

ROOSEVELT, RANCHES, AND RESOURCES: THEODORE ROOSEVELT NATIONAL  
PARK'S SEARCH FOR A BALANCE BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURAL HISTORY

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**Title**

Roosevelt, Ranches, and Resources: Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Search  
for a Balance Between Human and Natural History

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## **ABSTRACT**

National parks share the same challenge debating the significance of their cultural and natural resources. In the past, many parks decided to emphasize the value of natural resources over that of their human histories. Theodore Roosevelt National Park was an exception to that trend because of its connection to President Theodore Roosevelt. In the early years of the park's existence, National Park Service management emphasized the value of its cultural resources. The preservation and interpretation of Theodore Roosevelt's Maltese Cross Cabin and Elkhorn Ranch were two of the park's top priorities.

Around the 1980s, park officials increasingly placed emphasis on the park's natural resources in an attempt to balance the significance of its natural and cultural resources. Through this attempt, Theodore Roosevelt National Park has embraced the concept that human and natural history cannot and should not be separated.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Ben. Without your sacrifice, care, and support this achievement would not have been possible. Thank you for always believing in me.

And to my parents, Gary and Kathy, who have always encouraged my education and my goals with enthusiasm. You first introduced me to Theodore Roosevelt National Park and left me with wonderful memories of the west. You taught me that the greatest rewards in life come from hard work, determination, and a smile.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

NPS .....National Park Service

TRNP .....Theodore Roosevelt National Park

## CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Many national parks share the same challenge when it comes to the preservation and interpretation of historical structures and human history in their parks. What stories do they tell? Are those stories worth telling? Should these structures be saved, or should they be left in a state of ruin? What if these cultural resources affect the preservation of animal habitats? These are difficult questions that many national parks continue to face. In the 1950s and 1960s, many superintendents simply decided which structures and sites were worth preserving, and which ones were worth selling without a set of guidelines. In 1966, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act, which provided some guidelines for future decision making about these historic resources.<sup>1</sup> However, the question of whether to manage a park as a natural park versus a park that interprets and preserves the park's human history is still a challenge that many park administrators, including those at Theodore Roosevelt National Park, face in the twenty-first century.

Although it is the responsibility of all national parks to “identify, evaluate, document, register, and establish basic information about cultural resources and [their] traditionally associated peoples,” preserving and interpreting those resources has often been postponed, or never occurred in the first place.<sup>2</sup> This issue is primarily a debate over the purpose and mission of the National Park Service. Many park administrators argued, and some continue to argue, that the NPS' primary mission is the preservation of its natural resources, not cultural interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Righter, *Peaks, Politics & Passion: Grand Teton National Park Comes of Age* (Moose, WY: Grand Teton Association, 2014), 167.

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, “Cultural Resource Management,” in *Management Policies, 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> I decided to use the National Park Service's definition and concept of ‘cultural resources’ in this essay. The National Park Service defines cultural resources as physical evidence of past human activity. This includes “archeological resources, cultural landscapes, ethnographic

These Park Service leaders believed that visitors primarily traveled to parks to appreciate the aesthetic beauty and recreational opportunities that the parks provide. These park officials argued that it was the stupendous scenery that was worth preserving. The “scenic superstars,” grand landscapes of “forests, streams, wildflowers, and majestic mammals,” were given preservation priority over any cultural history.<sup>4</sup> The parks, with their grand natural landscapes, served as an escape from the mundane, urban life that visitors were accustomed to. Therefore, remains of human history in the park detracted from that goal of escape, as they were not natural. Other park officials believed that these human artifacts and structures threatened the preservation of natural resources, such as wildlife and plant life, and therefore they could not be preserved.<sup>5</sup>

The objective of this study is to understand how Theodore Roosevelt National Park preserved and interpreted two of its most significant historic sites and structures, the Maltese Cross Cabin and the Elkhorn Ranch. This research will allow scholars to better understand how national park officials make decisions about the value of their cultural resources.

In order to understand NPS policy concerning natural and cultural resources, I first examined two other lands managed by the NPS, Grand Teton National Park and Apostle Island National Lakeshore, to better understand how the NPS has made decisions concerning the preservation and interpretation of its cultural and natural resources. I then examined various primary and secondary sources to understand the history of TRNP and its two most important historic resources related to Theodore Roosevelt. Finally, I examined TRNP’s documents and records relating to the history, preservation, and interpretation of the Maltese Cross Cabin and

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resources, historic and prehistoric structures, and museum collections.” See National Park Service, “Cultural Resource Management,” 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Righter, *Peaks, Politics & Passion*, 168.

Elkhorn Ranch site to understand how changes in funding, NPS policy, and management have impacted decisions towards these two cultural resources.

During my research I faced limitations and road blocks when it came to resources. There were a limited amount of historic structure reports, surveys, management plans, and archaeological studies done on the Maltese Cross Cabin and Elkhorn Ranch sites. This, as explained by the NPS employees at TRNP, was either because of limited funding to do such research, and a limited number of trained professionals and help to conduct the surveys. As for the archaeological studies, the ones referenced in this essay are the only studies I was given access to. Other archaeological studies may exist, but park officials at TRNP were hesitant to provide these resources because the studies revealed locations of archaeological and cultural sites. If these sites were to be known to the public, the park officials explained, it would danger the artifacts and remains at the sites.

There is a very limited body of scholarship concerning the debate that national parks face about the significance of their cultural and natural resources. This is a debate, however, that impacts the very purpose of the parks: their development, resources, aesthetics, and significance to future generations of visitors. Understanding how various park officials, such as at TRNP, have made decisions considering these important resources will help other park officials make future decisions about their cultural and natural resources.

### **1.1. Nature versus Culture: The National Park Service's Debate**

The debate between natural and cultural history is a challenge that the National Park Service faces with almost all of its managed lands and resources. Since the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, the principal concerns of the Park Service have been the

preservation of natural scenery and the economic benefits of tourism from those sights.<sup>6</sup> It was scenery that inspired the national park idea in 1870, and it was scenery, these early Park Service officials believed, that justified the national parks' existence through tourism. Although most national parks had already been extensively altered by human activity long before becoming parks, the cultural histories were typically pushed aside in order to showcase the scenic landscapes.<sup>7</sup>

Some national parks, such as Grand Teton National Park, contain a plethora of historic resources relating to the human history of the park, and grand landscapes that include mountain peaks, valleys, lakes, and foothills.<sup>8</sup> Although a prolonged debate between the value of nature and cultural history occurred at the park, park officials increasingly see the park's cultural resources as valuable and work to preserve and interpret them. Other lands managed by the National Park Service, such as Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, also contain many cultural resources, however management has taken a different outlook. Here, the NPS has emphasized the importance of natural resources over cultural resources and has acted accordingly. The challenges faced by the NPS at these two sites provides greater insight into the debate between nature and culture.

