

D-1646

# historic structure report

september 1980

ON MICROFILM

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT

CCC STRUCTURES / PEACEFUL VALLEY RANCH /  
MALTESE CROSS CABIN / ELKHORN RANCH

NATIONAL PARK / NORTH DAKOTA



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DENVER SERVICE CENTER  
BRANCH OF MICROGRAPHICS  
EMERGENCY COPY

**Color Scans**

10/25/2002

HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT  
HISTORICAL DATA SECTION

CCC STRUCTURES  
PEACEFUL VALLEY RANCH  
MALTESE CROSS CABIN  
ELKHORN RANCH

THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL PARK  
NORTH DAKOTA

Prepared by  
Louis Torres

DENVER SERVICE CENTER  
MIDWEST/ROCKY MOUNTAIN TEAM  
BRANCH OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to provide basic historical data essential to preservation and restoration of certain structures at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The study has been prepared to fulfill the requirements of the development/study package proposal of February 17, 1976, and the task directive of September 6, 1977.

The author was fortunate to have had at his disposal several studies prepared in the 1940s and 1950s by Ray H. Mattison and Chester L. Brooks. These former park and regional historians also left a wealth of research notes and photographs. Messrs. Mattison and Brooks were thorough in seeking out data on Theodore Roosevelt and his ranches in the many repositories scattered throughout the country. However, because almost 30 years had elapsed since their work was undertaken, this writer felt compelled to retrace some of their earlier steps in order to make certain that no newer data was overlooked. To his satisfaction, he found very little new information that might challenge the findings of the earlier studies.

In addition to Messrs. Mattison and Brooks, this writer is grateful to the park employees Bill Herr, Gerry Altoff, and Einar Justesen, whose assistance was provided in so many ways.

## CONTENTS

STRUCTURES BUILT UNDER EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAMS OF THE 1930s / 1	
A Brief History of Emergency Relief Programs in the Park / 1	
Description of the Structures / 5	
East Entrance Station / 5	
Picnic Shelters at Squaw Creek Campground / 13	
Little Missouri River Overlook Shelter / 17	
Iron Sculptures / 21	
PEACEFUL VALLEY RANCH / 27	
A Brief History of the Occupants / 27	
Description of the Structures / 29	
Ranch House / 29	
Barn / 37	
Bunkhouse / 39	
MALTESE CROSS CABIN / 43	
ELKHORN RANCH / 55	
Former Research / 55	
A Brief History of the Ranch / 56	
Description of the Structures / 60	
Ranch House / 60	
Stables / 67	
Cow Shed / 68	
Horse Corral / 69	
Miscellaneous Structures / 69	
APPENDIXES / 71	
A: Plans of the Maltese Cross Cabin / 73	
B: Floor Plan of the Elkhorn Ranch House / 75	
BIBLIOGRAPHY / 77	

## ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1-2. East entrance privy and check station / 6, 8
3. Pylon at east entrance / 8
4. Pylon being moved from east entrance to Painted Canyon overlook / 9
5. Ranch brands on iron strips, east entrance / 10
6. Fireplace in east entrance check station / 10
- 7-8. Large shelter at Squaw Creek campground / 12, 14
- 9-10. Details of construction of large shelter / 14
11. Rear chamber of large shelter / 15
12. Details of ceiling, large shelter / 15
13. Fireplace in front chamber, large shelter / 15
14. Small shelter at Squaw Creek campground / 16
15. Interior fireplace, small shelter / 16
- 16-20. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook / 18, 19
21. Iron sculpture at Painted Canyon overlook / 20
22. Inscription at Painted Canyon overlook / 20
23. Iron sculpture at Cottonwood campground / 22
24. Iron sculpture at North Unit entrance / 24
25. Peaceful Valley Ranch / 30
- 26-27. Peaceful Valley ranch house / 34, 35
- 28-29. Barn at Peaceful Valley Ranch / 38
- 30-31. Bunkhouse at Peaceful Valley Ranch / 41, 42
32. Maltese Cross cabin / 44
- 33-34. Restored living quarters in the cabin / 46
35. Restored kitchen in the cabin / 48
36. Maltese Cross cabin / 50
37. Restored Maltese Cross cabin / 52

STRUCTURES BUILT UNDER EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAMS OF  
THE 1930S

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAMS IN THE  
PARK

Theodore Roosevelt National Park contains several structures built during the emergency relief programs of the 1930s, under NPS guidance and from NPS designs, which deserve a prominent place in architecture. Before describing these structures and giving an account of their development, a brief history of these programs is presented in association with the history of the park itself.

During the early 1930s, the Rural Resettlement Administration began to acquire submarginal lands in the North Dakota Badlands throughout Billings and McKenzie counties to aid in adjusting the pattern of land uses in a manner that would improve the agricultural economy. In cooperation with the National Park Service and the State Historical Society of North Dakota, which administered state parks, small areas of land acquired under this program were designated for recreational use. This formed the nucleus of what later became a national park area.<sup>1</sup>

During the period from 1934 to 1941, the State Historical Society, cooperating with the National Park Service, established Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in the North and South units to

---

1. Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park was established April 25, 1947, and redesignated Theodore Roosevelt National Park November 10, 1978.

begin the development of park roads and much needed recreational facilities. The State Historical Society purchased 1,174 acres in two sections of state school lands and 173 acres of private lands in the South Unit in order to provide locations for the new CCC camps and to facilitate the commencement of work. The lands eventually acquired under this program were to be administered by the National Park Service as the Roosevelt Recreation Demonstration Area. It became the largest of 46 similar areas established in the United States under a federal land classification permitting assistance to states by demonstrating how lands of submarginal agricultural value could profitably be put to use for recreation.

After several roads and other facilities were constructed, the CCC camp in the South Unit was discontinued in June 1937. The CCC camp in the North Unit continued to operate until October 1939, when it was transferred to a federally owned site east of the Little Missouri River in the South Unit (a different location from the old camp) to continue the work begun by the old camp.

Although the CCC was primarily established to perform development projects, some CCC crews were sent from the South Unit to the North Unit to do maintenance work between October 1939 and November 1941.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the work within the North and South units, the CCC also restored the historic Chateau De Mores and constructed other improvements on land west of the town of Medora and outside the

---

2. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service (USDI, NPS), Warren J. Petty, "Park History" (Theodore Roosevelt National Park, August 1965); Fred J. Novak, Actg. Reg. Dir., Region 2, NPS, to The Minot Daily News, Minot, N.D., October 14, 1963, Historical Files, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, Medora, North Dakota (hereafter referred to as park files).

park boundary known as the De Mores Historic Site, which was operated by the State Historical Society. The CCC camp remained in operation through October 1941, when because of the approaching war it was discontinued as part of the gradual termination of the CCC program throughout the country.

During the years the CCC operated, other federal work relief agencies were also engaged in development projects in the park, employing labor mostly from surrounding communities. An Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) project operated in both units of the park in 1935-36. Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects operated in the South Unit until 1942. Trucks with canvas enclosures picked up the laborers from surrounding localities each morning and took them home at night. The labor force under the ERA constructed the east entrance station in the South Unit and also built the road that ran eastward from this station to a point where it met the CCC road construction project that ran westward for about two-thirds of the way to the Peaceful Valley junction. The ERA project also constructed several temporary buildings at Peaceful Valley Ranch, which was then the headquarters for all the federal agencies involved in relief programs at the park. During the late 1930s there was a gradual change from ERA projects to WPA projects; the ERA was finally discontinued in late 1939, while the WPA continued to operate until June 30, 1942.

There is little evidence either in park files or in the National Archives to indicate which of the several emergency relief programs was responsible for the construction of particular structures at the park, but we do know that all the significant permanent structures were designed and their construction supervised by the National Park Service.



The following existing structures were built during the lifetime of the emergency relief programs:

✓ Check station, privy, and pylon at the east entrance station (South Unit)

Two camp shelters at the Squaw Creek campground (North Unit)

Little Missouri River overlook shelter (North Unit)

✓ Iron sculptures at Painted Canyon overlook and Cottonwood campground (South Unit), and at the North Unit entrance station

These structures and sculptures were of a permanent nature and in all instances conformed to the rustic style of architecture so common to structures designed and built by the National Park Service in the 1920s and 1930s. They possessed criteria laid down by NPS guidelines, in that they were constructed of native materials, were unobtrusive, avoided rigid lines and oversophistication, provided the feeling that they were executed by pioneer craftsmen, and harmonized with the natural surroundings.<sup>3</sup>

The construction of these permanent-type projects in what was then Roosevelt Recreation Demonstration Area occurred at a time (ca. 1937-38) when the National Park Service was turning away from rustic architecture towards a more modern and functional style, but

---

3. See USDI, NPS, William C. Tweed, Laura E. Souliere, and Henry G. Law, National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942 (San Francisco: Western Regional Office, 1977), particularly Chpts. 5 and 6, for a history of rustic architecture designed by the National Park Service in the 1920s and 1930s.

the decline in rustic architecture was not sudden or universal. After these years, the rustic style was frequently seen in parks where little or no development had taken place. The Roosevelt Recreation Demonstration Area was one such park.

The state of North Dakota, a partner in this development, agreed with this style of architecture. One state official noted that the "use of early frontier architecture of simple design for all building and physical improvement" was of paramount importance in the development of structures for the park.<sup>4</sup>

Sandstone from a local quarry was utilized for the construction of these structures, but there is conflicting evidence as to whether the quarry was right within the park boundaries or some miles outside. A 1937 photograph caption implies that the quarry was in the North Unit, but a longtime employee of the park was certain that the quarry was some 25 miles southwest of the park in an area called Flat Top Butte.<sup>5</sup>

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STRUCTURES

### East Entrance Station

The east entrance station originally consisted of three structures: the check station, privy, and pylon. With the exception of the

---

4. George F. Baggley, Wildlife Supervisor, State Parks, to NPS, November 16, 1935, Record Group 79 (National Park Service Records), National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter referred to as RG 79, NA).

