

The Connells Show How to Build a Club

By JACK ILLIAN



Bud Connell

You might say the \$5 membership did it for the Marion Country club.

Or, you might say Bud Connell did it— Bud and his wife, Winnie.

And you might say hard work did it.

Actually, however, it is probably a combination of all that put the old Marion CC on its feet and made it

an important cog in the eastern Iowa golf and social wheel.

While we're about it, let's drop that "Marion Country club" name. There isn't any such thing anymore. Today it's the Indian Creek club with club rooms full of people and a golf course full of players.

The new name was taken from the creek which flows adjacent to the club's 9-hole layout, but that's getting a little ahead of the story.

The transformation of the old Marion club started with the arrival of Bud Connell in October of 1941. Bud had been the pro at the Geneva G&CC at Muscatine, Ia.

He purchased the Marion layout from Claude D. Knapp during that fall and moved in immediately. What Bud and Winnie found on their arrival was a very meager excuse for a country club.

There was a 9-hole golf course, a small pro shop and a one-room club house 60 by 34 feet with a small kitchen adjoining. The club had about 50 members, all of whom were preparing to pull in their necks for the winter.

The club had never been operated during the winter. Because of its general run-down condition, the lack of a good heating system and a number of other drawbacks, no attempt was made by Bud and Winnie to operate it during their first winter there.

That was the winter, you'll remember, when the war started.

Bud and Winnie opened the club the following spring, maintaining about 50 or 60 memberships on a \$25 family basis and \$15 for a single membership. It wasn't too

good a summer, but they kept the club going.

By the fall of 1942 the war was on in earnest and Bud decided to go into war work. He obtained a job as a supervisor at the Collins Radio Co. in nearby Cedar Rapids. But, and this is important, they kept the club open during the winter.

The summer of 1943 was rough.

"I didn't have to stay on that war job," Bud said, "but I felt patriotically frozen there. By that time, too, it was impossible to get help.

Winnie Mowed Fairways

"I trucked off to work every morning and Winnie worked on the golf course. She actually did all the mowing on the fairways that summer. I mowed the greens and did the other work on the course after getting off work in the afternoons.

"It was hard work on the course until after midnight every night, then up at 5 a.m. to another job, knowing that your wife was going to be doing manual labor on a golf course.

"We maintained the same membership price, but people weren't interested and the membership dropped down to around 35 hardy souls.

"That fall, though, things picked up and people began to show a little more interest."

About the same time the strain of handling two jobs proved too much for even so rugged a character as Bud. Bothered by hay fever and suffering badly as a result of a dry fall, he quit the war job and decided to devote full time to running the golf club.

"We began to realize," he said, "that people needed and wanted a place to sit around and lie to each other and talk about the long drives they would get when the new balls came back on the market.

"So at that time we instituted the \$2 social membership in order to get people to come out to the club. The idea was to give them a place to go.

"It also gave them a chance to get a taste of Winnie's marvelous cooking and we enjoyed quite an increase in membership.

"When spring came we went back to the

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Before . . .



View of the old Marion clubhouse before its transformation.

Indian Creek Club

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old \$25 membership, but it didn't go. Oh, the people came out and played some golf, but the \$2 social members weren't interested. It taught us something, though.

"The following fall, that was in 1945, we put in a \$5 social membership and again it was very successful. People came out to dance and have a drink, but mostly just for a place to talk and eat.

"We maintained it the following spring, allowing the \$5 social membership holders to play golf by paying green fees. I don't believe we lost a member. It gave a lot of people the opportunity to play the course and they liked it.

"Bring the Family"

"Things were looking up. We stressed the club as a family club. We urged the members to bring their children and it caught on. The same summer we also had an opportunity to play host to a number of civic clubs for picnics, etc. They used the club, ate Winnie's cooking, but most important of all, they joined.

"In fact, we tried anything we could

think of to get people to come out. We weren't worried about their staying when things got back to normal if we could just get them out.

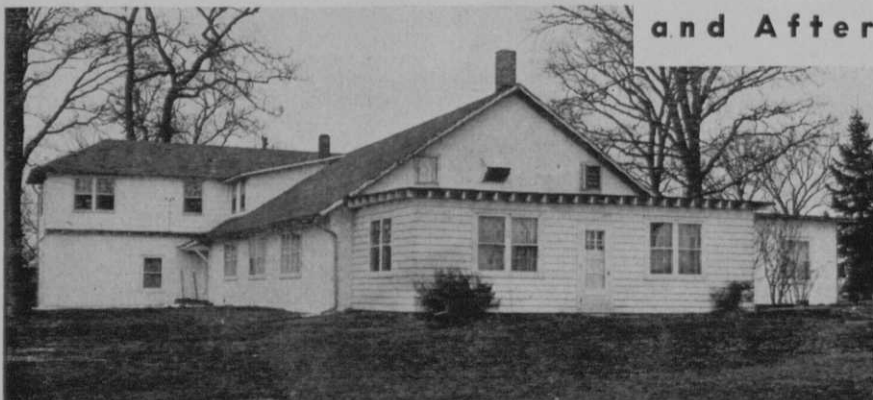
"And it worked. People liked what we were trying to do. In the spring of 1946 we went back to the old membership idea, with \$35 for a family membership and \$25 for single memberships. The total membership stayed right at 200 families."

