



Seventy-two cottages like these lure Olympia's members to become all-summer residents.

HOW SUMMER COTTAGE COLONY Boosts House Business

FOR OLYMPIA FIELDS, CHICAGO

By JACK FULTON, Jr.

UNIQUE among private country clubs because it was the first 72-hole layout in the world and because today, fourteen years after its founding, it is, to the best of this writer's knowledge, the only completed project of that size, Olympia Fields C. C. in the Chicago district has furnished many an interesting golf business story.

The reason for this lies in Olympia's magnitude. Its clubhouse alone cost more than \$1,000,000. Its annual operating and administrative expenses exceed \$250,000, and its income from dues, departmental operations and the like must not, if the club is to avoid assessments, fall below that figure. Consequently Olympia Fields does a great deal of pioneering in modern methods of club operation.

Because Olympia lies 26 miles outside Chicago, one of its major problems has been to attract members to the club during the week and thus assure economical operation of the various departments. There is no problem on week-ends when members have plenty of time to make the 26-mile jump from town, but it is another

thing to lure them out after work, unless, somehow, the members and their families can be interested in staying overnight, or better yet, can be interested in the idea of living at the club through the summer. Only then can the club's departments, in particular the dining-room, operate on an efficient and economical basis.

It is to the credit of the past and present governing officials of Olympia that this problem has been most successfully solved. Olympia's dining room does an annual business of \$165,000, fully half of which is taken in during the week. While no definite figure are available, Col. C. G. Holden, manager of the club, estimates the average number of meals served each week day (Monday to Friday) at not less than 750! That's a lot of meals for a club 26 miles removed from a city. How does Olympia do it?

Many Rooms Specified

First of all, at the time the club authorized the architects to design its permanent clubhouse (it went along eight years with a temporary structure) free rein was given in all but one particular—there



Canvas houses, like the upper view, have given way to modern wall-board cottages, shown below.

must be ample accommodations for members desiring to stay overnight, or all season. So the architects used the entire second story of the low rambling building and the tower which dominates the structure for single and double sleeping rooms, 79 in all.

These accommodations have proved extremely popular with the members and each year sees over 50 per cent of the rooms engaged for the season. All vacant bedrooms are quickly gobbled up on Friday and Saturday nights by members anxious to stay over the week-end. Translated into terms that warm the House Chairman's heart, these resident members and their families mean at least two meals a day, seven days a week in the dining-room, assure that a full staff of waiters and a complete kitchen crew can be kept busy all week long, and that the number of extra employes needed to meet the week-end peak-loads is very small compared to what it would be were these everyday residents not on hand.

The season occupants of the sleeping rooms, however, cannot account in full for

the remarkable number of meals Olympia serves each day, and it is in fact another adjunct of the club that makes up the balance. I refer to Olympia's "Terrace Colony," a cluster of 72 small, one and two-room cottages owned and erected by the members in an oak grove slightly removed from the clubhouse on plots leased to the individual members of the club.

750 Meals a Day

From this colony, which itself returns a pleasant profit each year to the club, come the balance of the "residents" who fill the dining-room and permit Olympia's departments to operate at comfortable volume.

Of the average week-day volume of 750 meals, possibly 250 are accounted for by members who do not live at the club, but merely have come out for a day of golf. The other 500 meals are eaten by the resident members.

Olympia's Terrace colony is so extraordinary as a country club feature that a rather full description of it will be given in this article in the belief that, with the present tendency of clubs to move many miles from the cities from which their membership is drawn, it will very frequently prove exceedingly hard to attract their members save on week-ends unless some way is found to hold members overnight. The cottage colony scheme, as has worked out so successfully at Olympia, can easily be copied by many clubs to their obvious financial benefit.

The colony had its beginning some ten or eleven years ago when a small group of Olympians, annoyed at the necessity of the long 26-mile pilgrimage to Chicago on Saturday evenings only to turn around the next morning and come out again, decided to purchase a number of 10x12-ft. canvas houses and erect them under the trees somewhat removed from, but convenient to the temporary clubhouse. Within a few months, before the season was over, the colony had grown to over thirty tents.

The arrangement was really ideal. Other



There are 79 sleeping rooms in Olympia's massive clubhouse.

than the original investment, for the canvas house and such simple furnishings as were necessary, there were no expenses. A member kept his clothes in his clubhouse locker, did his dressing there, used his tent only for sleeping, which because essentially in the open air was much cooler and more comfortable than attempting rest at home in the sun-baked city. Conveniently near, in the clubhouse, were all the comforts of home.

By the middle of the following season the colony had grown to over 75 tent-houses and this growth continued until at one time there were more than 150 of these individually owned cottages. The original oak grove could not contain all of these and a second colony, popularly referred to as the "Gold Coast" sprang up across the way.

Growth Forces Regulations

When there had been only a dozen or so cottages, the club gave the colony only tacit recognition, but when the number increased to a sizable settlement, it was forced to step in, establish rules and regulations to control the erection and maintenance of the tents and the privileges of the residents; it had to build paths through the colony, hire a night watchman, do a certain amount of landscaping. All of this cost money and so, in spite of the fact that the club was profiting indirectly through the increased business in its departments, it felt justified in asking the colonists to pay for these improvements and they were assessed 25c per sq. ft. per year for the area actually covered by their tents. Since the average size was 9x12 ft., this brought in to the club about \$30 per tent, or \$4,500 total per year for all 150 cottages.

Terrace Made Permanent Fixture

The arrangement was very satisfactory. After the cost of the improvements and the watchman's services had been taken care of, there still remained a small profit for the club; and the members felt that \$30.00 was a small price to pay for the privilege of living in the country for the summer season.

However, as each season passed, the realization became stronger and stronger that the colony, with its canvas houses, was not a thing of beauty, or an adjunct that could in any way be considered permanent. No amount of landscaping could hide the weather-beaten appearance of the cottages after two or three years of exposure to the rain and sun. In addition,

with the houses averaging not more than twenty feet space between them, there was no denying that a fire hazard of considerable moment had been created, particularly in the fall when, on snappy evenings, nearly every tent had an oil-heater in operation to keep out the damp. Either the colony had to be done away with, or some way had to be found to improve its appearance, and put it in keeping with the general beauty of Olympia's grounds, and at the same time do away with the danger of fire.

Accordingly it was decided by the Terrace Committee, which by this time was just as permanent a part of the club organization as the House Committee or the Green Committee, that beginning the following season canvas houses would no longer be permitted in the colony and that semi-permanent, fireproof cottages of wall-board or stucco construction, with fireproof roofs, would be the only type of structure permitted. To prevent an unofficial sort of race between the site owners to see which could erect the most elaborate home, the cottages were limited in size to a maximum of 368 sq. ft., including porches and overhanging eaves, and limited to one story in height. These requirements effectively held the structures to two 12x14-ft. rooms, with 32 sq. ft. left over for a front porch and the overhang of the eaves.

As can readily be understood, a number of members, not willing to invest the \$500 to \$2,000 or more these substantial little homes cost, gave up their tent-sites and the number of cottages under the new "building code" dropped from the heyday number of 150 to the 72 in existence today. This made for less crowding, greater privacy and a far more orderly and pleasing appearance to the colony as a whole.

Harmony Through Supervision

Another ruling enforced by the committee was that the plans for all cottages must be submitted to it for approval before construction commenced. As the club architect was made a permanent member of the committee and any modifications in the plans recommended by him were essentially obligatory, the homes in the colony today present a general uniformity and fitness to the surroundings without in any way losing the charm of individual design.

September GOLFDOM will tell how Olympia's "Terrace" is run today.