

Thomas A. O'Donnell's "Desert Golf Course"

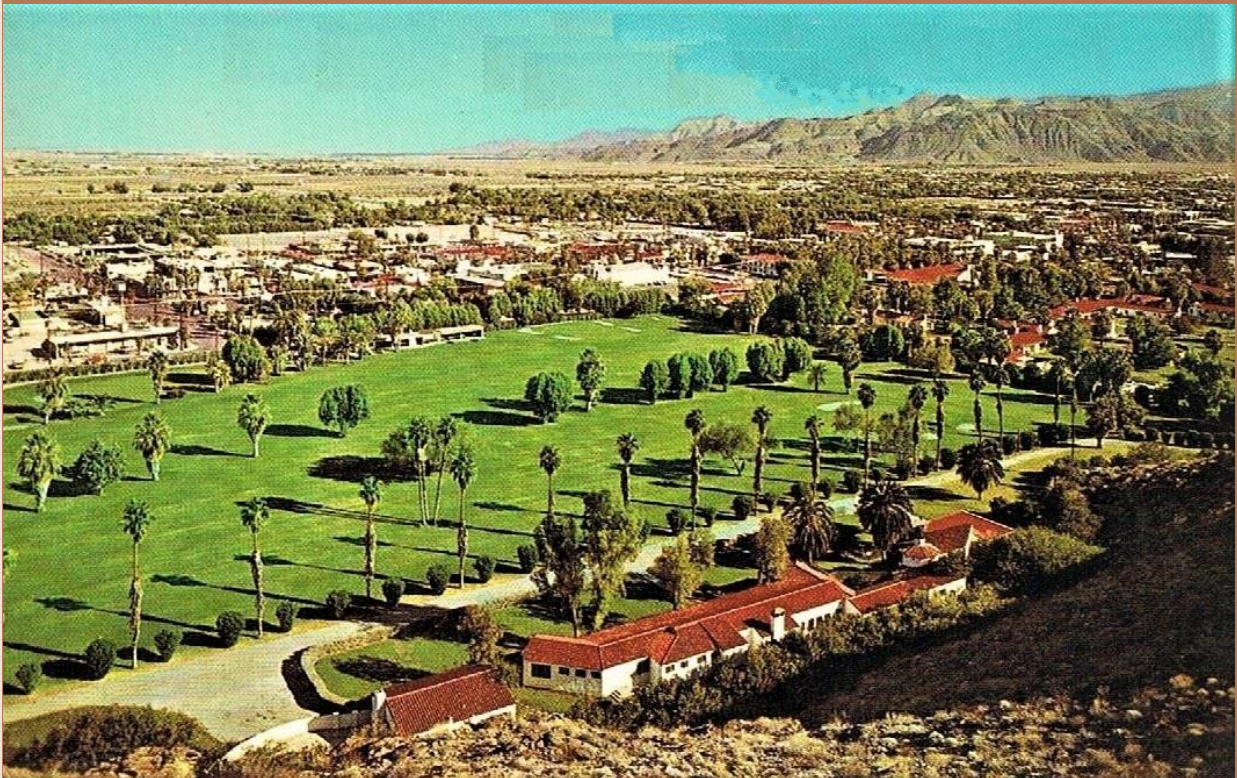
301 North Belardo Road

Palm Springs, CA 92262

Nomination Application For

City of Palm Springs

Class 1 Historic Site



Prepared by

Steven Keylon

For the

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

August 30, 2019



The cover of an early scorecard for Thomas A. O'Donnell's Desert Golf Course. O'Donnell, who often played wearing little more than shorts and a hat, is depicted on his private 9-hole golf course, with his hillside residence, Ojo del Desierto, shown above him. Ca. 1940, courtesy Tracy Conrad.

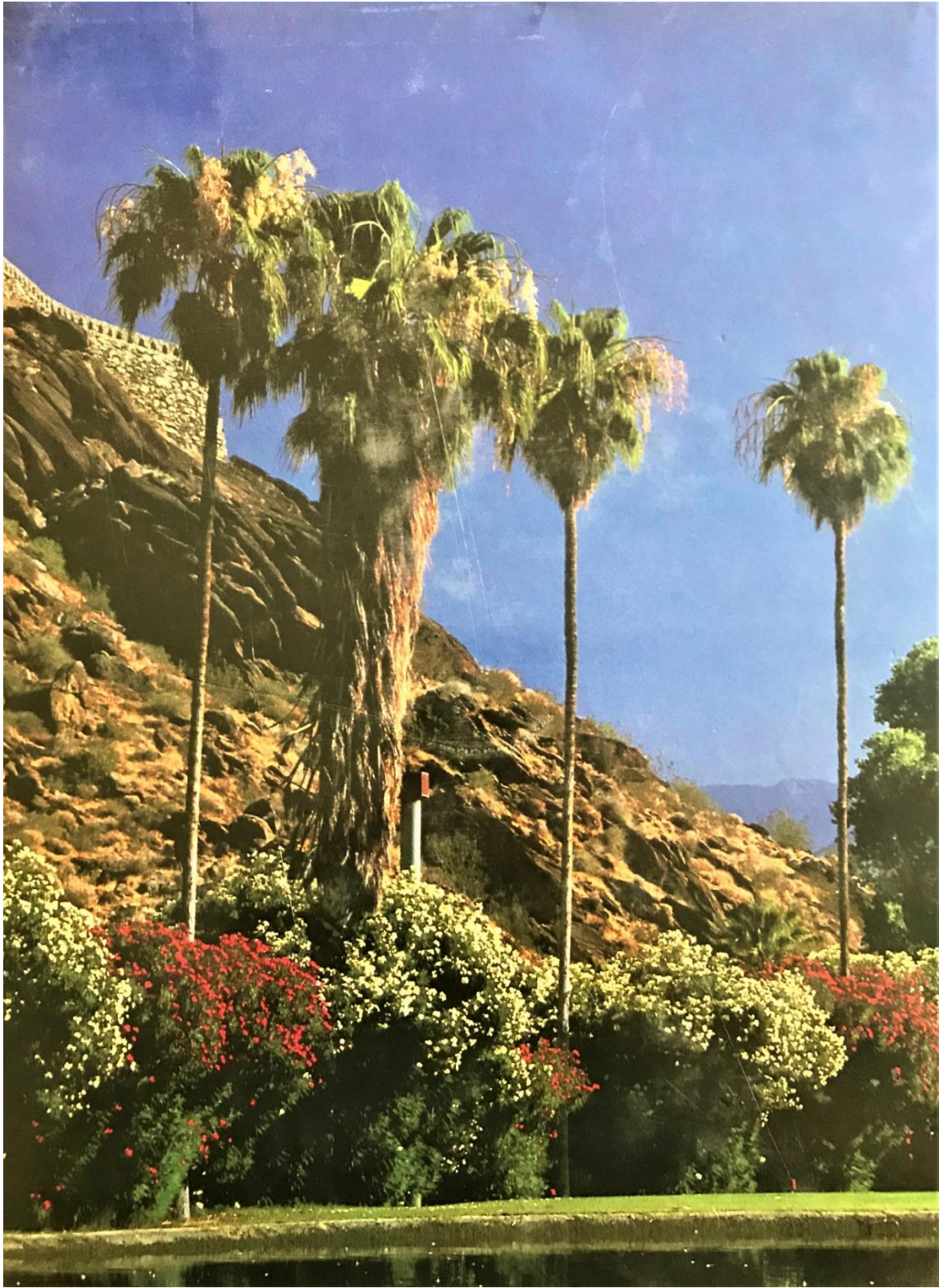
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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And a very special thank you to the Palm Springs Historical Society for their outstanding collection of historic photographs and documents. Photographs from the Historical Society used here are identified by their watermark.

Special thanks to Ron Duby, copy editor.



The historic landscape of the Desert Golf Course featured a long row of Mexican fan palm, with red and white oleander being a predominant character-defining feature.

THOMAS A. O'DONNELL'S “DESERT GOLF COURSE”

CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) is a non-profit organization whose mission is “to educate and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving the historical resources and architecture of the city of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley area.” In June of 2018, the PSPF board of directors assigned the task of writing Thomas A. O’Donnell’s “Desert Golf Course” Class 1 Historic Site nomination to Steven Keylon.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE: Thomas A. O’Donnell’s “Desert Golf Course,” known today as the O’Donnell Golf Club, at 301 North Belardo Road in Palm Springs, was the creation of oil tycoon Thomas O’Donnell, who began construction in 1926, finishing the first iteration of his private 9-hole course the following year. The oldest existing golf course in the Coachella Valley—the Desert Inn’s Mashie Course predates it but no longer exists. The historic designed landscape, golf course, and contributing structures are important as the “front yard” of Thomas A. O’Donnell’s private estate, *Ojo del Desierto* (Eye of the Desert), which is on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1936 he commissioned a custom Spanish-Colonial Revival residence on the golf course, which the O’Donnells called the “Golf House,” where they lived until O’Donnell’s death in 1945. The O’Donnell Golf Club has significance in several areas; first, as a historic golf course, whose configuration has survived largely unchanged since the 1930s; also as an important historic designed landscape; and finally, it has significance for contributing structures designed by architectural designer William Charles Tanner. These significant elements remain remarkably intact and exhibit numerous stylistic features which place them within the historic context of the period “Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)” as defined in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings* created by Historic Resources Group. The period of 1919-1941 was when wealthy and influential people were building second homes in the growing and increasingly well-known resort Village. Though contemporary in function, most of these homes and gardens were typically built in Mediterranean-Revival styles meant to evoke a feeling of Old California—which is true of the landscape and structures at the O’Donnell Golf Club.

In 1944 O’Donnell willed the club to the city of Palm Springs, which leased it back to the O’Donnell Golf Club for 99 years. That lease ends on October 31, 2043. Under the terms of the O’Donnell gift, when the lease ends, the O’Donnell Golf Club property must be named the Thomas A. O’Donnell Municipal Park, and its use must remain solely a public benefit. Whether the existing golf course will be turned into a public golf course, or whether the historic

landscape and structures are adaptively reused to create a public park, the property may not be used for any other purpose. Should the city break this agreement, the entire 33-acre site would revert to the heirs of Thomas O'Donnell.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA: For this nomination, a period of significance is established — 1925-1945 — the period when Thomas O'Donnell purchased the lots and created his golf course, up to the point he transferred ownership to the City of Palm Springs in 1944. Historic character-defining features from the period of significance will be described and evaluated, documenting them as either eligible or ineligible. Changes that have taken place since 1945 will be documented.

The O'Donnell Golf Club has not previously been evaluated for Class 1 Historic Site eligibility, but it is included in the draft 2015 Citywide Historic Resources Inventory, which described it thusly:

Thomas A. O'Donnell, an oilman who moved to Palm Springs in the mid-1920s and built the O'Donnell Golf Club soon after. He purchased the land on which the golf course is now situated in two parcels, in May and December 1925. He planned and built the golf course, which includes nine holes with two tee positions for each hole. In 1944, after operating the golf course for over fifteen years, O'Donnell organized the O'Donnell Golf Club as a private, nonprofit club. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the Palm Springs Invitational Golf Championship was played at O'Donnell Golf Club. Many highly respected former PGA Tour Pros played in the tournament, including Ken Venturi, Al Geiberger, Gene Littler, Billy, Butch & Craig Harmon, Harvie Ward, and George Archer. Many celebrities were members of O'Donnell, including William and "Mousie" Powell, Bob and Dolores Hope, Kirk and Joel Douglas, William Holden, and Clark Gable. (Source Palm Springs Life).

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 1 Historic Resource: Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met.

FINDING 1: The site, structure, building, or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

8.05.070 (C.1.a) paragraph 2 - **Significant Persons:** This criterion recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to the national, state or local history. *As the creation of Thomas O'Donnell, known nationally as a pioneer oilman, one of the "Big Four," as well as one of Palm Springs' most important and beloved philanthropists, the O'Donnell Golf Club qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 2.*

8.05.070 (C.1.a) paragraph 3 - **Design:** The O'Donnell Golf Club is eligible under the theme of "Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)." In its design, the O'Donnell Golf Club golf course, landscape, and contributing structures are highly important Palm Springs landmarks. These are largely unchanged examples of several themes: As the earliest remaining golf course in the Coachella Valley, a place internationally known as the "Winter Golf Capital of the World"; as an historic designed landscape, with much of its trees still thriving after nearly 90 years; as having supporting Spanish Colonial-Revival structures designed by William Charles Tanner.

The historic nine-hole golf course has remained largely unchanged since O'Donnell opened the course to the public in 1932. The configuration of holes, tees, greens and fairways are masterfully designed to take advantage of the breathtaking views and vistas from the golf course, while the mountain itself ingeniously becomes a part of the course design, particularly at the famous fifth hole. From the beginning, the course was a draw to celebrities, as *Fore* Magazine described, "Bob Hope and William Powell were members, while other luminaries such as President Gerald R. Ford, Bing Crosby, Clark Gable, Kirk Douglas, Gordon MacRae, Phil Harris, Hoagy Carmichael and Johnny Weissmuller could be seen strolling O'Donnell's verdant fairways by day."

The landscape was designed to enhance the golfer's experience, framing views and screening adjacent fairways. The limited palette of drought-tolerant trees was so successful that nearly a hundred years later, most remain and still serve their intended function. The mature plantings are in a serene setting of acres of open space at the foot of the majestic mountain.

The five structures on the property were all designed to harmonize with O'Donnell's hillside home, *Ojo del Desierto*, as well as with the adjacent Desert Inn. All are Spanish-Colonial Revival in style, and three are known to have been designed by master architectural designer William Charles Tanner, who also designed *Ojo del Desierto* and the Desert Inn. Though the designer hasn't been positively identified for two of the structures, the author feels strongly that they were also designed by Tanner, as they were built in the same period, using the same design and with the same materials, and are all as beautifully detailed as the structures known to be Tanner's.

Because of these, the site has significance for its distinctive characteristics and qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 3.

8.05.070 (C.1.a) paragraph 4 - **Construction:** The O'Donnell Golf Club is eligible under the theme of "Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)." In its construction, the O'Donnell Golf Club exhibits the same quality of materials and craftsmanship as seen at O'Donnell's *Ojo del Desierto*. The landscape was created using high-quality plant material, expertly planted, allowing the majority of the trees the ability to survive for nearly a century in the brutal

climate of the Sonoran Desert. The structures were constructed using high-quality materials such as brick, stucco, steel casement and wood sash windows, decorative ironwork, and terra cotta roof tiles. Because of the care taken during construction, the contributing structures at the O'Donnell Golf Club remain in excellent condition.

Because of these, the site has significance for its distinctive characteristics and qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 4.

8.05.070 (C.1.a) paragraph 5b - *High Artistic Value*: High artistic values may be expressed in many ways, including areas as diverse as community design or planning, engineering, and sculpture.

The structures designed by architectural designer William Charles Tanner for O'Donnell and his Desert Golf Course are eligible under the theme of Mediterranean-influenced design—their Spanish-Colonial Revival architecture possess numerous distinctive characteristics that make up the style including stucco or brick walls, clay tile roofs, broad loggias and usually a splayed, asymmetrical layout. Even the utilitarian structures, such as the freestanding restroom, are artfully detailed and well-proportioned. Detailing such as wood board-and-batten and decorative ironwork further enhance the architecture. As custom structures skillfully designed by Tanner, these buildings rise to the level of works by a master architect with high artistic values. *Therefore, for its distinctive characteristics, as the work of a master architectural designer, and for its high artistic values, the site qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 5.*

SUMMARY: This evaluation finds the O'Donnell Golf Club eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Site under 8.05.070 (C.1.a) paragraphs 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the local ordinance's seven criteria.



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services

3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Phone 760 323 8245

Fax 760 322 8360

Historic Preservation Officer 760 322 8364 x8786

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)

WHEN TO USE THIS APPLICATION:

Use this application if you are seeking Class 1 or Class 2 historic designation for a property or parcel or for historic district applications.

Use the MINOR ARCHITECTURAL APPLICATION FORM (MAA) if you are seeking approval for alterations to Class 1, Class 2, Class 3 or Class 4 historic sites. (Contact the Planning Department if you are unsure of the classification of your property.)

WHO MAY APPLY:

Any individual or organization may apply to the City for consideration of a request for historic resource designation. Applications must be signed and notarized by the owner(s) of record of the site, structure, building or object for which the designation is sought.

PROCEDURE:

1. For proposed historic sites or resources: Refer to Palm Springs Municipal Code ("PSMC") Section 8.05.070 for *Procedures and Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources*. Visit: [www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal code/ title 8/section 8.05 "Historic Preservation"](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal%20code/title%208/section%208.05%20Historic%20Preservation).
2. For proposed historic districts: Refer to Municipal Code Section 8.05.090 for *Procedures and Criteria for Designation of Historic Districts*. Visit: [www.palmspringsca.gov/government/ departments/planning/municipal code/Title 8/section 8.05 "Historic Preservation](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal%20code/Title%208/section%208.05%20Historic%20Preservation).
3. Complete all parts of the application and include related reports, mailing labels and back up information in support of the application. Denote "NA" for any line item that is not applicable.
4. Once the application is complete, contact the Planning Department and schedule a pre-application conference with the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO").
5. Submit the completed application and related materials to the Department of Planning Services. A Planning Department case number will be assigned to the application.
6. Applications for historic site / resource or historic district designation are evaluated by staff in the City Planning Department who will prepare the application for consideration by the City's Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB") at a noticed public hearing. Applicants should plan on attending the hearing. City staff will schedule site visits for members of the HSPB to become familiar with the site prior to the public hearing. (Exterior review only, interiors are not subject to HSPB review.)
7. At the public hearing, the HSPB will evaluate the application and make a recommendation for City Council action. The City Council will consider the application and the HSPB's recommendation at a second noticed public hearing. The applicant should again attend that hearing.
8. The final action of the City Council to designate will be recorded on the property title with the County Recorder's office.

FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE APPLICATIONS, SEE CHECKLIST FOR CLASS 1 AND 2.
FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT APPLICATIONS, SEE CHECKLIST FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS.



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services

3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262
Tel 760-323-8245 – FAX 760-322-8360

For Staff Use Only

Case Number: _____

In-Take Planner: _____

Date: _____

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION PLANNING / ZONING GENERAL INFORMATION FORM

TO THE APPLICANT: Complete all parts of this application. Denote "NA" for lines that are not applicable.

Project Information:

Applicant's Name: Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

Applicant's Address: 1775 East Palm Canyon Drive, Suite 110-195, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Site Address: 301 N. Belardo Rd., Palm Springs, CA 92262

APN: _____

Phone #: (760) 837-7117

Email: srk1941@gmail.com

Zone: _____ GP: _____ Section/Township/Range: _____/X____/X____

Description of Project:

The O'Donnell Golf Club is the oldest existing golf course in the Coachella Valley, a place internationally known as the "Winter Golf Capitol of the World." The 33-acre parcel includes an historic designed landscape, a historic golf course whose configuration has remained largely unchanged for nearly a hundred years, and five structures designed by William Charles Tanner.

Note: For Historic District applications: on a separate page provide a list of all sites/parcels within the proposed historic district boundaries with the same information listed above.

Is the project located on the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation? Yes/No: No

(Refer to the Land Status Map under Tribal Resources on the Planning Department home page)

Construction Date: Begins 1926 ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual (denote source, i.e. building permits)

Architect: Thomas O'Donnell and Capt. J. F. Lucey (golf course); William Charles Tanner (Structures)

Original Owner: Thomas O'Donnell

Common/Historic Name of Property: Desert Golf Course/O'Donnell Golf Club

Other historic associations: _____

Attach to this application any information, photos, drawings, newspaper articles, reports, studies, or other materials to fully describe the characteristics or conditions that support this application for historic designation.

Architectural Style: Spanish-Colonial Revival

Refer to the Architectural Styles chapter of Citywide Historic Context Statement, under Historic Resources on the Planning Department Home Page: www.palmspringsca.gov.

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION APPLICATION (CONT.)

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 1 Historic Resource:

Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met. Refer to the US Department of the Interior National Register Bulletin "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" of potentially historic resources for further information.

Provide a written description of how the site qualifies as a historic resource per the following Findings. Please provide answers on a separate sheet or report.

FINDING 1: The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

- a. The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state, or community. ¹
- b. The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.
- c. The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history.
- d. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.
- e. The resource presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or that possess high artistic value.
- f. The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists.

FINDING 2: The site, structure, building or object retains one or more of the following aspects of integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Provide a written description for each element as listed: Design; Materials; Workmanship; Location; Setting; Feeling; and Association. ²

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 2 Historic Resource:

Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 2 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided the site, structure, building, or object exhibits significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed in Finding 1 above. A Class 2 historic resource is not required to meet the findings for integrity as described in Finding 2.

Criteria and Findings for Designation of Historic Districts:

In addition to the criteria listed in Finding 1, to be considered for designation as a Historic District, a defined area must:

- a. Contain contributing resources on a majority of the sites within the proposed district which individually meet the criteria in Finding 1. The defined area may include other structures, buildings, or archaeological sites which contribute generally to the overall distinctive character of the area and are related historically or visually by plan or physical development. *Provide a separate list by address and Assessor Parcel Number (APN) for each site/parcel that meets the criteria outlined in Finding 1.*
- b. Identify non-contributing properties or vacant parcels to the extent necessary to establish appropriate, logical or convenient boundaries. *Provide a separate list by address and APN number for each site/parcel within the proposed historic district that is considered non-contributing to the overall historic significance of the historic district.*

¹ NOTE: Unlike the National Trust criteria, the City's criterion does not consider "patterns of events". For consideration of "patterns of events", use Criterion "C", reflecting a particular period.

² NOTE: Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin for "How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property".

**CITY OF PALM SPRINGS
PLANNING DEPARTMENT APPLICATION
HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION**

CLASS 1 AND CLASS 2

APPLICANT'S REQUIRED MATERIAL CHECKLIST

The following items must be submitted before a **Historic Resource Designation** application will be accepted. Please check off each item to assure completeness. Provide twelve (12) hard copies and one (1) PDF copy of the following materials unless otherwise noted:

	Applicant Only	City Use Only
Application Information:		
• General Information form (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Notarized letter from property owner consenting to Historic Designation (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Ownership and Address History ("Chain of Title") (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historic Resource Report:		
The following items shall be included in a historic resources report describing the site, structure, buildings, or objects eligible and appropriate for designation per PSMC 8.05.070.		
• Photographs of the exterior of the proposed site, structure, buildings or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Aerial photo of the site/resource (from Google Maps or equal).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Information on the architect, designer, and/or developer.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Date and method of construction. Provide copies of building permits.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• A detailed assessment of the character defining features describing materials, architectural details/style, landscape elements, or other relevant descriptors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Evaluation of the site relative to the Criteria and Findings for Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional Information:		
• Site Plan: 8-12" x 11" or 11" x 17"	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Public Hearing labels per PSZC Section 94.09.00.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Any other documentation or research as may be necessary to determine the qualifications of the site, structure, building, or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Applicants are encouraged to review the bulletin from the U.S. Department of the Interior titled "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation". (National Register Bulletin 15 (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>)).

6. Statement of Significance

Summary

The O'Donnell Golf Club, located at 301 North Belardo Road, was constructed 1926-1927, with later additions. A period of significance has been established of 1925-1945. The O'Donnell Golf Club is composed of several separate parcels, all owned by the city of Palm Springs but leased back until 2043. At that time, according to the terms of the lease, the O'Donnell Golf Club must be renamed the Thomas A. O'Donnell Municipal Park and is to be used only as a public golf course or other public benefit.

First Owner, Thomas O'Donnell

See Appendix II for information on the eight parcels that historically comprised what is now the O'Donnell Golf Club, and changes in ownership over time.

