

The Bear Lake Club's clubhouse is located near the juncture of Roundaway Bayou and Bear Lake several miles northwest of Tallulah. The simple "no style" frame camp house has suffered various losses over the years, and at present is in deteriorated condition. However, it could be argued that members of the club from the historic period would still recognize their old clubhouse today.

When the clubhouse was built c.1905, the location would have been remote indeed. It was built for an organization of outdoorsmen whose express purposes were conservation-related (see Part 8), although clearly the group had a social function as well. The house's setting on Roundaway Bayou can best be appreciated in the enclosed historic photo. (Today the banks are too overgrown to allow such a view.) During the historic period Bear Lake (which actually looks like a stream -- see USGS map) flowed into Roundaway Bayou. Today there is a dam with a road on top where the two meet. The old clubhouse stands at the rear of a parcel of land with a brick ranch house at the front; however, the clubhouse is far enough back to have its own immediate setting.

Although the club's stock certificates bear the image of a grand house, the clubhouse is quite modest and utilitarian, like a camp house. Originally there was a two-room main block with another section attached at a rear corner via an open porch. Each had their own roofline and in effect read as separate buildings. Today only the main block with its broad double pitched hip roof survives. The building shown to the left in the old photo is believed to be the caretaker's cottage (per the recollections of the son of a caretaker in the 1920s and '30s).

Per the old photo and the recollections of the caretaker's son, the two-room main block was encircled by porches. (The walls are sheathed in weatherboards -- i.e., designed to repel water -- which would lead one to think they were originally exposed to the elements.) During the historic period screening covered about one-third of the front porch and extended down one side (the left side as you face the house). Today the screening is gone, and the opposite side of the front porch has been enclosed as has the corresponding side porch. Whether these enclosures were done before the club disbanded in 1943 is not known -- they have a thrown together look (using salvaged materials). Other losses on the exterior include the porch floor. The present posts were placed there by the current owner to shore up the roof. (The originals, one suspects, would have been quite simple and utilitarian.)

The two rooms feature exposed stud walls on the perimeter, while the wall between the two and the ceilings are covered in narrow gauge beaded board. Each room retains its simple wooden mantel.

While the "no style" classification is appropriate for the clubhouse, it is worth noting that the building does exhibit certain forms associated with Louisiana's French Creole architecture. This is an anomaly because it is located in the Anglo-American northeastern part of the state, where the French Creole building tradition is virtually unheard of. Forms found at the clubhouse typically associated with French Creole architecture include the broad umbrella roof with its double pitch; the placement of the chimney internally, at the center; and what were originally encircling porches.

#### Assessment of Integrity:

Despite what are admittedly notable losses and modifications (the loss of the rear section and the porch enclosure), and despite deterioration, it could be argued that the old clubhouse retains enough of its original character to convey its historic identity. The most character-defining aspect of the clubhouse was, and is, its broad umbrella-like roof with its double pitch. This distinctive roofline is the building's architectural signature. Also worthy of note is that the two rooms of the main block survive largely intact on the interior, although admittedly with some deterioration.

SIGNIFICANT DATE: c. 1905  
ARCHITECT/BUILDER Unknown  
CRITERION: A

The Bear Lake Club clubhouse is significant in the area of conservation because it represents a major phenomenon in the late nineteenth century sportman's world – the organization, by hunters generally, of clubs to promote wildlife conservation. Choosing an appropriate level of significance is hampered by limited knowledge of the number and distribution of these clubs -- there has been no scholarly study of them in Louisiana, for example. Local significance seems the most appropriate because the Bear Lake Club was the only such organization known to exist in Madison Parish.

While hunters and wildlife conservation may to some seem mutually exclusive terms, historian John R. Reiger's thesis, in his scholarly study *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation*, is that sportsmen were in the forefront of conservation. Writing of the late-nineteenth century, he concludes that the "code of the sportsman" (a moral concept based upon the English model of the gentleman hunter) fused with concern over dwindling game and habitat to provide an important impetus to the wildlife conservation movement. Inherent in this "code" was responsibility for the total natural environment.

Critical to the development of a conservation movement among sportsmen was the appearance of various newspapers which led the charge. First among them was *American Sportsman*, launched in October 1871, which according to Reiger, "marks a watershed in environmental history." Others were *Forest and Stream* (1873), *Field and Stream* (1874), and *American Angler* (1881). While it seems like a modern notion, sportsmen of the period felt threatened by the wholesale alterations of the environment being caused by the Industrial Revolution and the systematic commercial exploitation of American animal life. The commercial hunter (who obviously did not play by the rules of the gentleman hunter) was the particular villain of editorials in *Forest and Stream* and others of its type.