5. Photograph, caption "North Roosevelt State Park, North Dakota, SP 7 Rock Quarry," RG 79, NA; Einar Justesen, interview by author, Medora, N.D., October 3, 1977



Illus 1. East entrance, showing privy on left, check station on right (photograph from park files, taken June 4, 1949)

iron sculpture and iron lettering on the pylon, these structures were constructed by the CCC. The entrance station was completed in 1938 (illustrations 1, 2, 3). In 1968, after a stretch of Interstate 94 was finished, the east entrance was closed and abandoned, and the pylon with its ironwork was moved to the Painted Canyon overlook, where it stands today (illustration 4).

Undoubtedly the largest and most impressive structure at the east entrance is the check station, which stands on one side of the old abandoned road leading to the park. This structure consists largely of sandstone and exhibits exceptional craftsmanship, its stone being cut in meticulous detail. The exterior surfaces possess a rough texture and inset mortar joints with the wall surface canting inward at a constant angle. The interiors have been chiseled to a flush, evenly pitted surface with the mortar joints.<sup>6</sup> Cedar shingles over boards cover the gabled roof, and log rafters and purlins project to form deep overhangs. The exterior dimensions of the check station are approximately 15 by 20 feet.

One of the most distinctive features of this structure is the iron that appears on the interior and on the door. This iron was hand forged by Einar R. Olstad, a blacksmith and rancher who at one time lived in Medora and worked for the WPA. Olstad did much of the ironwork in the park and was responsible for the exquisite iron sculpture. The horizontal iron strips that reinforce the doors contain incised figures of both the Maltese Cross Ranch and Elkhorn Ranch brands where bolts are found. Olstad's name is incised on an iron bar of the main door (illustration 5).

---

6. USDI, NPS, "Classified Structure Field Inventory Report, Old East Entrance Station" (Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver, August 1975).



Illus 2. East entrance, showing privy on left, check station on right (photograph from park files, taken September 28, 1939)



Illus 3. Pylon at east entrance (photograph from park files, taken September 12, 1959)



Illus. 4. Pylon being moved from east entrance to Painted Canyon overlook (photograph from park files, taken August 1968)



Illus 5. Ranch brands on iron strips, door in east entrance check station (photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 6. Fireplace in east entrance check station (photograph by author, taken October 1977)

The check station has two casement windows that measure 5 feet 8½ inches by 4 feet and two smaller windows, one measuring 1 by 2 feet and another measuring 4 feet 2 inches by 1 foot 11 inches. The floor is concrete.

A highly decorative stone stands above an equally decorative fireplace. Inscribed upon the stone in relief is "1938," the year the station was completed, and also the Maltese Cross and Elkhorn brands and the letters "AFB," presumably the initials of the stonecutter who did this very fine piece of work. The interior of the fireplace is brick (illustration 6).

The stone privy lies across the old abandoned road from the check station. This structure measures at its base 6 feet 6 inches by 8 feet. It is made largely of sandstone cut and joined in the same manner as the check station. However, unlike the check station, the roof is topped by two large flat stones. The floor is concrete with a circular iron manhole set flush into the surface.

Stone walls project from each of the two structures, becoming heavy log fences at the outer reaches. The fences run east and west and each one totals more than 30 meters in length.

At the time the east entrance was constructed it cost \$10,625.<sup>7</sup>

---

7. USDI, NPS, Individual Building Data, Checking Station, Old East Entrance, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, December 30, 1976, park files.





illus 7. Large shelter at Squaw Creek campground, soon after construction (photograph from National Archives, taken ca. 1938)

## Picnic Shelters at Squaw Creek Campground

There are three structures in the North Unit that have considerable architectural merit. All three structures were constructed by the CCC. They are the two picnic shelters at the Squaw Creek campground and the overlook shelter at the Little Missouri River overlook.

The two picnic shelters at the Squaw Creek campground are permanent structures of sandstone, volcanic rock, and heavy logs. They were designed in 1938 by Mr. Weingarten of the National Park Service regional office in Omaha, Nebraska. One shelter, the larger of the two, is located to the right upon entering the campground (illustration 7). It has an open, rectangular-shaped front chamber joined in a T formation with a smaller enclosed rear chamber. The low gabled roof consists of pine shingles, and the floor is made of flagstone. The structure rests on a volcanic-stone foundation. The most prominent feature of the shelter is the large chimney stack, which consists of uncoursed rubble scoria. Two identical fireplaces lie back to back, one in the front and one in the rear chamber. The fireplaces are semicircular with white brick interiors. Large sandstones flank the fireplaces, and the rest of the wall consists of vertical planks. The other three sides of the front chamber are open, with uncoursed rubble scoria piers forming small benches at the corners, and log posts and beams supporting the roof (illustrations 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). The smaller rear chamber is enclosed on three sides with vertical board walls on 2-foot foundations.

The second shelter, which lies to the left of the campground about one-quarter of a mile distant from the other, is similar in construction but consists of only one chamber. Although it has two fireplaces back to back, one fireplace is in the open. The smaller



Illus 8. Large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 9. Details of construction, large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 10. Details of construction, large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)

Illus 11. Exterior view of rear chamber, large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author taken October 1977)



Illus 12. Details of ceiling, large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 13. Fireplace in front chamber, large shelter at Squaw Creek campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)





Illus 14. Small shelter at Squaw Creek campground  
(photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 15. Interior fireplace, small shelter at Squaw Creek  
campground (photograph by author, taken October 1977)

shelter also differs to some extent from the larger one in the materials used. The fireplaces in the smaller shelter are composed of sandstone in their entirety, unlike the fireplaces in the large shelter which consist of sandstone and scoria (like the other fireplaces they are lined with white brick). While the stone that acts as a foundation for the smaller structure is a volcanic stone, it differs from the volcanic stone employed in the large shelter in that it is smoother and less irregular. It gives the appearance of having been cut (illustrations 14, 15).

#### Little Missouri River Overlook Shelter

Photographs taken in 1937 depict this shelter when it was being constructed (illustrations 16, 17). It was probably designed by the National Park Service regional office in Omaha.

The rectangular structure has semicircular terraces extending on three sides. One terrace overlooks the Little Missouri River, providing a spectacular view. The roof, which is low pitched, consists of wood shingles, and the floor is made of flagstone. In recent years, the wooden members have been stained and the roof has been resingled. Enclosure walls are of four-coursed squared rubble stone, and piers of the same material are battered to meet the log wall plate that supports the gabled roof. The inner lining of the structure as well as the main support of the roof are made of sandstone, whereas the stone on the exterior is a volcanic rock or rubble. The terrace overlooking the river is also made of sandstone, but its exterior is a volcanic stone. The sandstone is cut much more evenly than the volcanic stone (illustrations 18, 19, 20).



Illus 16. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook, under construction (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1937)



Illus 17. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook, under construction (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1937)

Illus 18. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook (photograph by author, taken July 1977)



Illus 19. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook (photograph by author, taken July 1977)



Illus 20. Shelter at Little Missouri River overlook (photograph by author, taken July 1977)







Illus 21. Iron sculpture on pylon at Painted Canyon overlook (photograph by author, taken October 1977)



Illus 22. Inscription on letter "T", pylon at Painted Canyon overlook (photograph by author, taken October 1977)

## Iron Sculptures

The park possesses three magnificent iron sculptures that were cast in 1938. Two of these sculptures were originally placed at entrances to the park--one at the old east entrance to the South Unit, the other at the North Unit entrance; the third was probably placed at an entrance, but there is no evidence to support this. Today, one hangs on the pylon at the Painted Canyon overlook, another hangs on the pylon at the North Unit entrance, and the third hangs at the amphitheater at the Cottonwood campground.

The sculpture at the Painted Canyon overlook is a representation of Theodore Roosevelt in cowboy attire on horseback (illustration 21). On one side of the horseman the name "Roosevelt" appears vertically, while on the other side the word "Park" appears, also vertically. This was the designation of the park prior to its becoming a national park.


Like other ironwork in the two main areas of the park, this sculpture was cast by the local blacksmith Einar H. Olstad under the emergency relief programs. Its dimensions are 47 inches high by 34 inches wide measured at its widest point. The bottom right corner has inscribed "H. Olstad." The first initial E (for Einar) either was never placed there or has been obliterated by age. At the extreme lower right corner is inscribed "254." It is not known what this number stands for. There are also faint inscriptions of what appear to be two other names. Next to these names are roughly inscribed "Proj. Mgr." (Project Manager) and "Don" followed by an illegible word.


In addition to the sculpture, which is the main feature, this pylon also has the name "Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park" hung on each side in large iron letters, also cast by Olstad. When the



illus 23: Iron sculpture at Cottonwood campground  
(photograph by author, taken October 1977)

east entrance was constructed in 1938, Olstad placed the words "Roosevelt Park Entrance" on the pylon. After the area became a national park in 1947, Olstad changed the lettering to what it now is. When the pylon was removed to the Painted Canyon overlook in 1968, all the ironwork was removed and replaced in its original position.

The large letter T in "Theodore" on one side of the pylon has incised upon it the name "E.H. Olstad" and the symbol  (illustration 22). The letter R, in "Roosevelt" on the other side of the pylon, also has "E.H. Olstad" and the symbol incised upon it.

Another sculpture, also cast by Olstad, hangs at the amphitheater in the Cottonwood campground (illustration 23). Exactly where this sign was originally hung is not known. During the off-season the sign is removed and stored at the campground to protect it from vandals. This sign depicts a cowboy on horseback, and is said to be a representation of Will Rogers. The dimensions of this sculpture are about 48 inches high by 30 inches wide at the base. At the bottom, reading left to right, are incised the following names: "E.H. Olstad," "M.G. Hoyth--Proj. Mgr.," "W. [eldon] Gratton--Land. Arch.," and a final name that is illegible with the title "Arch[itect]." At the lower left hand corner is the encircled letter . The Elkhorn Ranch brand is also incised on the horse just below the neck and above the horse's right front leg. The cowboy faces to the right.