TIMELINE:

- May-December 1925—O'Donnell acquires 33.16-acre parcel, as well as another parcel for a maintenance yard.
- 1926-27—Land graded and golf course laid out; Gate Lodge built; course landscaped
- 1927—O'Donnell acquires parcel at Stevens and Palm Canyon for private reservoir.
- 1927—Course opens as a private golf course for O'Donnell and his friends.
- February 1932—course opened to the public.
- 1932-33—Golf Shop and restroom structure built.
- 1936 — Golf Shop enlarged, and modifications to several greens and tees.
- 1936—Golf House, O'Donnell's second residence, built adjacent to golf course.
- 1937 – Putting green added.
- 1937 – Palm Springs Golf Club incorporated.
- Ca. 1943—O'Donnell sells *Ojo del Desierto* and Lots 702 and 47 to Nate and Virginia Milnor.
- 1944—O'Donnell promises golf course as a gift to the city with a 99-year lease.
- 1945—City Council votes to accept the gift, and the course becomes a private golf club; Thomas O'Donnell dies.
- 1945—O'Donnell "Golf House" residence sold by Mrs. O'Donnell to the Milnors, who then sell the house to Pat Dougherty. Deed changed for Lot 47 so ownership is shared by the Milnors and Dougherty, who will use the same driveway.
- 1945 – permit pulled for Golf Shop garage, \$4,100 and an addition to the Golf Shop, \$1,000.

- 1946 – New traps added, and old ones enlarged and re-shaped; trees and shrubs added.
- 1947 – City buys 50 foot by 1127 foot strip of land adjacent to the course at its northern boundary (Lot 47) along Alejo Road.
- 1954 – Electric golf carts introduced.
- 1955 – Storage building for electric golf carts added to the Golf Shop, which was remodeled, expanding pro shop.
- 1969—City of Palm Springs acquires Lots 702 (former Carriage House) and Lots 688, 689, and 690 (O'Donnell's Golf House Residence, which was turned into O'Donnell Golf Club Clubhouse).

Local Architectural Context

The O'Donnell Golf Club should be viewed within the context of the period between World Wars I and II when Palm Springs was becoming established as a fashionable winter resort for wealthy and/or famous people. According to Historic Resource Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*:

“In the 1920s and 1930s, a number of architects and designers from Los Angeles and elsewhere worked in Palm Springs, designing Spanish and Mediterranean Revival-style residences primarily as winter homes for seasonal residents. As the focus on regional expression through architecture evolved, period and exotic revival styles took hold throughout California. Mediterranean Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival examples prevailed, in large measure due to the Panama-California Exposition, held in San Diego in 1915. Well suited to the region's warm, dry climate, the Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival styles appealed to many Southern California residents for their exotic appearance and sense of history.”

Landscape design in the Coachella Valley had been minimal up to the 1920s. Landscape architecture at the time was influenced primarily by the same Spanish Colonial-Revival and Mediterranean Revival styles that inspired the architecture. Horticulturists and nurseries in the Coachella Valley (as well as most of Southern California) were experimenting with drought-tolerant species from similar climates in the Mediterranean, South Africa, and Australia, using those that were successful along with plants and trees native to the Sonoran Desert.¹

Site Description

Location.

The O'Donnell Golf Club is located at 301 North Belardo Road.

Permit History

See Appendix II for details about ownership of the various parcels over time.

BACKGROUND / HISTORIC CONTEXT

The relatively short history of Palm Springs can be organized into several distinct periods, as defined by the Historic Resources Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*. These include the following:

- Native American Settlement to 1969
- Early Development (1884-1918)
- Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)
- Palm Springs During World War II (1939-1945)
- Post-World War II Palm Springs (1945-1969)

It is within the context of the period “Palm Springs between the Wars” that the O'Donnell Golf Club will be evaluated. The following context statement is edited from Historic Resource Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings: Palm Springs Between the Wars* (1919-1941): This context explores the transformation of Palm Springs from a modest spa town into a luxury winter resort in the years between the First and Second World Wars. By 1918 Nellie Coffman and her sons, George Roberson and Earl Coffman, understood the town's potential, not as a health spa for asthmatics and consumptives, but as an exclusive winter resort for the well-to-do, and set about transforming their sanatorium into the luxurious Desert Inn, one of the most renowned hostelrys in the country. Their success inspired the development of two equally spectacular hotels in the 1920s and cemented the town's growing reputation as one of the country's premier luxury winter resorts. The Oasis Hotel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. (known as Lloyd Wright) opened in 1925 by Pearl McCallum McManus; and the grand Hotel El Mirador, designed by Walker and Eisen in a sumptuous Spanish Colonial Revival style and opened in 1927.

Automobile tourism played an early and important part of the success and growth of Palm Springs as a destination. In 1914, highway bonds were passed in Riverside County for extensive road improvements and construction of new routes. As part of these efforts, the highway connecting Los Angeles and Palm Springs was completed in October 1916. Pavement of the highway through to Indio was completed in 1924, allowing travelers to drive all the way from Los Angeles to Palm Springs in less than 4 hours, all on paved roads.

The first residential subdivisions were recorded in the early 1920s on tracts largely concentrated on land immediately surrounding the existing village and the resorts. Several tracts were subdivided by Prescott T. Stevens, along with other prominent early Palm Springs settlers including Pearl McManus, Raymond Cree, and Harriet Cody.

In the 1920s, business tycoons, industrialists, and other wealthy businessmen, along with the Hollywood elite discovered the desert and began to transform Palm Springs into an international resort. While the movie stars primarily stayed at the resort hotels when visiting Palm Springs, other wealthy residents and seasonal visitors started building architect-designed estates and drawing increased attention to the growing resort town.

The 1930s saw Palm Springs blossom, as more and more celebrities made it their winter weekend getaway, and more development sprang up to house and entertain them. By the start of World War II, Palm Springs had so long been thought of as a movie star's playground that some of the neighborhoods were described as "Beverly Hills in the desert." One section was so filled with film notables, the neighborhood was ultimately dubbed the "Movie Colony."

In the 1930s important figures in finance and business continued to flock to the desert in the winter, helping to cement the village's reputation as one of the nation's top winter resort destinations.

Architecturally, the Spanish and Mediterranean Revival styles were the town's dominant architectural expression during this period. In addition, there are examples of simplified Ranch houses featuring rustic details and board-and-batten exterior walls. Beginning in the 1930s, prominent Modernist architects began making significant contributions to the architectural landscape in Palm Springs.

7. Integrity Analysis (using U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards)

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. To be listed in the local registry as Class 1, a property must not only be shown to be significant under the criteria, but it also must have integrity. The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. Historic properties either retain integrity (that is, convey their significance) or they do not. The definition of integrity includes seven aspects or qualities. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant. The following sections define the seven aspects and explain how they combine to produce integrity.

DESIGN

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture. The design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation, and materials. A property's design reflects historic functions and technologies as well as aesthetics. It includes such considerations as the structural system; massing; arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; textures and colors of surface materials; type, amount, and style of ornamental detailing. ***The O'Donnell Golf Club's essential characteristics of form, plan, space, structures, configuration of tees, greens and holes, hardscape and landscape features, and style, have survived surprisingly intact.***

MATERIALS

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveals the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies. ***The pattern and configuration that today forms the O'Donnell Golf Club, with its landscaped grounds and Spanish Colonial-Revival structures, survives intact. A majority of the drought-tolerant plantings typical of the period remain extant, as well as planting used to define golf course features. Structures used high-quality materials typical of the Spanish Colonial-Revival buildings that architectural designer William Charles Tanner had designed for the adjacent Desert Inn, as well as Ojo del Desierto, Thomas O'Donnell's hillside home.***

WORKMANSHIP

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. It is the evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, or site. Workmanship can apply to the property as a whole or to its individual components. It can be expressed in vernacular methods of construction and plain finishes or in highly sophisticated configurations and ornamental detailing. It can be based on common traditions or innovative period techniques. Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principles of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles. Examples of workmanship in historic buildings include tooling, carving, painting, graining, turning, and joinery. ***The landscape at the O'Donnell Golf Club featured high-quality specimens, expertly planted by Palm Springs pioneer Oliver McKinney's Desert Nursery, and as such, remain largely intact and in excellent condition. The structures at the O'Donnell Golf Club are comprised of simple materials like stucco, brick, wood,***

steel, and glass, with terra cotta roof tiles. Except for the loss of the south wing, the O'Donnell Golf House residence continues to express a high degree of integrity and quality workmanship expected of a structure from this period. The secondary structures also represent the high-quality materials and workmanship of the period.

LOCATION

Location is the place where a historic property was constructed or the place where a historic event occurred. The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understand why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved. *The O'Donnell Golf Club remains in its original location, and therefore qualifies under this aspect.*

SETTING

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves *how*, not just *where*, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve. In addition, the way in which a property is positioned in its environment can reflect the designer's concept of nature and aesthetic preferences. *The setting of the O'Donnell Golf Club continues to reflect the original design relationship of landscaped site and structures. The important views and vistas from the golf course to the mountains beyond are for the most part unchanged from the period of significance and remain an important character-defining feature of the landscape.*

FEELING

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. For example, a rural historic district retaining original design, materials, workmanship, and setting will relate the feeling of agricultural life in the 19th century. *The O'Donnell Golf Club is sited on a prominent lot in downtown Palm Springs which takes advantage of panoramic, relatively unspoiled mountain views to the west. The associated landscape retains a high degree of integrity from the period of significance—the original rows of Mexican fan palm and California fan palm remain nearly intact; so does the tamarisk windbreak; the long row of Arizona cypress survives with losses. and the golf course configuration has been largely unchanged for nearly ninety years. Accordingly, the residence and contributing structures retain nearly all their original integrity of feeling.*

ASSOCIATION

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character. For example, a Revolutionary War battlefield whose natural and man-made elements have remained intact since the 18th century will retain its quality of association with the battle. Because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register. *The O'Donnell Golf Club is important as the oldest extant golf course in the Coachella Valley, in a region known around the world for its golf courses. Built for legendary Palm Springs pioneer and philanthropist Thomas O'Donnell, it continues its association with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the community. The O'Donnell Golf Club was designed to be an integral part of O'Donnell's large estate, Ojo del Desierto, now on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as being one of the last living links to the renowned Desert Inn, pioneer Nellie Coffman's resort which put Palm Springs on the map.*

INTEGRITY SUMMARY: This integrity analysis confirms that the site and structures of the O'Donnell Golf Club still possesses all seven aspects of integrity. *The O'Donnell Golf Club's golf course design has remained unchanged for nearly ninety years. The significant historic designed landscape retains much of its plant material, hardscape, layout, configuration from its primary period of significance with relatively minor modifications. Additionally, aside from the loss of one wing of the O'Donnell Golf House residence, and other interior modifications made to turn the residence into a golf clubhouse, the Golf House remains substantially intact. The other contributing structures also retain a high level of integrity. In summary, the O'Donnell Golf Club and the O'Donnell Golf House residence still possess a significant degree of integrity sufficient to qualify for designation as a Class 1 Historic Site.*

APPENDICES

I Owner's Letter of Support



1 August, 2019

Members of the Palm Springs City Council
3200 E Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Re: O'Donnell Golf Club

Gentlepersons:

I am writing on behalf of the Members and Board of Directors of the O'Donnell Golf Club in expressing our firm support for the Class 1 Historic Site Designation for The O'Donnell Golf Course, located in downtown Palm Springs.

The O'Donnell Golf Course, built in 1927, is the oldest golf course in the Coachella Valley and has been a prominent fixture of our desert community for all of its nearly 100 years of existence.

The design of the golf course reflects the natural beauty of its unique environment, nestled as it is against the San Jacinto mountains which forms a backdrop of incomparable beauty, accented with rocks and natural desert-scape in foothills that envelop the western side of the golf course. In addition to the expansive views, the entire course blends in seamlessly with this natural setting, providing an ideal habitat for both the flora and fauna of the desert.

The Board of Directors of the O'Donnell Golf Club believes that a Class 1 Historic Site Designation is consistent with our dedication to maintaining the unique character and natural beauty of the O'Donnell Golf Course that was envisioned at its founding,

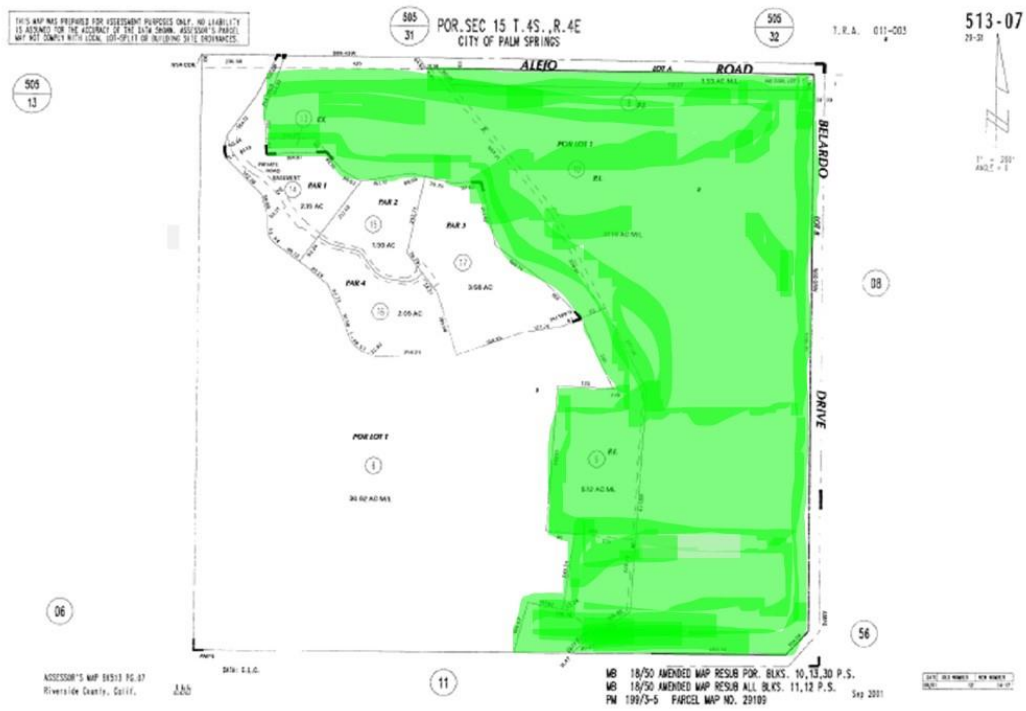
Thank you.

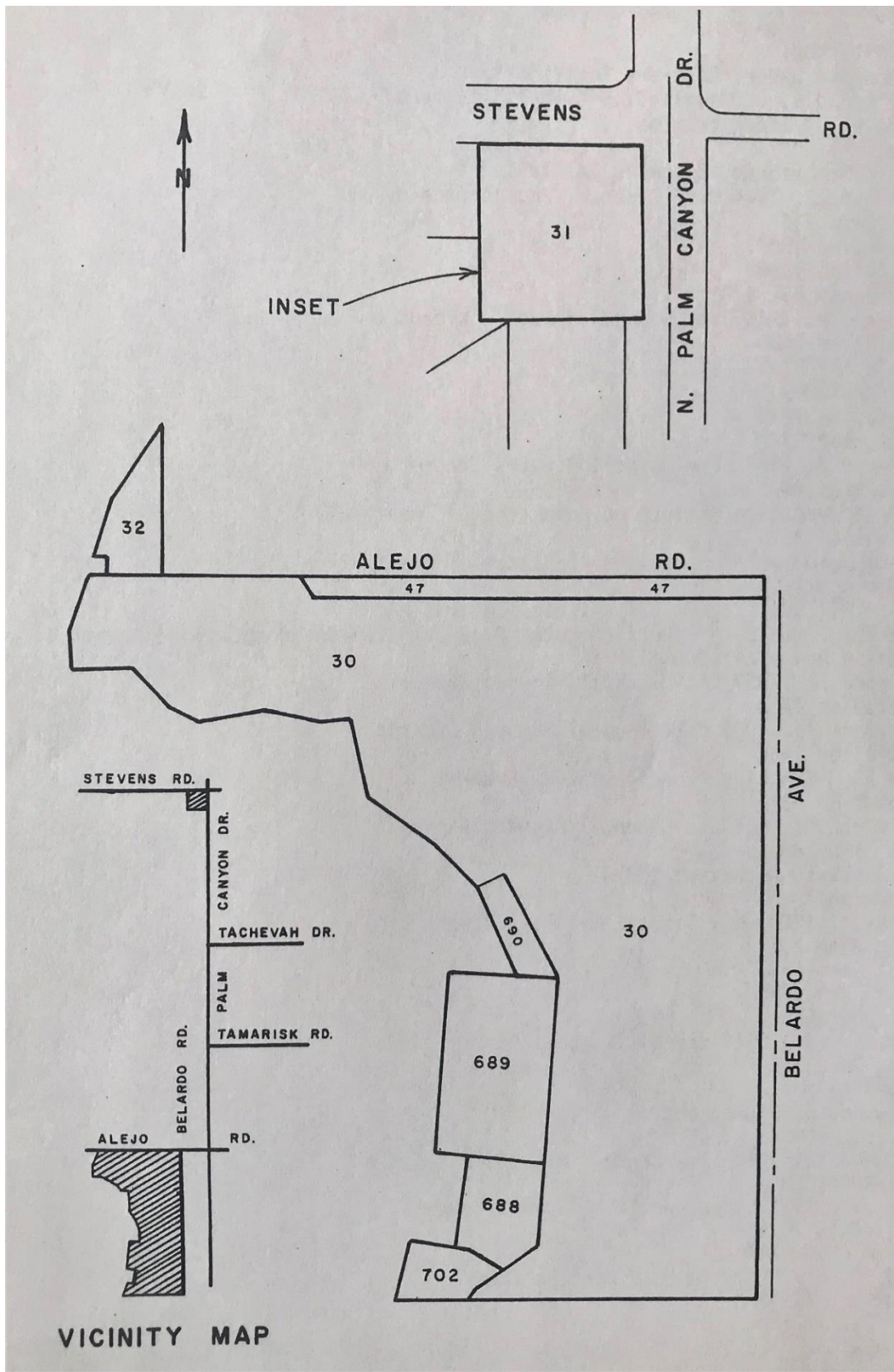
Sincerely,

Ritch Colbert
President

II

Assessor's Map





This drawing of the parcels at the O'Donnell Golf Club as they were in 1977, the year of a report commissioned by the city to understand the terms of the O'Donnell gift.

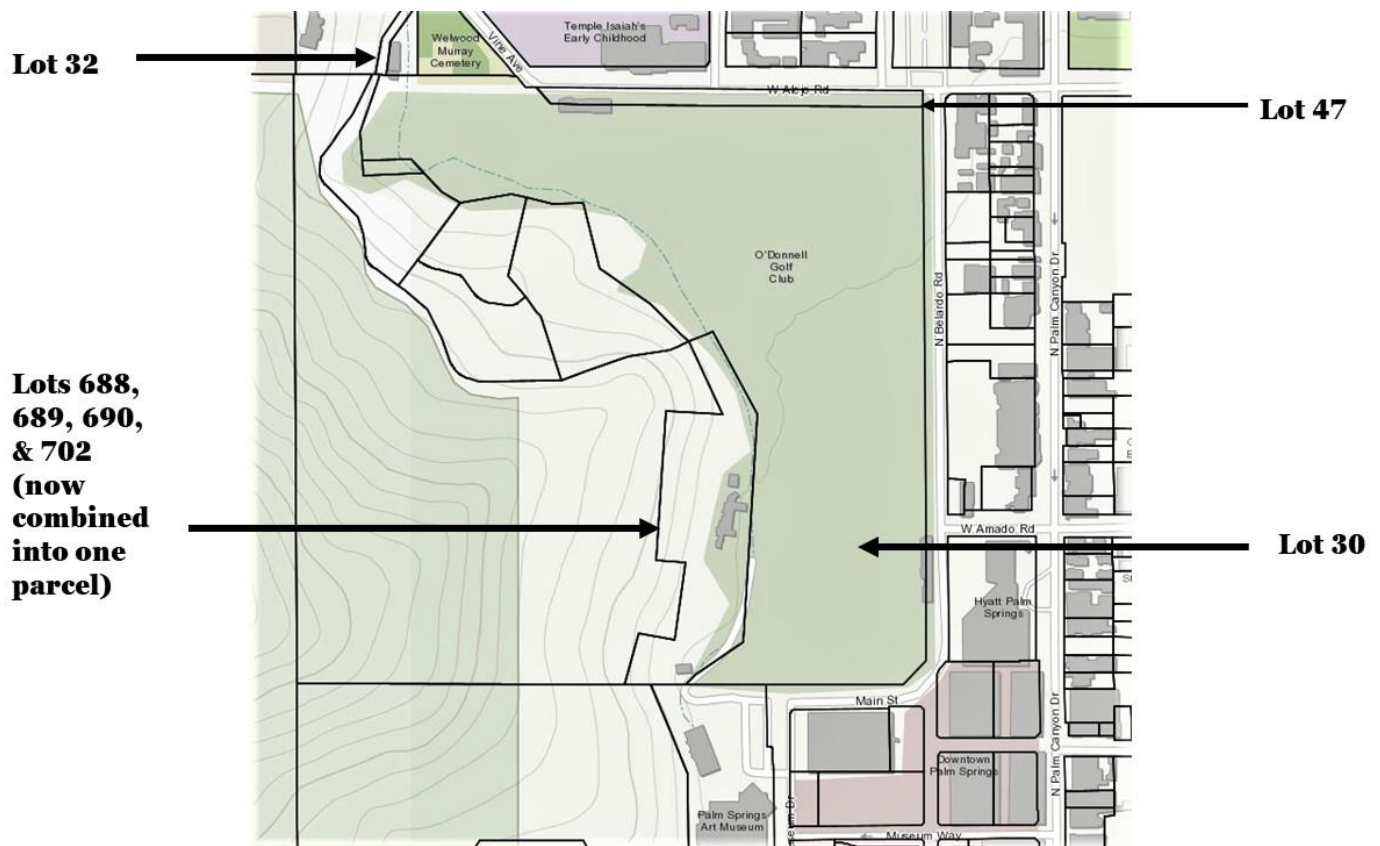
HISTORY OF THE O'DONNELL GOLF CLUB PARCELS

In 1925, Thomas O'Donnell purchased a 33.16-acre parcel for his private golf course. Two more parcels, one for a maintenance yard, the other for a reservoir, were soon added. In the 1940s, O'Donnell began to subdivide and sell portions of that original parcel. As a result, the land on which the O'Donnell Golf Club now sits is made up of seven separate parcels, which the city of Palm Springs has acquired by purchase or gifts. The eighth parcel, Lot 31—the site of the O'Donnell reservoir, is no longer associated with the Golf Club.

Here is a legend to the lots identified in the drawing on page 22:

- **LOT 30:** Between May and December of 1925, O'Donnell purchased a large 30-acre parcel from P. T. Stevens directly north of the Desert Inn. He also bought another smaller but important parcel from Glenn V. Plumley, a real estate broker and one of the founders of Cathedral City. The three-acre Plumley parcel was said to be adjacent to the Desert Inn pool and running along the border of Belardo Road. This smaller parcel had been a run-down campground. These two parcels combined to create what is Lot 30. At the time, Lot 30 also included what would become Lots 688, 689, 690, 47, and 702. O'Donnell would subdivide and sell these lots in the 1940s. (APN 513-070-010).
- **LOT 31:** The site of O'Donnell's reservoir at Stevens Road and Palm Canyon Drive. This was also purchased from P. T. Stevens in 1927.
- **LOT 32:** This lot, adjacent to the Welwood Murray Cemetery, was purchased from Alvah Hicks, and became the site of the O'Donnell Golf Club Maintenance Yard. (APN 505-312-008).
- **LOTS 688, 689, and 690:** These three parcels are where O'Donnell had his 1936 Golf House residence built. When O'Donnell gift deeded the O'Donnell Golf Club to the city of Palm Springs in 1944, he had these three lots subdivided, but continued to live in the home. After O'Donnell's death in 1945, the three lots containing O'Donnell's Golf House were purchased by Nate and Virginia Milnor from Mrs. O'Donnell. The Milnors very quickly resold Golf House to Pat Dougherty. In 1969, these three lots were acquired by the city of Palm Springs and leased back to the O'Donnell Golf Club, which turned the residence into the O'Donnell Clubhouse. (APN 513-070-009).
- **LOT 47:** In the early 1940s, O'Donnell sold his former residence, *Ojo del Desierto*, to his friends Nate and Virginia Milnor. Lot 47, which had the Gate Lodge and a long strip of land along Alejo, was sold to the Milnors, who later included Pat Dougherty on the deed, as they shared a driveway. The Milnors and Dougherty sold Lot 47 to the city in 1947. The city then leased the land to the Committee of Twenty-Five. (APN 513-070-008).
- **LOT 702:** When *Ojo del Desierto* was sold to the Milnors in the early 1940s, Lot 702, which contains the O'Donnell Carriage House and Chauffeur's Apartment, was subdivided and sold to the Milnors. Virginia Milnor sold this lot to the city of Palm Springs in 1969. (This is now part of the Golf House parcel, APN 513-070-009).