*Forest and Stream's* first issue announced: "It is the aim of this paper to become a medium of useful and reliable information between gentlemen sportsmen from one end of the country to the other . . . ." From the beginning, a clear distinction was made between the "true sportsman" and those who would debase sport. In the latter were those who killed merely for the fun of killing, without appreciation and understanding of the quarry and its habitat; poachers and others who did not play fair; and worst of all, the commercial hunter, who was interested only in the money wildlife would bring.

An outgrowth of the establishment of these national sporting journals was the "club movement" (the term, says Reiger, that sportsmen of the time used themselves). In the winter of 1874-75 nearly 100 sportsmen's clubs were founded all over the country. Through the influence largely of the above mentioned journals, which promoted "the club idea," sportsmen realized that they had a responsibility for wildlife, and banded together to establish organizations committed to the perpetuation of wildlife and their habitats. After the "initial spurt" of 1874-75, the clubs grew at an "incredible" rate, notes Reiger. By 1878, there were 308. The most prestigious, the Boone and Crockett, was organized in 1887. Among its well-known (and well-heeled) founders was Teddy Roosevelt.

Virtually all of the clubs organized in the late nineteenth century controlled, by leasing or ownership, large acreage that was kept in natural condition. And while only a small minority of these clubs ever had an important influence on conservation, concludes Reiger, "the general effect of the movement was to increase sportsmen's awareness – and the nation's as well – of the damage being done by American economic growth."

The Bear Lake Club, Ltd. clearly represents this "club movement." The club was incorporated in 1899 with the following "objects and purposes" in its charter: "the protection and preservation of game in this state, on land and water, and the protection of fish in the waters of this state, navigable and not navigable, also to stock waters with fish, and woods with game, to clean out bayous and lakes of obstructions and to own and operate steam, vapor, electric or other watercraft for the purposes of this corporation."

The club was capitalized at \$5,000, with 100 shares of stock at \$50 each to be issued. Dues were set at \$10.50 annually. In 1903 the club bought 234 acres where the present building is located. One assumes it was built shortly thereafter (hence the date of c.1905 in this nomination). The exact number of members is not known, but there were at least 65, per surviving stock certificates in the present owner's possession dating from 1902 to 1919. As one elderly individual recalls, they were all "big wheels." The president in the 1920s was Dr. Bert Coad, an entymologist at the Department of Agriculture Experiment Station in nearby Tallulah. By 1943, when the club officially disbanded, there were

only 15 members.

While the club held its meetings in a room above a bank in Tallulah, the candidate was their clubhouse, so-to-speak – the building specifically associated with the organization. It is the clubhouse, for example, that appeared on the organization's stationery. James L. Cooks, Sr., the caretaker's son (born in 1921), recalls from his boyhood daily life on the property. They were particularly busy in the fall and winter with members and guests coming for hunts. In the summer, he recalls member's families coming to stay a few days. His father was notified by mail as to who was coming and how many and was given instructions to pick them up in a wagon from the nearest road. When time was short, Dr. Coad had a crop-duster plane fly over and drop messages about picking up guests.

Clearly the Bear Lake Club had an important social function, like others of its type. The actual work the club accomplished toward its conservation goals is not known. With the exception of a brief account of the meeting disbanding the organization in 1943, there are no extant minutes. And there are no living former club members. But as Reiger noted, only a small minority of the clubs actually had an important specific influence upon conservation. Their importance, to him, was in increasing consciousness about the environment and assaults upon it. And collectively they were a major phenomenon in the late-nineteenth century sporting world. As best the Division of Historic Preservation can determine, there has not been any scholarly study of the "club movement" in Louisiana. Bear Lake is the only one known to have existed in Madison Parish.

While National Register significance is not being claimed, the Bear Lake area is legendary for being the venue of Teddy Roosevelt's famous two-week bear hunt in 1907, which he described in an article called "In the Louisiana Canebrakes," published in *Scribner's Magazine* in January 1908. Roosevelt describes "our new camp beautifully situated on a bold, steep, bank of Bear Lake," and it is while at this camp that TR shoots his bear – a much sought after but until then illusive goal. (While it is believed locally that the Bear Lake Club property figured in this hunt, thus far this has not been documented. In any event, even if it could be documented to National Register standards, the Register generally does not accept such a transitory and brief association with a significant individual.)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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