The third sculpture, which hangs on the pylon at the North Unit entrance station, depicts a cowboy on horseback, also said to represent Will Rogers (illustration 24). Unlike the sculpture at the Cottonwood campground, this cowboy faces left. What is unusual about this sculpture is the fact that no names appear on it; the only engraving is the Maltese Cross Ranch brand, which appears on



Illus 24. Iron sculpture at North Unit entrance  
(photograph by author, taken October 1977)

the horse's rump. However, even though there is no name on this sculpture, there is enough similarity in style to believe that it was also made by Olstad. Why he did not inscribe his name upon it remains a mystery. This sculpture measures about 46 inches high by 28 inches wide at the base. When the pylon was moved to the present location in 1961, the sculpture was removed and replaced in its original position.

The art represented by these three sculptures is associated with the rustic style of architecture prevalent in the 1930s at Roosevelt Recreation Demonstration Area. The sculptures are basically simple, are associated with the history of the locality, and are unobtrusive. As such, they represent the romantic art of the times in which they were created.

## PEACEFUL VALLEY RANCH

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OCCUPANTS

At Peaceful Valley Ranch, which is presently operated by a concessioner as a riding stable, there are three buildings: the ranch house, barn, and bunkhouse. At least the ranch house is contemporary with the Elkhorn Ranch, and the other two are over 50 years of age.

Peaceful Valley is the name given to the ranch around 1920 when it was first operated as a dude ranch and it has retained this designation to this day. Before 1920, the ranch--which contained many more structures than it does now--was operated as a horse and cattle ranch. The records are obscure concerning its early years.

The ranch was first owned by Benjamin F. Lamb, said to have come from Boston around 1885, about the time that Theodore Roosevelt was establishing his Elkhorn Ranch. Lamb assumed squatter's rights on what was probably government land leased to the railroad. The census records of 1885 reveal that he was then 22 years of age, a native of Ohio (not Boston), and had 200 head of cattle. Lamb was active in community affairs and was a member of the Little Missouri Stockman's Association and the Montana Stockgrower's Association. He was an early probate judge and county treasurer of Billings County.<sup>1</sup> Following the harsh winter

---

1. USDI, NPS, Ray H. Mattison, "Interpretive Planning Report on Longhorn Ranch Project, Peaceful Valley, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park" (February 1961).

## PEACEFUL VALLEY RANCH

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OCCUPANTS

At Peaceful Valley Ranch, which is presently operated by a concessioner as a riding stable, there are three buildings: the ranch house, barn, and bunkhouse. At least the ranch house is contemporary with the Elkhorn Ranch, and the other two are over 50 years of age.

Peaceful Valley is the name given to the ranch around 1920 when it was first operated as a dude ranch and it has retained this designation to this day. Before 1920, the ranch--which contained many more structures than it does now--was operated as a horse and cattle ranch. The records are obscure concerning its early years.

The ranch was first owned by Benjamin F. Lamb, said to have come from Boston around 1885, about the time that Theodore Roosevelt was establishing his Elkhorn Ranch. Lamb assumed squatter's rights on what was probably government land leased to the railroad. The census records of 1885 reveal that he was then 22 years of age, a native of Ohio (not Boston), and had 200 head of cattle. Lamb was active in community affairs and was a member of the Little Missouri Stockman's Association and the Montana Stockgrower's Association. He was an early probate judge and county treasurer of Billings County.<sup>1</sup> Following the harsh winter

---

1. USDI, NPS, Ray H. Mattison, "Interpretive Planning Report on Longhorn Ranch Project, Peaceful Valley, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park" (February 1961).



In 1936 Olsen, who was instrumental in trying to get the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park created, transferred his land to the government as part of the recreation demonstration area. The Peaceful Valley Ranch became the headquarters of this newly established area. In 1946-47 the recreation demonstration area was absorbed by the Fish and Wildlife Service as part of a wildlife refuge, but with the creation of the national park in 1947, the land was transferred to the National Park Service, and Peaceful Valley Ranch became the headquarters of the superintendent. After the park headquarters was moved to Medora in 1959, the ranch was converted to a concessioner-operated riding stable for visitors.

During the years that the ranch was owned privately and publicly, several structures were added and old ones were radically altered to meet the needs of the owners. What remains today are three major structures plus one or two sheds. The remainder of this chapter is a history and description of the three structures with the changes that they underwent over the years.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STRUCTURES

### Ranch House

The ranch house is the oldest and most significant structure at Peaceful Valley. According to Mrs. Chris Rasmussen, a former resident of the ranch whose husband worked for Lamb, the main portion of the ranch house was originally built about 1885-87, while Lamb was the proprietor. This is the two-story frame section (illustration 25). The lower story consisted of two rooms, one of which was a kitchen. The upper story was an attic that was



Illus 25. Peaceful Valley Ranch. Original two-story house with first addition is at the right; however, this is a reverse print--house should be at left (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1904)

reached by an outside staircase on the east side of the house.<sup>5</sup> Another contemporary of the period who was acquainted with the ranch was certain that in 1892 "there was nothing to the house but the plain two-story structure." He remembered the back kitchen door opening straight out towards the barn and corrals.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1890s, at about the time that George Burgess acquired the ranch, a section was added to the main house.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Rasmussen said that this addition consisted of railroad ties. She was mistaken in this, however, because this section was actually made of hewed logs. She had mistaken this section for another addition made in later years, which was made of railroad ties. One writer who interviewed Mrs. Rasmussen recorded that she described the interior of the first addition as follows:

The part of the house that was made of railroad ties was used by Mrs. Rasmussen as her kitchen. In it she had her stove against the north wall. The stove was a wood range with a warming oven above it. Her oak dining room table . . . stood to the northwest of the room and to the right of the stove. . . . In the southwest corner of the room between the door leading to the living room and the outer wall stood a high plain cupboard with shelves for dishes. . . . Between the door leading to

---

5. Sally Johnson, Nebraska State Historical Society, to Merrill Mattes, November 20, 1959, park files. This letter documents an interview with Mrs. Chris Rasmussen, conducted by Sally Johnson on July 16, 1959. Mrs. Rasmussen lived in the ranch house in 1906-07.

6. Jack Reid to Chester L. Brooks, Park Historian, September 13, 1956, park files.

7. Ibid.

reached by an outside staircase on the east side of the house.<sup>5</sup> Another contemporary of the period who was acquainted with the ranch was certain that in 1892 "there was nothing to the house but the plain two-story structure." He remembered the back kitchen door opening straight out towards the barn and corrals.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1890s, at about the time that George Burgess acquired the ranch, a section was added to the main house.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Rasmussen said that this addition consisted of railroad ties. She was mistaken in this, however, because this section was actually made of hewed logs. She had mistaken this section for another addition made in later years, which was made of railroad ties. One writer who interviewed Mrs. Rasmussen recorded that she described the interior of the first addition as follows:

The part of the house that was made of railroad ties was used by Mrs. Rasmussen as her kitchen. In it she had her stove against the north wall. The stove was a wood range with a warming oven above it. Her oak dining room table . . . stood to the northwest of the room and to the right of the stove. . . . In the southwest corner of the room between the door leading to the living room and the outer wall stood a high plain cupboard with shelves for dishes. . . . Between the door leading to

---

5. Sally Johnson, Nebraska State Historical Society, to Merrill Mattes, November 20, 1959, park files. This letter documents an interview with Mrs. Chris Rasmussen, conducted by Sally Johnson on July 16, 1959. Mrs. Rasmussen lived in the ranch house in 1906-07.

6. Jack Reid to Chester L. Brooks, Park Historian, September 13, 1956, park files.

7. Ibid.

In 1904 a log kitchen was added to the north side of this earlier addition and the latter became the living room. This later addition was never sided with clapboard and may have had a dirt or scoria roof. Today it has a cedar shingle roof like the rest of the house. A recessed porch on the east side, off the living room, was flanked by the smaller bedroom and the kitchen, and the doorways entered into both the living room and the kitchen (illustration 26).

A shed dormer with a double window was constructed in the center front of the main house in the early 1920s, and during the same period an enclosed porch, spanning the front of the house, was also built. Old photographs taken before and after clearly depict the changes that were made (illustration 27). Old photographs also show a major change made to the roofs of the two additions. For example, as late as the 1920s, when Olsen operated the ranch, the apex of the roof of the last addition to the house was about 2 feet higher than the earlier addition. In later years, possibly around 1930, the higher roof was altered and made to conform to the rest of the first addition.<sup>10</sup>

Sometime around 1935 a small shed was built onto the east side of the house, obliterating the porch. The final floor plan of the house, the one that appears today, was established at about this time: The ground floor of the main house was a large living room, with a stairway leading to an equally large attic bedroom located in the southwest corner. The first addition made on the house was the kitchen and the northernmost addition was a bedroom and toilet.

---

10. Photograph in News from Home: Medora & Black Hills 19(1):23.



Illus 26. Peaceful Valley ranch house. View shows two additions at rear of house (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1959)



Illus 27. Peaceful Valley ranch house. View shows porch addition and dormer window (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1959)

In 1947 the house was remodeled, but the floor plan did not change appreciably. What prompted this remodeling was a flood that caused considerable damage to the house. After the flood, the partial basement, which had consisted of a combination of earth, brick, plank, and cement walls, was enlarged into a full basement with new beams, and a cement foundation was installed under the main portion of the house. New cross members in the floors of the main house were also installed. The floors in the living room and utility room were replaced, the closet in the living room was converted to a stairway to the attic bedroom, and the bathroom was remodeled. Finally, the main chimney was replaced by a new brick chimney on the outside of the house.<sup>11</sup>

Since these changes were made, various portions of the roof have been resingled, new linoleum has been placed on the living room floor, new counters and a sink have been installed in the kitchen, and the entire interior has been painted.

In 1967 the plaster ceiling of the attic bedroom fell, and a new sheetrock ceiling replaced the old one.<sup>12</sup>

Because of its extensive remodeling, the ranch house now possesses a conglomeration of eastern and western architectural influences. The structure is atypical of a Badlands ranch house, being much unlike the low log, dirt- or sod-roofed ranch houses generally built on the northern plains in the 1880s.

---

11. Report of Flood Damage, Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge, enclosure to Memorandum for Files, Fish and Wildlife Service, ca. 1947, park files.