As summarized in the 1977 “Report on the O’Donnell Golf Course,” by 1969, “All four parcels of land to the west of the original golf course, encompassing a total of 5.12 acres, were now tied to the original 1944 agreement between Tom O’Donnell and the O’Donnell Golf Club, and along with the original land donated by Thomas O’Donnell, must be reserved for use by O’Donnell Golf Club which the City has the authority to enforce, but not to terminate, as long as required rentals are paid.”²



The parcels as they exist today, overlaid on diagram showing structures.



The existing configuration of tees, greens, and holes at the O'Donnell Golf Club has remain unchanged for most of its history.

III GOLF COURSE DESIGN

Built at the very edge of the San Jacinto foothills, the O'Donnell Golf Club's greens and fairways curve in and out against the mountainside, the unspoiled natural backdrop becoming an important design element. The spectacular foot of San Jacinto encroaches out into the course, meeting the greens and becoming part of the challenge of the famous Fifth Hole.

The O'Donnell Golf Club course was not designed by one of the premier landscape architects or golf course designers of the time but was instead laid out by O'Donnell himself, working with a good friend and fellow oilman, Captain J. F. Lucey. Both men had played the best courses around the world for decades, so they knew what constituted a well-designed golf course. They also had a clean slate: after O'Donnell had bought the land and the site was cleared and graded, he and Lucey got to work. In a *Desert Sun* article celebrating the 1945 gift to the city, the newspaper described it as a "considerable task. It was quite an undertaking to mold this arid desert ground soil into what we now know as the scenic and beautiful O'Donnell golf course and it took great vision on the part of its originator, for at that time this strip of land was a bit of the vast desert terrain of rolling sand dunes, strange rock formations and many washes from the canyons of the bordering Mt. San Jacinto range. Mr. O'Donnell stood on the plot that was to be the number one tee, used his driver, then an iron shot and where the ball landed, he planted the first green. In the preceding manner, they laid out the nine holes of play. Knowing the maximum distance he could get with every club in his bag, Mr. O'Donnell made the length of the fairways in accordance with his game so as to put all clubs into play at some time during the round."³

When they were done, they had a par-35, nine-hole course, and with the addition of a double set of tees, it allowed, "ambitious players the ability to do a full eighteen holes if desired. Completed in 1927, the finished course was officially named the Desert Golf Course. Almost instantly, it was affectionately dubbed "O'Donnell's."⁴ According to golf historian Greg Niemann, "It is considered a tight course with fast greens."⁵

Originally intended just for O'Donnell and his closest friends, he soon allowed guests of the adjacent Desert Inn access to play and opened the course to the public in 1932. At first, there were no sand traps, the greens were 50 feet in diameter, and the only water hazard was the old Whitewater Ditch that ran alongside O'Donnell's stately driveway. When he opened the club in 1932, O'Donnell changed the locations of the first tee, and the sixth and ninth holes.⁶ In 1941, the *Desert Sun* described other changes that had taken place at the golf course since it opened to the public in 1932: "With increased interest and play on the course, improvements have been made yearly. The greens have been enlarged from 75 to 90 feet in width, fairways have been lengthened and there are now 19 traps guarding the several greens. A large putting green was added in 1937 which has proved extremely popular, not only for those who do not play the usual 18 holes but for practice putting as well."⁷

Another major change came much later. “In 1977 Clinton Burnett [an O’Donnell Golf Club trustee] suggested connecting the club’s water system to the Desert Water Company’s main near the seventh hole practice green to supply instant water when the Whitewater supply was inadequate. That connection is currently in place. The board approved construction of a pond or reservoir west of the sixth tee at a cost of \$15,000. Lake Burnett, with a capacity of 360,000 gallons, was born!”⁸

See Appendix VII for detailed description of the course layout.

See Appendix VIII for historic and contemporary photographs.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE O’DONNELL GOLF CLUB COURSE:

- Historic configuration of holes, greens, tees and fairways
- Extensive use of grass — Bermuda base, overseeded with rye
- Putting Green
- Elevated Fourth Hole Tee

NON-CONTRIBUTING

- Lake Burnett



Color-coded diagram showing extant examples of the character-defining layout of trees

IV LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The landscape of the O'Donnell Golf Club featured a limited palette of drought-tolerant trees, appropriate to the Sonoran Desert, as a means of defining the fairways, tees, greens, and holes of the golf course. Long rows of a single species—Mexican fan palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), native California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*), and Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*)—lined fairways, and framed views and vistas. The two lines of tall, narrow palm trees were interplanted with fuller trees and shrubs to screen out adjacent fairways. Between each Mexican fan palm along O'Donnell's long driveway, red and white oleander were planted, offering a dazzling display of flowering color. The line of native California fan palms had a single Arizona cypress specimen planted between each slender tree, the shrubby, conical form contrasting with the tall palms.



One of the most distinctive character-defining features of the O'Donnell Golf Course landscape were the rows of red and white oleander.

When O'Donnell bought the large parcel, an existing windbreak of tamarisks (*Tamarix ramosissima*) had been planted, the mature trees nearly enclosing the entire site. O'Donnell augmented those existing trees with more tamarisks along the perimeter, as well as using tamarisk as an accent tree within the golf course itself.

Scattered around the golf course were clusters of these same species—two, three, four or more—planted as punctuation marks, as well as for wayfinding, for hazards, and for marking the ends of long fairways. O'Donnell added date palms to the palette, generally planted in single specimens or in small clusters. Originally, O'Donnell had planted several groupings of cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*) for shade, but those have since died or been removed.

One of O'Donnell's first landscape projects was to find a grass suitable to carpet the Coachella Valley's first large-scale golf course, doing research to find something appropriate to the harsh desert climate. After touring many courses around the country, he learned that the greens had to be built up from a Bermuda base, requiring many tons of seed. This was overseeded during the winter with rye seed, and unlike much of Palm Springs at the time, O'Donnell never allowed his turf to die off in the summer.

See Appendix VIII for more photographs.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE O'DONNELL GOLF CLUB LANDSCAPE:

- Views and vistas from the golf course to the unspoiled mountains beyond.
- Long rows of single species trees—Mexican fan palm, California fan palm, and Arizona cypress.
- Perimeter planted with tamarisk windbreak.
- Extensive use of grass — Bermuda base, overseeded with rye.
- Date palm clusters or single specimens.
- Groupings of palms, tamarisks, and Arizona cypress.
- Rock with O'Donnell's memorial plaque.
- Remnants of O'Donnell's driveway. Long sections are extant, especially on the southern part of the property, and should be preserved.
- Native stone retaining walls.

NON-CONTRIBUTING

- Palo verde trees planted between each Mexican fan palm along the historic O'Donnell driveway. These replaced the oleander which was an important character-defining feature. The oleander suffered from oleander leaf scorch.
- Ficus trees shading the clubhouse patio. These were planted after 1969 when the home was adapted for use as the Clubhouse.

MISSING FEATURES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR REPLACEMENT

- Red and white oleander. These have succumbed, like most oleanders in the Coachella Valley, to oleander leaf scorch. Should a treatment be discovered for leaf scorch in the future, the oleanders should be restored. They were one of the O'Donnell Golf Club's most important character-defining features, especially planted between each Mexican fan palm.
- Arizona cypress planted between each California fan palm. These trees are now missing. These cypress trees were an important element in the historic landscape, screening the adjacent fairway. Replacing the Arizona cypress should be considered.
- Cottonwoods planted for shade. Though these trees are now missing, replanting some cottonwoods in their historic locations should be considered.
- O'Donnell's driveway from the Gate Lodge to the fifth hole has been replaced by grass. Reestablishing the historic driveway should be considered.



V STRUCTURES

1. *Ojo del Desierto* Carriage House and Chauffeur's apartment, 1925.
2. O'Donnell Gate Lodge, 1926.
3. Third Green Bathroom, ca. 1930s.
4. Golf Shop, ca. 1933.
5. O'Donnell Golf House Residence, 1936.

See Appendix VIII for more photographs.



Photo courtesy Tracy Conrad

Thomas O'Donnell, standing in front of his Cadillac, watches stonemasons building the road to Ojo del Desierto, the O'Donnell Residence, 1925. Photo courtesy Tracy Conrad.

1. *OJO DEL DESIERTO* CARRIAGE HOUSE AND CHAUFFEUR'S APARTMENT, 1925

Designed by William Charles Tanner at the time he was designing the Thomas O'Donnell Residence, *Ojo del Desierto*, the O'Donnell Carriage House used the same detailing as the main house above. The simple, two-story stucco structure had a gabled roof clad in variegated clay barrel tile. Just below the point of the roof gable was an attic vent created using the same barrel tiles as the roof. On the first floor, five garage bays featured wooden double-doors, adorned with a Moorish-inspired star pattern. The second-floor apartment had a long, covered balcony, with wooden posts and beam, the balcony rail featuring the same vertical detail as *Ojo del Desierto*. Wood-framed casement windows were covered by insect screens. The exterior of the Carriage House featured wrought-iron lanterns.

Originally, the driveway of *Ojo del Desierto* was oriented to the adjacent Desert Inn. After O'Donnell finished his golf course, he created a new driveway from Alejo Road. Before he had a Golf Shop built with locker room and space for caddies, one of the garage bays served double duty as a locker room and golf equipment storage.

The O'Donnell Carriage House retains nearly all its character-defining features, except for the distinctive garage doors. Those have been replaced with flat panel garage doors.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE CARRIAGE HOUSE:

- Simple, two-story gabled structure
- Stucco exterior
- Variegated barrel roof tiles
- Wood-framed casement windows with divided lights
- Distinctive balcony rail detail
- Wrought-iron lanterns

MISSING FEATURES OF THE CARRIAGE HOUSE THAT SHOULD BE RESTORED:

- Double garage doors with Moorish-star detailing



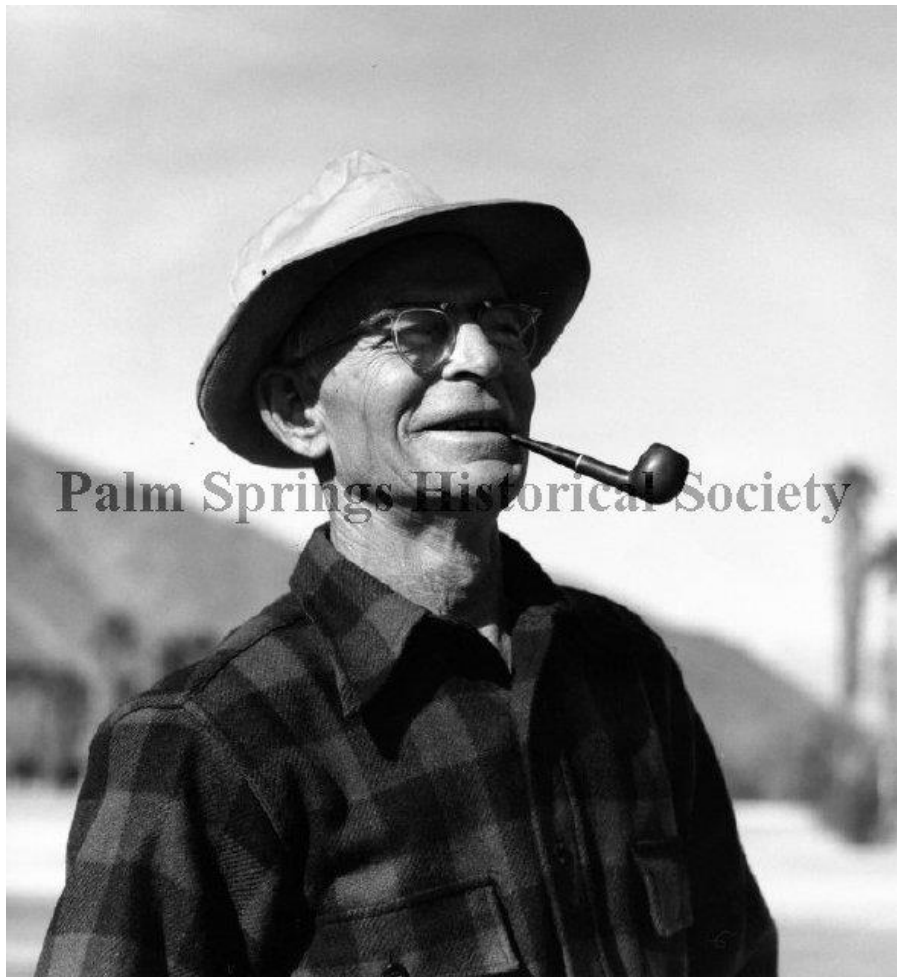
The O'Donnell Carriage House and Chauffeur's Apartment, July 2019.



In this very early photograph, the O'Donnell Gate Lodge, 1926, is seen from the new Desert Golf Course. The Gate Lodge stands at the gates of the driveway to Ojo del Desierto, which passes through O'Donnell's Desert Golf Course.

2. O'DONNELL GATE LODGE, 1926 421 West Alejo Road

In 1926, after O'Donnell purchased the 33-acre parcel to create his private golf course, he changed the primary access to *Ojo del Desierto* from the Desert Inn to 421 Alejo Road (at the time Alejo was named North Road). From Alejo, a majestic driveway, lined on one side with Mexican fan palms (*Washingtonia robusta*), hugged the adjacent hillside through the impressive new golf course, leading to the Carriage House and up the hill. At the new entrance to O'Donnell's property, William Charles Tanner designed a Gate Lodge inspired by the low, rambling haciendas of the Andalusian region of southern Spain. Tanner's design featured an irregular plan with low, horizontal massing, which resulted in an interesting, asymmetrical façade. Though it was designed and built at one time, the varied gabled roofs, covered in variegated barrel clay tiles, suggested the rustic house had grown over time. Exterior walls were stucco, the wide expanses pierced with wood-framed multi-light casement windows, many adorned with plank wood shutters. Windows had wooden lintels above and projecting wood sills. The house, for the most part, turned its back to the street, with all primary rooms opening on to the



John Kline.

golf course beyond. A gracious covered porch had vertical wood posts supporting a wooden beam on one section, with large windows featured on other sections of the house.

After it was completed, O'Donnell's friend and groundskeeper John Kline moved into the Gate Lodge with his family, living there until 1946. O'Donnell appointed Kline the Desert Golf Course's first manager, a position he held for twenty years. In 1948, the Committee of Twenty-Five, a private men's club was formed and began leasing the building from the city of Palm

Springs, who had purchased the lot. Later additions are by E. Stewart Williams, Clark & Frey, and Jim Cioffi & Bill Hajjar.⁹ The Committee of Twenty-Five still occupies the space. Before the O'Donnell Golf House Residence was turned into the O'Donnell Golf Club's Clubhouse in 1969, large Golf Club events were held at the Committee of Twenty-Five building.¹⁰



Diagram showing 1948 kitchen addition by Clark & Frey, 1948 (in RED), and 1967 E. Stewart Williams kitchen addition (in BLUE). The 1991 addition, the Roger Rice Room, by architects Jim Cioffi and Bill Hajjar (in ORANGE).

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE GATE LODGE:

- Horizontal one-story rambling structure with staggered massing.
- Stucco exterior.
- Variegated barrel roof tiles.
- Wood-framed casement windows with plank shutters.
- Deep-set loggia with rusticated wooden posts and beam.

CONTRIBUTING

- William Charles Tanner 1926 Gate Lodge.

NON-CONTRIBUTING

- Later minor additions to kitchen area by Clark & Frey (1948) and E. Stewart Williams (1967).
- 1991 Addition by Jim Cioffi.



3. RESTROOMS STRUCTURE, CA. 1933

Though no architect has been positively identified as the designer of this structure, it was presumably designed by William Charles Tanner. The small restroom near the Third and Fourth Holes of the golf course is constructed of brick and features a gabled roofline, now covered in flat terra cotta tiles (these were originally the same barrel vault tiles as seen on the other O'Donnell Golf Club structures). Discreetly tucked into a landscaped area on a low rise just above the green, a men's restroom faces east, while the women's restroom faces west.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE THIRD HOLE RESTROOMS:

- Simple, single-story gabled structure.
- Brick.
- Terra cotta roof tiles over simple curved rafter tails. The original design had terra cotta barrel tile, so it is recommended that when roof needs to be replaced, original style tiles are used.



O'Donnell Golf Club caddies at the Golf Shop, early 1950s.

4. GOLF SHOP, CA. 1933

After O'Donnell opened the golf course to Palm Springs residents in 1932, it became necessary to have a dedicated Golf Shop, with locker room, space for golf club storage, and a room for caddies. Though research uncovered no positive attribution for an architect, the author believes the structure was designed by William Charles Tanner, since he designed all of O'Donnells other buildings, as well as those of the adjacent Desert Inn. The small gabled one-story Spanish-Colonial Revival structure had stucco walls with a roof clad in variegated barrel tiles. A series of large, identical wood-framed square multi-light windows created a rhythm around the façade. The front door was set back underneath the tile roof, with one vertical wood support. A small bathroom structure in the same style was nearby.

The Golf Shop was described in 1935 as “operated after the English style of club. Not expensive, but a place to change shoes, keep clubs without charge, it carries a full line of golf equipment at regular Los Angeles prices, making it possible to purchase anything in the golf line. Lessons or playing lesson can be obtained from George Howard, resident professional.”¹¹ In 1936, John Kline announced that several changes would be made to the course, including enlarging the Golf Shop, “providing considerable room which is badly needed.”¹² In 1945 a garage was added, and the Golf Shop was again enlarged. Electric golf

carts were introduced at the O'Donnell Golf Club in 1954, so the following year a much larger storage garage was built to house the new carts. The entire Golf Club building was remodeled at the same time. These 1955 garages are non-contributing structures.



At top, original Golf Shop. Two yellow shapes are garage structures added after 1945. Small structure between two garages is the original restroom structure.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE GOLF SHOP:

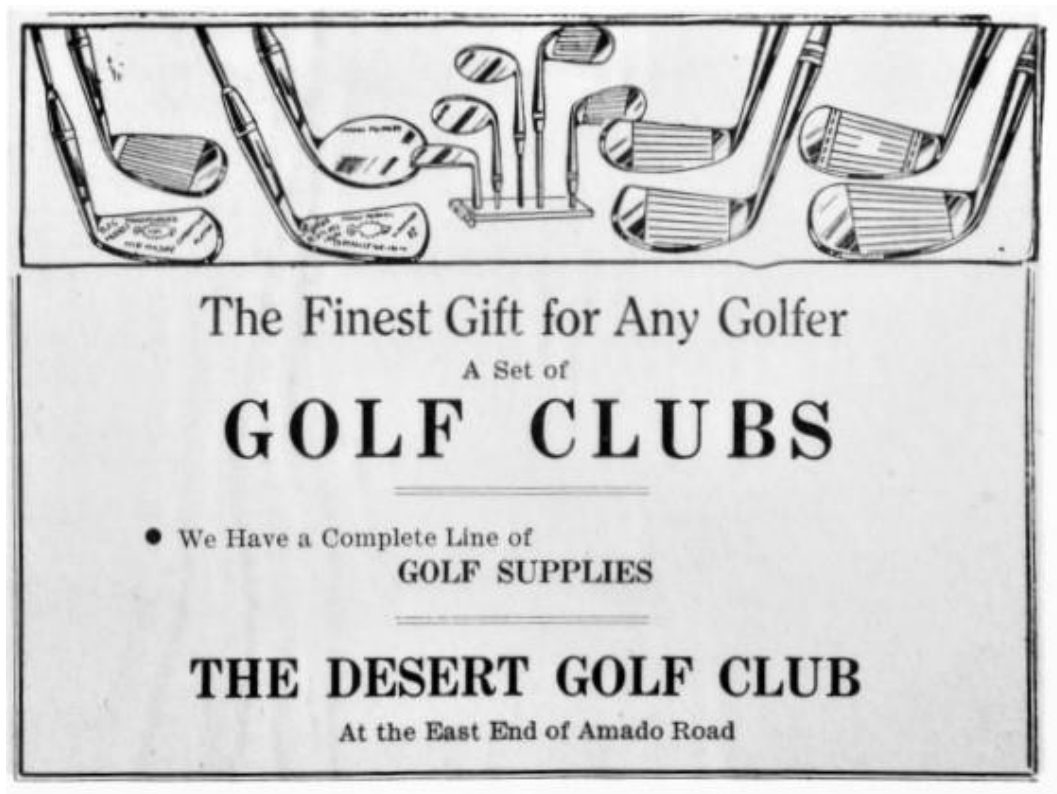
- Simple, one-story gabled structure.
- Stucco exterior.
- Variegated barrel roof tiles.
- Wood-framed multi-light square windows.

CONTRIBUTING

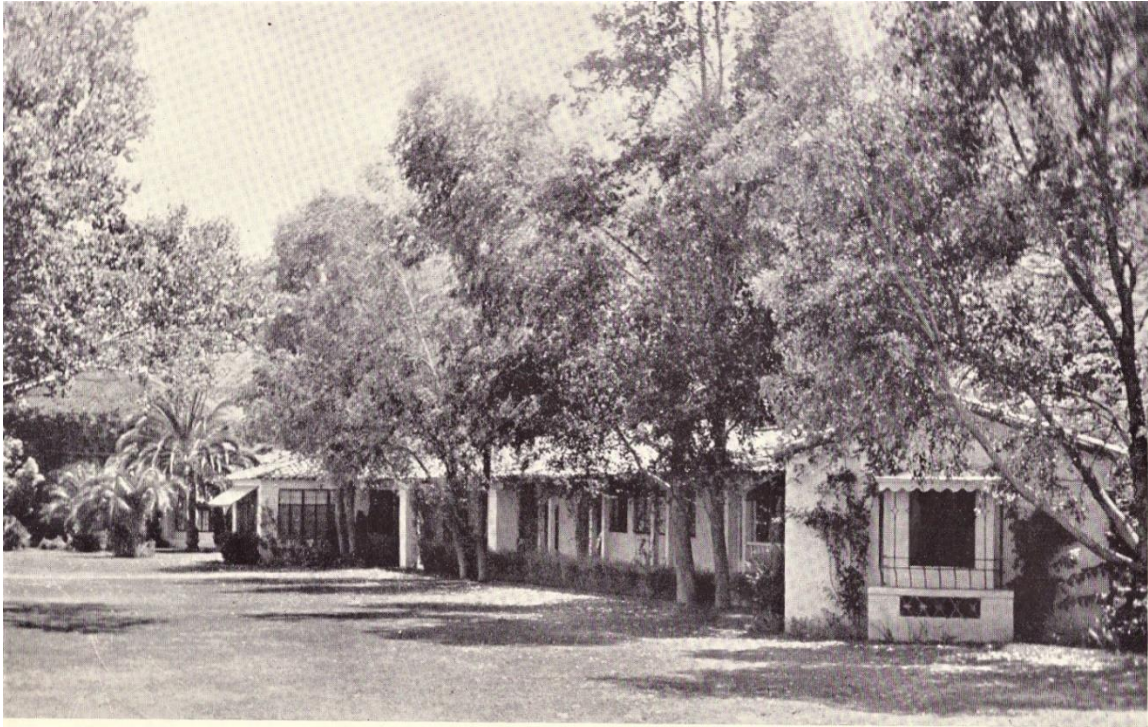
- Original Golf Shop and restroom structure, and additions through 1945.

