

SEBRING SHUFFLEBOARD

By LILLIAN M. JUDD

THE popularity of the game of shuffleboard is very graphically displayed in the growth of the city of Sebring, even from the city's earliest years. There is no written record concerning those first years, from 1912, when George E. Sebring and his son, H. Orvel Sebring, of Ohio, founded the city, until 1927, while the first citizens and others were building homes.

However, it is known there were hours of recreation, when local folks enjoyed themselves and entertained visitors. They often met in a small group in a room in a city building on the Circle. There an embryonic Tourist Club was formed, though it may not have had a name as such.

In 1941 the group, headed by the late Mr. J. B. Boring was organized and Frank E. Oliver became its first president, with Mr. Boring secretary-treasurer.

Within that small group the first shuffleboard activities began without much suitable space for enjoying play. Records show that fees of 50c per member were collected by a Mrs. Stewart.

About 1930 two concrete courts were laid on the No. Pine Street side of land now a part of the present 33 courts in that area. Later additional courts were added. The first two were beneath the shelter, a frame structure thatched like a Seminole chickee, with its cover of palm fronds, shown below. Previous to the building of the two courts the shelter had been a social outdoor meeting place for cards and other games.

A "blown up" copy from a tiny negative taken of the Shelter in 1932 hangs now in the Tourist Club auditorium.

In 1933 the group members enjoying shuffleboard organized with A. L. Fields and Mr. Boring, president and secretary-treasurer respectively.

In 1941 the Tourist Club group and the shuffleboard group, with so many mutual interests, were united as

one club, with Dr. Tuckwood as president. Club activities then began in and about the present club building. That building was built by the Federal Government for the Air Force in 1939 and subsequently was given to the Sebring Tourist Club for recreational activities.

Through the ensuing years and the reign of 18 presidents the Tourist Club has increased in membership to the present figure of about 1200 for the season. A careful survey recently disclosed about 60 to 70% of the members play shuffleboard.

Participation is in casual foursomes, in home tournaments, in district contests, or in Tri-City contests in the three clubs of Lake Wales, Avon Park and Sebring, with a revolving trophy, and thus fosters a close neighborhood fellowship. Further, there is the "Orange Blossom" state contest, a real climax, with visiting players from all over the state, enjoying those 33 courts and comfortable benches recently so renovated as to reach near perfection for the game.

There is no play on the courts on Sunday. Indeed, the courts and blocks need the rest. Every weekday, almost from the crack of dawn, until "lights out" at approximately 10 P.M. on fair nights, winter and summer, the courts are in constant use with at times a waiting line to play and acquire a good tan, and maybe some blisters.

Sebring's visitors are enjoying that popular, clean sport, shuffleboard, for fun, for health and for good fellowship.

Who would dream that the simple game, played with small metal blocks on a table, like billiards in the time of Henry VIII of England, would steal across the Atlantic on ships' decks and even with those wooden blocks gain such popularity as to become almost a U.S.A. national pastime! Players may become tired and then re-tired, but on they go. They love it!



Two courts, covered by a thatched roof — a humble beginning in 1932.