



The camera does not do justice to the fine rolling terrain of the Mark Twain layout.

# Fine New Muny for Elmira

By Bart J. Scanlon

THE immense growth of popularity of golf as a game for all citizens is demonstrated clearly by its development in Elmira, New York, a medium sized city of 50,000 population. For a number of years there was agitation for a municipal golf course. In 1926 the city constructed a small 9-hole course on a side hill just outside the city limits. It was located just below Quarry Farm where Mark Twain lived and did much of his work.

The course was not well designed. It was a homemade adaptation of a piece of farm land for use as a golf course. But it grew like Topsy in popularity. In spite of its many limitations it had an average of 300 regular players and on Sundays it was over-crowded. The fairways of this first course were straight and narrow. There were no natural hazards except for the side hill on which it was built. The soil had a stony shale rock underlay on which it was hard to keep the turf. For this reason, the course was expensive to maintain.

## Old Course Was Popular

Built originally as a municipal course, the city farmed it out and it was operated by the American Legion on a non profit basis during the years 1931-1934, when Elmira was in dire financial straits.

The universal appeal of the ancient game of golf as a recreation for all the

people is shown by the popularity of this inexpensive course in Elmira. By tapping a new group of people, who had never played the game before, it widened the interest in golf and laid the ground work for the construction of the new ideally situated, professionally designed and well equipped Mark Twain Community Golf Course, which will open its first official season in May of this year.

Starting in 1936, there was a spontaneous city wide group movement among the city's golfers to enlarge the old Mark Twain course to 18 holes. However, a study of the situation soon showed that this was impractical because the topography was not favorable, the soil poor and the cost of remaking and regrading the old course would be prohibitive.

## Old Course Abandoned

The public discussion of revamping the old Mark Twain course aroused public sentiment sufficiently so that finally a group of leading citizens led by William Tyron urged the city to obtain the services of Donald J. Ross, famous golf course architect, to make a survey of the situation. Ross was retained by Colus C. Hunter, then City Manager, early in 1937. In the meantime, all the interested authorities had agreed to drop the idea of trying to revamp the old course and to build an entirely new municipal course with the assistance of WPA. This would, they felt,

give employment to a large number of Elmira citizens who were unemployed.

After an inspection of several possible sites within a radius of 10 miles, Ross advised the purchase of the present site located just outside the village of Elmira Heights, about 2½ miles from the central part of Elmira.

The site contained 225 acres of land and its topography was well adapted to the development of a golf course. The soil was gravel with a minimum of rock close to the surface. Ross recommended its purchase and the city acquired title through condemnation proceedings in July 1937. While condemnation proceedings were in process, Ross submitted plans and specifications. These were approved by WPA in May 1937. Work got under way immediately.

#### Construction Cost \$232,000

Funds expended upon the construction of the new course, including the clubhouse and the equipment house, will total \$232,312.00 according to Carlisle Pontius, WPA Field Director of the Elmira district. Of this total, WPA funds allotted to the project made up \$130,402.00 of the total; the city will expend \$101,910.00. For the most part, the funds allotted to the project by WPA go to pay the wages of workers who were removed from the home relief rolls of the city and employed on the project. Some of the Federal funds were expended for material.

The city's share of the cost took the form of purchase of needed material, use of equipment, preparation of the plans and specifications.

Total cost of the project will be divided as follows: construction of course, including a practice green, starter's booth, caddie shelter, entrance road, parking area, a pump house installation of water system and the erection of 1,000 feet of cyclone fence along highway—\$201,913.84, WPA allocation, \$117,193.00. Construction of a golf pavilion to house dressing rooms, shower-rooms, a pro-shop, and living quarters for the pro, total cost, \$23,933.00, WPA allocation, \$9,852.00. Construction of fire-proof brick building to house mowers, rollers and other maintenance equipment, \$6,656.00, WPA allotment, \$3,356.00.

Unemployed citizens of Elmira, taken from local relief rolls, have been given 1,000 months of employment on the project, Pontius estimated.

On May 27, 1939, WPA turned the

first 9 holes of the course over to the city at a dedication exercise in which Lester W. Herzog, State WPA Administrator, participated. Speaking at the dedication, Herzog said, "Not long ago, golf was regarded as a rich man's pastime. Its play was confined largely to exclusive and expensive country clubs. However, its growth and general popularity during the last two decades has been remarkable. The municipal golf course is rapidly becoming the main-spring in any city recreation program."