NON-CONTRIBUTING

- Electric golf cart storage garages built 1955 and later are outside the period of significance.



From the Desert Sun, December 3, 1937.



A desert hacienda set among lawns and trees is that of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. O'Donnell, overlooking the O'Donnell Golf Course. This long, low house with its simple lines and tiled roof is well suited to the desert village and is adapted with sun logias to receive its maximum share of winter sunshine. A low over-hanging roof gives cool shadow to part of the house which is valuable during early fall and spring months where owners come early to the desert and stay late.

5. THE O'DONNELL "GOLF HOUSE," RESIDENCE, 1936

By the middle 1930s, O'Donnell's health began to fail, and he found it difficult to navigate the two-story *Ojo del Desierto*. In 1936, he once again called on architectural designer William Charles Tanner to design a one-story home right on his golf course, which the O'Donnells named "Golf House." Because the O'Donnells were spending more time in the desert, the new home would be completely air-conditioned, one of the first homes so equipped in Palm Springs (the Bullock's Demonstration Home of 1936 also had true air-conditioning—not an evaporative cooler).¹³ It would be built adjacent to his aviary, replacing the formal garden that had graced the site since 1927.

Meant to harmonize with the Spanish-influenced architecture of the adjacent Desert Inn, as well as O'Donnell's other structures, the informal home, inspired by the sprawling haciendas of the Andalusian region of Spain, was built using primarily rustic brick, some sections being covered in stucco. Vertical board-and-batten detailing adorned the end gables, each vertical board having a "V" shaped end. The home had a staggered, low-pitched roofline covered in terra cotta barrel tile. A long screened-in covered arcade, supported by a series of vertical heavy masonry and wooden double posts ran the entire length of the main section of the house, a pleasant shady spot from which the O'Donnells could enjoy friends and guests playing golf.



In this 1950s postcard, the original south wing is extant, showing circular tower with tile cupola.

The north wing, which jutted out at an angle, had an attractive bay window, covered with a stylized scalloped steel roof. Decorative wrought-iron bars enclosed the bay's steel casement windows. Another wing to the south of the house, the sunroom, with large steel casement windows on three sides, extended outward from the main volume of the house at a right angle. The remainder of the house had multi-light steel casement windows. The south end of the house had a service wing, its primary feature being a tall circular tower with tile-roofed cupola. Adjacent were a garage, with shed-roofed kitchen and staff quarters.

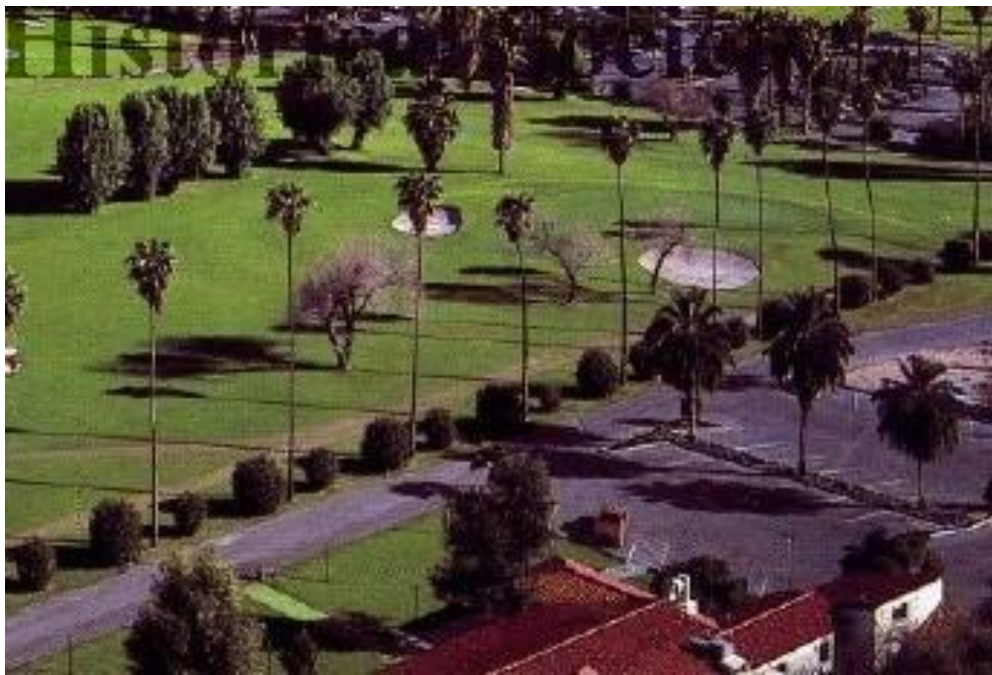
Separate and north of the main residence was Dr. Winifred O'Donnell's physiotherapy office. Dr. O'Donnell was a leading and respected osteopath, and her office had a sunny reception room with fireplace, an office and an examining room. Outside was a walled patio. The office structure had the same architectural detailing as the main house.



The O'Donnell Golf House Residence was nestled into a bay in the mountainside.

At the front of the home was a spacious lawn, bordered by a long bed of flowering color along the driveway. O'Donnell had three groupings of twin cottonwoods planted in the front of the house for shade, with a single cottonwood planted near Dr. O'Donnell's office. Large Canary Island palm specimens were planted near the service wing. At the base of the residence, a compact and neatly clipped hedge hugged the foundation, while the double vertical posts supporting the covered arcade were planted with flowering vines.

When the city acquired the O'Donnell Golf House in 1969, it was leased back to the Golf Club, who adaptively reused the building to serve as its clubhouse. By this time O'Donnell's aviary had been removed. The south service wing was demolished for parking, the covered arcade enclosed with aluminum-framed windows, and the interior spaces turned into rooms for use by the members of the O'Donnell Golf Club. Apart from the demolition of the service wing, the house exhibits a high level of integrity. The mature planting in front of the house was replaced with a broad patio for dining, shaded by enormous ficus trees.



After the Golf Club acquired the Golf House in 1969, the south wing was demolished to provide parking.



Showing the location of the service wing that was demolished for parking in 1969, and the former site of O'Donnell's aviary, dismantled in 1952.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES OF THE GOLF HOUSE:

- A simple, one-story gabled structure constructed of rustic brick, some sections covered in stucco.
- Long covered arcade.
- Carved wood doors.
- Variegated terra cotta barrel roof tiles.
- Steel-framed multi-light casement windows.

CONTRIBUTING

- O'Donnell Golf House residence and Dr. O'Donnell's Office.

NON-CONTRIBUTING

- Outdoor dining patio and ficus trees.
- Parking area adjacent to the clubhouse.
- Aluminum framed windows which infill and enclose the formerly screened-in arcade.
- Current awnings.



VI
THOMAS A. O'DONNELL AND THE CREATION OF
HIS DESERT GOLF COURSE



Though his career epitomized the American drama in which fortune marks certain players for unique and unforgettable roles, Tom O'Donnell never lost the common touch. Who of those who knew him will ever forget that massive frame, that earthy humor and rugged charm? His close friends ranged from the lowliest oil field workers to a Scottish Lord, but they could pay no higher tribute than just to call him "Tom." Neither saint nor sinner, he had that Jeffersonian faith in the individual that believed a person supreme—an end in himself, not to be denied the right to the fullest life. With steadfastness, friendliness, and irrepressible faith; dutiful and loyal, true to the highest values he knew, Tom O'Donnell fulfilled what he believed he, as an individual, had been appointed to do.

—American Petroleum Institute, in memorium, February 1945.

THOMAS ARTHUR O'DONNELL

(Note: for the definitive biography of Thomas A. O'Donnell, see Steve Vaught's Inspiration Point Class 1 Nomination, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, 2019.)

Thomas Arthur O'Donnell (June 26, 1870 – February 21, 1945), was an Irish-American pioneer in the California oil industry. O'Donnell was nationally-known as one of the “Big Four,” along with Edward L. Doheny, Charles A. Canfield, and Max H. Whittier.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Bradford, Erie County, Pennsylvania to Thomas O'Donnell and Myra Parsons, Thomas O'Donnell had a strong entrepreneurial streak from an early age, working as a newsboy until the age 12 when he left Pennsylvania for Colorado. There, he worked for two years as a grocery store clerk. Always ambitious, he next worked for five years in a gold mine, using a pick and shovel. In 1889, at the age of nineteen, he gave in to the urge to “go west,” arriving in California, and securing a position at the Union Oil Company in Ventura. There, he got an education in the oil business. In 1893, he moved to Los Angeles, and met successful oil pioneer Edward L. Doheny, going to work for Doheny as a field superintendent. During his year with Doheny, O'Donnell recognized that his fortunes were to be made in oil, going into partnership with Max H. Whittier to form a company which would drill oil wells. After five years with Whittier, O'Donnell ventured out on his own, becoming an independent oil driller, operator, and land speculator.

In 1897, O'Donnell met and then married Lillian Constance Wood. They had two daughters, Ruth O'Donnell Davis (October 24, 1898 – January 28, 1985) and Doris O'Donnell Connolly (January 5, 1901 – 1977).

As his success blossomed, O'Donnell organized several oil companies, financing many himself. He helped form the American Petroleum Company, followed by the American Oil Fields Company, which, at the time, were among the largest independent oil concerns in the country. In 1912, the two companies merged, forming the California Petroleum Corporation, known as CALPET. O'Donnell served as its president and board chairman until it was sold to the Texas Company (later known as Texaco). O'Donnell then became a director in the Texas Company, later retiring from that position. During World War I, O'Donnell became national director of oil production for the U.S. Federal Fuel Administration and served on the Fuel Conservation Board. In 1919, he became the first president of the American Petroleum Institute, the largest national trade association representing the industry, serving in that role until 1924.



Dr. Winifred O'Donnell and Thomas O'Donnell, 1920s.



Winifred and Thomas O'Donnell with Nellie Coffman, ca. 1932.

PALM SPRINGS AND THE DESERT INN

In the early 1920s, O'Donnell began spending time in Palm Springs, seeking relief for his respiratory ailments. He stayed at the Desert Inn, which was then a simple frame-sided boarding house with bungalows. O'Donnell appreciated Coffman's hospitality, and the two hit it off.

One of Thomas O'Donnell's passions was golf, which he took up in 1900.¹⁴ At the time O'Donnell began staying at the Desert Inn, there was nowhere to play golf in the desert. In 1923, O'Donnell had brought his golf clubs to the desert, hoping to keep up his game. As reported a few years later in the *Desert Sun*, "Being a real golf bug and knowing the value of practice, he started out to look for a place to drive balls. The only place available was in front of No. 1 lodge of the Desert Inn."¹⁵ Soon, a few short holes were developed between the cottages of the hotel. Not satisfied, O'Donnell sought more space dedicated to the game. With Nellie Coffman's encouragement, he and John Kline, who had most recently served as O'Donnell's chauffeur, took over a meadow adjacent to the Desert Inn (once part of the McCallum Ranch pasture), and "the ground was cleared, and the burr clover, which was two feet tall, was cut by means of the old fashioned horse-drawn sickle used as a mower. The result was that a short nine hole course was put into play and was called the 9-hole Mashie Course."¹⁶ The simple pitch and putt course, designed around the existing trees in the old pasture, was enclosed in 1924 by a native stone wall.¹⁷

Separated from his wife Lillian, the couple divorced in 1924, and a property settlement of \$750,000 in cash and securities was approved by the court. A year later he married Dr.

Winifred Willis Jenney (November 5, 1880 – January 24, 1969), a Long Beach osteopath, in the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. Jenney was one of the most prominent osteopaths in Southern California and considered a leader in the country. She was born in New York and married William E. Jenney, a successful dentist, in 1900. The Jenneys had a son, William Willis Jenney. (1905-1960). The Jenneys moved to California in 1916, and like the O'Donnells, were divorced in 1924.

After a few seasons at the Desert Inn, O'Donnell's and Coffman's friendship, mutual trust, and respect facilitated an advantageous business arrangement. Coffman had wanted to expand and modernize the Desert Inn, using the Spanish Colonial-Revival architecture then in vogue. O'Donnell agreed to loan Coffman the funds, in exchange for her building a house for him and Winifred. William Charles Tanner, the "architectural artist" Coffman had retained to design the new Desert Inn, designed *Ojo del Desierto*, a 4,100 square foot Spanish Colonial-Revival home—the highest hillside home in Palm Springs for more than forty years.



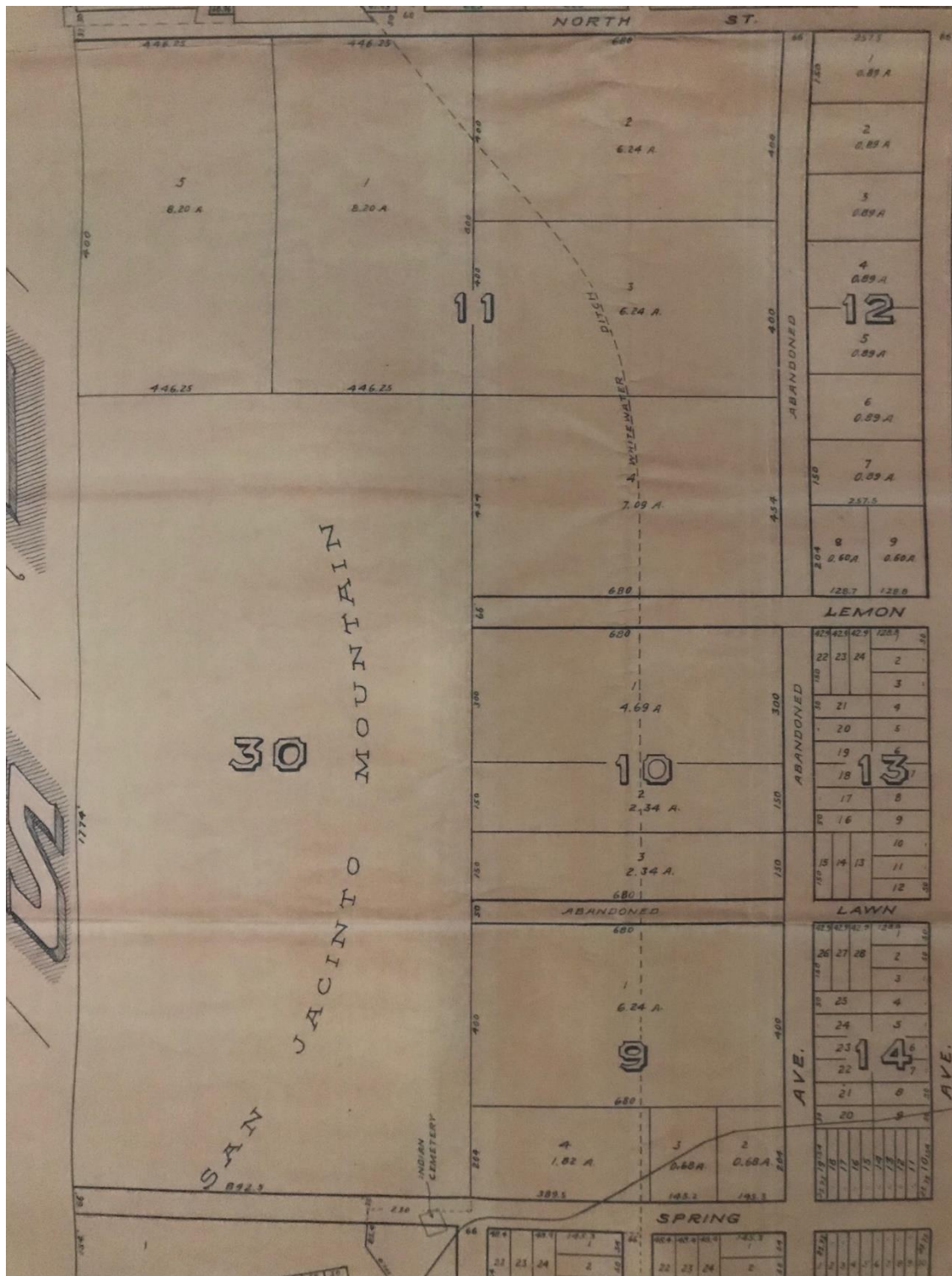
The living room of Ojo del Desierto, with portrait of O'Donnell.



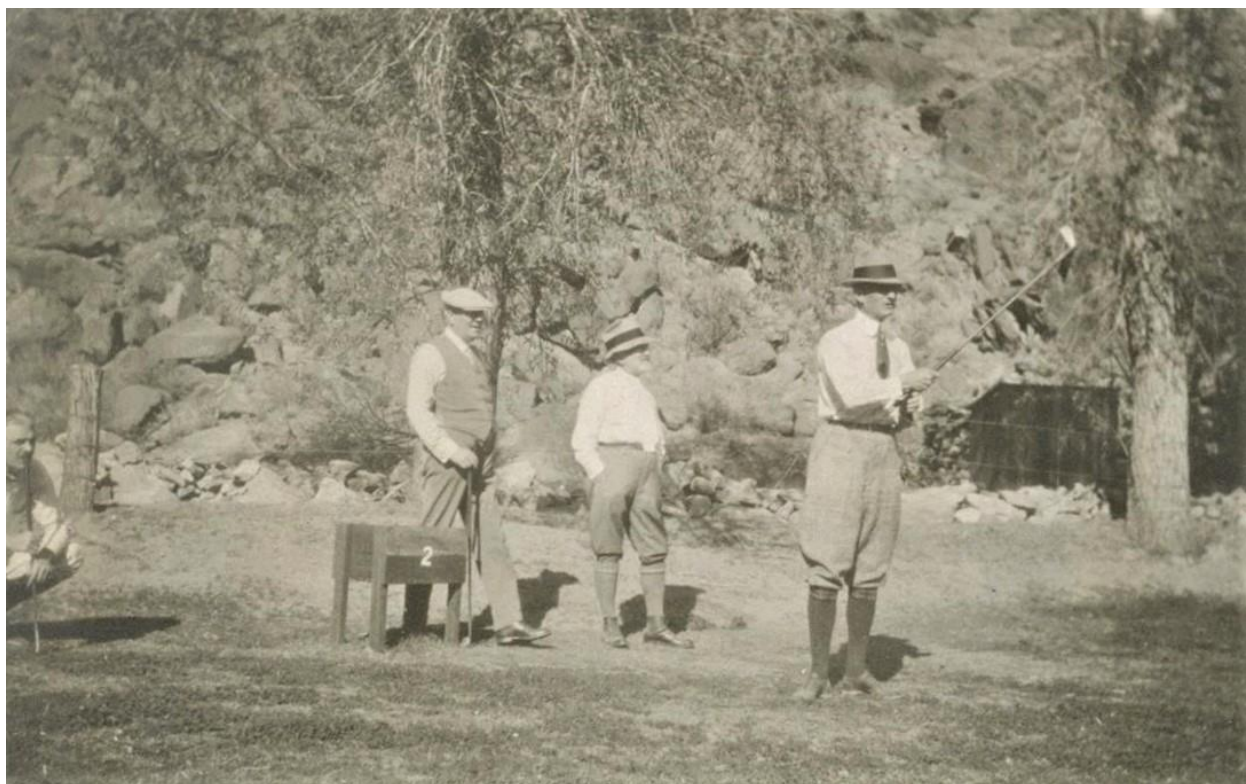
From the Desert Inn grounds, Ojo del Desierto is seen on the hillside above.



The Desert Inn's Mashie pitch and putt course on the site of Judge McCallum's former pasture.



A portion of a 1923 parcel map, showing how the O'Donnell Golf Club land had been platted for subdivision. Courtesy Will Kleindienst.



Men playing golf on the Mashie, 1924. James D. Phelan papers, courtesy Bancroft Library.

ACQUIRING THE LAND

“Like most ardent golfers without a golf course on which to play, he still yearned for his daily game. The longing for more playing space grew with each passing month.”¹⁸ What O’Donnell really wanted was a private course so that he and his friends might better enjoy the sunshine and desert surroundings, while keeping their golf games up to par.

As J. E. “Dad” French, then president of the O’Donnell Golf Club, would later recall, “It is ancient history, of course, but when our old friend, the late Thomas A. O’Donnell, announced that he had been talking to Mrs. Nellie Coffman, his neighbor, and that he was going to build a nine-hole golf course in Palm Springs adjacent to the grounds of the Desert Inn, the golf course architects and the experts said it couldn’t be done.”¹⁹ O’Donnell proved them wrong.

Shortly after his new hillside home was complete, between May and December of 1925 O’Donnell assembled the 33.16-acre parcel he needed to build his own private 9-hole golf course.²⁰ The parcels he sought were directly adjacent to the Desert Inn, as well as to the driveway of *Ojo del Desierto*. The largest section was bought from Palm Springs pioneer P. T. Stevens. O’Donnell had originally inquired on purchasing several acres to create his own small pitch and putt course, but Stevens was only interested in selling a large 30-acre block.²¹ For the most part, it was a blank slate, an ideal site on which to build a custom course, with a most

advantageous setting. Palm Springs' first mayor, Philip Boyd, recalled in 1938 the first time he saw the site, on Thanksgiving Day, 1922: "Then it was an untouched desert, covered with greasewood bushes and other desert growth."²² Kline's recollection was harsher, telling *The Golfer* magazine in 1950: "It was nothing but a cactus patch and dump ground in those days."²³ The parcel also had the old Whitewater Ditch running directly through it.



The future site of the O'Donnell Golf Club, ca. 1920. A biplane purported to be the first plane to touch down in Palm Springs. Standing nearby are Albert Patencio and Joe Bellue. Courtesy Will Kleindienst.