12. Einar Justesen, interview by author, Medora, N.D., October 3, 1977.



## Barn

The barn was undoubtedly built in two sections at different times (illustrations 28, 29). It is difficult to say which came first. In the southernmost section the logs are rounded, whereas in the other section the logs are hewed square. One can also observe where the two sections join by the slightly sagging roofs in each section. It has been said that the first section was constructed around 1892 and the second around 1904, but there is little documentary evidence to support these dates. It has also been said that the barn was constructed of cedar logs from Lamb's old barn, bridge piling, and Washington cedar that Burgess obtained from the railroad construction project he was engaged at in Medora.

The barn, which has a long rectangular plan, runs north and south for approximately 200 feet east of the ranch house. It is a more permanent type of structure than that usually found on most ranches of the area.<sup>13</sup> Construction consists of double saddle-notched logs with 6-by-6-inch horizontal timber walls, 2-by-2-inch roof joists, and 1-inch decking. The upper gable walls are clapboard, and the barn has a medium-pitched shingled roof.

In 1954 a concrete foundation was placed under the building, and the barn was converted to a carpenter shop and storage area with a small portion retained for a horse barn. Today, the barn is used as an office, tackroom, storage, and carpenter shop by the concessioner.

---

13. USDI, NPS, Mattison, "Interpretive Planning Report."



Illus 28. Front view of barn, Peaceful Valley Ranch (photograph from park files, taken 1967)



Illus 29. Rear view of barn, Peaceful Valley Ranch (photograph from park files, taken 1947)

## Bunkhouse

The bunkhouse, the newest of the three major structures at Peaceful Valley Ranch, was built as a single room in the early 1920s when the area was operated as a dude ranch by Olsen. It was then known as the "lodge and recreation hall" (illustration 30). There is an excellent early interior view of this structure looking towards the fireplace on the west side. It depicts details of the ceiling, floor, and walls, in addition to the fireplace.<sup>14</sup>

After the National Park Service acquired the ranch, the bunkhouse was remodeled to serve as a ranger residence, and the one large room was converted to five rooms: a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. In 1950 a small frame clapboard bedroom was added to the rear (north side) of the bunkhouse (illustration 31).

The structure consists of double saddle-notched pine logs. The most distinctive feature of this building is the large and attractive scoria fireplace that dominates the west wall. The fireplace was closed in 1947 when the structure was remodeled in the interior, but the chimney on the exterior is still intact.

There is a centrally placed door and three small casement windows on the front of the building. The low-pitched scoria-covered roof is built of 2-by-6-inch rafters and 1-inch decking. It has a 2-foot overhang. The inside walls consist of wallboard, and the floors are made of wood.

---

14. Photograph, caption "Lodge and Recreation Hall," in Olsen, "Peaceful Valley Ranch."

No major renovation has occurred since 1947, and the bunkhouse now serves as a dormitory for the concessioner's children.

Aside from the extension that was added at the rear, the exterior remains essentially as it was when the bunkhouse was first built. However, the interior, as we have seen, has undergone extensive changes.



Illus 30. Bunkhouse at Peaceful Valley Ranch (photograph from park files, taken 1947)



Illus 31. Rear addition to bunkhouse at Peaceful Valley Ranch  
(photograph from park files, taken ca. 1950)

## MALTESE CROSS CABIN

When Theodore Roosevelt first saw the Maltese Cross cabin, it was a primitive structure common to those seen in the Badlands of that period. The Harvard University Library has an original photograph of the cabin said to have been taken by Roosevelt (illustration 32).<sup>1</sup>

The cabin was a log structure made of railway ties that had been unsuccessfully floated down river, where they had become stuck in low water. The roof of the cabin was low-pitched, consisting of dirt or scoria. The interior floor also consisted of dirt. It was a one-room structure. Sylvane Ferris, who became Roosevelt's partner, described the cabin simply as a "pretty poor affair."<sup>2</sup>

Roosevelt first described this shack as a "log structure with a dirt roof, a corral for the horses nearby, and a chicken-house jabbed against the rear of the house. Inside there was only one room, with a table, three or four chairs, a cooking stove, and three bunks. The owners were Sylvane and Joe Ferris and William J. Merrifield."<sup>3</sup>

Soon after his arrival at the Maltese Cross Ranch and his newly founded partnership with Ferris and Merrifield, Roosevelt found the existing cabin to be inadequate. Roosevelt cherished his privacy as

---

1. This photograph is reproduced in News from Home 19(1):5.

2. USDI, NPS, Ray H. Mattison, "A Study of the Authenticity of the Maltese Cross Cabin" (1950), p. 3.

3. Theodore Roosevelt, An Autobiography (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), pp. 95-96.



Illus 32. Maltese Cross cabin (photograph from Harvard University Library, taken ca. 1886)



much as his new friendships and he needed some seclusion in which to do his writing. Although he liked his newly found life as a cowboy, with all its informality and rough living, his patrician background also demanded that his comforts be satisfied. He instructed Sylvane Ferris and Merrifield to remodel the cabin. The results were an entirely new structure with some of the luxuries not generally found in a ranch house of that period. Unlike most of the ranch houses, which had low-sloping roofs covered with sod and scoria, the new cabin, which consisted of the same logs and ties as the original one, had a high-pitched roof covered with shingles. It was actually 1½ stories high. The main floor consisted of three rooms: a living room, a kitchen, and a small bedroom and study which Roosevelt occupied (illustrations 33, 34, 35). The attic served as sleeping quarters for the ranch hands. Access to the attic was by way of a trapdoor in the kitchen ceiling.<sup>4</sup>

A photograph of the cabin taken by Roosevelt depicts a center door with two windows on either side (illustration 32). The windows have six-over-six panes. At one end of the cabin there is a long opening, the size of a doorway, at the attic level. Beneath this opening, at ground level, appears a section enclosed with logs, which may have been a door that had been sealed by the time the picture was taken. The two ends of the attic appear to be made of flat boards.

Mr. Ray Mattison, in his extensive research of the cabin, found general agreement among the several contemporaries of Roosevelt he interviewed concerning the following general features of the cabin:

---

4. Ray H. Mattison, "Roosevelt's Dakota Ranches," North Dakota History 22(4):159-60.



Illus 33. Restored living quarters in the Maltese Cross cabin (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1967)



Illus 34. Restored living quarters in the Maltese Cross cabin (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1967)

It was 1½ stories high; the roof was shingled; the triangular portions above the end walls were made of flat boards; and the attic was used for sleeping quarters.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after Roosevelt sold the Maltese Cross Ranch to Sylvane Ferris in the 1890s, Ferris sold the cabin to J.F. Snyder, who made drastic changes to the cabin, making it more akin to the other cabins of that area. Snyder was convinced that the high-pitched shingled roof was too cold in winter and too hot in summer so he replaced it with a slightly pitched roof of mud and scoria--similar to the one the cabin had had when Roosevelt first saw the Maltese Cross Ranch.<sup>6</sup> This alteration of the roof would in later years cause some difficulties in the attempt to authenticate the cabin.

In 1905, the year after the state of North Dakota took over the cabin in order to preserve it, the cabin was dismantled and transported to St. Louis, Missouri, where it was exhibited at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. In 1906 it was again dismantled and transported to Portland, Oregon, where it was displayed at the Lewis and Clark Exposition. That same year it was also exhibited at the North Dakota State Fair in Fargo, North Dakota. Each time the cabin was dismantled and shipped to these expositions, parts of the cabin, including the logs, were carefully numbered so that they could be replaced in their original positions. Diagrams of the

---

5. USDI, NPS, Mattison, "Authenticity of the Maltese Cross Cabin," pp. 2-3.

6. J.S. Snyder to Richard M. Maeder, Park Historian, January 1961, park files; Chester L. Brooks and Ray H. Mattison, Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 60.



Illus 35. Restored kitchen in the Maltese Cross cabin (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1967)

cabin, showing the breakdown of logs, are preserved in the State Historical Society of North Dakota.<sup>7</sup>

After the North Dakota fair, the cabin was returned to the capitol grounds at Bismark, where it remained for several years, in essentially the same state as when Snyder had owned it (illustration 36). In the 1920s the cabin was relocated to another site on the capitol grounds to make room for a new state building. It remained there until the National Park Service assumed ownership in 1959.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1920s the Daughters of the American Revolution took steps long needed to preserve and restore the cabin, which had by then deteriorated considerably. Much of the deterioration was due to the number of times it had been dismantled and shipped to various places. The sod roof was replaced by cedar shingles, although the low-pitched style remained. A concrete foundation was layed and a general preservative treatment was given to the cabin.<sup>9</sup>

In 1959, when the National Park Service assumed ownership, the cabin was transported to Medora, where it now stands close to the park's visitor center. At this time the Park Service restored the high-pitched roof and other parts of the cabin to the style it had

---

7. Copies of these diagrams are also in the Harvard University Library, which made them available to the author; see appendix A.

8. USDI, NPS, Mattison, "Authenticity of the Maltese Cross Cabin," p. 9; see also copies of affidavits by Sylvane Ferris and Howard Eaton testifying that the cabin in Bismark was the structure which Roosevelt lived in at the Maltese Cross Ranch, *ibid.*

9. USDI, NPS, Sally Johnson, "Furnishing Plan for the Maltese Cabin" (1959), citing Scrapbook, Minishoshe Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Bismark, N.D.



Illus 36. Maltese Cross cabin at Bismark, N.D.  
(photograph from park files, taken ca. 1919)

had when Roosevelt had lived in it (illustration 37). The cabin attained essentially the same appearance as the cabin portrayed in Roosevelt's photograph. The following instructions are a verbatim account of the specifications generally followed by the park in restoring the cabin:

Specifications for Restoration  
of the  
Maltese Cross Cabin

The purpose of this work shall be to restore the existing Maltese Cross Cabin, now located immediately north of the Visitor Center at the Medora Headquarters of the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. This restoration shall date back to 1883 when Theodore Roosevelt made use of this cabin.

In order to accomplish this work systematically, the following priority is suggested.