Grand Teton National Park, like Theodore Roosevelt National Park, has a connection to homesteaders and ranching history in the west. Grand Teton has an inventory of 542 historic buildings that are either listed in the National Register of Historic Places or eligible for inclusion on the list. Like Theodore Roosevelt, Grand Teton's NPS management has struggled over what

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<sup>6</sup> Sellars, *Preserving Nature*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Righter, *Peaks, Politics & Passion*, 2, 166.

to do with these historic structures and signs of human history in their park. Over time, Grand Teton altered its cultural resource policy to give interest and value to its historic sites.<sup>9</sup>

Human history in Grand Teton National Park begins with American Indian settlement along the shores of Jackson Lake. The fur trade also has a connection to the park's early history. However, these histories did not leave behind many sites and structures. It was not until Euro-American settlement in the park that many visible signs of human activity on the land appeared. Homesteading and ranching history are easily interpreted in the park, and therefore have been emphasized by park management. For many years, park management at Grand Teton placed little value on cultural history. The NPS believed that the unique features of the park were its mountains and wildlife, not its human history, and it was the natural resources that brought visitors to the park. In 1956, Acting Superintendent W. Ward Yeager decided to sell thirty-three old buildings from the park. Ten buildings were sold in auction, and fourteen were given away. The remaining buildings were burned. NPS Cultural Resources Specialist Michael Johnson, estimated that by 1990 some seventy percent of all buildings in the park boundaries had been removed or destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

However, not all park officials agreed with placing the value of natural resources above cultural ones. In 1942, Andrew E. Kendrew, a landscape architect, was sent to the west side of the Snake River to inventory the buildings of the JY Ranch and other holdings managed by the Snake River Land Company, which owned much of the land on the west side of the river. Kendrew suggested removing only a few of the structures, believing that it was important to reflect on the "early settlement in this area."<sup>11</sup> He believed that the public wished to learn more

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 173.

about the history of the ranching and cattle business. The park was slowly moving towards cultural preservation, even if it was only focused on old West themes at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Another significant shift in NPS thought about cultural resources came with the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. The act established the National Register of Historic Places and mandated that every state create a State Historic Preservation Office to evaluate and monitor nearby historic sites. Parks were now required to evaluate their historic structures and to produce a survey List of Classified Structures for the National Register.<sup>13</sup> However, even designation on the National Register did not ensure protection. For example, in 1998, Grand Teton decided to burn Leek's Lodge, a structure listed on the National Register. Built by a pioneer homesteader and photographer, Grand Teton's officials decided to burn the structure because they had no interest in interpreting the lodge or reusing its timber. After no ranch, family, or group bid to remove the building, the NPS decided to conduct a fire exercise in which the burning of the lodge took place.<sup>14</sup>

The BC Bar Dude Ranch brought about a change in policy at Grand Teton National Park. Built by Struthers Burt and Dr. Horace Carncross in 1912, the dude ranch attracted many eastern visitors, serving as a retreat for Americans who wished to experience the West. Grand Teton administrators decided to do nothing to restore the ranch after its listing on the National Register in 1990. Four years later, Mike Johnson, a former employee of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, came to work for Grand Teton National Park. He called for a volunteer cleanup day at the site and found money to contract a company to install temporary roofs on the more vulnerable cabins for the winter of 1994-5. He proved that the stabilization costs of these

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 174-175.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 177-178.

historic sites could be greatly reduced with volunteer labor. After seeing the success of Johnson's efforts, Johnson was able to convince Teton County commissioners to establish the Teton County Historic Preservation Board which meets with the superintendent and staff of the park to encourage preservation of cultural resources in the park.<sup>15</sup>

In 2002, Superintendent Jack Neckels retired from Grand Teton, and Steve P. Martin became the new Superintendent of the park. Martin brought a new mindset towards cultural resources. He wished to have an equal management of both natural and cultural resources, unlike previous superintendents such as Jack Neckels and Jack Stark who had "tipped the scales in favor of natural resources" during their management of the park.<sup>16</sup> With Martin's support, the new addition of cultural resources specialist, Katherine Wonson, and continued volunteer support, Grand Teton began to emphasize the stabilization, preservation, and interpretation of its cultural resources. The Lucas-Fabian Homestead and the White Grass Ranch were stabilized, repaired, and interpreted since these changes in park policy and local support. It is evident, through Grand Teton's history, that attitudes towards cultural resources have considerably changed. However, there are still many structures and histories that remain unprotected, in Grand Teton, and elsewhere in national parks. The primary cause is money, as many national parks budgets are stretched.<sup>17</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt National Park shares similarities with Grand Teton National Park's management history of cultural resources. It also shares similar struggles when it comes to modern issues concerning the preservation and interpretation of these resources. Although

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 179, 184-186.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 178, 187.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

cultural preservation now has representation within the park system, the histories of both parks reveal that the decision regarding these cultural resources are complex and difficult to resolve.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to Grand Teton and Theodore Roosevelt National Parks, Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin has a long history of human occupation and use. However, NPS management of the Lakeshore has decided to take a different direction regarding cultural resources. Emphasizing natural resources on the islands, NPS officials have decided to erase most of the islands' human history in order to preserve the natural resources of the land.

Native Americans used the islands that make up the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore for centuries. The Ojibwe regard Long Island as a sacred site. French traders and missionaries arrived at the islands in the 1600s, and Fort La Pointe located on Madeline Island was the center of the fur trade in the area through the 1830s. Euroamerican settlers of the Chequamegon Bay fished, farmed, and logged on the islands after the 1850s. Nature tourism also brought human visitors to the islands through activities such as kayaking, hiking, and camping. This extensive human history on the islands left behind an undeniable mark of human activity on the land.<sup>19</sup>

In 1970, the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore was created. With this designation came a management decision. The NPS decided to remove almost all visible signs of human activity, such as the fisherman's cabins, logging camps, and all other remnants of the previous economy on the land. The management at Apostle Islands allowed nature to return to the islands after long periods of intensive human use, a process which Apostle Islands historian James Feldman terms "rewilding."<sup>20</sup> Although some might see this as a victory of nature over past human use of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>19</sup> James Feldman, *A Storied Wilderness: Rewilding the Apostle Islands* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 6, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 14, 9.

land, Feldman argues that these rewilding landscapes are evidence of the “ongoing impact of human choices on natural processes and of natural conditions on human history.”<sup>21</sup> The landscapes represent history *and* nature, working together.