There was still a gap between his recently purchased parcels and the Desert Inn. Directly adjacent to the Desert Inn swimming pool was a three-acre parcel running partly along Belardo Road.²⁴ Owned by Glenn V. Plumley (1891-1982), a local real estate broker, and one of the four founders of Cathedral City (along with George Allen, Jack Grove, and M. V. Van Fleet), the parcel had long been a rather notorious campground. "There are stories that the campground had several years use as a home for people living in tents, or under trees in the open. The unsightliness of the area disturbed many residents and Mrs. Coffman had often considered buying the property and adding it to the Desert Inn grounds."²⁵ In 1940, Mayor Boyd recalled, "Before Mr. O'Donnell bought the property, it was a campground and an eyesore in the center of town, covered with tents, rocks, and rubbish."²⁶ But it wasn't without its charms. Going through the files in his office, Larry Sitter, the O'Donnell Golf Club's manager at the time, came across a letter written to the O'Donnell Golf Club by a woman who relates a tale of the night she and her husband spent at the old campground. It says in part:

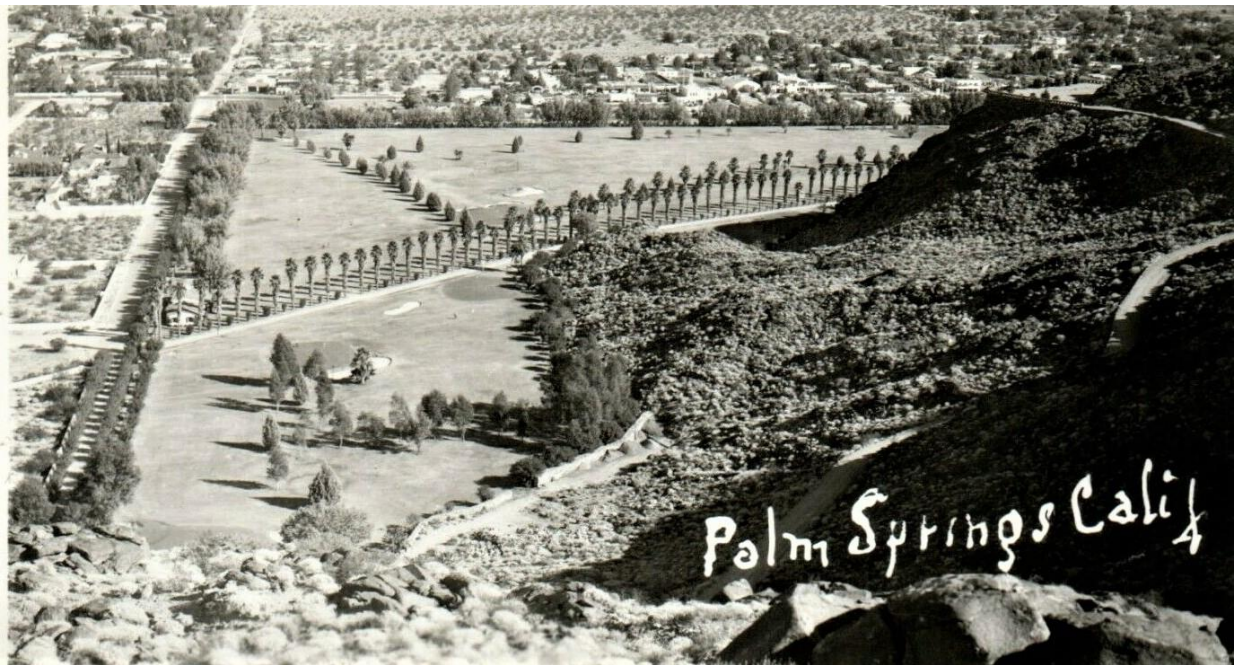
Back in November 1922 my husband and I packed up our camping equipment near Wichita, Kansas, our bulldog, and our nice new Overland touring car, complete with side curtains, mother-in-law's seat, etc. and headed for California. It took us exactly two weeks to get here as we thought driving over 25 miles per hour was a terrible speed to be going. I remember so very well coming up through the 'narrows' east of what is now Cathedral City, and on up to Palm Springs arriving about 8:30 p.m. We had watched the terrific big mountain (San Jacinto) for what seemed to be hours before we got to it. And this part you may not believe, but it's the gospel truth: When we arrived here, the main street (now Palm Canyon Drive) was practically a dusty dirt road. We had no idea where we could camp so we stopped at the Desert Inn to ask. I remember so well the kind and courteous clerk—in answer to our question as to where the campground was — said: 'I'll just go along with you and show you.' He hopped onto our running board and showed us to the campground which, as I remember, was one block off the main street towards the mountain. I remember what a beautiful place to stay overnight — stars down close to our heads (it was November), warm balmy night, soft water in the spigot outside our tent, and just a very heavenly place for two dusty dirty campers to drop into. I remember there were so-called tent houses, one of which contained a possible tubercular man who coughed absolutely all night, but we didn't mind at all.²⁷

One more half-acre parcel, north of the course and adjacent to the Welwood Murray Cemetery (known as the "Hicks Lot," presumably because it was purchased from Alvah Hicks) would serve as a maintenance yard. Now that O'Donnell had acquired the land, a considerable task lay ahead. But O'Donnell had vision, seeing beyond the vast desert terrain with its rolling sand dunes, deep washes, clusters of cacti and scrub, and dramatic rock formations. With John Kline in charge, rocks and boulders were moved off the site, greasewood and catclaws cleared, and then the entire 33-acre site was graded. In these years before modern bulldozers were widely available (especially in a small village like Palm Springs), the most common way to grade a site was to first plow the land with a horse-drawn plow. After the plowing was complete, the site was scraped flat with the use of a "Fresno Scraper," powered by a team of horses, the scraper resembling a giant steel dustpan.

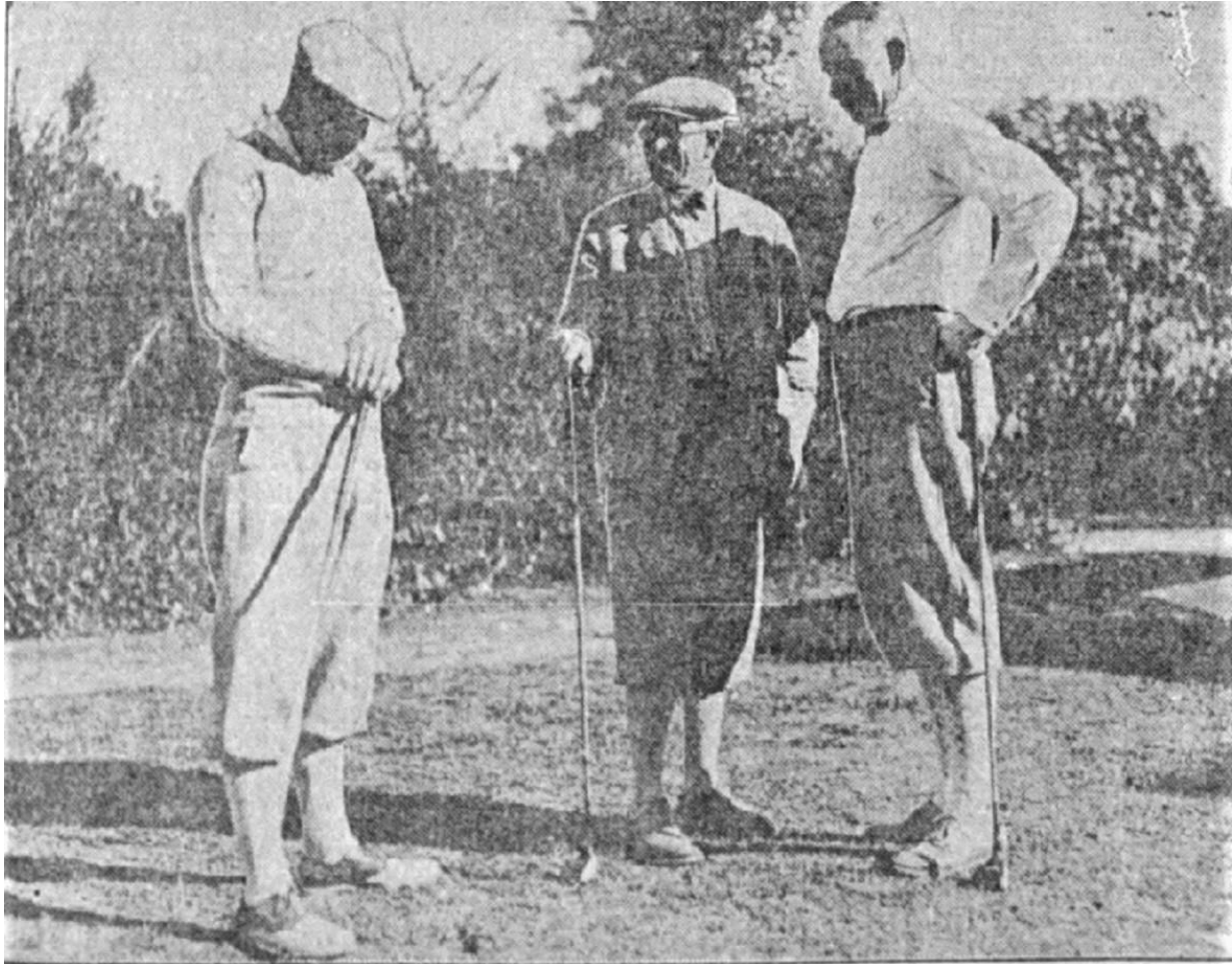
The first thing O'Donnell did when the site had been cleared and graded was to create an impressive new driveway to his hillside home from Alejo Road (known at the time as North Road). After *Ojo del Desierto* was completed in 1925, O'Donnell had originally accessed the house from the adjacent Desert Inn. From the service road at the hotel, the steep driveway had a tricky hairpin turn at its base. Wanting a safer and more gradual approach, the monumental new driveway ran alongside the existing Whitewater Ditch, following the contour of the adjacent mountainside, and traversed the entire length of his planned golf course.²⁸

He once again commissioned architectural designer William Charles Tanner, this time to build a Gate Lodge at the entrance to the site from Alejo Road. Styled like an Andalusian farmhouse,

the Spanish-Colonial Revival structure was designed to harmonize with *Ojo del Desierto*, without imitating it. John Kline and his family moved into the Gate Lodge in 1927.



From North Road, now Alejo, a Gate Lodge stands sentry at the beginning of O'Donnell's impressive, long, palm-lined driveway, which followed the old Whitewater Ditch, which O'Donnell made a part of the design of the course and landscape. Note the long rows of single tree species which defined fairways.



Left to Right—C. A. Young, Thomas O'Donnell and Capt. J. F. Lucey.

CREATION OF THE COURSE

Unlike the Desert Inn's Mashie Course, whose design was driven by the existing trees on the site, O'Donnell's new golf course had no such limitations—it was a blank slate. To design the configuration of the nine holes, O'Donnell called upon his good friend and fellow oilman, Captain J. F. Lucey (1874-1947). Lucey, a prominent Republican and intimate of future president Herbert Hoover, was equally enamored of golf—both men had played the finest courses around the world, so they were well-suited to design O'Donnell's private course. The two men, assisted by John Kline, designed the course basing the distance between holes simply by how far each man could hit a ball.²⁹



When O'Donnell and Lucey laid out the golf course, the first tee was located at an elevated spot accessed from the steep driveway of Ojo del Desierto. O'Donnell would come down from the hillside house and access his golf equipment from the first set of doors on the east side of the Carriage House. Above, players tee off, the ball soaring over the driveway and landing on the course below. The Palm Springs Hotel can be seen in the distance. Below, the original stone retaining wall still exists.



Using their own unique method, O'Donnell and Lucey mapped out the first tee at an elevated spot off the steep driveway to *Ojo del Desierto*. Using a driver, then an iron, O'Donnell marked the spot where the ball stopped for the first green. They then went through all the clubs in their bag until they had the entire nine-hole golf course plotted.³⁰ After seeing how far they could drive and chip, they placed the greens at distances they felt comfortable with. They created a challenging par-35 traditional course. According to golf historian Greg Niemann, “the hardest hole is a par-5 472 yards, while the easiest is a par-4, 274 yards. It is considered a tight course with fast greens.”³¹ One of the quirkiest features was a par-3 fifth hole which was played blind over the foot of San Jacinto, which encroached onto the green. Another unique feature was the seventh and eighth holes that played across each other's paths.³² With a double set of tees, ambitious players could play a full eighteen holes, if desired.

Originally, there were no bunkers or sand traps, to spare players any fear of using their sand irons. Because the greens were only 50 feet in diameter, they called for accurate approaching.³³ Before it was replaced with underground pipes in the late 1930s, the Whitewater Ditch that ran alongside O'Donnell's driveway served double duty as a water hazard.³⁴ Before the Golf Shop was built in the 1930s, O'Donnell used one stall of the Carriage House near the first tee as golf equipment storage for those who played at that time.³⁵



An aerial photograph of O'Donnell's reservoir at Stevens and Palm Canyon.

THE LANDSCAPE

With the course laid out, O'Donnell began planning for the landscape of the golf course. His initial plans for the course were not as elaborate as what eventually developed, but there was one thing the golf course must have—grass. One of his first projects was to find an appropriate

grass to carpet the Coachella Valley's first large-scale golf course. He became extremely interested in the varieties of grass available and researched what would be the most adaptable to the desert climate. While on a trip to St. Louis, O'Donnell recalled an amusing incident. Being driven around by a local cab driver, O'Donnell asked to see the golf courses in that city. "Being particularly interested in the type of grass used, he inquired of the driver, 'What do they use for greens here?' The ready reply of the cabbie was: 'Oh, we use beet tops, spinach, carrot tops, and dandelions, mostly.' The information was conclusive but of little use for Mr. O'Donnell's purpose. However, he learned that the greens had to be built up from a Bermuda base, requiring many tons of seed for the greens alone and it is interesting to know also, that every fall, entirely new greens have to be sown. He found that construction and upkeep on the desert is not too simple an achievement."³⁶

While O'Donnell was doing his research, Kline oversaw the preparation of the site for planting the grass. Ton upon ton of precious top-soil was trucked onto the newly graded site. Then, more than two thousand tons of raw fertilizer were brought in from El Centro and Brawley, covering the vast thirty-acres of land. Two tons of Bermuda seed was sprinkled over the topsoil, to build a base of turf. Establishing the turf was at first difficult, as Kline would later recall, "First we couldn't get water for our greens. We'd plant grass and the wind would blow the seed away."³⁷

To properly irrigate the 33-acre site, he knew he would need vast amounts of water. Unaware of the water table beneath his property, in 1927 O'Donnell bought a parcel at the corner of Stevens Road and Palm Canyon Drive and built a private reservoir to irrigate the course, buying 750 shares of the Whitewater Mutual Water Company. Unlike the Palm Springs Water Company (which O'Donnell helped establish with a loan to Alvah Hicks), Whitewater provided water for irrigation purposes only. His investment in Whitewater helped provide revenue to build the 14-mile, 22-inch pipeline from Whitewater Canyon to the reservoir.³⁸ From there, water was pumped to the golf course in a 16-inch steel line terminating at a six-inch main, from which irrigation pipe and sprinklers were installed.³⁹

O'Donnell began using the rather modest course in 1927, and as Kline later recalled, "remember, this was still a private course for the boss and his friends only. It wasn't until 1927, when there was a small banker's convention in town, that we ever worked seriously on developing some acceptable greens."⁴⁰

This began a program to fully landscape the new golf course. To the existing tamarisk windbreak which nearly enclosed the 33-acre parcel, O'Donnell added a limited palette of hardy trees capable of surviving the harsh climate. Tall vertical palm trees were primarily planted in rows to line and designate fairway limits, with fuller trees and shrubs planted between each palm for screening, enhancing and framing spectacular vistas of the desert and mountains.⁴¹ From the Smiley Heights area of Redlands came 130 Mexican fan palms

(*Washingtonia robusta*), most of them ten feet tall, with each one costing \$75.00.⁴² George Roberson later recalled that “Getting them here from Redlands was a major operation in those days, even though they were just 10 feet tall.”⁴³ The only nursery in the Coachella Valley capable of transplanting mature trees like these in 1926 was the Desert Nursery—its owner, Palm Springs pioneer Oliver McKinney, had previously been a welldigger and had the equipment necessary to dig and move large specimen trees. O’Donnell had earlier used McKinney to transplant even taller mature palm specimens at *Ojo del Desierto*. O’Donnell took great pride in the fact that none of the trees he transplanted died.⁴⁴



*A Desert Nursery truck, with Eldon McKinney standing on a palm tree, before planting it at Ojo del Desierto in 1924.
Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society.*

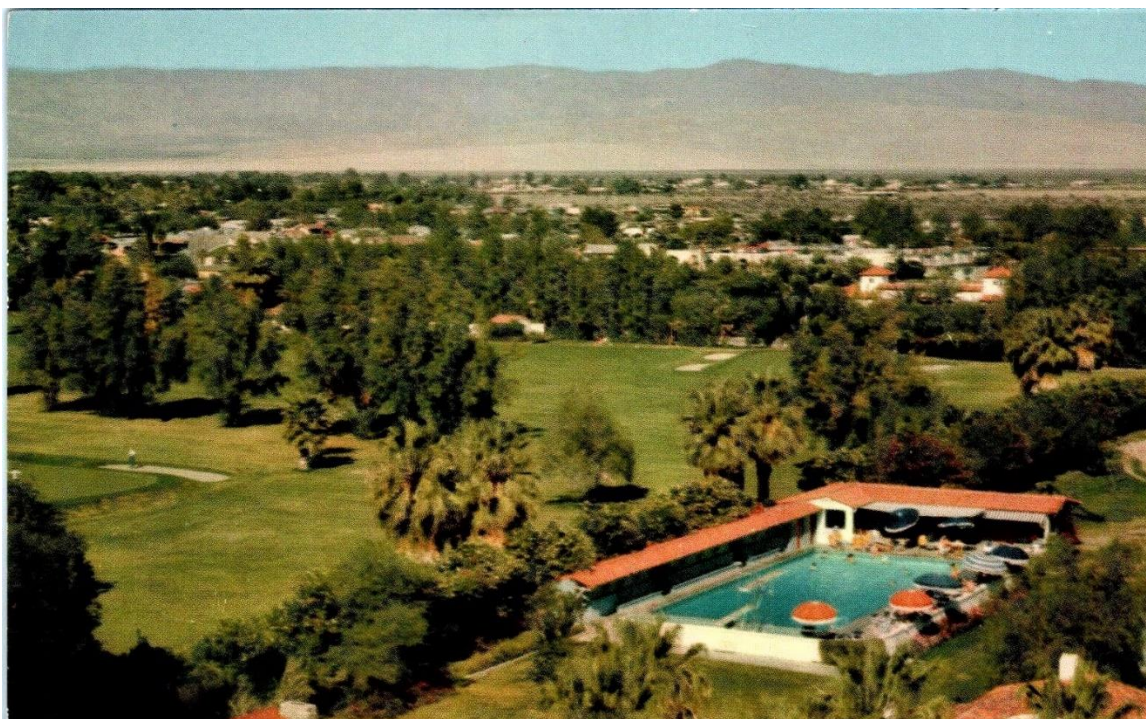
O’Donnell had a long row of Mexican fan palms planted to line his majestic driveway from Alejo to his hillside home. Between each tree, colorful red and white oleander shrubs were planted. Another long row of palm trees — Native California fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) — were planted starting on the north end of the property and running southeast at a diagonal stopping near the eighth green. Between each of these palms, O’Donnell planted a drought-tolerant Arizona cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*), its bushy, gray-green pyramidal form a striking contrast to the verticality of the stately palms, with their dull, gray-green fronds. Arizona

cypress was also used for another row of trees, running diagonally northeast from the fifth green ending at uppermost corner of the parcel.

Scattered around the course were smaller clusters of trees, planted in pairs or threes—Mexican fan palm, California fan palm, date palm, tamarisk, Arizona cypress. These punctuation marks in the landscape served as wayfinding, designating tees, greens, and holes. Others did double duty as obstacles. Cottonwoods were planted at various places to provide shade. Besides the magnificent stands of red and white oleander, which soon became an O'Donnell signature, the third and fourth holes featured an assortment of roses.



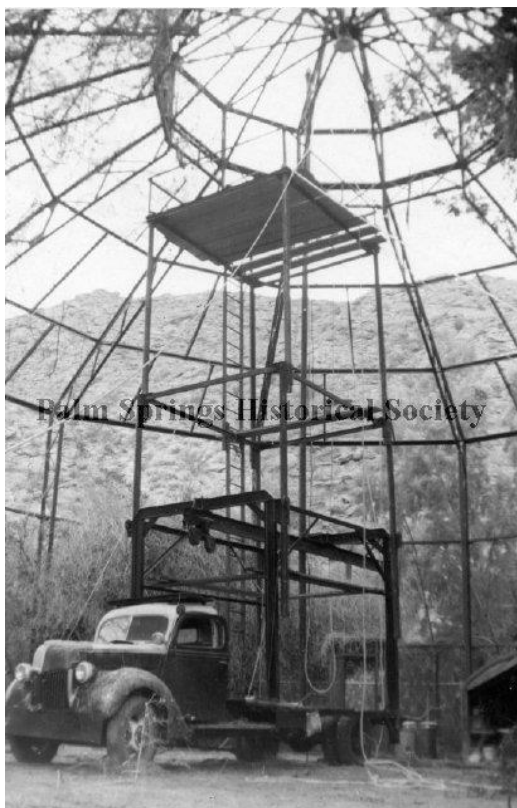
An early photograph of O'Donnell's long, impressive driveway, which followed the old Whitewater Ditch. Planted on one side were a long row of Mexican fan palms. The oleanders had not yet been planted.



Two groupings of three California fan palm were planted behind the Desert Inn pool, serving as a backdrop. The trees are extant, letting us now see where the Desert Inn pool once stood.



Trees defined long fairways, leading the eye to the desert scenery beyond.



O'Donnell had a large aviary installed in a bay created where the mountain met the golf course. Adjacent to this, he created a large formal garden, from which guests could watch the golf games. The photograph at left shows the aviary being dismantled in 1952. At right, the formal garden can be seen adjacent to the palm-lined driveway.

In a bay across from the eighth green — a natural enclosure created by the curve of the mountainside — O'Donnell installed an enormous iron aviary, 50 feet in diameter and 40 feet high. O'Donnell stocked the aviary with more than 40 different kinds of birds. To help cool the open-air aviary from the intense sun, he had flowering vines planted, which grew up and mostly covered the steel structure. Adjacent to this was a formal garden.⁴⁵

After the course was initially planted, O'Donnell made upgrades periodically, and while his tree and shrub choices thrived, he found it more difficult to maintain the enormous expanse of turf in the harsh desert climate. The *Desert Sun* reported in 1938, "It is a difficult matter to keep a good turf all summer, but with an abundance of water coming from Mr. O'Donnell's own reservoir, supplied by the Whitewater river some 15 miles distant, and a crew of workmen who are busy all summer watering the course, a good turf is maintained. Fertilizer is added by carloads every year, and the greens are re-seeded every fall. Few who enjoy this course in the wintertime realize the tremendous amount of money, time and effort extended each year to give Palm Springs a first-rate golf course."⁴⁶



*Thomas O'Donnell, in shorts at far right next to wife Winifred, with two unidentified friends, ca. 1933.
Courtesy Tracy Conrad.*

OPENING COURSE TO PUBLIC, 1932

At first, the Desert Golf Course was used only by O'Donnell and his closest friends and select Desert Inn guests. O'Donnell was finally persuaded to open it for public play in February 1932. As an article in *Palm Springs Life* later recalled, "a bankers convention was coming to town and the delegates had been promised golfing facilities. The responsible parties came to Mr. O'Donnell and pleaded with him to throw his private golf course temporarily open to public play, knowing it was like asking him to lend out his favorite golf club. He stoutly refused. Then, he quietly arranged with John Kline to bring in supplies the next day. 'I was only trying to get a rise out of them,' confided O'Donnell."⁴⁷

As described in *The Golfer* magazine in March, 1950, "In 1932 set out in earnest to develop a great club and started a concerted program of improvement of the beautiful greens and fairways."⁴⁸ The elevated first tee was moved to its current location at this time, one of the only changes made to the original configuration of the course.

O'Donnell appointed John Kline as manager of the course, a position he held until 1947 when he was replaced by Ernie La Fleur. Kline was a popular man in Palm Springs, and as related by the *Desert Sun*, "he has made a host of friends throughout the country. His unfailing personal interest in the upkeep and care of the project has been a large contributing factor to the success of the enterprise."⁴⁹ The immediate enthusiastic response made it necessary to also hire a golf professional. Mike Flavin was hired in the fall of 1932, holding that position until 1934, when he was lured away by the real estate business. He was replaced by George Howard, who the *Desert Sun* described in 1941 as "a genial host and superior player, he has made many friends during his years here besides being known as one of the best instructors of the game in the West."⁵⁰ The same issue of the newspaper identified many of the original caddies hired in 1932:

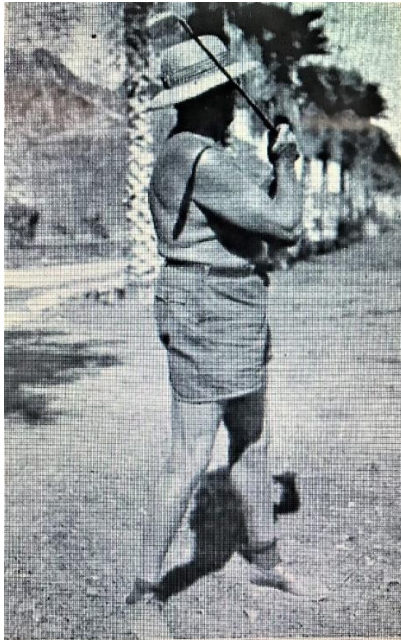
A resume of the golf course would be most incomplete without a word concerning the caddies. It is just another feature that makes it different from the average run of clubs. The first caddie to carry a bag on the course was Cruz Navarro, so to him goes the distinction of being the longest in continual service. Waldo, Griffen and Bryson King were employed when the course was opened to the public and have returned each season since that time. The Martin brothers, Bernie and Pat have both been regulars for several years as has Rightie Vogt. Al Gardello joined the ranks seven years ago and is supposed to know which way each blade of grass grows for the benefit of the 'fussy foursome.' George Browell, the daddy of the caddies, boasts of being able to take the loops with the best of them in spite of his 68 years—not old, but 68 years young, according to George. He has two sons toting as well and one year, a grandson, making three generations on the job.⁵¹

O'Donnell commissioned two more Spanish-Colonial Revival structures, both of which were presumably designed by William Charles Tanner. First, a modest Golf Shop with lockers for golf equipment storage was built on the east side of the property, at Belardo and Amado Roads. A small restroom structure was adjacent, while yet another small restroom building, with facilities for men and women, was built near the third and fourth greens.

