

Mashies at Mapledale: A Black Country Club in Massachusetts During the 1920s

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During the 1920s, when America was caught up in the aura of the so-called Golden Age of Sports, there arose in the United States a movement by blacks to organize, maintain and run country clubs for use by fellow Afro-Americans.

One of the most famous of these clubs within the Afro-American community during the decade was Mapledale Country Club, a facility located in Stow, Massachusetts, some 25 miles to the west of Boston.

The club occupied the site of the former estate of Dr. John Witt Randall, a wealthy 19th century resident of Stow who died in 1892. Established in 1926 by a black man, Robert H. Hawkins, Mapledale quickly gained a reputation for its ground and facilities. A press account of the period described the club as containing a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, a croquet area and a bridle path. Dr. Randall's former residence, an 18-room colonial mansion, served as the club house.

Despite these facilities, Mapledale might well have remained a club for local links enthusiasts had it not been for the fact that the course served as the venue for the first three national open championships and the first amateur championship of the United States Colored Golfers Association (the name later was changed to United Golfers Association).

The first open championship, conducted in early September of 1926, attracted some 38 contestants from 10 states. Harry Jackson of Washington, D.C., one of the few black pros of the era, captured that inaugural event with a 72-hole first prize of 295 to win the \$100 first prize. The two Chicagoans he beat, Porter Washington and Robert "Pat" Ball, would win the title in succeeding years.

In 1927, Ball who had won an integrated event, the Cook County (Chicago) title earlier that year by defeating a white contestant, captured the open with a 72-hole score of 293, some 20 strokes better than the veteran John Shippen who had finished fourth the year before.

The year 1928 saw Porter Washington, who had moved from Chicago to Mapledale to become the club's pro, emerge victorious by defeating Ball in the match play finals, 4 and 3. One of Washington's rounds during the tournament was a 66, a competitive record for the course. The first amateur championship was also played that year with Frank Gaskin of Philadelphia winning the title.

In spite of these events of national prominence, however, Mapledales's days were numbered. The property had been heavily mortgaged and Hawkins had spent a considerable amount of his personal funds on the project. In 1929, one mortgage was foreclosed, a portion of the property was sold at auction, and the club ceased to cater to a black clientele. Another mortgage was foreclosed in 1930 and the remainder of the property was sold at auction, ending a most interesting chapter in black sports history.