After the creation of the Apostle Islands Lakeshore, NPS officials elevated the protection of natural resources over that of cultural resources. They quickly drafted a resource management plan that aimed to return the islands to their prelogging conditions. Although wilderness designation for the lakeshore did not occur until 2004, the NPS still managed the Islands as if they were a designated wilderness. The NPS removed almost all evidence of previous human activity on the islands to create the appearance of pristine wilderness. Feldman argues that this policy creates a “deception—a wilderness without history.”<sup>22</sup>

The NPS has preserved some history at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, although it is limited. In 2001, after NPS planners initiated a study of wilderness suitability for the National Lakeshore, planners decided what historic sites would stay. The NPS decided to keep Sand Island’s Shaw/Hill farmstead and orchard trees and ditches, and the island’s West Bay Club site as historic sites. This is because both sites showed obvious signs of past human activity on the land, which would be difficult to erase. Some of the original lighthouses also still stand on the islands, and visitors can tour the structures. At Manitou Island, the NPS interprets the lives of the traveling fisherman, and park management also provides visitors with information on the quarries, logging camps, and farms that previously existed on the islands prior to its National Lakeshore designation. Although the park does manage and preserve some of its cultural resources, Feldman argues that it still reinforces a division between nature and culture. The

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 191, 192.

interpretation is limited and isolated throughout the lakeshore. In 2004, the NPS at the National Lakeshore decided to declare eighty percent of the islands' land wilderness.<sup>23</sup> Feldman argues that the attempts of the NPS to erase this history and to create the appearance of a pristine wilderness is problematic. The islands were logged, farmed, mined, camped on, and used for fishing. This is a history that cannot be removed or changed; it is a part of the island's history.<sup>24</sup>

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore Superintendent Krumenaker saw the NPS' 2004 decision emphasizing wilderness in a different way; as a balance of nature and history. The preservation of human history at the Sand and Basswood Islands, and an eighty percent wilderness designation at the lakeshore was praised by Superintendent Krumenaker. Krumenaker said the "park's embrace of its human history as a complement, rather than a competitor, to wilderness may be unique and hopefully heralds a new era in celebrating the integration of natural and cultural resource preservation in the national park system."<sup>25</sup> Although NPS management at the Lakeshore decided to preserve these aspects of the park's human history, Feldman argues that it needs to do more to preserve the history of the rewilding process, and the general human history of the land. This interpretation would link nature and culture, revealing the important relationships between nature and humans on the islands and how human choice continues to effect natural environments. Feldman explains that recognizing the histories of national parks and other wild places does not compromise the value of those places, but rather enhances one's understanding of human choices and their consequences.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 226-227.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 214, 223.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 231, 233.

The decisions made by the NPS at the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore show the complexity of the debate between natural and cultural resources. Although parks like Grand Teton and Theodore Roosevelt National Park have moved towards balancing the value of natural and cultural resources, other areas managed by the NPS have not, or have only slightly begun to compromise. The management at Apostle Islands reveals how difficult this decision is for modern NPS administrators, and how traditional attitudes that the primary mission of the NPS is the preservation of natural resources remains prominent today.

## **1.2. The Concept of Wilderness and Theodore Roosevelt National Park**

Some environmental historians, such as William Cronon, have argued that the idea of pristine wilderness is a cultural construct, and a historically inaccurate concept. Many nineteenth and twentieth century Americans believed wilderness to be the last places where civilization had not touched the Earth. However, according to critics like Cronon, this is far from the truth. Cronon described wilderness as a “human creation...a product of civilization.”<sup>27</sup> To eighteenth century Europeans, “wilderness” was “desolate,” “deserted,” even “barren.”<sup>28</sup> It had nothing to offer civilized people. In the nineteenth century, this concept of wilderness changed. Wilderness became sacred, often compared to the Garden of Eden.<sup>29</sup> In America, the national myth of the frontier convinced Euroamericans that by moving to the “unsettled lands of the frontier” they could leave civilization behind and reinvent the national character of the United States.<sup>30</sup> The mythic frontier had a masculine gender; here a man could become a “real man,” freed by the

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<sup>27</sup> William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1 (January 1996): 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

“feminizing tendencies of civilization.”<sup>31</sup> Men who often felt that masculinity was intimately connected to the frontier were often from elite classes. This group included Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>32</sup> These Americans feared that the frontier itself might be disappearing, but the frontier experience could be preserved if wilderness was preserved.<sup>33</sup>

This concept of frontier wilderness became a form of cultural imperialism, however, as Americans forcibly removed American Indian people from their ancient homes in order to preserve American notions of wilderness. The myth of wilderness as “virgin,” uninhabited land was incorrect. American Indian people had inhabited and used the land for hundreds or thousands of years. Now they were being removed from the land to create an “uninhabited wilderness,” places where Euroamericans could experience the “vanishing frontier.”<sup>34</sup> Historian Mark Spence explained that the “uninhabited wilderness” of the national parks had to be “created before it could be preserved.”<sup>35</sup> The American Indian people who had inhabited the land prior to the creation of the national parks were removed from their homelands and prohibited from living on or using the lands.

Although park officials may hope for and attempt to restore national parks to a state of “pristine wilderness,” it is not possible.<sup>36</sup> As is the case with Theodore Roosevelt National Park and many other areas deemed today as wilderness, American Indians have consciously shaped and used these landscapes throughout history. It is unlikely that there has been a long moment in

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>35</sup> Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999), 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 7.

American history when these environments were not directly being shaped by human activity.<sup>37</sup>

The archaeological record of the Badlands suggests that long term occupation of the land was impractical. Travel was made difficult by the steep terrain and slippery clay soils of the land. This made hunting and gathering in the Badlands difficult. Although the geography may have made long term occupation of the lands out of the question, it also made the area a significant spiritual site for pre-Columbian cultures. Tribal elders explained that the unique landforms, particularly the buttes, inspired these pre-Columbian people. They considered the buttes homes of animal spirits and traveled to the Badlands on vision quests or to conduct rituals. Although the Badlands were forbidding, the ecological diversity and geology attracted pre-Columbian people to the area for various reasons beside spiritual. The first settlers of the Badlands hunted animals for subsistence, gathered plants and water, and used clay to make paints.

Some artifacts have been found in Theodore Roosevelt National Park that indicate that the region has been inhabited for thousands of years. A spear point made of Knife River flint and several projectile points have been found dating to the Archaic Tradition (5,500 BCE-500 CE). Projectile points and cord-roughened pot shards found in the park indicate the presence of people from the Plains Woodland Tradition (1-1,200 CE). A variety of projectile points, pot shards, and the remains of a bison processing camp also show the presence of the pre-Columbian peoples in the Late Pre-Columbian or Plains Village Tradition. There have also been several sites found in the park that coincide with oral tradition dating to the Historic Period (1742-1880s CE). These include stone rings, a rock cairn, and four conical, timbered lodges. These lodges were most likely used by men for seasonal eagle trapping, and they still stand today. Several cultures during historic times utilized the Badlands and their natural resources. The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Crow

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<sup>37</sup> Feldman, *A Storied Wilderness*, 14-15.

used the Little Missouri Basin for bison hunting. The Blackfeet, Ojibwe, Cree, Atsina, and Dakota also traveled to western North Dakota in the early nineteenth century to hunt and trade.<sup>38</sup>

Since its creation in 1947, Theodore Roosevelt National Park has emphasized the cultural sites within the park as an essential aspect of its mission of preservation and interpretation. By preserving and interpreting the signs of human activity, the National Park Service management at TRNP joins a limited group of like-minded parks that promote the interpretation of human history and nature together to better understand the history of the land. TRNP, however, is somewhat unique in this aspect. Created to memorialize President Theodore Roosevelt's history in the Badlands and his contributions to the conservation of America's natural resources, TRNP would most likely not exist had it not been for the twenty-sixth president. Because of Roosevelt's significance as a President of the United States and as a powerful ally of the nation's natural resources, TRNP was created. The president's significance and history in the area became the emphasis of the park's preservation and interpretation. This includes his two ranches built in the 1880s, and their structural and archaeological remnants. The park officials at TRNP continue to preserve and interpret these two ranches in the park, placing them at equal value and interest as preserving and interpreting the natural history of the land. However, changes in NPS policy, funding, and management led to two different outcomes for these two ranch sites in the park, revealing the complexity of the NPS debate between nature and culture.