1. Log "Surgery."

Test all logs, inside and outside, by vigorously tapping all over with a rubber hammer, "sounding" each log thoroughly for solidity. Any and all decayed, rotting, and rotted portions shall be scraped entirely clear of all semblance of decay and the cavity cleaned and soaked with an 11% solution of pentachlorophenol-in-mineral-spirits. Plug into each such cavity a section of log cut to fit snugly and to follow the grain of log. Plugs shall be of aged logs, similar in texture to the original log. These plugs shall be glued in place with a strong, proven, marine adhesive capable of resisting the elements. The plugs shall then be sanded to conform to the log surface.

Such log "surgery" will retain maximum of the original log, develop the strength of the section, and preclude disturbance of the structure. It is further believed that the public will be more inclined to accept the authenticity of a "plugged" log than an entirely new one. Finally, this method will save considerable money. In general, the logs appear reasonably sound.



Illus 37. Restored Maltese Cross cabin (photograph from park files, taken ca. 1960)



2. Sash Replacement.

Remove all existing Sash and adjust (as little as possible) window frames to receive new 6-light double-hung sash made to fit the existing frames. The new sash shall be of white pine, 1-3/8" thick, and shall be glazed, if possible, with glass of 1883 vintage. In making window frame adjustments, obliterate screen hinge holes, if any, by plugging with materials to match. The gable window shall be a single 8"x10" sash fixed in place with 1"x2" stops.

3. Doors and Door Frames.

Repair existing door frames by plugging all screen hinge holes with materials to match. Both doors appear to be original and should remain intact except that all white paint and whitewash shall be removed.

Replace existing door knobs with white china knobs.

4. Roof Changes.

Remove existing roof to present top log. Carefully preserve existing horizontal log purlins. Remove and retain existing 2x4 top plate. Remove existing columns and beams but leave in place existing horizontal 2"x4" ledger strip. Before the new roof is built, the side walls shall be raised by placing two of the existing log roof purlins on each with two logs also on each end wall. These latter logs are to be obtained from the shelter building at the former picnic area.

5. Lumber.

As much as possible of the lumber from the existing Maltese Cross Cabin, the picnic area buildings, and other wrecked buildings on the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park Area shall be utilized. Rafters and floor joists shall be rough sawn. Use exposed roof sheathing, flooring, and weathered boards.

The re-use of old shingles is not practicable, thus the entire roof shall be covered with new shingles, treated for a weathered appearance.

All other materials shall be as specified on the drawing.

All interior partitions shall remain intact except that a ladder shall be installed as shown.

Since the attic is not contemplated for display, the floor loads have not been calculated for that purpose.

6. Finish.

Entire interior of cabin shall be whitewashed. Exterior shall be treated in entirety with pentachlorophenol-in-mineral spirits.

7. Flues.

There shall be two 6" round stove pipes where shown, extending through thimbles in roof and floor structure. Each shall extend approximately 6" below the ceiling joists.

8. Measurements.

All measurements and verification of dimensions shall be determined at the site. Site conditions may dictate changes in details shown on the drawings.

---

10. Copy in park files.

## ELKHORN RANCH

### FORMER RESEARCH

The Elkhorn Ranch is the third and smallest unit of the park, consisting of 218.12 acres. It is located about 35 miles north of Medora between the South and North units. There are very few surface remains of the ranch that Roosevelt operated between 1884 and 1892.

Much has been written about the ranch by Roosevelt and his contemporaries and by his biographers and National Park Service historians, particularly by Messrs. Ray H. Mattison and Chester L. Brooks, who did extensive research between 1948 and 1960. Mattison has left us with an excellent record of the repositories of Roosevelt memorabilia that he searched during these years, especially those at the Widener Library of Harvard University, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Library of Congress, Theodore Roosevelt Association (New York), and a host of Roosevelt's contemporaries in the Badlands. These writers have left us with an excellent account of what the Elkhorn Ranch looked like when it was occupied by Roosevelt, who the last people to operate it were, and when it finally disappeared into oblivion. A great achievement undertaken by Mattison was his attempt to find and authenticate the actual site in the absence of practically all physical traces of remains. With his studies for guidance, Professor Dee C. Taylor, an archeologist from Montana State University, doing work under a National Park Service contract, was able to uncover considerable data concerning the subsurface remains of the Elkhorn Ranch in 1959.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Dee C. Taylor, "Archeological Investigations of the Elkhorn Ranch Site," prepared for the National Park Service (1959).

With such extensive and scholarly studies undertaken by his predecessors, there was little left for the present writer to do but to retrace some of these earlier steps to see whether new source materials had been uncovered over the past 25 or 30 years since Mattison and Brooks had done their research. This writer approached Harvard University, the Library of Congress, and the Theodore Roosevelt Association, the main repositories of Roosevelt papers, as well as other lesser repositories, to see what they may have acquired. The results were almost negative.

This writer also carefully reviewed some of the old data employed by his predecessors in their studies for possible inconsistencies in their interpretations. Again, he had to conclude that in almost every instance their conclusions were sound. Thus, whatever appears in this account is nothing more than a reaffirmation of what they had found. Without any significant additional sources uncovered, this writer has concluded that Mattison and Brooks must remain the authorities on the Elkhorn Ranch.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RANCH

How Roosevelt selected the site for his second ranch in the Badlands remains a mystery, but according to one contemporary, Howard Eaton, another rancher may have suggested the site to Roosevelt, who was then seeking a more isolated and quiet spot to live than the noisy Maltese Cross Ranch, which seemed always to be frequented by travelers and cowboys.<sup>2</sup> Work on the new site began

---

2. USDI, NPS, Ray H. Mattison, "Preliminary Study of and Identification of Elkhorn Ranch Site" (1950), p. 4.

in October 1884 when William Sewall and Wilmot Dow, backwoodsmen from Maine whom Roosevelt had asked to join him in the Badlands, began hewing timber for the new ranch house. Evidence is not clear as to when the whole ranch was finally completed, but it was probably in the spring or early summer of 1885 that the ranch house, the first and main structure, was finished.<sup>3</sup>

In later years Sewall said that he had designed the ranch house, but it is more likely that Roosevelt was responsible for the general plan and layout. A rough drawing of the floor plan of the ranch house in Roosevelt's own handwriting led Mattison to conclude, and rightly so, that Roosevelt prepared the basic design and not Sewall.<sup>4</sup> Knowing that Roosevelt had suggested the construction of a new and more convenient cabin at the Maltese Cross Ranch, and knowing his penchant for privacy and certain comforts, there is every reason to suppose that he played a major role in the design of his new ranch house.

The Elkhorn ranch house was much more elaborate than the small cabin at the Maltese Cross Ranch. And it was a far cry from the simple and primitive houses common to the Badlands. Roosevelt provided a good description of the average ranch house in the Badlands when he first arrived. He said that it was sometimes a mud dugout or a shack made of logs stuck upright in the ground. More often it was a fair-sized, well-made building of hewn logs, divided into several rooms. Around the ranch house were grouped the other supporting buildings--log stables, cow sheds, hay ricks, a storage outhouse, and on large ranches, bunkhouses where ranch

---

3. Ibid., p. 5.

4. Copy of sketch of the Elkhorn ranch house, n.d., park files (original in Cunningham Collection).

hands slept. The strongly made circular horse corral, with a snubbing post in the middle, stood close by; the larger cow corral, in which the stock was branded, was some distance away. A small patch of ground was used for a vegetable garden and a much larger piece of ground, with water in it, was used for a pasture.<sup>5</sup> With the exception of the ranch house, which represented an elaborate style and incorporated elements not normally found in the Badlands, the Elkhorn Ranch seemed to fit this description.

The cottonwood logs for the house were cut in the vicinity of the ranch site, while the pine boards were hauled from the hamlet of Little Missouri, some 50 or 60 miles from Medora. By the middle of December 1884 the walls of the ranch house were nearly completed. Sewall wrote, "We are working on the house; have got the timber all hauled and would have had the walls up but have been off after horses."<sup>6</sup> During the winter months the two Maine woodsmen worked on the ranch house. The cold sometimes hampered their work. Although they had got the house shingled and the underfloor layed, they had to stop work at one point because of the bitter cold. The house was finally completed in the spring or early summer of 1885.<sup>7</sup>

The ranch house was one of the finest structures of its kind in the Badlands. Roosevelt called it his "home ranch house." Henceforth

---

5. Theodore Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), pp. 5-6.

6. W.W. Sewall to S.T. Sewall, December 19, 1884, Cunningham Collection, cited in Ray H. Mattison, "Historical Study of Buildings at Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch Site . . ." (1960), p. 6.

7. Ibid.

he was to spend most of his time there rather than at the Maltese Cross Ranch.<sup>8</sup>

Little is known about the other structures of the ranch. In all probability, soon after the ranch house was completed, work on the other structures was begun.

After the severe winter of 1886-87, when heavy cattle losses were suffered, Roosevelt spent less and less time in the Badlands, but he made his appearance there from time to time. In the meantime, his political star was rising in the east, leaving him little time to attend to his ranching business. By 1892 he had abandoned the Elkhorn Ranch, shifting his activities back to the Maltese Cross Ranch. Although he visited the Elkhorn in later years, perhaps as late as 1896, the fate of the ranch and its buildings had become a matter of time. In later years there were differing opinions as to what had happened to the structures after Roosevelt had abandoned the ranch. Some said that the buildings had been swept away by the floods of the Little Missouri, but the general concensus among old residents of the area was that neighboring ranchers had dismantled the structures and hauled the lumber away. The history of these events in later years is ably treated in other studies.<sup>9</sup>

During the more than 60 years that have elapsed since the ranch was abandoned and the structures disappeared, the wild and picturesque setting of the site has remained almost as unspoiled as when Roosevelt first set eyes on it. Because of its isolation and its inaccessibility, few people venture over the 28 miles of winding dirt

---

8. Brooks and Mattison, Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands, p. 25.

9. See, for example, Mattison, "Preliminary Study," pp. 10, 24-26, and Mattison, "Historical Study," pp. 12-14.

road that connects it to the Peaceful Valley Ranch. However, there have been some changes in the vegetative cover, the most obvious being the disappearance of the giant cottonwoods. Some of the foundation stones of the ranch house and a few bricks remain. The latter may have come from the chimney of the old ranch house or they may have been part of structural members placed there by later inhabitants.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STRUCTURES

No attempt will be made to establish the exact locations of these structures since this has already been done through other historical and archeological studies.