After the club's 1932 opening, for Thomas O'Donnell, the immediate appreciation and response were tremendously gratifying. O'Donnell was highly regarded by his community, the *Desert Sun* announcing in 1938:

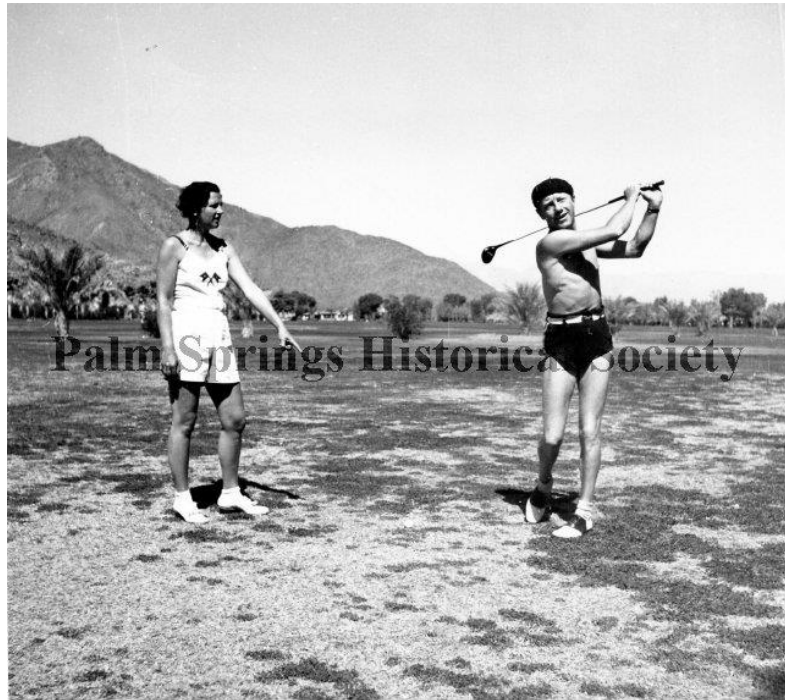
If ever a community had an 'angel,' it is Palm Springs. But for Thomas O'Donnell, this resort probably would not have a first-class golf course. What is more important to a resort than a golf course? Mr. O'Donnell did not turn over his course to the Desert Golf Club, and thus to public use, to make money, for he knew it would cost him a handsome sum each year to keep it going. He did it solely so that the guests and residents of Palm Springs could enjoy the best of all resort recreations—golf. Judging from the number of hotel guests seen daily on the course, we venture the guess that a survey among them would disclose that many come

here to play golf. A large proportion of our winter visitors are in or past the middle age of life—past the age of strenuous athletics. They naturally prefer golf. On the Desert Golf Course, one of the most beautiful in the country, they can get all the light exercise they want and the sunshine they seek when they come to the desert. That's why most of them play in their shorts.⁵²

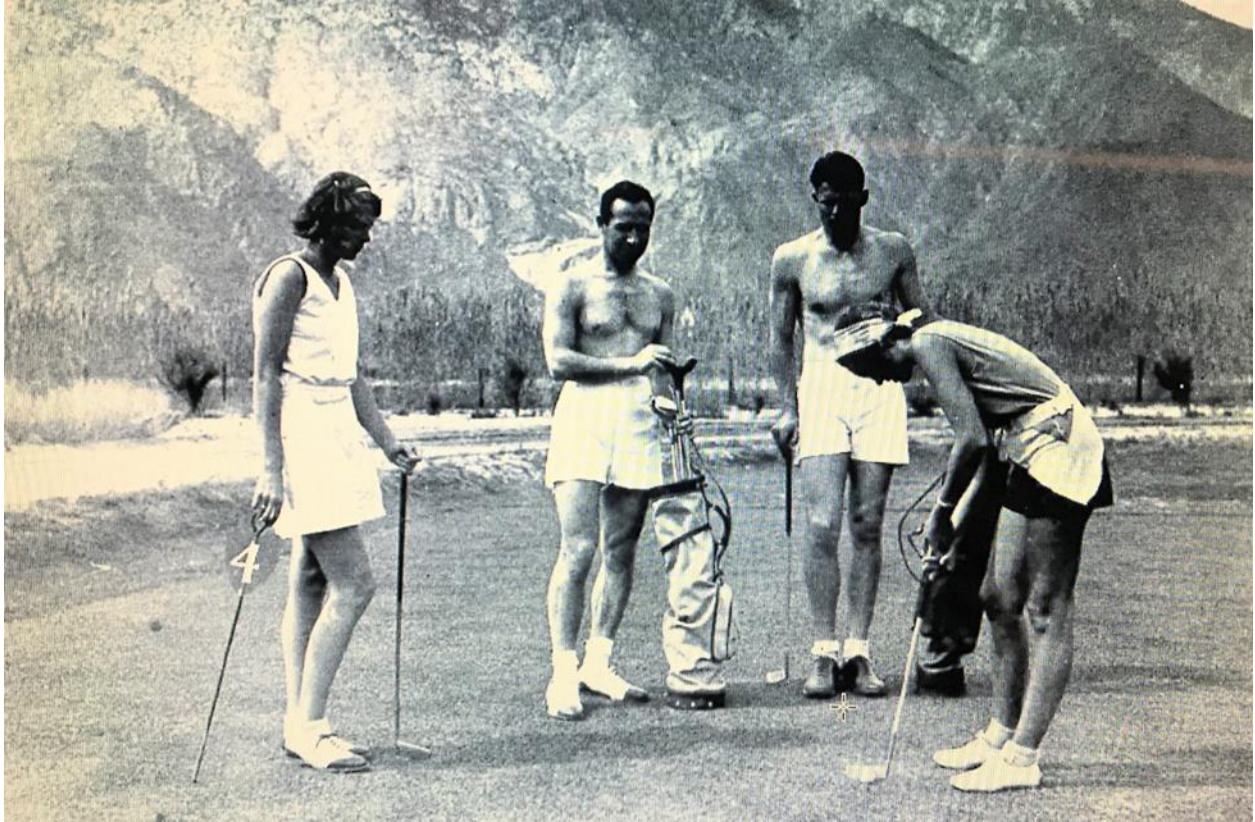


Tom O'Donnell in shorts.

O'Donnell plays wearing shorts and not much else, 1930s.



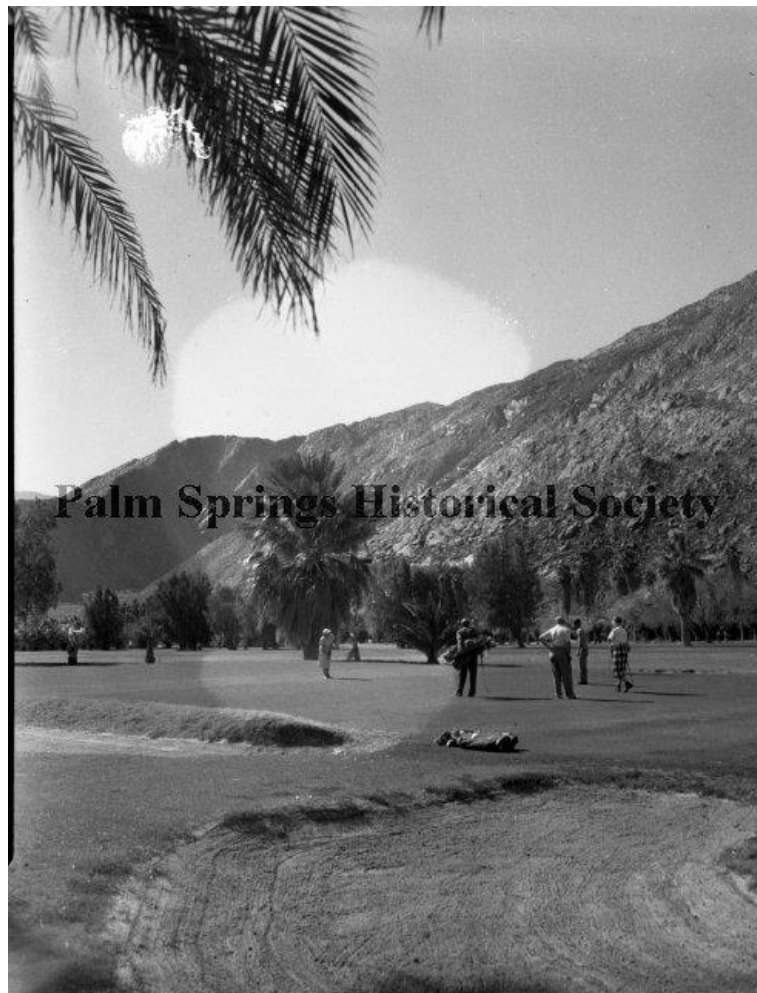
Lita and Freeman Gosden (he is famous for the radio show "Amos & Andy") play in bathing suits.



The caption for this 1930s photo reads, "The foursome at the 4th hole shows Mrs. James Garibaldi, when she was Miss Marian Jahns of Pasadena, putting before her sister-in-law Mrs. Robert Jahns, Tony Burke and Harold Hicks. The latter are seen wearing the only shorts available those days, cotton underwear from Carl Lykken's general store."



Players were very casually dressed in the 1930s.



The views and vistas from the golf course have remain unspoiled since the time Thomas O'Donnell designed it in the 1920s and remain one of its greatest assets.

The pleasure of golf on the Desert course is unique. With wonderful grass greens, very unusual for this part of the golfing world, and a course having the yardage of a championship course, Palm Springs is very fortunate. Add to this the superb views of the mountains, the warmth of a sub-tropical sun and the 'props' of waving palm trees, one can play to their heart's content. On the links at Palm Springs, the foursome is likely to include champions from all parts of the country, leaders from all fields of industry and stars of the motion picture world. Another noticeable feature of the unique playground is that you will find a number of our famous divot-diggers playing in 'shorts,' getting the full benefit of the sunrays. Like all other courses, the Desert Golf Course has a history. It was a privately owned and still is, by Thos. A. O'Donnell, for his own use. Of late he opened it to the public. This course with its grass greens and tees has been developed under the supervision of John O. Kline. He prides himself on bringing out ways on the desert sand, supplanting it with wonderful turf. Golf is coming into its own at Palm Springs. With the inauguration of an open tournament now

*underway and the bringing of the leading stars of the country here the middle of February, we have something to look forward to. The clubhouse is operated after the English style of club. Not expensive, but a place to change shoes, keep clubs without charge, it carries a full line of golf equipment at regular Los Angeles prices, making it possible to purchase anything in the golf line. Lessons or playing lesson can be obtained from George Howard, resident professional.*⁵³

In February 1935, a professional golf tournament was announced to be held February 12 and 13, to be held at the Desert Golf Club, with a \$2,000 purse. Twenty-one players participated. In 1936, the annual Palm Springs Golf Invitational was launched.



Bob Hope and Bing Crosby at the O'Donnell Golf Club, 1940s.

The Desert Golf Course became a magnet for Hollywood celebrities visiting Palm Springs, and it became common to see stars such as the radio team of Amos and Andy (Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll), or Bing Crosby and Bob Hope. Hope later recalled, "The oldest course in Palm Springs is O'Donnell, a nice little 9-hole layout. I played it twice one day and shot 66. I told Bing about it and Bing said, "Tsk, Tsk, Bob. I've told you before—you can't walk in after 15. You've got to finish the round."⁵⁴



The William Charles Tanner-designed O'Donnell Golf House Residence, 1936. Photo courtesy Tracy Conrad.

“GOLF HOUSE,” 1936

Though O'Donnell had come to Palm Springs seeking relief from his respiratory ailments, he also began suffering from a heart condition. By the mid-1930s, the condition worsened enough that it was a factor in the O'Donnell's decision to move from *Ojo del Desierto*. Another reason was that the O'Donnell's began spending longer periods in the desert, and wanted a house designed to be completely air-conditioned. That, with a location adjacent to his golf course, would make it easier to play on a whim.⁵⁵ He called William Charles Tanner back once again to design a one-story, sprawling Andalusian-influenced Spanish Colonial-Revival home, and the O'Donnells named their new home “Golf House.”⁵⁶ Adjacent to the vine-covered aviary, the house replaced the formal garden O'Donnell had installed in 1927.



The landscape for the O'Donnell Golf House featured pairs of cottonwoods for shade, Canary Island palm specimens, neatly groomed foundation plantings, and beds of flowering color.

Bottom photo courtesy Tracy Conrad.

Completed in 1936, the *Limelight* reported, “The charming, long, low house is designed by Charles Tanner in early Californian architecture, with the exception of an entirely glass-enclosed sunroom. Nestling against the foothills, the house commands a fine view of the golf course; it includes in addition to living rooms, three master’s bedrooms; porches and patios.”⁵⁷ The main section of the home was bookended by two shorter wings—one extended at a right angle, and was a sunroom, with enormous casement windows on three sides. The other short wing extended at an angle. Built using rustic brick, a long screened-in loggia was covered by a roof clad with variegated barrel roof tiles.

Separate from the main residence was what *Limelight* described as “a Battle Creek physiotherapy room.” This was the Palm Springs medical office of Dr. Winifred Willis O'Donnell. Dr. O'Donnell, a Long Beach osteopath, was one of the most prominent osteopaths in Southern California and a leader in that profession in all the country. Using the same materials and detailing as the main house, the physiotherapy office featured a large, sunny reception room with fireplace and a small examining room and office, with an adjacent walled-in patio.

Shortly after the Golf House was completed, O'Donnell's poor health required him to give up golf, a heartbreaking situation. Though he was forced to give up playing the game, it didn't stop his enjoyment of it. “Daily he would drive to the seventh tee where he would sit and bet dimes with his guests that they could not get onto the green (185 yards) in one stroke.”⁵⁸

CHANGES

Though the layout and landscape of the golf course have survived remarkably unchanged, from the beginning, O'Donnell added features and modified others. By 1937, the course had become so popular that changes were necessary to ensure efficiency, the *Desert Sun* reporting, “play at the Desert Golf Club was increased to the extent that a starter will soon be at the first tee to regulate the play. Starting time will be necessary after the first of the year. Word comes from John Kline, manager, that the play is way ahead of any time since the course was opened. A ruling to the effect that all players must have caddies went into effect today. This helps to speed the play at the course.”⁵⁹ In 1941, the *Desert Sun* described changes that had taken place at the golf course since it opened: “With increased interest and play on the course, improvements have been made yearly. The greens have been enlarged over time [from 50 feet originally], to 75 and then 90 feet in width, fairways have been lengthened and there are now 19 traps guarding the several greens. A large putting green was added in 1937 which has proved extremely popular, not only for those who do not play the usual 18 holes but for practice putting as well.”⁶⁰

GIFT TO THE CITY

By the early 1940s, O'Donnell's health began to seriously decline. In 1941, he suffered a severe heart attack and soon realized that he would have to make plans to preserve the golf course to which he had become so devoted.⁶¹ As B. F. Shearer, vice-president of the O'Donnell Golf Club later recalled, "He would have liked to have donated it directly to the city, but he was afraid the course would be used for something else, a park or a civic center."⁶²

O'Donnell began meeting with Palm Springs mayor Eugene D. Therieau, to discuss the possibility of O'Donnell turning over the 33-acre parcel as a gift to the city, which would also be beneficial to O'Donnell for tax advantages. The terms of the lease were negotiated — Lease Agreement 208 would be effective from November 1, 1944 to October 31, 2043. In December 1944 the *Desert Sun* announced:

*Palm Springs received a magnificent Christmas gift this week when Thomas A. O'Donnell, prominent Village resident, deeded the O'Donnell golf course to the city, a gift worth around \$300,000, and insuring that there will always either be a golf course on the site or a municipal park. The O'Donnell Golf Club holds a 99-year lease on the property and with the transfer of the property, the club now becomes a tenant of the city and all revenue derived from the lease goes to the city to be spent for public purposes. The gift provides that should the golf club terminate its lease, the property becomes a public park. A resolution accepting the deed with grateful appreciation to Mr. O'Donnell's generosity, was adopted by city council by unanimous vote Wednesday. Upon passage of the acceptance resolution, Councilman Armand Turonnet introduced another, providing that the property in perpetuity be known as the Thomas A. O'Donnell Municipal Park. The motion was unanimously adopted.*⁶³

In January 1945, O'Donnell gifted the Hicks parcel, the site of the maintenance yard, and the reservoir at Stevens and Palm Canyon.⁶⁴

O'Donnell set up a Board of Trustees for the O'Donnell Golf Club, a group of 25 men (not to be confused with the Committee of Twenty-five). After the new private club was formed, the course was popular from the beginning, requiring the management to develop new rules to manage the crowds. It was reported in January 1945:

Owing to the large amount of play on the O'Donnell Golf Course, it has become necessary to make certain rules in order to accommodate the winter guests as well as to take care of the season ticket holders. We have adopted the same rules that we follow during the crowded tournament play; namely, we will allow only sixty golfers on the course each morning and it is necessary that each player procure a starting time. Pat Martin, the starter, requests only foursomes play. Any incomplete foursome should see Pat on the first tee and he will arrange your game. Each morning after the sixty players have teed off, the course will be closed for

*two hours and during this time no daily tickets can be purchased. In this way the players will enjoy their game and can complete the eighteen holes within three and one-half hours. Beginning at one-thirty the course will be open to afternoon golfers and we expect to conveniently accommodate then another forty players; this will make a total of approximately a hundred a day.*⁶⁵

Thomas O'Donnell died on February 21, 1945 at Wilshire Hospital in Los Angeles. He was 74 years old. His funeral was held February 23 at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, while concurrently, Palm Springs residents gathered at the putting green of the O'Donnell Golf Course for a local memorial service.

Nate Milnor, who had previously purchased O'Donnell's *Ojo del Desierto*, bought from Dr. Winifred O'Donnell all of O'Donnell's Palm Springs properties that hadn't been gifted to the city, including O'Donnell's Golf House residence, and the 44-acre hillside parcel known as Inspiration Point. He quickly sold the Golf House to Mr. and Mrs. Pat Dougherty of Pasadena, and the Milnors and Doughertys became joint owners of the Gate Lodge (Lot 47), which marked the driveways to both *Ojo del Desierto* and the Golf House.⁶⁶

In July 1947, the Palm Springs city council voted to buy the 50 foot by 1127 foot Lot 47 for \$52,500 from the Milnors and Doughertys. The land was then leased back from the city by the Golf Club for a fee of \$5,000 per year, for 25 years.⁶⁷ In 1948, when the Committee of Twenty-five was formed, they leased the Gate Lodge building as their clubhouse.

In 1952, O'Donnell's iron aviary adjacent to the Golf House was dismantled and shipped to the Griffith Park Zoo in Los Angeles.⁶⁸

ATTEMPTS TO BREAK LEASE

Since O'Donnell's generous gift in 1944, there have been several attempts to break the terms of his lease and acquire the land for purposes outside of the agreement between O'Donnell and the city of Palm Springs. In 1957, the Palm Springs Real Estate Board made the first attempt to break the 99-year lease, asking the O'Donnell Golf Club and the Committee of Twenty-five to give their properties to the city in order to establish a public golf course, to be named the Palm Springs O'Donnell Public Golf Course. Their true intent, however, was to subdivide the property into a parking lot, a park or botanical garden, and a 5,000 seat auditorium. That proposal fortunately died.⁶⁹

Twenty years later, the lease was once again challenged, when the Associated Desert Retirees (ADR) complained that Palm Springs residents were not allowed to use the golf course, that it was the domain only of O'Donnell Golf Club members. The ADR incorrectly believed that the 99-year lease with the city was a violation of state code. This triggered a review by the city in

1977. The city manager initiated an investigation into the terms of the Golf Club's leases with the city. A report was generated and released in June of that year. After reviewing all the documentation related to the terms of the leases, the city manager's office concluded that the leases were indeed enforceable and advised against tampering with them until 2043.

In 1990, yet another attempt to violate the terms of the lease was initiated by a developer, SENCA, who was working with the city of Palm Springs on a "Vision Plan" for the site. The mayor of Palm Springs at the time, Sonny Bono, "sent a letter to Jon Shoenberger, then club president, stating that barring a satisfactory negotiation for purchase of the club, the city would commence condemnation (eminent domain) proceedings."⁷⁰ The O'Donnell Golf Club's Board of Trustees met, and adopted a resolution to remain committed to the terms of the lease. SENCA finally gave up.

Finally, as recently as 2006, Mayor Ron Oden questioned the terms of the lease and appointed a committee to once again review the documentation. Oden later suggested the purchase of the Club could be part of a bond issue which would be voted on in the 2007 election, but it was never followed through.

The lease is slated to expire October 31, 2043. The leases to the golf course, the former Gate Lodge, and the former O'Donnell Carriage House will expire, and all seven parcels, by the terms of the agreement, must be used solely for a public purpose. The property is to be renamed the Thomas A. O'Donnell Municipal Park and must either ideally remain a golf course, but become public, or be adaptively reused for a public park. Should the city decide not to honor O'Donnell's wishes, the parcels willed to the city by O'Donnell in 1944 will revert to O'Donnell's heirs.

VII

THE HISTORIC GOLF COURSE CONFIGURATION

Hole	White Distance (yards)	Handicap	Red Distance (yards)	Handicap
1	312	7	320	8
2	357	1	367	2
3	130	15	150	16
4	207	13	250	14
5	125	17	130	18
6	468	5	472	6
7	197	11	207	12
8	504	3	508	4
9	301	9	305	10

NOTE: First set of quotes from 1990s O'Donnell Golf Club pamphlet at the Palm Springs Historical Society; second set of quotes from a list of Desert Golf Club rules from 1939.

Hole 1/10 (Par 4): (*Note: When the golf course opened in 1927, the original location of the elevated Hole 1 tee was on a hill off the driveway to Ojo del Desierto, near the Carriage House. After the course was opened to the public in 1932, the location of Hole 1 moved to its current location.*)

1990s: “Out of bounds right tests your nerves right away; smart shot is a fairway wood to the left side of the fairway, leaving a middle to short iron to green.”

1939: “No. 1 Hole—Out-of-bounds to the right, penalty, loss of distance only (this means play two from the tee). Play winter golf (tee with club head only). Tree basins, lift without penalty, two club-lengths and have a free, clear shot to the hole. All other trees, without basins, play ball as it lies. Ball lodging in palm trees or any other trees, count as unplayable, and player may drop with two strokes penalty, and have free clear shot to the pin. Players may clean ball on the green. In case the ball lodges in divot hole on green, lift and place as close as possible, not changing the line of putt. Ball going over No. 1 green must be played, as it is not out of bounds.”

Hole 2/11 (Par 4):

1990s: “Length of the tee is a big plus on this hole. The green is well-bunkered and the palm trees in front of the green make the approach shot all the more challenging.”