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<sup>38</sup> National Park Service, "Cultural History," Theodore Roosevelt National Park, 10 April 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/cultural-history.htm>.

## CHAPTER TWO. IN MEMORY OF A PRESIDENT

### 2.1. Creation of the Park

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is dedicated to the “preservation and public enjoyment of important historic, scenic, and natural resources.”<sup>39</sup> The park memorializes President Theodore Roosevelt for his contributions to conservation and preserves the natural resources that influenced Roosevelt’s actions and thoughts about environmental conservation. In addition, the park interprets the cattle ranching history of the nineteenth century. The historic resources in the park that relate to Theodore Roosevelt are primarily located in the Elkhorn and South units of the park. The Elkhorn unit is where Roosevelt once operated the Elkhorn ranch. The South unit contains Roosevelt’s Maltese Cross Cabin, his first ranch house in the Badlands. The North unit also contains historic resources including structures from the Civilian Conservation Corps, and traces of the Long X cattle trail.<sup>40</sup>

In 1921, Carl Olson, the owner of the Peaceful Valley Dude Ranch, now located in the South unit of the park, introduced a bill to Congress to establish Roosevelt Park. Congress, however, did not approve of the bill at the time.<sup>41</sup> Ranchers in the area were initially supportive of the park idea, believing that it would bring additional ranch hands to the area which would in turn provide opportunity for increased ranch profits. However, after learning about the proposed size of the park and the amount of grazing land that it would require, the ranchers became

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<sup>39</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan, Development Concept Plans, Land Protection Plan, Environmental Assessment* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 1986), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Chester L. Brooks and Ray H. Mattison, “Establishment of the Park,” in *Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands* (Medora, North Dakota: Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association, 1983).

adamantly opposed to the idea.<sup>42</sup> Drought and economic depression in the 1930s subsequently changed attitudes towards the land. Following the Great Depression annual income for farms in North Dakota fell, and many homestead claims in the Badlands were abandoned. A number of ranchers sought to sell out to private parties, but there were no private sector buyers interested in purchasing the “submarginal land.”<sup>43</sup> In 1934, under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Resettlement Administration purchased the lands to set up leased grazing and rehabilitation areas. Later that same year, an agreement to start a Roosevelt Regional Park Project was signed by the Resettlement Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the National Park Service (NPS), and the state of North Dakota. However, the amount of land purchased by the Resettlement Administration was too great for the State Historical Society, which was then responsible for managing North Dakota’s state parks. In 1935, the Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA) program purchased lands throughout the country which had been deemed unsuitable for agriculture. The Roosevelt Regional Park was purchased as a part of this program. In June of 1942, Congress placed the RDA lands under a list of reserves to be further studied for possible inclusion in the National Park System after management hesitation was made clear by the state.<sup>44</sup>

In the 1940s, debates began over whether the Badlands of North Dakota should be developed into a national wildlife refuge or a national park. Representative William Lemke argued against the land becoming a wildlife refuge because it had, in his opinion, always lacked abundant wildlife. Instead, he proposed that the lands be turned into a national park for their scenic value. Lemke’s proposition did not win, and in April 1946 the Roosevelt Recreation

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<sup>42</sup> David Harmon, *At the Open Margin: The NPS’s Administration of Theodore Roosevelt National Park* (Medora, North Dakota: Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association, 1986), 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

Demonstration Area became the Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge under the administration of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.<sup>45</sup> Newton Drury, Director of the NPS, called for a compromise with Lemke and other national park supporters, proposing the creation of Theodore Roosevelt National Monument, but Lemke would not give in. The National Park Service then proposed the creation of Theodore Roosevelt National Historical or National Memorial Park, reluctant to create an “inferior” national park that lacked the “scenic quality” that other national parks had.<sup>46</sup> Lemke agreed with this compromise, and Truman signed bill H.R. 731 into law on April 25, 1947 establishing Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park.<sup>47</sup> In 1947, Representative Lemke introduced a North Unit bill that would ensure the rancher’s support for the national memorial park. This bill forever reserved local ranchers the right to drive their stock through the park to railheads. On June 10, 1948, Congress approved of the addition of the North unit through public law 620 (62 Stat. 352).<sup>48</sup> This law also added land from the previous RDA lands, and land west of the Little Missouri River, which included the petrified forest. In March of 1956, public law 438 (70 Stat. 55) added the lands north of Medora to create the park headquarters.<sup>49</sup> Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Park was not officially designated a historical area until 1964, however early NPS staff at the park emphasized the significance of cultural resources. Only a limited amount of natural science monographs from the park were released prior to 1964, while several archaeological surveys and historic accounts of the park were completed during this time.<sup>50</sup> On November 10, 1978, after continued pressure from North

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10-11, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5, 21.

<sup>47</sup> The congressional bill became Public Law 38 (61 Stat. 52). See National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1986, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 24-26.

<sup>49</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1986, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Harmon, *At the Open Margin*, 44.

Dakota politicians and business interests, Congress officially changed the memorial park to “Theodore Roosevelt National Park”, establishing 29,920 acres of the park’s lands as wilderness.<sup>51</sup> Coinciding with this change in designation came a shift in park management to increasingly emphasize the natural resources of the park, with value still placed on the natural resources’ role in allowing individuals “the opportunity to experience” the Badlands “as Roosevelt once did.”<sup>52</sup>



Figure 2.1. *Theodore Roosevelt National Park Regional Map*. 2017. National Park Service, North Dakota.

<sup>51</sup> This designation was done under public law 95-625 (92 Stat. 3467) and (92 Stat. 3490). See Brooks and Mattison, “Establishment of the Park” and National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1986, 7.

<sup>52</sup> National Park Service, *1975 Statement of Management* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 1980 revision), 1.

## 2.2. Natural and Cultural Features of the Park

Theodore Roosevelt National Park is located in western North Dakota and consists of three units; the North, South, and Elkhorn units. It is the only national park in North Dakota. The park consists of various significant natural and cultural features. These features include East Entrance Station, Burning Coal Bed, Old Lamb Ranch, Beef Corral Bottom, Wild Canyon, Elkhorn Ranch Site, Johnson Plateau, Maltese Cross Cabin, Medora Overlook, and others.<sup>53</sup> The Badlands of the park contain colorful layers of geologic formations. Volcanoes, mountains, and glaciers created the landscape, depositing sediments across the land. Between seventy and forty thousand years ago, the Laramide Orogeny formed the Rocky Mountains in Montana and Wyoming. This mountain-building event created intense erosion, and eastward flowing streams brought the eroding sediments to western North Dakota. These sediments accumulated and deposited on the flood plains and swamps in North Dakota, creating the layers of sandstone, claystone, and siltstone that are visible in the Badlands.

