatwright in the winner's circle.

Little is known about Woodman. Search engines come up blank. Queries to golfers and journalists with deep Carolinas roots yield nada. The few scant newspaper mentions link Woodman at various times to Marion, S.C., and Brevard, N.C.

Miner, however, is a different matter. His is a fascinating story.

The Miners were natives of Scotland and immigrated to the United States in the 1800s. Dermont Miner was born in 1868, learned golf as it established its early roots in America in the 1890s and became a professional. He claimed to be the first American-born golf professional, and his tombstone in Littleton, N.H., reads “Dean of American Golf.”

Miner’s son Ralph worked for him at a golf course in New Hampshire and became a golf pro as well. During the winters when it was too cold to play golf in New England, Ralph joined other northern pros in traveling south and giving exhibitions.

“Ralph Miner was 22 when he came to New Bern Golf & Country Club to give an exhibition,” says Chuck Tyson, a lifelong New Bern resident and the club historian. “He liked the course, the town, and the people, and they liked him. They offered him a job as head pro.”

Miner was hired at New Bern, which was founded in 1920 with a nine-hole course made of sand greens, at a salary of \$200 a month and stayed on the job until health issues forced him to retire in 1943. He was a colorful character, often playing in kilts since his ancestors were Scottish. He was also an excellent player, shooting a 63 in 1933 in a qualifying round for the U.S. Open. He won his second Carolinas PGA in 1927.

And he was a good businessman.

The club at New Bern was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1934 during the depths of the Great Depression. It was going to be auctioned off on the steps of the Craven County Courthouse for \$6,536.44 — the total of the club’s debts. Miner bought the club and became the sole owner, telling the members if he died or retired, they could buy it back for the same amount he paid for it.

Miner was good for his word. He retired in May 1943 and sold the club back to the members for that exact price. He died in 1958 and is buried in New Bern Memorial Cemetery, two miles away from the golf

course.

Tyson, a former club president, spearheaded an effort to recognize and salute Miner. Working from a black and white photograph found in Miner's archives, an artist commissioned by the club created a color portrait of Miner wearing kilts that hangs in the clubhouse. The club also in 2022 purchased a decorative clock that was positioned beside the 10th tee to pay homage to Miner.

"Not many clubs make it to 100 years old," says Tyson. "We owe a lot to Ralph Miner. We might never have survived if not for him."

Miner's kilts and his Scottish roots were certainly symbolic of the early golf profession in the United States. Americans didn't know the game, so hundreds of young men from Scotland, where the game had been played for centuries, moved across the pond to develop the sport. Exhibit A, of course, would be Donald J. Ross, who came to the States in 1900 from his home of Dornoch, soon found his way to Pinehurst and would evolve into a talented golf course architect, with some 400 courses to his credit through his death in 1948.

Heyward Sullivan, a champion of multiple amateur competitions over the mid and late 1900s, grew up in Greenville, S.C., and remembers taking golf lessons at Greenville Country Club in the 1940s from club pro David Ferguson, a Scotsman who served three decades at the club.

"You had to listen carefully," Sullivan says. "He rolled his Rs through a thick burr. He used to say, 'Laddie, the short game will help your long game, nay the long game will never help the short game.' He wanted you to practice chipping and putting."

Other early Scotsmen who moved to America to carve a career in the golf business, landed in the Carolinas and won early CPGA titles included Frank Clark, who worked at three clubs in Asheville, and Marshall Crichton, who established a remarkable family legacy at Hope Valley Country Club in Durham.

Clark grew up in Montrose on the east coast of Scotland and came to America in 1920. He started at Asheville Country Club and then

worked at Beaver Lake Golf Club and Biltmore Forest CC through 1943, when he took a job in sales. He won the 1924 Carolinas PGA Professional Championship.

Twenty miles south along the Scottish coast is the town of Monifieth, where the Crichton family lived. Marshall moved to the United States, held several jobs and landed as the first pro at Hope Valley when it opened in 1926. He won the Carolinas PGA Professional Championship in 1928 and the Carolinas Open in 1928, 1930 and 1931. His son Dave succeeded him as pro and held that job until he retired in 1981, and his daughter Maggie is working part-time in the golf shop at Hope Valley today.

Bob Byrnes, director of golf at Hope Valley since 2009, remembers the PGA Seniors Championship being on the golf shop television one time when Maggie casually remarked that her father had won that event in 1949.

“That kind of blew me away,” Byrnes says. “How many clubs have that kind of history and connections back to the early days of golf?”

There are lots of those around the Carolinas as the CPGA celebrates 100 years.



**LEE PACE** is a Chapel Hill-based golf writer who has written about the history, architecture and great golfers of the Carolinas over four decades. He has written more than a dozen club histories and in 2021 released along with UNC Press his book, "Good Walks--Rediscovering the Soul of Golf at 18 Top Carolinas Courses."



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