The membership is well above that figure in this spring of 1947.

It sounds pretty easy, doesn't it, the way Bud tells it. It doesn't sound as though working from 5 a.m. until midnight is too hard, nor that mowing fairways is tough work for a woman.

It sounds as though all they tried to do was keep the place running and during the darkest hours between October 1941 and the spring of 1946 that was sometimes true.

But actually Bud and Winnie knew just what they were doing and exactly where they wanted to go. "We never lost faith in the possibilities of the club or in our idea of how it should be improved and



and After

Indian Creek is the new name of the club and a comparison of this view with that above shows something else new has been added.



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operated," Bud said. "In the end, I think that did as much as anything to pull us up."

Improvements came so gradually they were hardly noticed. Today the new members simply assume they were always there. But, let's take a look at that one-room club house Bud and Winnie found upon arrival.

Made Many Improvements

First of all it's been enlarged. There's a ball room and dining room, both newly decorated. There's the Indian room, a beautifully decorated bar and tap room, there's a new ladies lounge, game rooms and ladies' locker room.

Those are things that meet the eye. Add to that a new kitchen, serving rooms and a new heating plant and a five-room apartment which serves as living quarters for the Connells.

The men's locker rooms have also been improved, and then there's the course itself.

Naturally beautiful, a good portion of the layout was hacked out of native timber. Well-wooded, it demands accuracy. The greens testify to Bud's ability as a greenkeeper and are well trapped.

This year the course will have the benefit of the long experience of Joe Benson, greenkeeper at the Cedar Rapids CC for many years, who is transferring to the up-and-coming Indian Creek club.

Joe will have at his command complete equipment for caring for the course. The machinery must also be included among the many hidden improvements effected by Bud since 1941.

Addition of Benson to the staff will also give Bud the opportunity to devote full time to professional duties, a task he was forced to neglect while improving the club and course facilities.

And, there are still plans for the future.



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You remember the name Indian Creek, mentioned earlier as running adjacent to the course? Well, it winds its way back and forth through 72 rolling, wooded acres.

"We wanted to change the name of the club when we came," Bud said. The Marion CC had never been successful in 20 years and we wanted to get rid of that stigma as soon as possible.

"So, we called it the Indian Creek club, and not just because we thought it sounded pretty, either.

"Some day, soon, we hope to have that second nine laid out on those 72 acres through which Indian Creek winds its way."

GO ALONG WITH NATURE IN GETTING GOOD FAIRWAYS

Charles Baskin, Waterbury, Conn., CC in addressing the GSA convention, counseled making a careful study of what grasses, soil conditions and watering naturally does the best job of developing fairway turf, and adjusting all maintenance practice to those factors nature has tested and proved.

Although standards of appearance, walking ease, playing conditions and weed control are sharply lowered by inability to apply fairway watering properly, Baskin remarked, "Healthy grasses growing on properly treated soils are not injured to any great extent by periods of drought, even though these grasses do become brown over dry periods. The turf merely becomes dormant and will again renew its normal growth when conditions become favorable. Under some conditions it may be necessary to change slightly the treatment of the turf and improve soil conditions some in order to make full use of our annual rainfall.

"On most Northern fairways which have no artificial watering we find a variety of grasses growing and thriving. Chiefly among these we find Kentucky blue, fescue, and a variety of Colonial bents. I think here I may say that most of these varieties of Colonial bents, cut at a height favorable to Kentucky blue or fescue make an excellent turf and a good fairway grass.

"From a golfer's point of view, I do think that up to now we have not found a grass more suitable for fairways than the grasses just mentioned, especially the fescues and Kentucky blue grass. That being so, then let us cultivate and cut these grasses so as to improve them. We should see to it that our soils do not become over-acid. Over-acid soils not only shorten the root growth of the plant, but it has been proven in tests taken that such soil will not absorb the rainfall. Consequently it allows a loss of valuable moisture.

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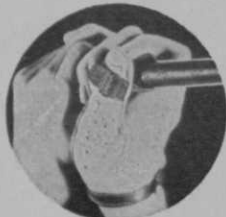
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