Glaciers and volcanic ash also played a part in the creation of the Badlands. Volcanic ash from the creation of the Rocky Mountains accumulated in clay layers which eventually weathered into bentonite. Around three million years ago, glaciers redirected the Little Missouri River, eroding and sculpting the Badlands topography.<sup>54</sup> The North Dakota Badlands also

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<sup>53</sup> Chester L. Brooks and Ray H. Mattison, "Features in the Park," in *Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands* (Medora, North Dakota: Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> John P. Bluemle, *North Dakota's Geologic Legacy: Our Land and How it Formed* (Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Press, 2016), 67-69.

contain many fossils, including petrified trees, freshwater clams, alligators, turtles, crocodiles, snails, and the fossils of the extinct *Champsosaurus gigas*.<sup>55</sup>

The variety of flora and fauna are also significant features of the park. As of 2015, more than 186 types of birds can be found living in or passing through the park. Notable bird species in the park include wild turkeys, great-horned owls, western and eastern kingbirds, northern harriers, Baltimore orioles, woodpeckers, golden eagles, black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, white-throated sparrows, American goldfinches, sandhill cranes, warblers, swallows, flycatchers, juncos, and redpolls.<sup>56</sup> Large grazing animals including feral horses, elk, longhorn steer, bison, white-tail and mule deer, and pronghorn range in the park. Small grazers, the most common being the black-tailed prairie dog, share the range with the larger animals. Beaver, coyote, porcupine, chipmunks, mice, voles, and the desert cottontail rabbit still occupy the park's land as well. Several varieties of snakes and lizards also dwell in the park.<sup>57</sup> Apex predators, such as bears and wolves are primarily missing from the park.<sup>58</sup> The mountain lion is the only apex predator to currently live in the park, only recently returning to the area after hunting and changes in land use led to their near extinction by the 1890s.<sup>59</sup> Their absence creates

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<sup>55</sup> A pre-Columbian reptile, similar to a crocodile. See National Park Service, "Nature: Geologic Formations," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/geologicformations.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> National Park Service, "Nature: Birds," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/birds.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> National Park Service, "Nature: Animals," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/animals.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Large apex predators such as wolves and grizzly bears became locally extinct in the TRNP area in the 1800s. This was most likely due to overhunting of both the predators and their prey. See National Park Service, "Nature: Bison Management," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/bison-management.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Mountain lions began to return to the Badlands area in the 1950s. See Robert Seabloom, *Mammals of North Dakota* (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 2011), 111-112.

a need for additional park management and involvement that might not be as necessary in other national parks.<sup>60</sup> The park also contains over 400 species of plants, including sunflowers, asters, rabbitbrush, coneflowers, lilies, yucca, prairie roses, and prickly pears.<sup>61</sup> Over sixty species of exotic, or nonnative plants, have found their way to TRNP. These species include leafy spurge, spotted knapweed, Russian knapweed, Canada thistle, black henbane, absinth wormwood, and tamarisk or salt cedar. Several of the plants can cause substantial habitat damage. The leafy spurge, for example, is extremely competitive and displaces native plants in the park with its extensive root system.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 2.2. *Theodore Roosevelt Wilderness*. August 2009. Daniel Silva.  
National Park Service, North Dakota.

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<sup>60</sup> National Park Service, “Nature: Bison Management.”

<sup>61</sup> National Park Service, “Nature: Plants,” *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/plants.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> National Park Service, “Nature: Nonnative Species,” *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/nature/nonnativespecies.htm>.



Figure 2.3. *Prepare to be Petrified!* 2016. Laura Thomas.  
Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.



Figure 2.4. *Coyote with American Bison.* 2015. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.



Figure 2.5. *Bison with Calf*. 2015. Jeff Zylland. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park contains several sites of historical significance. Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch Site, Maltese Cross Cabin, Peaceful Valley Ranch, and Long X Trail are the most significant historic sites relating to the era of cattle ranching in the late 1800s.<sup>63</sup> The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) also built two picnic shelters and the River Bend Overlook shelter in the North Unit of the Park. The old East Entrance Station located in the South Unit of the park was also built by the CCC, although it is no longer used as an entrance. Long before the cattle ranching period, the northern Badlands were used by many American Indian peoples including the Hidatsa, Crow, and Mandan. Archaeological evidence found in the park boundaries have been dated to 5,500 BCE-500 CE, suggesting that American Indians used

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<sup>63</sup> National Park Service, "History & Culture: People," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/people.htm>.

the lands to hunt and gather other materials thousands of years prior to the creation of the park.<sup>64</sup> In 1864, war between the U.S. Army and the Sioux brought conflict into the northern Badlands, near modern day Theodore Roosevelt National Park.<sup>65</sup> The Sioux, familiar with the landscape of the Badlands, used the rugged, desolate terrain to their advantage. Although the Sioux were fighting against the superior weaponry of the U.S. Army, the knowledge of the Badlands' landscape allowed them to "mount a massive harassment campaign."<sup>66</sup> The Sioux attacked the Americans "from every point, cliff, hole, or cave" that they could find. The Lakota fought in the Badlands for "personal honor, revenge for the defeat at Killdeer Mountain, and driving the army out of their territory," and they succeeded at all three goals.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> National Park Service, "History & Culture: Cultural History," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/cultural-history.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> National Park Service, "History & Culture: The US Army and the Sioux," *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/the-us-army-and-the-sioux.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Paul N. Beck, *Soldiers, Sioux, and the Punitive Expeditions 1863-1864* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 222.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, 237.



Figure 2.6. *Longhorn Steer*. National Park Service.  
Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

The park maintains a small herd of longhorn steers in the North Unit as a historic demonstration herd. Longhorn steers were moved from Texas to new ranges on the Northern Great Plains via the Long X Trail in the late 1800s.



Figure 2.7. *East Entrance Station*. National Park Service.  
Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

## CHAPTER THREE. COWBOY, PRESIDENT, CONSERVATIONIST

### 3.1. Theodore Roosevelt: A Rancher, President, and Conservationist in the Making

Born on October 27, 1858, in New York City, Theodore Roosevelt entered the world with a privileged, elite status. His grandfather was wealthy, and the Roosevelt name was distinguished. When Roosevelt described his childhood story to others, he often led with his family's elite status, prideful of his origins. The Roosevelts were members of the New York elite. The family had history of leadership, power, and influence in the city for generations. After the American Revolution, the Roosevelt family had already achieved economic prominence, and they held on to that wealth and influence.<sup>68</sup>

Roosevelt's family also provided Theodore with important teachings that would help shape his life and political agendas early on. Roosevelt's father, Theodore Roosevelt Senior, known as "Thee," was a Christian, and taught the Roosevelt children that Jesus was a strong man physically, that he was muscular and full of stamina. Thee preached to his children that physical exercise and nature were forms of salvation. Thee believed that the strong, both physically and financially, had an obligation to help the poor, and he taught this to his children.<sup>69</sup> He took his children out into the countryside, teaching them to ride horses, camp, and engage in active sports such as tennis, fox hunting, and polo. Roosevelt remembered the time spent in the countryside favorably writing: "We children, of course, loved the country beyond anything. We disliked the city. We were always wildly eager to get to the country when spring came."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2002), 15-16, 21.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Autobiography of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 6-7.