1939: “No. 2 Hole —Out-of-bounds to the right, loss of distance only. Tree basins or rose bushes, lift without penalty straight back keeping the same line of flight; to the hole. Ball in the road crossing the fairway, lift without penalty and place according to which half of the road it is on. Ball landing in the residence on No. 2 fairway, lift straight out, no penalty.”

Hole 3/12 (Par 3):

1990s: “Smart club selection is required on this Par 3. Bunkers left and right of the green catch a lot of short balls.”

1939: “No. 3 Hole—Observe out-of-bounds rule and tree basin rule. Stakes govern the boundary line.”

Hole 4/13 (Par 4):

1990s: Short Par 4 with elevated tee makes shot to green very tempting. Stroke saver is a two or three iron just short of the green and the trouble, leaving a short pitch to the pin.”

1939: “No. 4 Hole —Players are asked to kindly put in force the following rule: After all players have approached the green, please step to the back of the green and invite the approaching match to drive. This will save about 15 minutes in playing time for the nine holes and relieve congestion. The caddies have instructions to mention this to the players. Please abide by this. Out-of-bounds makes this hole, marked by stakes. Ball in rose bushes, lift without penalty and place according to which side of the basin it stops. Same for ball in the road back of the green. Tree basin rule applies on this hole.”

Hole 5/14 (Par 3):

1990s: “Short Par 3 signature hole with a blind shot over the mountain. Use the tall palm tree for line and be sure to carry the bunker short left.”

1939: “No. 5 Hole—Ball in rocks, counted as out-of-bounds, and ball may be re-teed. Road and rose bush rule are the same as hole four.”

Hole 6/15 (Par 5):

1990s: “Dogleg right Par 5 with out-of-bounds right the entire length; demands a tee shot to left side of fairway leaving an open second shot to a narrow fairway.”

1939: “No. 6 Hole—Tree basins to the left have been discontinued, ball must be played as it lies. Out-of-bounds to the right all the way down the fairway. Ball hitting the tree in center,

of No. 6 fairway may be teed with club head, but the line of flight must be kept the same. Ball lodging near trees guarding green must be played as it lies.”

Hole 7/16 (Par 3):

1990s: “Long Par 3 requires plenty of club off the tee; premium on avoiding trap on right side of sloping green.”

1939: “Hole No. 7—All previous rules are in force here. Players are requested to follow the rule which on Number 4 hole, namely invites the approaching match to drive when all balls are on the green. It is also good golf etiquette to allow the match driving on number 8 tee, to drive before crossing in front of them.”

Hole 8/17 (Par 5):

1990s: “Plays longer than yardage since uphill all the way; long and straight off the tee a must with out-of-bounds both right and left. Play your second shot to the right of the fairway, and use enough club on your approach to carry the trap in front of the elevated green.”

1939: “No. 8 Hole—Out-of-bounds to the left, first stake underneath tree and this continues all the way to the last stakes near the green. Ball going to the right, towards the clubhouse or in the palms surrounding the putting green, may be lifted directly out in the fairway, giving the golfer a free shot. Ball on putting green or in trap back of number nine green may be lifted out to number eight fairway, not nearer the hole, and no penalty. Ball in the trap at right side of number nine green must be played. Play ball as it lies from the palm trees around number nine green, although one is still playing the eight hole.”

Hole 9/18 (Par 4):

1990s: “Hit a fade off the tee to a narrow fairway, avoiding trees on both sides of this short, downhill Par 4. Narrow green demands a good short iron shot for a birdie putt.”

1939: “No. 9 Hole —Player could hook out-of-bound from nine tee across number one fairway. All local rules apply on this hole. Ball over the green on practice putting green must be lifted and placed to the right, not nearer the hole. Players coming off ninth hole can alternate with matches starting from number one tee.”

III PHOTOGRAPHS

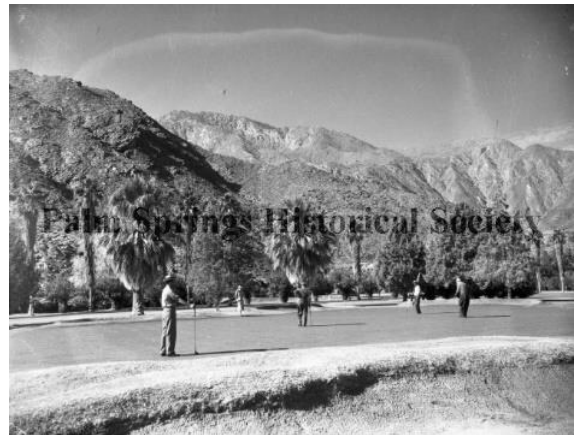
GOLF COURSE DESIGN



Looking north over the second hole fairway. In its earliest iteration, there were no sand traps.



When the course opened to the public in 1932, bunkers and sand traps became part of the design.



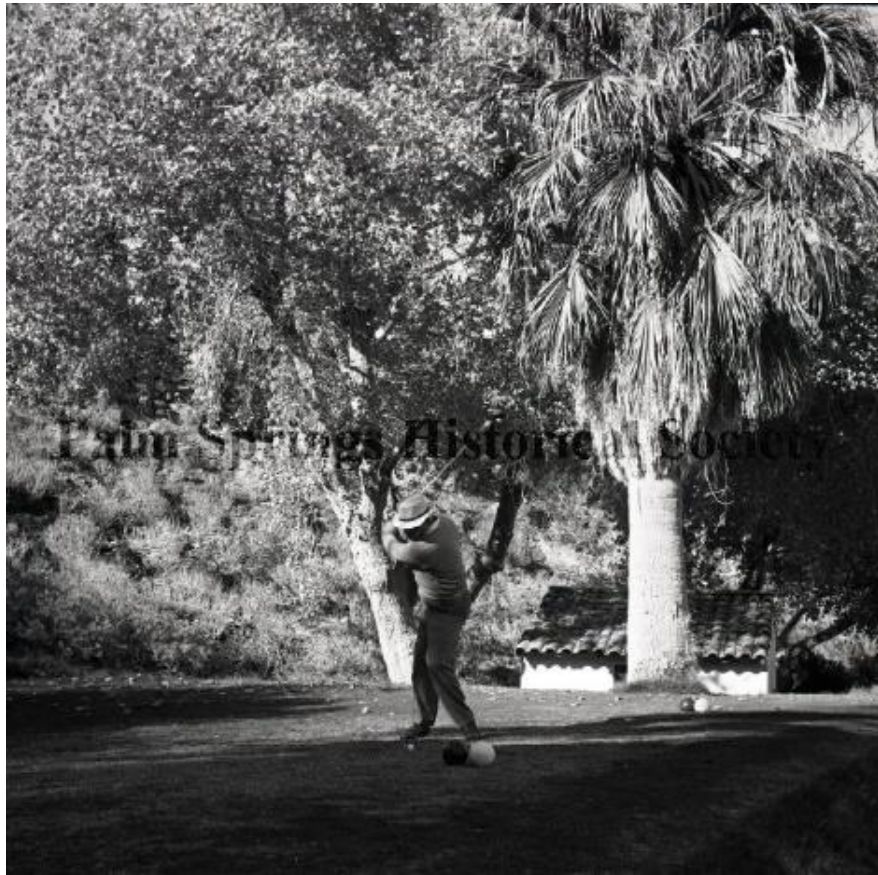
By the mid-1930s, sand traps and contoured earth mounding had been introduced.



The famous Fifth Hole.



The Putting Green.



A golfer tees off from the elevated fourth hole tee. Note restroom in background, with its original barrel tile roof.



The view from the elevated fourth hole, 2019.

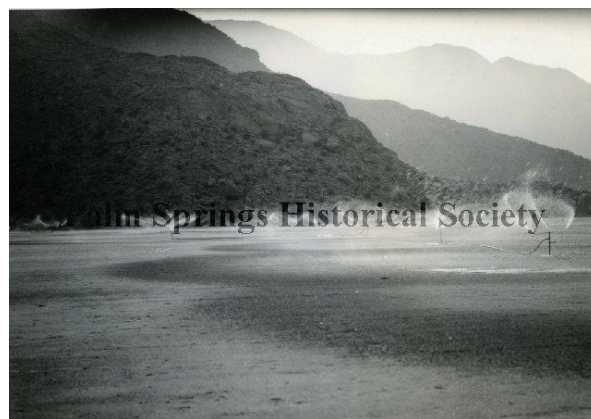


Lake Burnett, introduced 1977.

LANDSCAPE



A very early photograph of O'Donnell's impressive driveway, lined by Washingtonia robusta palms on one side, and the Whitewater ditch on the other. Note the cottonwoods in the distance, planted for shade. Ca. 1929.

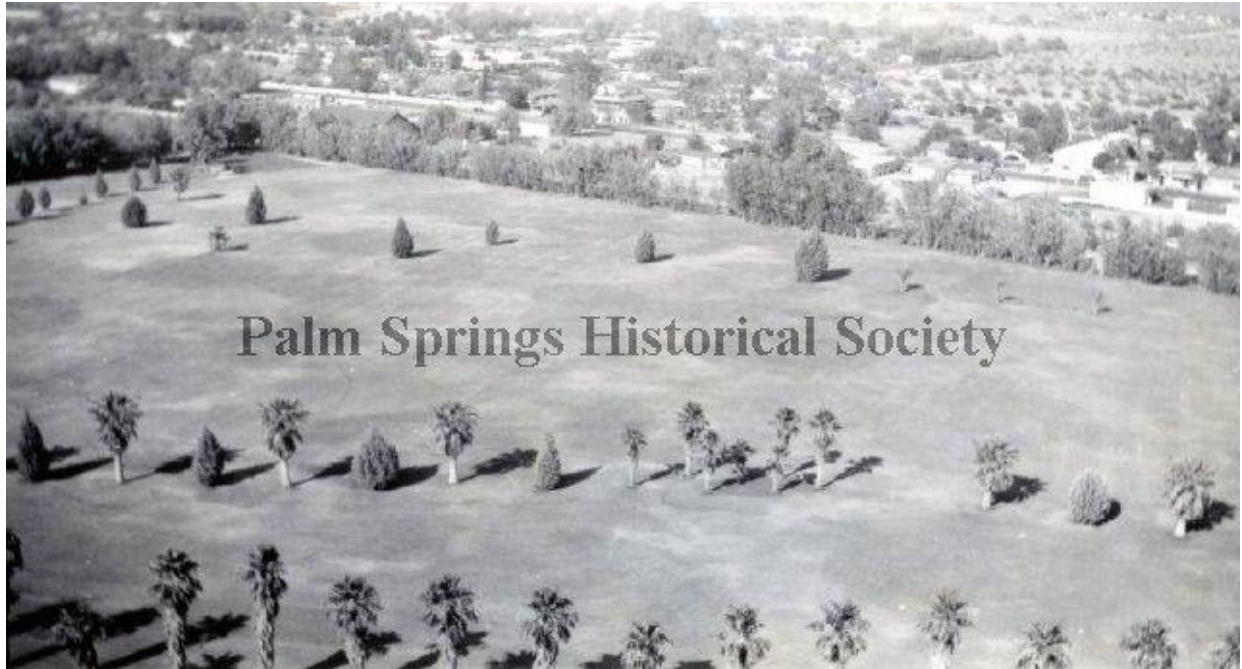


Before golf course laid out or landscape created, the grass was established. 1926.



Long fairways defined by rows of trees and shrubs.





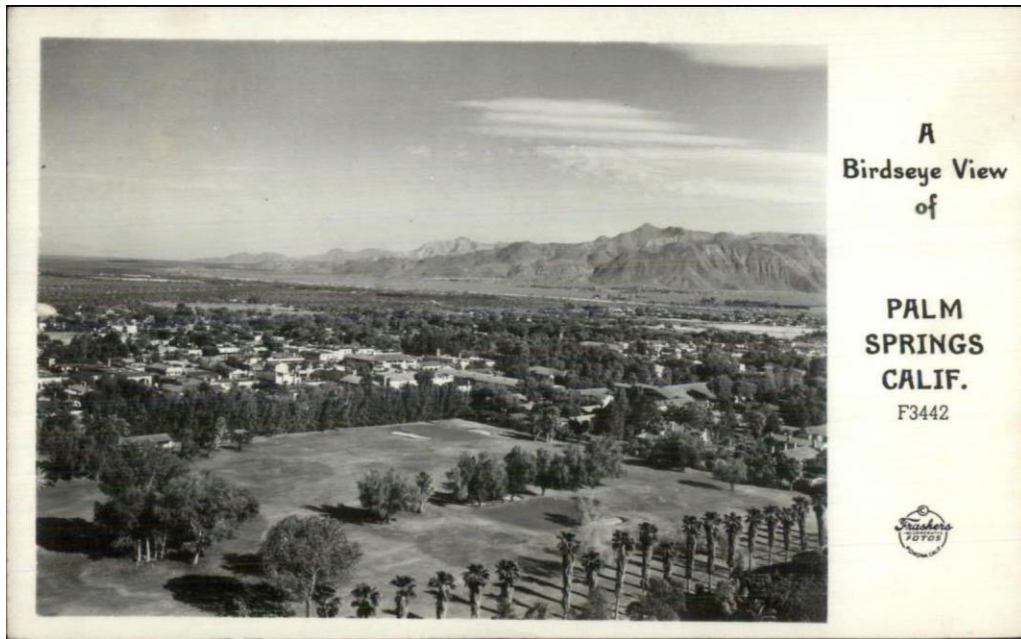
Palm Springs Historical Society

Arizona cypress planted between each California fan palm.



Palm Springs

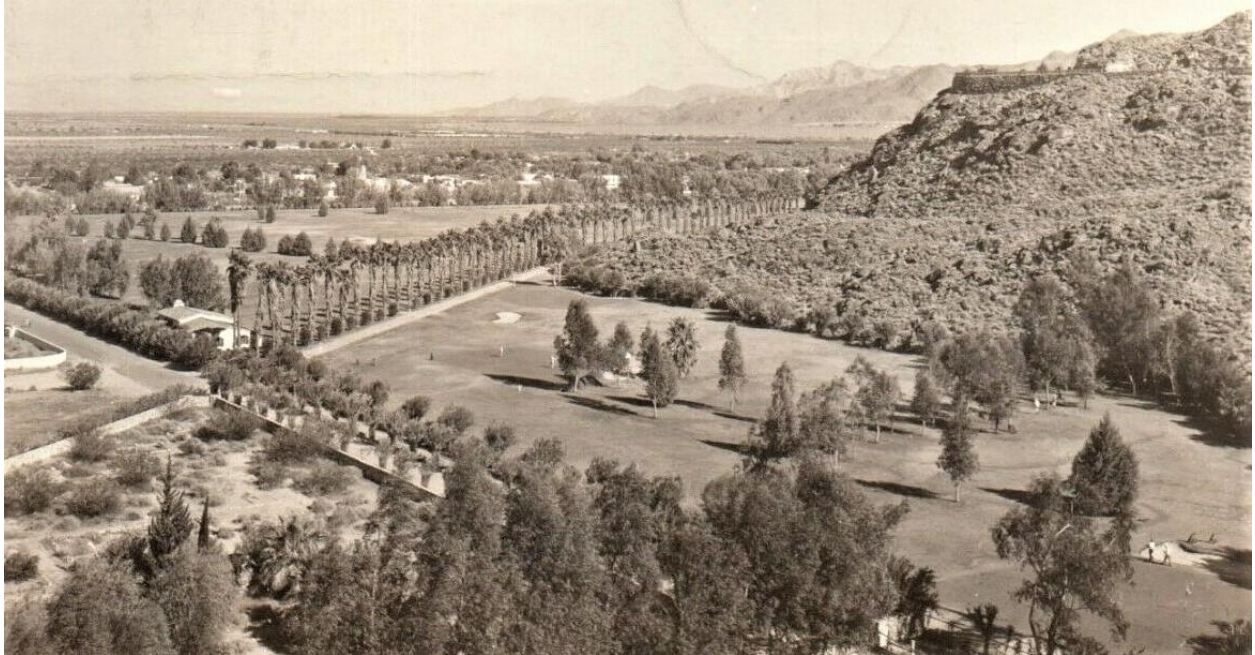
Cluster of densely planted tamarisks create screening.



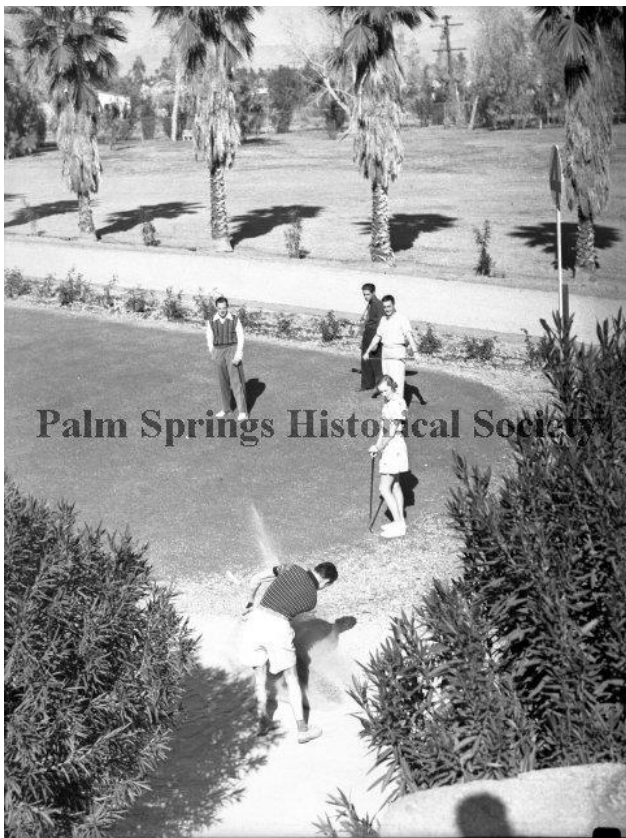
O'Donnell retained the existing tamarisk trees (and supplemented them) to line and define the perimeter and create a windbreak.



A limited number of Date palms were planted to give certain greens their own distinctive character. Single date palms were also scattered along the green as exclamation marks.



Long rows of tamarisks, palms and Arizona cypress. The third, fourth and fifth holes, seen at right, featured rose gardens.



Oleander at the perimeter of the Fifth Tee.



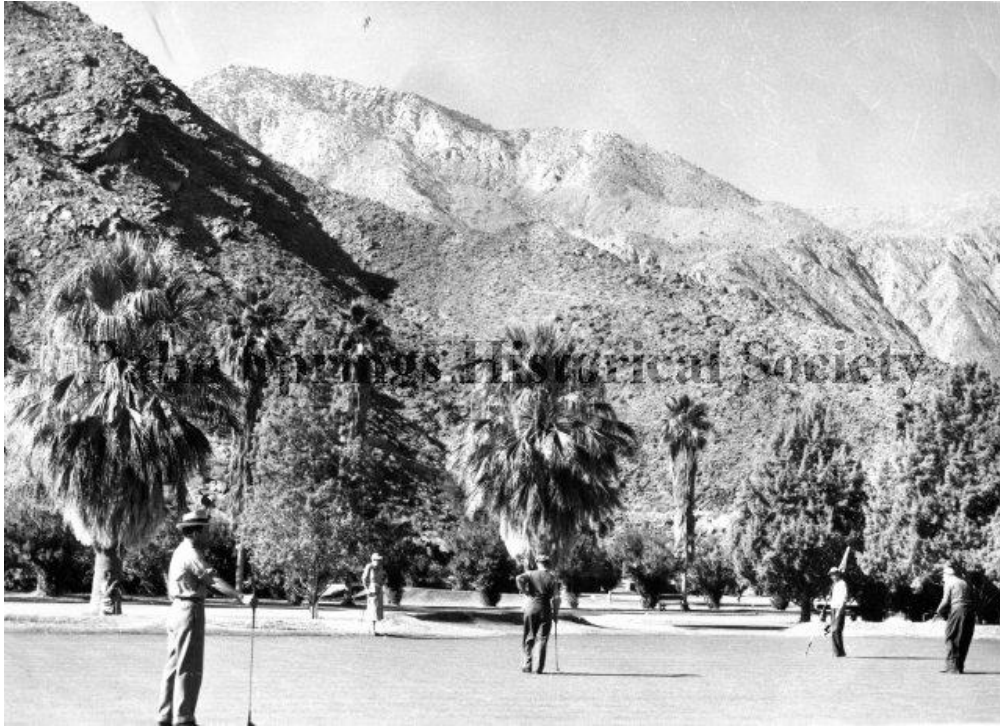
Clusters of two, three or more palms dotted the landscape.



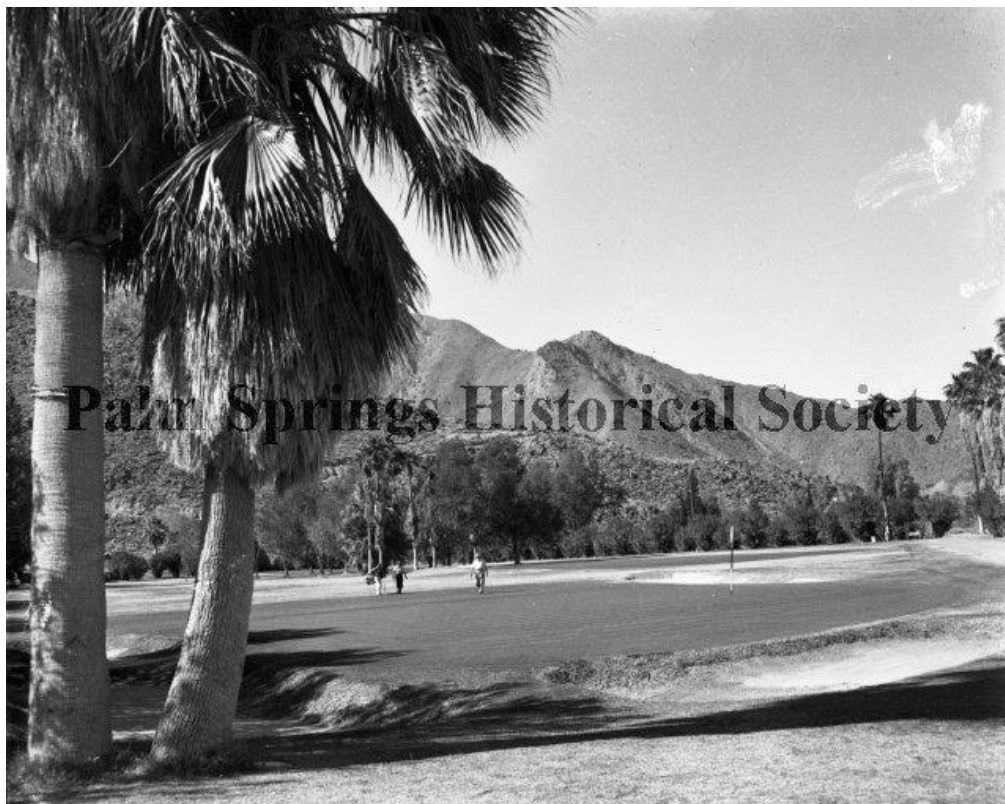
The long rows of trees and shrubs defined and screened fairways.



O'Donnell's landscape plan used a limited palette of trees suited for the intense climate, to define spaces and create landmarks on his golf course. Long rows and massive banks of alternating red and white oleander was another important character-defining feature. Here, alternating red and white oleander are planted between each Washingtonia robusta palm tree lining the driveway. They were planted along the perimeter and used to screen spaces.



From the Eighth Green, unspoiled views and vistas to the mountains beyond.



THE GOLF COURSE LANDSCAPE TODAY:



This long line of Mexican fan palms shows where O'Donnell's historic driveway once was, which followed the Whitewater Ditch.



O'Donnell's palm-lined fairways remain.



