



The newness has not yet worn off Klinger Lake's clubhouse built in 1938 to replace a fire destroyed predecessor.

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

By JACK FULTON

TWENTY plus years ago, in Sturgis, Mich., there lived a curtain rod manufacturer named C. W. Kirsch, who had never played golf. One late summer's day in 1920 a friend invited him to Kalamazoo to try the game. On the first tee, Kirsch socked one 200 yards down the groove.

There is no record of Kirsch's score for the rest of the round, but that first-tee drive was enough. Next morning, the Kalamazoo pal got a phone call from Kirsch. Sturgis didn't have a golf course and something ought to be done about it. How much land did a golf course need? What would it cost to build one? How many members ought a club to have? Who could be hired right away to lay out a course? The friend suggested that Kirsch contact Maurie Wells, well-known Michigan pro. Maurie would know the answers.

Fast Organization

So Wells came to Sturgis, had a number of meetings with Kirsch and other golf-minded natives, looked over a likely 50-acre tract on the shores of Klinger Lake, seven miles from town, and finally told them that all they needed was members and money; he could build the sort of course they wanted on the land they'd picked and have it ready for play the following spring. Kirsch said go ahead; he'd underwrite it until the members could be signed up.

Thus, in the fall of 1920, the Klinger Lake Country Club was born. A membership drive in Sturgis, in nearby towns and at Klinger Lake, where families from many points of the middle-west have sum-

mer cottages, soon lined up a comfortable roster of charter members. Wells laid out a sporty 9-hole course, soon had a crew of men clearing fairways, filling fairways, filling swampy areas and contouring greens. Another bunch of workmen put up an attractive frame clubhouse on a knoll a little way back from the highway to town. It commanded a view of the entire course. Play began on schedule in the spring of 1921.

Days of Plenty

Like hundreds of other clubs that had their start in the early '20s, Klinger Lake went along beautifully. Money was easy and members had plenty of it to spend. Charley Kirsch, who rightfully regarded the club as his baby, saw to it that the organization prospered. He also saw, by the time 1928 had rolled around, that members were becoming harder to sign up. The club needed a second nine holes, too.

So one night he called a meeting of charter members. It was a dinner, and at the end of the meal Charley handed the men 16 twisted sheets of paper and asked them to light their cigars with the tapers. The sheets of paper were thousand dollar bonds on the club! Charlie was donating them to the good of the organization. This munificent gift had several provisos: the members were requested to get together and pledge enough money to build the second nine holes, to reduce the initiation fee from \$300 to \$50, and as quickly as possible to put on an aggressive membership campaign. The clubhouse needed a lot of remodeling, too,



After more than 20 years in the U. S., a Carnoustie burr still marks the speech of Jimmy Millar, shown here in front of his shop.

but Charley Kirsch said he'd stand the rap on that.

Naturally, the members agreed to every suggestion Kirsch made. Why not; if the club was to continue to exist, some action had to be taken and the Kirsch ideas were sound and practicable. Besides, the \$16,000 of burned bonds had put the club in sensible financial shape.

Wheels began to turn. Fifty-two acres of added land were purchased and the second nine holes laid out. A membership drive netted 50 new members. Charlie Kirsch made good on his promise to remodel the clubhouse and then sat back, modestly disclaiming more than a minor part in the club's rejuvenation. But the members knew how large a part he had played and gladly conceded that it was still "his baby." The club would be that today, too, only Charlie Kirsch died several years ago. But his influence on Klinger Lake will be felt for many years to come.

Fire Razes Clubhouse

On July 31, 1937, fire broke out in the clubhouse and, before help could arrive from Sturgis, burned the frame structure to a pile of charred rubbish. Estimated loss was \$35,000, about half of it covered by insurance.

Many clubs would have taken months recovering from a mid-season blow of this seriousness, but not Klinger Lake. Embers were hardly cool before a temporary building had been erected to shelter the members through the season and plans were under way for a new clubhouse. Soon it was determined that the building would cost \$55,000, furnished, and the sum, less what had been realized on the insurance, was promptly donated by the members.

Plans were completed and ground broken for the new clubhouse that fall. Ten months after the fire, on May 1, 1938, to be exact, Klinger Lake's attractive sandstone clubhouse had not only been built, but was furnished and ready for occupancy. This remarkable speed is typical of the way the club operates. If there is something needed for the club's well-being, do it—quick!

Today, Klinger Lake CC owns 105 acres of wonderful golfing terrain on which is a thoroughly modern golf course. It has a new clubhouse, and a comfortable roster of members to keep it operating in the black. And I am told, unofficially, that the total clubs indebtedness is less than \$7,000. No wonder the organization is so healthy and prosperous.