#### Ranch House

In his autobiography Roosevelt described his ranch house as

long, low . . . of hewn logs, with a veranda, and with, in addition to other rooms, a bedroom for myself, and a sitting-room with a big fire-place. . . . and enough books to fill two or three shelves. . . . And . . . I do not see how any one could have lived more comfortably. . . . There were at least two rooms that were always warm, even in the bitterest weather. . . .

The ranch house stood on the brink of a low bluff overlooking the broad, shallow bed of the Little Missouri. . . . In the front of the ranch-house veranda was a row of cottonwood trees. . . . In the long summer



afternoons we would sometimes sit on the piazza, when there was no work to be done. . . . Sometimes from the ranch we saw deer, and once when we needed meat I shot one across the river as I stood on the piazza.<sup>10</sup>

In an earlier work, one which he wrote while living at his ranches, Roosevelt described his ranch house as follows:

From the low, long veranda, shaded by leafy cottonwoods, one looks across sand-bars and shallows to a strip of meadowland, behind which rises a line of sheer cliffs and grassy plateaus. This veranda is a pleasant place in the summer evenings. . . . The story-high house of hewn logs is clean and neat, with many rooms, so that one can be alone if one wishes to.<sup>11</sup>

The two descriptions given in Roosevelt's own words tell us quite a bit about the house. It is obvious that for a ranch house it was a fairly comfortable structure. It is also obvious that the house contained many features that were the personal touches of Roosevelt. A large fireplace at the ranch house recalls that he also had a large fireplace in the north room of his Sagamore Hills home. The existence of book shelves at the ranch house were also typical of his need for facilities to hold his many books. Roosevelt cherished his privacy and basic comforts and he therefore made certain that the new structure would contain sufficient rooms to satisfy this need. On two separate occasions Roosevelt mentioned

---

10. Roosevelt, Autobiography, pp. 96-98.

11. Roosevelt, Hunting Trips, pp. 15-16.

that he had a sitting room which he used entirely as his own and where he did much of his reading and writing.<sup>12</sup>

Hermann Hagedorn, one of Roosevelt's earliest biographers, described the ranch house as follows:

It was a one-story log structure, with a covered porch on the side facing the river; a spacious house of many rooms divided by a corridor running straight through from north to south. Roosevelt's bedroom, on the southeast corner, adjoined a large room containing a fireplace, which was to be Roosevelt's study by day and the general living-room by night. The fireplace, which had been built by an itinerant Swedish mason whom Sewall looked upon with disapproval as a dollar-chaser, had been designed under the influence of a Dakota winter and was enormous. Will Dow, who was somewhat of a blacksmith, had made a pair of andirons out of a steel rail, which he had discovered floating down the river loosely attached to a beam of yellow pine.<sup>13</sup>

We are very fortunate to have a number of photographs of the Elkhorn Ranch taken by Roosevelt. These have nearly all been reproduced in Roosevelt's publications or by his biographers. Photographs taken from a point southeast of the ranch house reveal several deviations from the rough floor plan sketch purported to have been made by Roosevelt. The photographs depict six windows

---

12. Roosevelt to Cowles, March 28, 1886, in Anna Roosevelt Cowles, Letters from Theodore Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 1870-1918 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), pp. 72-73; Roosevelt to Robinson, May 12, 1886, Elting E. Morison, ed., The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 1:99-100.

13. Hermann Hagedorn, Roosevelt in the Badlands (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921), p. 240.

on the east side of the house and a window on the south gable. Thus, between the time the sketch was first drawn and the house was completed, either Roosevelt or Sewall felt compelled to make changes.<sup>14</sup>

A ground plan roughly drawn by Roosevelt's sister Edith Roosevelt while she was visiting the ranch in 1890 also reveals some deviation from the Roosevelt sketch. This drawing shows no piazza on the west side of the ranch house. It also shows eight rooms rather than ten rooms as indicated in the earlier sketch. However, as Mattison suggests, it is quite possible that the house might have been altered during the five-year period between 1885 and 1890, since the place was changed from a two-family dwelling to a one-family house.<sup>15</sup> Both plans depict a piazza on the east side. Both plans also show a large hall running through the middle of the house from the south door about three-fourths of the width of the house. The sketch drawn by Edith Roosevelt reveals a different use of the several rooms from that shown in the old Roosevelt sketch. Again, these differences might be attributed to the possible changes that the house may have undergone over five years.

In one letter Sewall mentioned the dimensions of the ranch house. He wrote the following in October 1884 just as work got underway on the house:

---

14. Ray H. Mattison, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, reprint (Bismark, N.D.: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1960), p. 11.

15. Copy of page from a letter that Edith Roosevelt wrote her sister from the Elkhorn Ranch, n.d., park files.

It is to be 60 feet long and 30 feet wide. The walls 9 ft. high so you see it is quite a job to hew it on three sides. The logs are cottonwood. They are generally short but we get some over 30 ft. in length that square a foot.<sup>16</sup>

The Roosevelt sketch indicated that the walls were to be 7 feet in height and the logs were to be 1 foot square. Photographs of the house reveal that the walls were seven logs in height.

The roof and gables were shingled. One of Sewall's letters states that "all boards and shingles here is Pine." In another letter he wrote that "the weather is so cold we can't do much on the house. Have got it shingled and the under floor layed."<sup>17</sup>

Sewall said little about the interior of the house. At one point he wrote: "The house is to have a very flat roof, no chamber, single floor overhead. The boards here are all Pine planed on one side and both ends of a width. They are all seasoned and of course are nice to handle."<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to understand why Sewall made reference to a "very flat" roof when evidence from the photographs clearly indicates the existence of a low-pitched roof. This probably was an exaggeration on his part not reconcilable with fact, but it might also have been an instance of the finished product differing from the original plan (as happens so frequently in the design of structures), especially since he wrote this long before the house was completed.

---

16. William Wingate Sewall, Bill Sewall's Story of T.R. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), p. 19.

17. Copies of letters, Sewall to Sewall, October 19, 1884, and February 1885, park files (originals in Cunningham Collection).

18. Copy of letter, Sewall to Sewall, October 18, 1884, *ibid.* (original in Cunningham Collection).

Sewall's daughter informed Mattison in the 1950s that a cellar or basement existed beneath the ranch house which Roosevelt used as a dark room for processing his photographs. Mattison had noted that a depression on the site of the ranch house suggested the presence of a cellar, and since then, it has been confirmed by archeological studies.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence is abundant in showing that the ranch house had a fireplace. We have already cited some references to a fireplace made by Roosevelt. In another reference he noted that

the long winter evenings are spent sitting round the hearthstone, while the pine logs roar and crackle, and the men play checkers or chess in the firelight. The rifles stand in the corner of the room or rest across the elk antlers which jut out from over the fireplace.<sup>20</sup>

When Roosevelt's sister visited the ranch in 1890, she noted that the fireplace in the sitting room was big.<sup>21</sup> As late as 1924, one observer, who had visited the Elkhorn Ranch site, stated that "later, around a campfire, on the site of the fireplace of Roosevelt's ranch house, we had a session of short talks."<sup>22</sup> Sewall's son

---

19. Mattison, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, p. 13; Taylor, "Archeological Investigations," pp. 39-46.

20. Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman, p. 16.

21. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, My Brother Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), p. 135.

22. Memorandum of E.A. Goldman, 1924, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial National Park, RG 79, NA.

stated that Wilmot Dow had built the fireplace. It was Mattison's impression that the hearthstone had been recovered by the State Historical Society of North Dakota. Although the early photographs show no chimney, it may be that it was obscured by trees.<sup>23</sup>

In Roosevelt's Hunting Trips of a Ranchman appears an etching by R. Siwan Gifford that depicts a large fireplace within the sitting room of the ranch house. It is obviously not based on fact because it shows the fireplace located on an outside wall, when according to available evidence it was on an inside wall.<sup>24</sup>

Roosevelt spared no expense on the lumber. A list of items prepared by Sewall revealed that in addition to the logs that went into building the outer shell of the house, there were 16,000 board feet of rafters, joists, floors, partition boards, and roof boards.<sup>25</sup> The partitions of the house, however, must have been thin, for in one of his letters Roosevelt, who referred to them as "mere partitions," noted that at one point he had overheard a conversation between Sewall and his wife from the adjoining room.<sup>26</sup>

The Harvard University Library has made available to the author a copy of a blueprint of the ranch house based upon Sewall's early sketch (appendix B). Probably sometime in the 1920s or 1930s it

---

23. Mattison, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, p. 13.

24. Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman, p. 40.

25. Ibid.

26. Roosevelt to Cowles, June 7, 1886, Cowles, Letters from Theodore Roosevelt, p. 82.

was proposed to reconstruct the house on Roosevelt Island in the District of Columbia as part of a memorial to the late president.<sup>27</sup> This event never materialized, however.

### Stables

Roosevelt wrote in 1885 that the Elkhorn Ranch had a string of horses. It was reported at one time that he had 20 horses, and at another time, he had as many as 30 horses.<sup>28</sup>

We know very little about the stables except that they were built after the ranch house. Sewall wrote in December 1885, about six months after the ranch house was completed, that they were still working on the stables. "We hew the logs," he said in one of his letters to his brother, "on three sides and are putting up two stables 16 by 20 feet with a twelve foot space between like a wood hovel and hay shed."<sup>29</sup>

Although this is a brief description of the stables, it does contain very valuable information. Not only does it give dimensions that cannot be disputed, since Sewall was directly involved in the construction, but it also provides some idea of the floor plan,

---

27. Blueprint, Elkhorn Ranch/Little Missouri River/Dakota, Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0", n.d., Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Harvard University Library, Cambridge, Mass. (hereafter cited as Harvard Library).

28. Roosevelt, Hunting Trips of a Ranchman, p. 16; Assessor's Returns for Billings County, N.D., 1886 and 1889, cited in Mattison, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, p. 1.