As a child, Roosevelt's mother, Martha "Mittie" Bulloch Roosevelt, taught him about the military achievements of her grandfather, General Daniel Stewart, and her father Major James Stephens Bulloch. Stewart had fought in the American Revolution, and her father was a veteran of the Texas War for Independence. Mittie emphasized the courage, strength, adventurous and 'manly' qualities of these two men, with the utmost admiration held for the two of them. Listening to these stories, Roosevelt became enamored, leaving him yearning for a distinctive life of adventure. However, Roosevelt had a problem that prevented his dreams from becoming a reality as a child; he was physically weak.<sup>71</sup>

Roosevelt was a slender, frail-looking child. He suffered from asthma and near sightedness as a youth and felt uneasy about recalling his childhood. He described himself as a "sickly, delicate boy," that had to rely on others to take care of him during his asthma attacks.<sup>72</sup> In his autobiography, Roosevelt said that he had limited attendance at school as a youth because of his problems breathing, gaining most of his education under private tutors. Roosevelt's interest and passion for the natural world began in his childhood. At the age of ten, Roosevelt made his first trip to Europe, and he found most of the trip unenjoyable. The only real source of enjoyment on the trip, he explains, was the exploration of ruins or mountains.<sup>73</sup>

In his autobiography, Roosevelt describes his first realization of his true love for natural history. While walking down Broadway in New York City, he passed a market and quickly noticed a strange object. Spread out on a slab of wood was a dead seal. Roosevelt was instantly interested in the specimen.<sup>74</sup> He describes the experience as filling him with "every possible

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>72</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 11, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>74</sup> Darrin Lunde, *The Naturalist: Theodore Roosevelt, a Lifetime of Exploration, and the Triumph of American Natural History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2016), 9.

feeling of romance and adventure,” as he yearned for more information about the seal.<sup>75</sup> He asked where the seal was killed, then returned home only to become increasingly intrigued by the sight. The following day, Roosevelt returned to the market, delighted to see the seal was still there. He began taking measurements of the seal and recorded other observations in a notebook in order to write a natural history of his own.<sup>76</sup> Hoping to preserve the seal for his own curiosity and research, Roosevelt asked to take the seal home with him and was gifted the animal’s skull. It remained in his room, and later in his families’ back hall, beginning the collection that he and his cousins called the “Roosevelt Museum of Natural History.”<sup>77</sup>

Roosevelt’s interest in natural history, however, was older than the incident with the seal. As a young boy, Roosevelt read David Livingstone’s *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, which was published in 1857. In it, he read about Livingstone’s experiences with the wild; with African wildlife, giraffes, zebras, rhinos, lions, and the unique geographical features such as that of Victoria Falls. He also read books by Captain Mayne Reid, including *The Boy Hunters*, *Afloat in the Forest*, and *Wild Life*. Perhaps his most cherished book was gifted to him by his father after his discovery of Roosevelt’s passion for natural history. This was naturalists’ J.G. Wood’s *Homes without Hands*. He read the book over and over, and at seven years old it inspired him to write an essay titled “The Foregoing Ant” which he read aloud to his family.<sup>78</sup>

When Roosevelt was about thirteen years old, he began taxidermy lessons with John G. Bell, who had been a friend of John James Audubon, accompanying Audubon on a trip to the

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<sup>75</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Cutright, *Making of a Conservationist*, 5-6.

Upper Missouri in 1843.<sup>79</sup> This education, Roosevelt explains, spurred his interest in collecting and mounting his own specimens. It was that same summer that Roosevelt first received a gun and joined others on hunts. He continued to obtain and read various books on wildlife.<sup>80</sup> In the fall of 1876, Roosevelt entered Harvard University with full intent of becoming a natural historian, a “scientific man of the Audubon or Wilson” type.<sup>81</sup> However, from 1876 until his graduation in 1880, Roosevelt wrote that Harvard and other American colleges did not see natural history as a field. They believed biology to be a science that only took place in the laboratory, not out in nature.<sup>82</sup> Roosevelt decided to make a career change and enrolled at Columbia’s Law School.<sup>83</sup>

As a boy, and as an adult, Roosevelt never forgot the teachings of his father when it came to physical fitness and strength. He was fond of horseback-riding, boxing, walking, climbing, hunting, and working on a ranch. Even as Governor of New York and President of the United States, Roosevelt continued his exercise in the forms of wrestling and boxing. While in the White House, Roosevelt tried to get in his daily exercise in the afternoon. This exercise included tennis, riding, walking, and on occasion swimming Rock Creek or the Potomac River.<sup>84</sup>

On May 28, 1882, Roosevelt was a guest of honor and speaker at a meeting of the Free Trade Club of New York City. It is here that he first met H.H. Gorringer, a retired naval officer. Gorringer had recently returned from a trip to the Little Missouri region in Dakota Territory. The two instantly took to one another, discussing hunting prospects in the territory. Gorringer assured

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>80</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>83</sup> Dalton, *A Strenuous Life*, 75.

<sup>84</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 28, 30, 32-33.

Roosevelt that bison were still living in the area, and that Roosevelt could fulfill his aspiration to kill one himself. They planned to make a trip to the Little Missouri region together in the fall. Gorringer was unable to make the trip to the Dakota Territory with Roosevelt, but Roosevelt's desire to hunt a bison was so strong that he made the trip alone. On September 8, 1883, Roosevelt stepped off a Northern Pacific train and arrived in the small town of Little Missouri in the Dakota Territory Badlands.<sup>85</sup> When he arrived the only building structures nearby were the train station and the Pyramid Park Hotel. The next day after arrival, ranchman Joe Ferris, agreed to take Roosevelt out to visit his ranch known as the Maltese Cross Ranch, or Chimney Butte Ranch. Joe Ferris' brother, Sylvane, and William J. Merrifield were the other two owners of the Maltese Cross Ranch. Roosevelt spent the night at the ranch. The next morning the men set out for a bison-hunt. They headed south, towards Little Cannonball Creek, arriving at the home of Gregor and Lincoln Lang.

The ensuing bison-hunt was unpleasant in several ways. The weather was disagreeable, raining for one solid week. Day after day, Roosevelt insisted that the men go out and hunt despite the unagreeable weather. They went the entire week without seeing a single bison, riding through the downpour, up slippery slopes, and through wet mud. It was not until the end of the second week of hunting that Roosevelt got his bison. He was ecstatic, even while he was faced with the task of removing the large animal's skin and head in order to be sent back to New York for taxidermy. Although the hunting trip had been unpleasant, Roosevelt never got discouraged.

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<sup>85</sup> Cutright, *Making of a Conservationist*, 144-145.