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A second story of Klinger Lake concerns one Jimmy Millar. Jimmy is from Carnoustie, that Scottish cradle of golf. Jimmy played in the 1919 Scottish Amateur with such well-known golfers as Macdonald Smith, Clarence Hackney, Francis Gallett and Bobby Cruickshank. Within a year after that event, all five of these lads had migrated to the United States, all of them to become golf pros of considerable prominence.

Nineteen Years on the Job

Millar tried Canada first, but didn't like the work he found. In 1920, his brother in St. Clair, Mich., heard that the professional job was open at the St. Clair CC. Jimmy applied for the job and got it, to serve for two years. At the end of that time, he was told that the pro post was open at Klinger Lake, then a promising young club. After Millar had looked over the possibilities of the job and after Charlie Kirsch and the other officials of Klinger Lake had looked over Jimmy, he was offered a contract and the spring of 1922 found Millar as the club pro. Today is 1941; Jimmy Millar is still golf professional at Klinger Lake. In those nineteen summers of service he has seen many changes in the club, equally as many in the place of the golf professional in the club picture.

"When I first came to Klinger Lake," Jimmy reminisced, "a good half of my income came from back-of-the-shop. We didn't have matched sets in those days, so we didn't sell as many clubs as we do now. But they were hickory shafted and they broke often enough to keep me busy at my bench through the summer, fitting in new shafts at \$3.00 a job.

There was \$2.00 profit in it for me. Wood shafts took a lot of refinishing and minor repairs, too.

"Nowadays, the steel shaft has taken most of the pro's bench work away from him and while, as I said, the matched set has made it easier to sell more clubs in a season, I still wish for the profits the hickory shafts used to bring.

"With golf balls, I'd say things are a bit better, now. Fifteen years ago a member would buy one ball or maybe two, while today he takes a 3-ball carton because the balls are packed that way. Then, too, members don't seem to play a ball for as many holes as they used to; they throw them in the practice bag as soon as a few dents come in the cover, instead of using the ball until they cut a smile through to the windings."

Shop Too Small

Jimmy's shop is small, much too small for a club with Klinger Lake's play. He has a bench and a buffing wheel and room for precious little else behind the bag rack which acts as a partition between the work area and the front of the shop; there, Jimmy can only find room for one medium-sized showcase, a settee and a couple of chairs. As for wall space, where a few sets of clubs might be displayed, Jimmy is really up against it. The bag rack takes up one wall. A large arched doorway from the clubhouse area and a telephone nook hog most of another wall. The third has two large windows while the fourth has another window and a door leading toward the first tee.

Jimmy doesn't complain over his cramped quarters, because architecturally there isn't much can be done about it. But this doesn't prevent him from wishing he had his old shop back, which until the fire and the new clubhouse, was located immediately behind the first tee on a knoll from which he could survey the whole course, watch the members drive off, act as a starter on busy days and have complete control over caddie assignments.

Millar is also Klinger Lake's greenkeeper, and with a regular crew of 3 greensmen manages to keep the course in tip-top shape. The men have been with Jimmy a long time and know what to do without constant instructions or supervision. Greens are mowed three times a week, fairways about once a week, and the rough when it needs it. Jimmy keeps his finger on course condi-

tions by touring the entire layout at least once a day and pitching in to help out when course work piles up too heavily on his small staff.

The Klinger Lake course is a fine test of golf. There is hardly a level spot on the grounds and a golfer to score well must take more than ordinary care in his shot-placement or he'll find himself in the woods, the tangled rough or one of Millar's well-placed sandtraps. On the other hand, the fairways are well turfed so that you're likely to get good lies and the greens of Washington bent are far larger and smoother surfaced than average.

With only three men on the grounds crew, Jimmy has worked out a system to get his greens watered nightly without requiring a night man. Jimmy shows he is not afraid of long hours by placing the sprinklers himself in the evening after dinner. At bedtime, he turns off the



To defeat side-hill wash, these stepped-down sand traps skirt the fairway edge on one of the Klinger Lake holes. Previous to their construction, Millar had great trouble maintaining turf in this area.

pump. Next morning, the grounds foreman sets the pumps to work again at 4:30 a. m. after shifting the sprinkler locations, then goes home to breakfast. Around 6:30 or 7:00 sprinklers are changed once more. Fairways are watered when they need it from frequent outlets located in the rough.

You've got to hand it to Jimmy. His golf course is in grand shape and a man can't run a maintenance crew by remote control. Yet, he finds time to operate a pro-shop of the type his members want and to be around to welcome them and to serve them at all hours of the day. It takes a certain amount of talent to last 19 seasons at any club. Whatever that talent is, Jimmy must have it, for he certainly fills his job at Klinger Lake.