29. Sewall to Sewall, December 20, 1885, Cunningham Collection, cited in Mattison, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, pp. 13-14.

particularly since it mentions a 12-foot space existing between two enclosed areas.

In the Roosevelt collection at the Harvard University Library is an excellent photograph of the stables, alleged to have been taken by Roosevelt, that shows the details of the stables and also provides a view of the separation and the surrounding fences. This photograph supports Sewall's brief description of the general plan and in addition shows another log structure that was probably the cow shed.<sup>30</sup>

#### Cow Shed

Unlike most ranches in the Badlands, the Elkhorn Ranch kept several milk cows. There are references in several sources to the use of cows and milk at the ranch--milk seemed to be popular--but there is little mention of the cow shed. Roosevelt, in his writings, alluded only once to a cow shed,<sup>31</sup> and Sewall never mentioned it at all. Fortunately, the photograph alleged to have been taken by Roosevelt that shows the stables also shows another structure to the east, which was probably the cow shed. This building is a low structure with a flat log roof that is covered with dirt and scoria.<sup>32</sup>

---

30. A copy of this photograph is in the park files and also appears in several early and late publications.

31. Theodore Roosevelt, Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail, 2d. ed. (New York: The Century Co., 1920), p. 19.

32. This photograph, the original of which is in the Roosevelt Collection at Harvard University Library, appears under the caption "Elkhorn barns and corrals" in News from Home 19(1):5.



### Horse Corral

As was noted earlier, the Elkhorn Ranch had some 20 or 30 horses at one time or another. There is only one brief description of the horse corral and this was made by Roosevelt. He said that "near the middle of the glade stands the high horse-corral, with a snubbing-post in the center, and a wing built out from one side of the gate entrance, so that the saddleband can be driven in without trouble."<sup>33</sup> A diorama of the Elkhorn Ranch made perhaps in the 1920s or 1930s, which is on display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, clearly depicts the corral.

### Miscellaneous Structures

There were other structures, enclosed as well as open, which formed part of the Elkhorn Ranch and its operations, but unfortunately we know very little about them. In some cases, only mere references are made to them in the sources. For example, Roosevelt alluded to the hayricks and pens "for such cattle as we bring in during winter." He also mentions a patch of garden land near the edge of the woods.<sup>34</sup> With 20 or 30 horses on the ranch, a blacksmith and a blacksmith facility would have been essential, even though there is no mention made of a blacksmith shop in any of the early writings. Archeologists have found that the structure appearing in one of Roosevelt's early photographs was indeed the

---

33. Roosevelt, Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail, p. 26.

34. Ibid.

blacksmith shop and have found evidence of the existence of such a structure southeast of the ranch house site.<sup>35</sup> We know that Wilmot Dow served as a blacksmith at the ranch.

---

35. Taylor, "Archeological Investigations," pp. 24-30; Photograph alleged to have been taken by Roosevelt, ca. 1886, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Harvard Library.

APPENDIXES

A: PLANS OF THE MALTESE CROSS CABIN

B: FLOOR PLAN OF THE ELKHORN RANCH HOUSE

Appendix A

7A				7B			
6B	✓		6X		6Z		✓6C
5B	✓	Window	5X	✓	5Z		✓5C
4B	✓	No. 4	4X		4Z	Door	✓4C
3B	✓		3X	✓	3Z	Opening	✓3C
2B		sub wall the work is done	2X	✓	2Z	No door for chas	✓2C
1B	✓		1X		1Z		✓1C

*Floor line*

*West wall - Inside.*

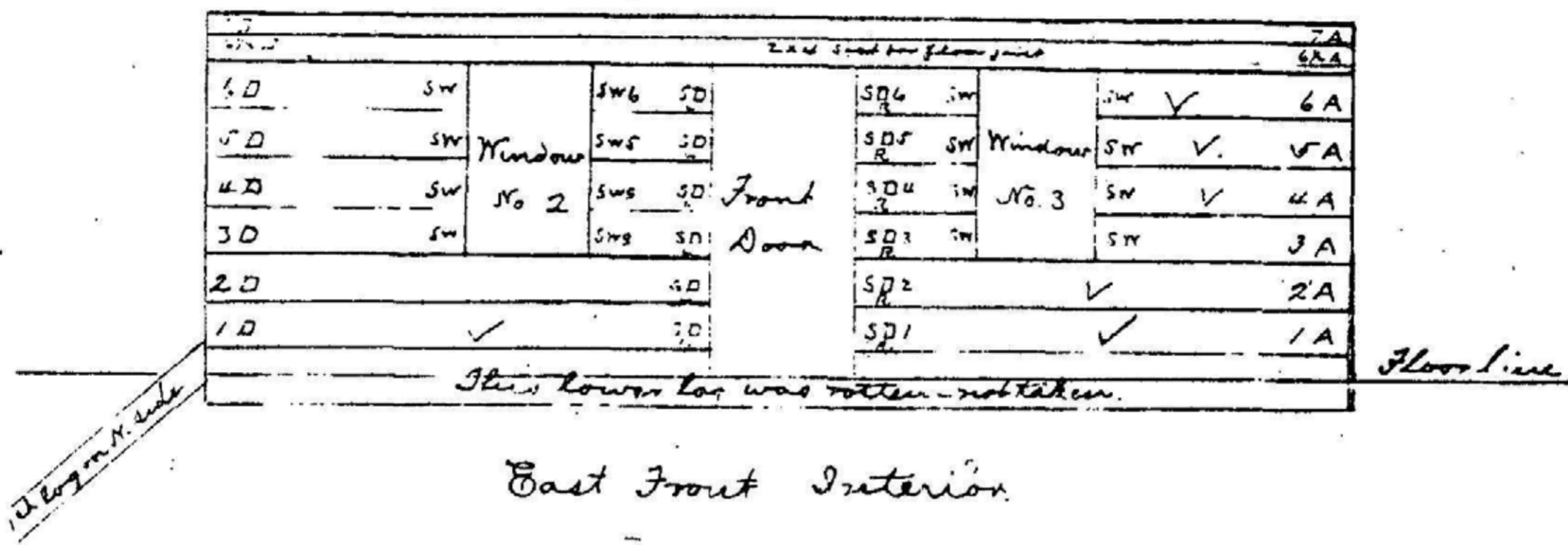
*South wall*

9 N				10			
8C	✓						8D
7C	✓	NW	North Window No. 1	NW	✓		7D
6C	✓	NW		NW	✓		6D
5C	✓	NW		NW	✓		5D
4C	✓	NW		NW	✓		4D
3C					✓		3D
2C					✓		2D
1C	✓				✓		1D