Following the brief dedication exercises, Walter Hagen, Tom Bonnar, pro of the Elmira CC; Bill Phillips, member of the city advisory golf committee and Jimmie Hunter, former Finger Lakes amateur champ, played an exhibition match witnessed by a gallery of over 2,000 people.

#### First Nine Opened Year Ago

After playing the first 9 holes and inspecting the last nine, Hagen pronounced it one of the finest municipal courses he had ever seen.

Following the opening of the first 9 holes last May, the response of the city's golfers exceeded the expectations of the Advisory Committee, indicating that with a modern, well-designed and completely equipped course, Elmira is entering a new era of golf enthusiasm. On week-ends and holidays, the first 9 holes were crowded. At times over 100 persons stood patiently in line at the starters booth waiting their turn to tee off. With the full 18 holes open for play, the committee expects the course will be on a self-sustaining basis.

Annual fee for a resident of Elmira is \$15. Non residents pay a \$20 fee. The green fee for residents is 50 cents on week days and \$1.00 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Non-residents pay a straight \$1.00 green fee.

Work is still continuing on the last 9 holes and the entire course will be open for play on May 15.

The fairways were seeded with a mixture of redtop, colonial bent and Kentucky bluegrass. The turf produced by this mixture, weathered the most severe drought in years remarkably well. The greens were planted with Washington strain bent stolons. The 83 traps on the course are filled with Pennsylvania white silica glass sand.

During the winter of 1937-38, 500 trees, ranging in size from an inch in diameter to 14 inches, were planted on the course.

When the Mark Twain course held its official dedicatory ceremonies last May, to mark the opening of the first nine holes, a bronze plaque was unveiled near the first tee. Grouped around the plaque (l. to r.) are: . Maxwell Beers, mayor of Elmira; William Phillips, chairman of golf advisory comm.; Walter Hagen; Tom Bonnar, pro at Elmira CC; Carlisle Pontius, WPA field director; and L. W. Herzog, state WPA administrator.



During the winter of 1938-39, over 5,000 trees and shrubs were transplanted. Plans call for the planting of 5,000 additional trees and shrubs before the course is finally completed this coming spring.

Last fall the entire course was top-dressed with a layer of sandy loam trucked from the bed of the Chemung river. The dressing was put on in  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. to 1-in. thickness, and 50 lbs. of grass seed to an acre were sowed. All power lines are housed in underground cables.

The water system on the course has sprinkler heads located near the tees, near the greens and at the 200-yard marker approaching the greens. The bayonet type valves with portable sprinklers are used. A small pump house houses the reinforced concrete tank fed by gravity from the city pressure. A booster pump located in the pump house keeps all the sprinkler heads on the course at a minimum pressure of 50 lbs.

#### Pavilion Houses Pro Shop

A small but completely equipped golf pavilion has just been completed. A two-story brick building, it has a lounge, pro-shop, a large dressing room for men with four showers and a smaller dressing room for women with two showers. The second floor is a modern 4-room apartment for the use of the pro.

Maintenance equipment is housed in a brick fire-proof equipment house. It contains the following equipment: a 7-gang fairway mower, 7 putting green mowers, a power mower, a sod cutter, a hydro spray, five seeders, two tractors, one with cutter bar attachment, and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton truck.

Other structures include an open shelter for caddies, a small building for use as a starter's booth located opposite Nos. 1 and

10 tees. All buildings are of brick construction and are uniform in design.

Items of work still to be completed include a parking space below the clubhouse to accommodate several hundred cars, and two tennis courts.

Over 5,000 feet of 6 ft. cyclone type fence is being erected along the exposed area of the property bordering the New York State Highway, Route 17, the Buffalo to Elmira route.

#### Have 7-Man Advisory Committee

The course is operated by a golf course advisory committee of 7 members appointed by City Manager Ralph Klebes. Their function is to make recommendations concerning the course, stimulate interest in the course among the general public and adopt rules of play.

The operating staff consists of Harry Shepard, the pro, and Wilbur Stone, greenkeeper. Shepard was formerly assistant pro at the Elmira Country Club; Stone was greenkeeper on the old Mark Twain course. During construction, Charles L. Harris and Hugh Murray of the Donald Ross staff, acted as construction superintendents, and Thomas S. Supple, engineer, assistant to the City Manager and Coordinator of the WPA projects of the City of Elmira, represented the city.

Contests held last year included a match play tournament for both men and women, a hole-in-one tournament and two 4-ball tournaments. So far, no one has equaled par for the course and there has been only one hole-in-one.

Elmira golfers are proud of their new course and look forward to the year when the Mark Twain Community Golf Course will be the scene of a National Public Links Championship.