In fact, he was the opposite, excited by the challenge.<sup>86</sup> At one point he exclaimed to Joe Ferris: “By Godfrey, but this is fun!”<sup>87</sup>

Roosevelt was so impressed by the trip that he made the decision to enter the cattle business. Having fallen in love with the Badlands, Roosevelt gave Bill Merrifield and Sylvane Ferris a check for \$14,000 in which to purchase stock.<sup>88</sup> Roosevelt was now the owner of Chimney Butte Ranch, or the Maltese Cross Ranch as it was known locally, named after the brand used on the ranch, an eight-pointed Maltese Cross. The ranch managers, Merrifield and Ferris, built a one and one-half story cabin at the ranch at Roosevelt’s request. This cabin became known as the Maltese Cross Cabin and it served as a temporary home for Roosevelt when he traveled to the area.<sup>89</sup>

On June 20, 1884, Roosevelt returned to the Little Missouri Valley for a second time. In a letter from June of that year, Roosevelt wrote to his older sister, Anna or “Bamie,” revealing to her that also he had experienced a loss of “25 head to wolves, cold, etc.,” but that his herd was in “admirable shape.”<sup>90</sup> He also provided Merrifield and Ferris with an additional \$26,000 to purchase one thousand more head of cattle. He then purchased property thirty-five miles downstream from the town of Little Missouri, where he would build his second ranch and home which he called Elkhorn ranch. Roosevelt had inherited \$125,000 from his late father, and he had used this money to purchase the land and cattle.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

<sup>87</sup> Hermann Hagedorn, *Roosevelt in the Badlands* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 36.

<sup>88</sup> Cutright, *Making of a Conservationist*, 148.

<sup>89</sup> National Park Service, “Places: Maltese Cross Cabin,” *Theodore Roosevelt National Park*, April 10, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/maltese-cross-cabin.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> Elting E. Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), Vol. 1, 73-74.

Between 1884 and 1892, Roosevelt often traveled between the Dakotas and New York City. After spending time in the Badlands, getting to learn the land, its seasons, and wildlife for himself, Roosevelt published his observations in three volumes: *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1884), *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888), and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893).<sup>91</sup> Readers and critics of the books were excited by their contents, impressed by Roosevelt's accounts of the West.<sup>92</sup>

Roosevelt found emotional healing through his experiences in the desolate and solitude landscapes of the Badlands after the death of his mother and first wife.<sup>93</sup> Hunting in this landscape was one of his favorite pastimes. In 1884, Roosevelt successfully hunted his first pronghorn. After an easy shot, Roosevelt, with "wild enthusiasm," broke out into a victory dance and shouted "I got him! I got him!" to his hunting partner Lincoln Lang.<sup>94</sup> Roosevelt gutted the animal himself, taking a long route back to his Maltese Cross ranch. Roosevelt described his experiences hunting pronghorns in his first book *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*. The pronghorn, an incredibly fast animal, created an exciting chase. Roosevelt said that the "number of cartridges spent compared to the number of pronghorn killed was enormous," due to the animal's swiftness, and that the "fun and excitement" of the chase were the main objects of the hunt, and the killing of the game was of secondary importance to him and his friends.<sup>95</sup> The glory of a successful hunt and the beautiful surrounding landscape of North Dakota filled his heart with joy. The Badlands were "always the same" to Roosevelt, filling him with feelings of seclusion,

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<sup>91</sup> Cutright, *Making of a Conservationist*, 150-151.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>93</sup> Lunde, *The Naturalist*, 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>95</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), 203.

vastness, and fascination. He described the landscape as a “boundless” prairie of “gentle, rolling slopes” which “roll in a succession as interminable as that of the waves of the ocean.”<sup>96</sup> He said, “as far as the eye can see there is no break...Nowhere else does one seem so far off from all mankind.”<sup>97</sup> The quiet solitude of the Badlands, the hours spent in silence allowed him time to reflect on his sorrows. It also allowed him to find a new source of excitement, joy, and happiness.<sup>98</sup>

Roosevelt continued to write about his hunting experiences in his two later published books, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* and *The Wilderness Hunter*. In *Ranch Life*, he describes his experiences hunting round-horned elk, big-horn sheep, and the “white-antelope goat” in the Rocky Mountains to the West. The round-horned elk and white goat were each given a separate chapter in his book. The described round-horned elk hunt occurred only thirty-five miles from one of his ranch houses in the Badlands. Roosevelt vividly expressed his enthusiasm for the hunt through his exploration the red scoria buttes and grassy hills of the surrounding landscape.<sup>99</sup> The chase of the prey, the “nerve, daring, and physical hardihood” required by the sport, and the time spent exploring the “timbered slopes of the Rockies,” the buttes and rolling hills of the Badlands, and the isolated landscapes of the American West, convinced him of the significance and value of the frontier.<sup>100</sup> The West, particularly the Badlands, had left a significant imprint on Roosevelt’s mind and heart.

Roosevelt’s ranching life came to an end in Dakota Territory after the harsh winter of 1886-1887. The severe winter season killed thousands of cattle on Roosevelt’s ranch, losing him

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Lunde, *The Naturalist*, 122.

<sup>99</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (New York, 1899), 147-148.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 186.

about \$50,000. Although his losses were great, Roosevelt still looked upon his time in the Little Missouri area with fondness. In his autobiography he wrote: “I do not believe there ever was any life more attractive to a vigorous young fellow than life on a cattle-ranch in those days. It was a fine, healthy life, too; it taught a man self-reliance, hardihood, and the value of instant decision—in short, the virtues that out to come from life in the open country. I enjoyed the life to the full.”<sup>101</sup>

Although his time in the Badlands as a rancher was finished, he never forgot his experiences there. William Roscoe, a friend of Roosevelt’s, said that his time in the Badlands “imparted to him also a knowledge which was to prove most precious to him in the unforeseen future. For it taught him the immense diversity of the people, and consequently of the interests, of the United States. It gave him a national point of view.”<sup>102</sup> The Badlands played a significant role in Roosevelt’s political career.

After Roosevelt spent three weeks hunting alone in the Badlands in 1887, seeing little wildlife, he became dedicated to wildlife conservation. He drew support from wealthy and influential friends and wildlife experts to create an organization with George B. Grinnell that promoted big-game conservation. Called the Boone and Crockett Club, it was the first organization created specifically to develop conservation legislation. In January 1888, the organization named Roosevelt its president. The club supported state legislation that protected wildlife and wildlife habitat and played a significant role in the passage of the 1891 federal Forest Reserve Act, which authorized the president to create federal forest reserves. The club

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<sup>101</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 60.