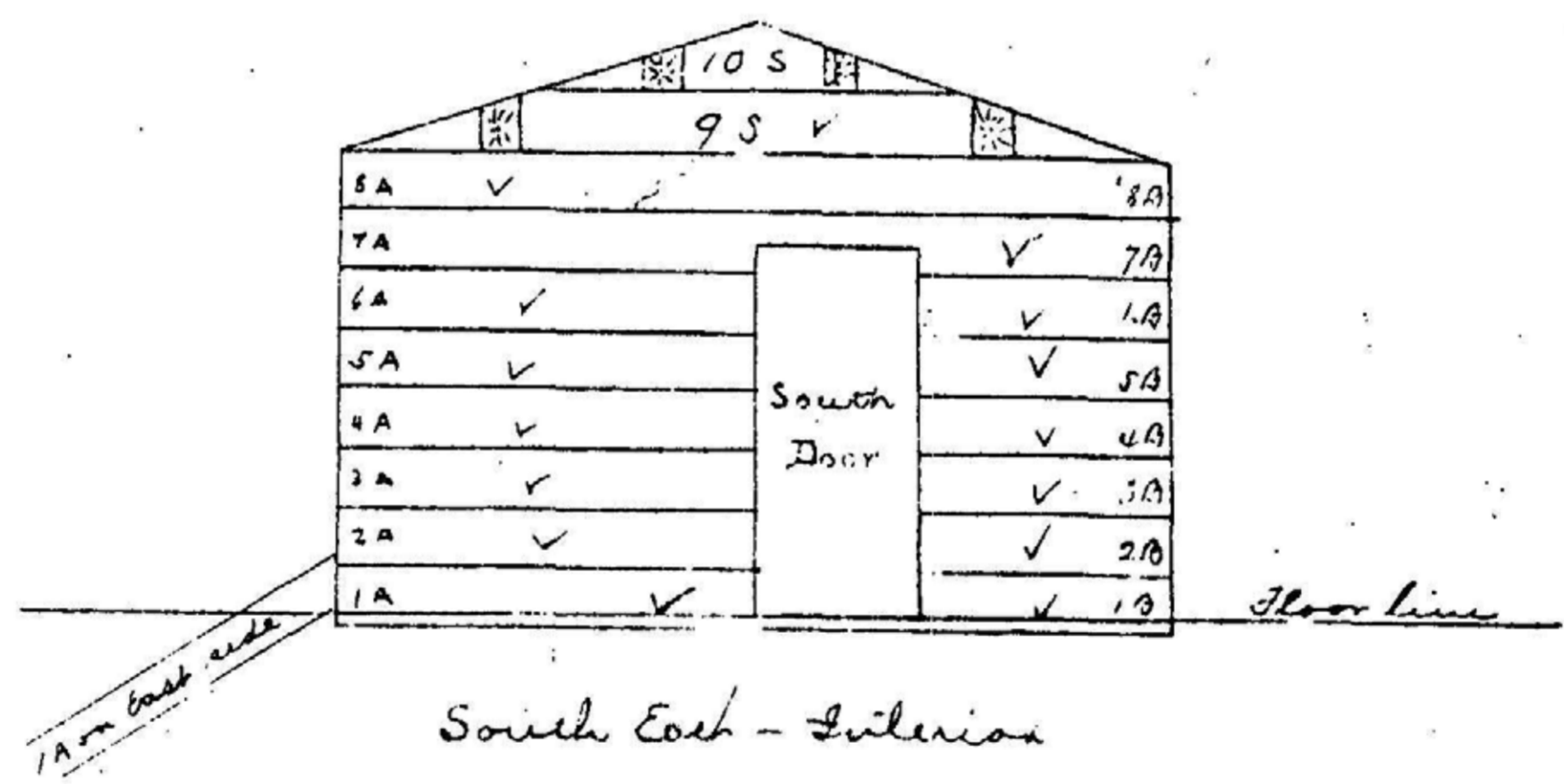
*Floor line*

*North Wall - Inside.*

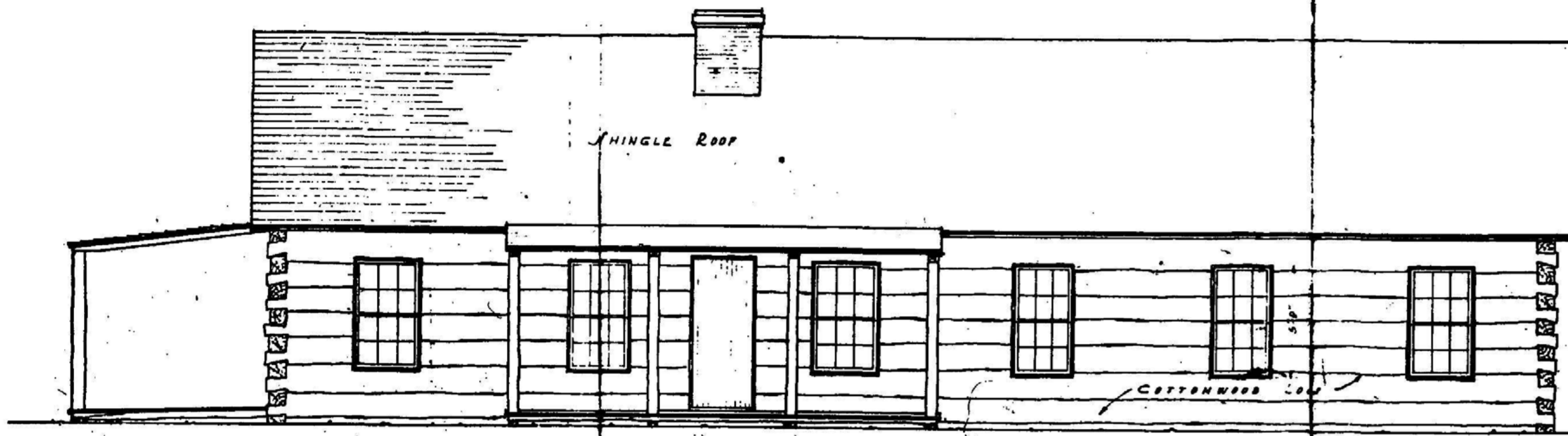
Scale 1/4 inch to 1 foot



Plans of Maltese Cross Ranch House, as now preserved on the grounds of the Capitol, Bismarck, N.D. ~ A model of this cabin may be seen elsewhere in the Museum



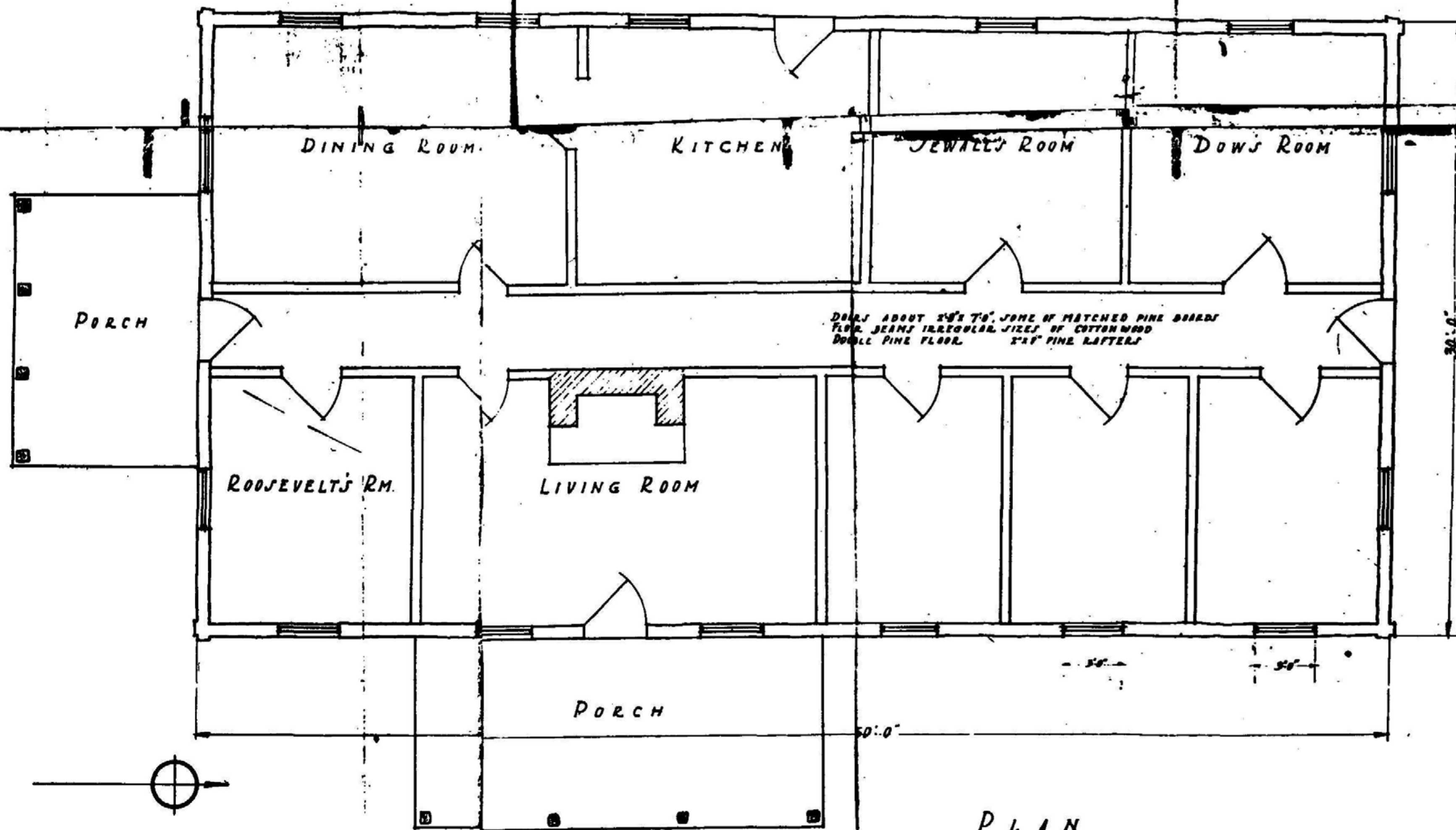
Scale 1/4 inch to 1 foot



EAST ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION



PLAN

ELKHORN RANCH  
LITTLE MISSOURI RIVER  
DAKOTA

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### MANUSCRIPT MATERIALS

Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Library. Theodore Roosevelt Papers.

In addition to a multitude of letters and papers concerning Roosevelt's life and political career, this collection contains photographs of his two ranches in North Dakota and miscellaneous drawings of the ranches done in later years.

Medora, North Dakota. Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Historical Files.

Copies of numerous papers, collections, and photographs from different repositories, mostly acquired by Ray H. Mattison and Chester L. Brooks, former park historians.

Washington, D.C. National Archives and Records Service. Record Group 79, National Park Service Records.

Contains some manuscripts of the park when construction projects were being undertaken through various emergency relief programs of the 1930s.

### BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

Brooks, Chester, L., and Mattison, Ray H. Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958.

Cowles, Anna Roosevelt, ed. Letters From Theodore Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 1870-1918. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924.

Hagedorn, Hermann. Roosevelt in the Badlands. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1921.

Mattison, Ray H. "Roosevelt's Dakota Ranches." North Dakota History 22(4):159-60.

\_\_\_\_\_. Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch. Bismark, N.D.: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1960. This is a reprint of a magazine article, "Life at Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch--The Letters of William W. and Mary Sewall." North Dakota History, vol. 27 (Summer and Fall 1960).

Morison, Elting E., ed. The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt. 8 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951. Vol. 1: The Years of Preparation: 1868-1898.

News From Home: Medora & Black Hills. Vol. 19 (Spring 1958). New York: Home Insurance Co.

Olsen, H.W. Peaceful Valley Ranch, Medora, North Dakota, In the Heart of the Wonderful Badlands of Dakota. By the Author, n.d. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

Robinson, Corinne Roosevelt. My Brother Theodore Roosevelt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921.

Roosevelt, Theodore. An Autobiography. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1914.

\_\_\_\_\_. Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1885.

\_\_\_\_\_. Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail. 2d ed. New York: The Century Co., 1920.

Sewall, William Wingate. Bill Sewall's Story of T. R. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919.

#### NATIONAL PARK SERVICE REPORTS

Taylor, Dee C. "Archeological Investigations of the Elkhorn Ranch Site." Prepared for the National Park Service, 1959. On file at the Rocky Mountain Regional Office.

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "A Study of the Authenticity of the Maltese Cross Cabin," by Ray H. Mattison. 1950. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Preliminary Study of and Identification of the Elkhorn Ranch Site," by Ray H. Mattison. 1950. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Planning Report on the Maltese Cross Ranch," by Chester L. Brooks. 1957. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.



- U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.  
"Furnishing Plan for the Maltese Cross Cabin," by Sally Johnson. 1959. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Historical Study of Buildings at Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch Site at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park," by Ray H. Mattison. 1960. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preliminary Draft of Report on Study of the Authenticity of the Maltese Cross Cabin," by Ray H. Mattison. 1960. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Interpretive Planning Report on Longhorn Ranch Project, Peaceful Valley, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park," by Ray H. Mattison. 1961. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Park History," by Warren J. Petty. 1965. On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Classified Structure Field Inventory Report, Old East Entrance Station." Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver, August 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. National Park Service Rustic Architecture: 1916-1942, by William C. Tweed, Laura E. Souliere, and Henry G. Law. San Francisco: Western Regional Office, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Specifications for Restoration of the Maltese Cross Cabin." On file at Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

Publication services were provided by the graphics and editorial staffs of the Denver Service Center. NPS 1646