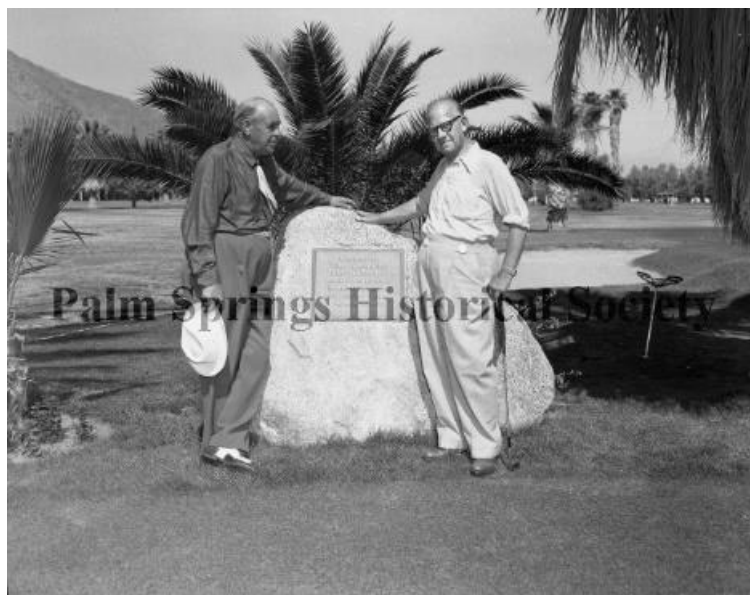


The views and vistas from the golf course to the mountains are an important character-defining feature that have remained surprisingly unchanged in the nearly hundred years of the golf course.



O'Donnell planted smaller clusters of date palms around the course.





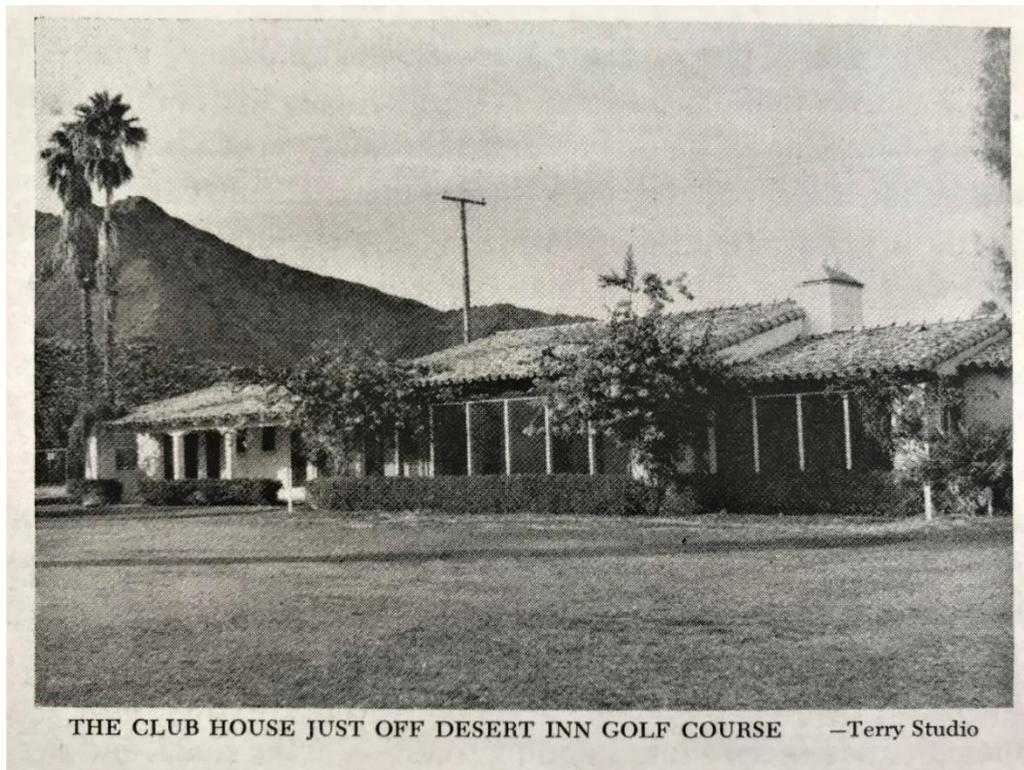
A trio of California fan palms mark the spot of O'Donnell's memorial plaque.

STRUCTURES

Gate Lodge



The Gate Lodge at the entrance to the golf course, late 1930s



The O'Donnell Gate Lodge in 1948, at the time the building was leased by the newly formed Committee of Twenty-Five. From the Palm Springs Villager.

THE GATE LODGE TODAY:



The O'Donnell Gate Lodge today. In the foreground is the most recent addition, by architect Jim Cioffi, 1991.



The O'Donnell Gate Lodge, with the row of trees from O'Donnell's palm-lined driveway in the background.



Window and shutter detail.

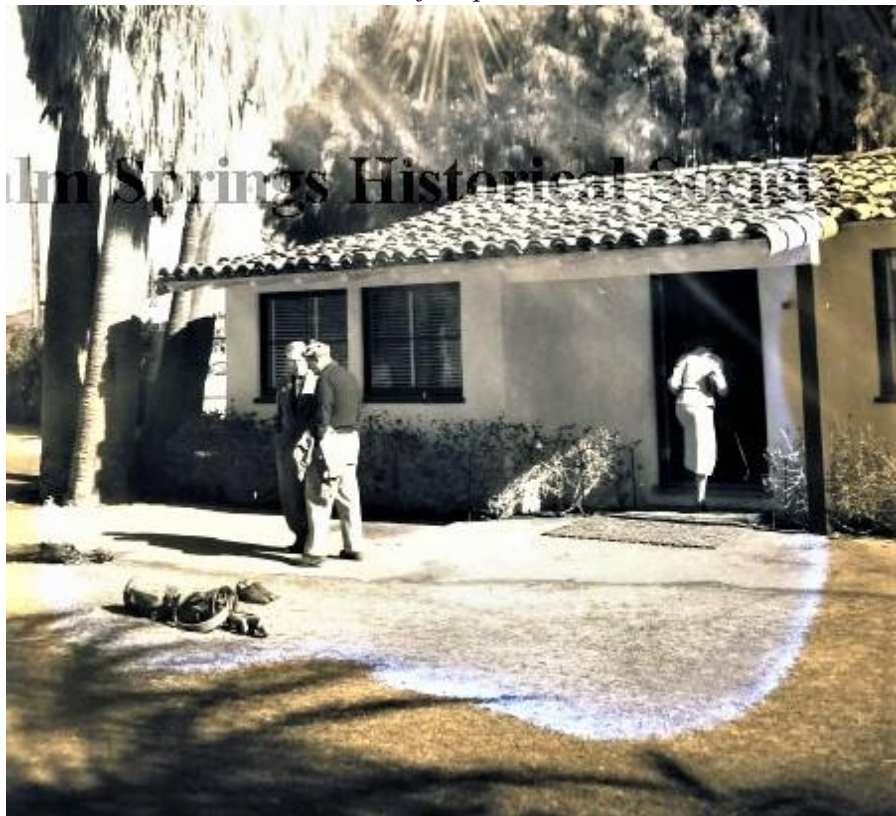


The rusticated posts and beam on the front of the Gate Lodge.

Golf Shop



The Golf Shop, 1930s.



The Desert Golf Club Golf Shop, late 1930s.



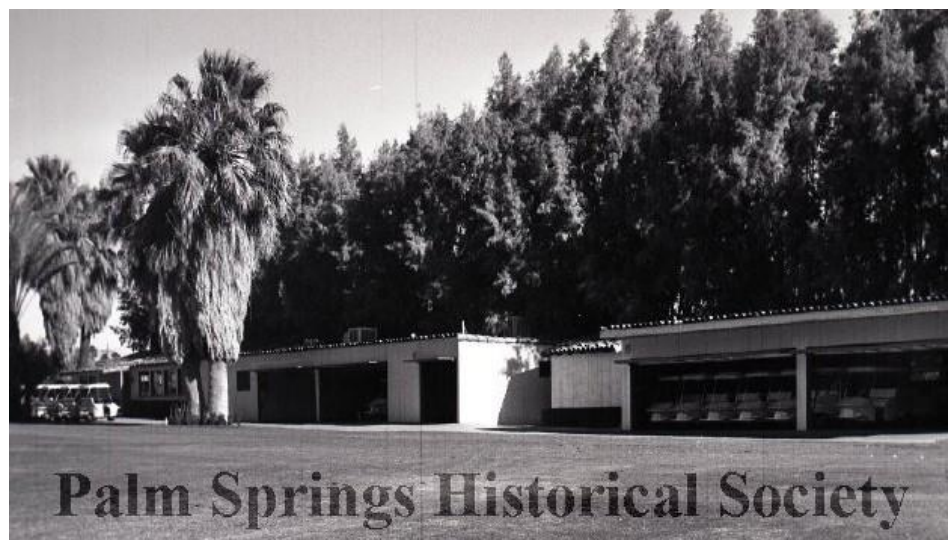
The interior of the Golf Shop, ca. 1950.



Golf pro George Howard on left, showing club manager Larry Sitter some of the selection of clubs available at the Pro Shop, 1958.



Golfing legend Ben Hogan on left, with George Howard, the O'Donnell's golf pro, 1952.



The Golf Shop after garages were added to store electric golf carts in 1955.

THE GOLF SHOP TODAY:



The windows on the north side of the building have been changed, date unknown but after 1950.



The same rafter tail detailing as seen elsewhere at the Golf Club.





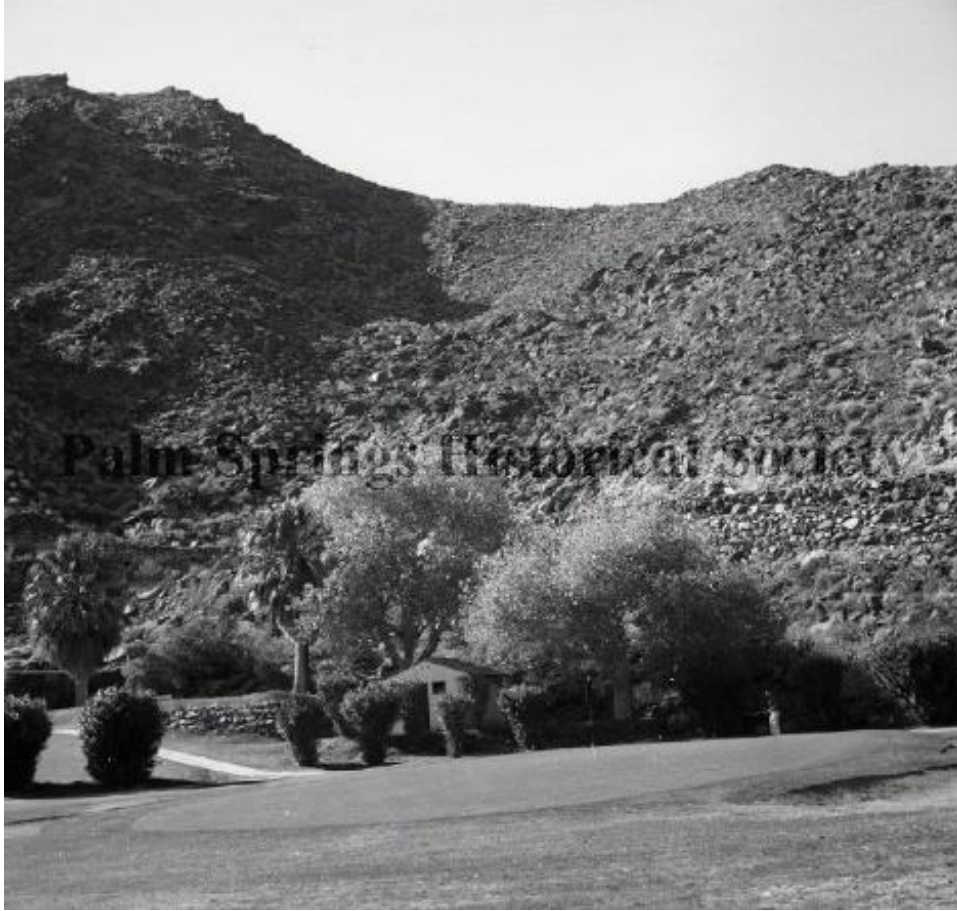
The electric cart storage garages have been built right up to the 1930s restroom building.





The electric golf cart garages were added beginning 1955.

Restroom Structure



An early photo shows the restroom structure, still partially obscured by landscape.



The restroom structure today. The building originally had barrel tile roof, like the other buildings at the Golf Club.



The simple detail of the rafter tails, brick exterior, and terra cotta roof tiles.

Golf House



This early photo shows the vine-covered aviary adjacent to the house.



The landscape of the Golf House featured pairs of cottonwood, a manicured foundation hedge, and flowers.



An early photograph of the primary façade.

THE O'DONNELL'S GOLF HOUSE RESIDENCE TODAY:



The original bay window and gabled board and batten detailing remain.



Heavy masonry pilasters paired at entrance, with a single pilaster to the north. Pairs of vertical wood supports line the arcade at the remainder.



Large steel casement windows line three sides of the sunroom.



When the south wing was demolished, this shed-roofed structure was cut off and new wall with door added.



Dr. Winifred O'Donnell's Osteopath's office.

¹ For more information on the topic of the development of Southern California landscape design, nurseries, and horticulture, see: "Southern California Gardens," by Victoria Padilla, University of California Press, 1961; "The California Garden," by Jere Stuart French, the Landscape Architecture Foundation, 1993; "California Gardens: Creating a New Eden," by David Streatfield, Abbeville Press, 1994.

² "Report on the O'Donnell Golf Course," Prepared by the City Manager's Staff of the City of Palm Springs, June 1977, p. 26.

³ "Tom O'Donnell's Love of Golf Gave Palm Springs Noted Course; Desert Converted Into Now Famous Sport Strip," *Desert Sun*, February 16, 1945, p. 11.

⁴ Palm Springs Legends: Creation of a Desert Oasis," by Greg Niemann, p. 118. Sunbelt Publications, Inc., San Diego, 2006. The date of the opening of the course comes from several sources, including an article, "World's Golf Capital at Resort," in "This is Riverside County: Palm Springs," a newspaper insert from 1955, in the collection of Tracy Conrad.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ According to Will Kleindienst, the original location of the ninth hole was near what is now the Clubhouse. The sixth hole was moved here around 1932.

⁷ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.

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- ⁸ "O'Donnell Golf Club: Jewel of the Desert for 65 Years," by Terry Dean and Judy Dickinson, p. 13. O'Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs.
- ⁹ "The Committee of Twenty-Five: The First Sixty-Five Years, 1948-2013," by Steve Vaught, p. 15. Committee of Twenty-Five, Palm Springs, 2014. Author Steve Vaught had access to the Committee's archives, and found documentation for the Clark & Frey kitchen addition of 1948 (p. 26), E. Stewart Williams kitchen and chef's apartment modifications of 1967 (p. 47), and the large Roger Rice Room of 1991 by Jim Cioffi and Bill Hajjar (p. 73-74).
- ¹⁰ "O'Donnell Golf Club, First in City, is Booming," *Desert Sun*, October 8, 1959, p. 11.
- ¹¹ "Real Golf Course on Desert Makes a Big Hit," *Desert Sun*, January 25, 1935, p. 8.
- ¹² "Changes and Improvements to be Made at Desert Golf Course During the Summer," *Desert Sun*, May 1, 1936, p. 1.
- ¹³ "O'Donnell Hacienda Completed," *The Limelight*, October 17, 1936, p. 1.
- ¹⁴ "400 Attend O'Donnell's Golf Party," *Desert Sun*, April 29, 1938, p. 8. In the article, O'Donnell says that he took up golf "thirty-eight years ago."
- ¹⁵ "On the Golf Course," *Desert Sun*, December 10, 1937, p. 12.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ "Palm Springs Golf," by Larry Bohannon, p. 14. History Press, Charleston, S.C., 2015.
- ¹⁸ "How Golf Came to the Desert," by Mar J. Pohl, *Palm Springs Villager*, March 1952, clipping at the Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ¹⁹ "The 1950 Palm Springs Golf Championship," *The Golfer Magazine*, March, 1950, p. 4.
- ²⁰ "The original deeds are #1098, on 25 May, 1925, recorded 14 May, 1927, Book 717, page 72, County of Riverside; and #1099, on 21 December, 1925, recorded 14 May, 1927, Book 717, page 73, County of Riverside, California." O'Donnell Golf Club brochure, 1967. Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ²¹ "How Golf Came to the Desert," by Mar J. Pohl, *Palm Springs Villager*, March 1952, clipping at the Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ²² "400 Attend O'Donnell's Golf Party," *Desert Sun*, April 29, 1938, p. 8.
- ²³ "Building a Golf Course in the Desert," *The Golfer Magazine*, March, 1950, p. 18.
- ²⁴ "From Sand to Fairway," by George Ringwald. Undated, typewritten pages at Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ²⁵ Typewritten article titled "O'Donnell Draft #2," written by Jackie Weiss. Palm Springs Historical Society. Plumley was also one of a group of investors who started Mountain Water Company in 1935, to supply water to Idyllwild.
- ²⁶ Typewritten sheet, Palm Springs Historical Society. Notation credits this information to a newspaper clipping furnished by Mrs. Ralph Clock in March, 1958. The typewritten pages discuss a surprise dinner given for O'Donnell at Judge Ralph Clock's home on Merito Vista Place.
- ²⁷ "O'Donnell: It Basks in Tradition," *Palm Springs Life*, 1960 Annual. Clipping at Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ "O'Donnell Golf Club: Jewel of the Desert for 65 Years," by Terry Dean and Judy Dickinson, p. 4. O'Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs.
- ³⁰ "Last Rites Said at Noon Today for Pioneer Oil Man," *Desert Sun*, February 23, 1945, p. 1.
- ³¹ "Palm Springs Legends: Creation of a Desert Oasis," by Greg Niemann, p. 118. Sunbelt Publications, Inc., San Diego, 2006.
- ³² "Palm Springs Golf," by Larry Bohannon, p. 18. History Press, Charleston, S.C., 2015.
- ³³ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.
- ³⁴ "The 19th Hole," *Desert Sun*, February 8, 1935, p. 4. "Not Superstitious At All" Here's a little news story that has been going around about two of our local men players and it sounds as if it actually happened. These two have been playing the course every morning for the past three seasons, for the nominal sum of ten cents a hole. On our second hole one of them put his third shot into the creek or water hazard and then a little confused. turned to his opponent and asked, "What must I do now?" He knew the rules as well as Hagen. His opponent conscientiously told him, "That's a water hazard, you can keep right on playing, but of course the rules insist that you must take a penalty stroke for going into the water. Now I'll tell you exactly what to do. Take another ball, face the water where your first ball disappeared, and drop the ball over your right shoulder." "Nonsense," said the embarrassed player who knew the rule in the first place. "I am not the least bit superstitious. I'll just put the ball on the ground and play it from there." Mr. F. is now playing poker instead of quoting rules when winter golf is in play."
- ³⁵ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.
- ³⁶ "Tom O'Donnell's Love of Golf Gave Palm Springs Noted Course; Desert Converted Into Now Famous Sport Strip," *Desert Sun*, February 16, 1945, p. 11.
- ³⁷ "Building a Golf Course in the Desert," *The Golfer Magazine*, March, 1950, p. 18.

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- ³⁸ "O'Donnell Golf Club: Jewel of the Desert for 65 Years," by Terry Dean and Judy Dickinson, p. 4. O'Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs.
- ³⁹ "ROADS BUILT ON O'DONNELL ESTATE; SITES ARE LEVELED," *Desert Sun*, September 27, 1935, p. 1.
- ⁴⁰ "Building a Golf Course in the Desert," *The Golfer Magazine*, March, 1950, p. 18.
- ⁴¹ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.
- ⁴² "On the Golf Course," *Desert Sun*, December 10, 1937, p. 12.
- ⁴³ *Palm Springs Villager*, May 1956, pp. 40-41.
- ⁴⁴ "The Committee of Twenty-Five: The First Sixty-Five Years, 1948-2013," by Steve Vaught, p. 15. Committee of Twenty-Five, Palm Springs, 2014.
- ⁴⁵ "O'Donnell Aviary, City Landmark, Dismantled," *Desert Sun*, July 31, 1952, p. 1.
- ⁴⁶ "Sun Spots," *Desert Sun*, April 22, 1938, p. 4.
- ⁴⁷ "O'Donnell: It Basks in Tradition," *Palm Springs Life*, 1960 Annual. Clipping at Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ⁴⁸ "Building a Golf Course in the Desert," *The Golfer Magazine*, March, 1950, p. 18.
- ⁴⁹ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² "Sun Spots," *Desert Sun*, April 22, 1938, p. 4.
- ⁵³ "Real Golf Course on Desert Makes a Big Hit," *Desert Sun*, January 25, 1935, p. 8.
- ⁵⁴ Bob Hope's Confessions of a Hooker: My Lifelong Love Affair with Golf," by Bob Hope as told to Dwayne Netland, Doubleday & Co., 1987, p. 139.
- ⁵⁵ "O'Donnell Hacienda Completed," *The Limelight*, October 17, 1936, p. 1.
- ⁵⁶ Inspiration Point Class 1 Historic Site Nomination, by Steve Vaught, 2019, p. 57.
- ⁵⁷ "O'Donnell Hacienda Completed," *The Limelight*, October 17, 1936, p. 1.
- ⁵⁸ "How Golf Came to the Desert," by Mar J. Pohl, *Palm Springs Villager*, March 1952.
- ⁵⁹ "On the Golf Course," *Desert Sun*, December 31, 1937, p. 7.
- ⁶⁰ "History of the Thomas O'Donnell Desert Golf Course is Related," *Desert Sun*, February 7, 1941, p. 8.
- ⁶¹ "O'Donnell Golf Club: Jewel of the Desert for 65 Years," by Terry Dean and Judy Dickinson, p. 6. O'Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs.
- ⁶² Typewritten copy of an article previously published in the *Riverside Daily Press*, 1955. Palm Springs Historical Society.
- ⁶³ "O'Donnell Gives Golf Course to City," *Desert Sun*, December 29, 1944, p. 1.
- ⁶⁴ "Additional Land Given City By T. A. O'Donnell," *Desert Sun*, January 12, 1945, p. 1.
- ⁶⁵ "Swarm of Golfers at O'Donnell Course Brings About New Rules Governing Daily Play," *Desert Sun*, January 26, 1945, p. 11.
- ⁶⁶ "Spa Greets Newcomers," *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1946, p. 43.
- ⁶⁷ "Improvement of Golf Course Seen in Council Action," *Desert Sun*, July 8, 1947, p. 1. According to Steve Vaught in his book "The Committee of Twenty-Five: The First Sixty-Five Years, 1948-2013," "Milnor had made a fortune in the import business during the 1920s and 1930s with a string of high-end shops touting the slogan "Gifts That Please From Overseas." An inveterate world traveler, Milnor had personally selected much of what went into his shops, using transoceanic steamships the same way others used commuter shuttles. He was also an avid and serious sportsman, to such an extent that in 1938 he was named president of the California State Fish & Game Commission by Governor Culbert Olson. It was in that capacity that Milnor had been given the honor of inaugurating the Palm Springs Tennis Club's new trout stream in 1938." Vaught also described Dougherty thusly: "Pat Dougherty was...a powerhouse within the oil industry, a position secured by his early and deep involvement in what were to become the great Kettleman Hills oil fields. Dougherty was...an avid sportsman and one of the pioneer board members of Hollywood Park racetrack. He was very active socially and involved in a number of worthy charities and civic enterprises."
- ⁶⁸ "O'Donnell Aviary, City Landmark, Dismantled," *Desert Sun*, July 31, 1952, p. 1.
- ⁶⁹ "O'Donnell Golf Club: Jewel of the Desert for 65 Years," by Terry Dean and Judy Dickinson, p. 11. O'Donnell Golf Club, Palm Springs.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 12.