<sup>102</sup> William Roscoe Thayer, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1919), 68.

also advocated legislation which punished poachers and national park violators, which culminated in the passing of the National Park Protective Act in 1894.<sup>103</sup>

In 1898, Roosevelt was elected governor of New York. He brought his conservationist attitude with him into office. He launched an investigation into the state's conservation work and set plans to improve the state's protection of its natural resources. In 1900, he ran as William McKinley's vice-presidential candidate for the Republican party. When McKinley was assassinated in September of 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became president. Once again, he brought his conservationist agenda with him to the office. He created the first national wildlife refuge, then added fifty more, he quadrupled the size of the national forest system to two hundred million acres, and signed five more national parks into law. He also supported the creation of the U.S. Forest Service.<sup>104</sup> Roosevelt's upbringing and his interest in natural resources, led him to the last remaining wilderness areas in the country. Had he not gone west and experienced the wilderness as he did in the Badlands, he might not have developed his conservation ethic. Roosevelt historian Robert J. Moore argues that Roosevelt's "commitment to conserving our natural resources was conceived and born during 3½ years (1884-1887) of ranching and traveling in the Dakota and Montana Territories."<sup>105</sup> In later years, Roosevelt wrote on the Badlands saying, "I owe more than I can ever express to the West, which of course means to the men and women I met in the West."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Roger L. Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands: A Young Politician's Quest for Recovery in the American West* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 2011), 245-246.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>106</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 76.



Figure 3.1. *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

## CHAPTER FOUR. CONSTRUCTING A LEGACY

### 4.1. History of the Maltese Cross Ranch and Cabin

Theodore Roosevelt first arrived in the Badlands at a significant turning point in history. In the 1870s, the American Indian Wars had reduced the strength of the Lakota and Plains Indians. This made Euroamerican settlement in Dakota Territory possible, as it was now safe enough for settlers to make their way across the state to the western Badlands area. By 1880, the Northern Pacific Railroad made its way to the Little Missouri River and had even crossed it. The growth of the railroad industry served as a catalyst for settlement in the Little Missouri Valley. Five months before Theodore Roosevelt first arrived in the valley, the 24-year-old Antoine Amedee-Marie-Vincent-Amat-Manca de Vallambrosa, the Marquis de Mores, arrived in the Badlands with an inexhaustible ambition. The Marquis hoped to build a meat processing plant in the valley from where he would ship processed beef directly to the east in refrigerated train cars, and then sell to slaughterhouses in Chicago. As soon as the Marquis appeared in the Badlands, so did other entrepreneurs, although they were of less respectable backgrounds. Saloonkeepers, prostitutes, gamblers, and gunmen also made their way to the valley hoping to make a profit off the Marquis' ambition.

In April 1883, the Marquis declared the birth of new town, which he named "Medora" in honor of his wife, Medora von Hoffman. Eager to begin his new business, the Marquis quickly ordered car loads of building materials, and hired the masons, construction crew members, and carpenters necessary to begin construction. He built housing for his new employees, as well as a general store, a hotel, and an office for his new company. He also invested in a new spur track to connect his new meatpacking plant to the mainline of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Businessmen located on the west side of the river quickly migrated across the banks to Medora,

excited by the new prospects for profitmaking. The meatpacking plant was operating the first week of October 1883, only six months after the Marquis first arrived in the Badlands. The plant cost the Marquis \$250,000.<sup>107</sup> Roosevelt's ranching prospects might not have happened or been as successful had these circumstances not existed prior to his arrival in the Badlands.

During his first trip to the Badlands, Roosevelt and local ranchman Joe Ferris spent the first night of the hunting trip at the Maltese Cross ranch. The ranch, as mentioned earlier, was owned by Joe Ferris' brother, Sylvane, and Sylvane's friend Bill Merrifield. The Ferris brothers and Merrifield had first met in Fargo, Dakota Territory, in 1881 while working on a bonanza farm in the Red River Valley. In 1881, the trio decided to move west together to the Little Missouri Valley. The three men arrived in the west on the very first Northern Pacific train to the Badlands. After arriving, they worked on various jobs to save enough money to purchase a small herd of cattle and a few horses. The men also took in one hundred and fifty head of cattle on shares from ranchers Wadsworth and Hawley. With these cattle, Sylvane Ferris and Bill Merrifield established the Maltese Cross Ranch, located seven miles south of the later established Medora. They selected a Jerusalem Cross, which was mistaken for a Maltese Cross, as their brand.<sup>108</sup>

With winter soon upon the trio, the men hurried to construct a log cabin on the east bank of the Missouri River, which would serve as their living quarters on the new ranch. The cabin, built in a stockade style with the wood logs laid vertically, was simple and unrefined. The floor and roof were covered in dirt, the joints between the logs were chinked with mud. The men built a one-room cabin, furnished simplistically with one table, mismatched chairs, a cook stove, and

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<sup>107</sup> Rolf Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches: The Maltese Cross and the Elkhorn* (Medora, ND: Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation, 2015), 15, 17.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 21.

three sleeping bunks. The cabin provided little protection against the weather and was heavily infested with fleas and other insects and rodents.<sup>109</sup> Roosevelt spent his first night in the Badlands laying on that dirt floor, with blankets that he had brought with him from New York.<sup>110</sup>

Gregor Lang, Roosevelt's guide and host during his first bison hunting trip in the west, had a major influence on Roosevelt's decision to go into the cattle business. Every night of the hunting trip, Roosevelt and Lang talked late into the night about the subject of ranching and the Badlands. Roosevelt fell in love with the Badlands, he believed it to be the last frontier left in America. Roosevelt felt that the west was still "the Wild West" in those days. It was a land of "vast silent spaces, of lonely rivers, and plains where the wild game stared at the passing horseman," where he learned to enjoy "life to the full."<sup>111</sup> Roosevelt informed Lang of his desire to invest in a ranch during his hunting trip. He even proposed a partnership to Lang, asking Lang to take in a herd of cattle from Roosevelt on share. Lang did not accept Roosevelt's offer, feeling his loyalties remained with Sir John Pender who had hired him to do investigative work in the Little Missouri Valley. Lang suggested that Roosevelt speak with Sylvane Ferris and Bill Merrifield about the opportunity. On September 18, 1883, Ferris and Merrifield met with Roosevelt and quickly accepted his business proposal. Roosevelt purchased an initial herd of four hundred head of cattle and offered to buy out the Wadsworth cattle that Ferris and Merrifield were running on shares. A day later, the men drafted a contract, and Roosevelt wrote them a \$14,000 check. Roosevelt was now in the ranching business.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Mike Thompson, *The Travels and Tribulations of Theodore Roosevelt's Cabin* (San Angelo, TX: Laughing Horse Enterprises, 2004), 3.

<sup>110</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 21, 23.

<sup>111</sup> Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 58, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 23, 25, 29, 31.

After the business deal had been finalized, Roosevelt spent the next few days surveying the Maltese Cross ranch, familiarizing himself with his new purchase. Roosevelt was not impressed by the living accommodations at the ranch, and prior to his departing the Badlands, he instructed Sylvane Ferris and Merrifield to build a new ranch house. On September 23, 1883, Roosevelt wrote a letter to his wife, Alice. In the letter, Roosevelt wrote that he “carefully” examined the country “with reference to its capacity for stock raising,” and that he became convinced that there was a profit to be made in the cattle business.<sup>113</sup> He was set on entering the business.

Several months after Roosevelt’s decision to enter the cattle business, tragedy struck his household. After giving birth to their first baby, Alice Roosevelt became sick, as did Roosevelt’s mother, Mittie. On Valentine’s Day, 1884, Mittie Roosevelt died of typhoid fever, and Alice Lee died of Bright’s disease.<sup>114</sup> Roosevelt was devastated. In his diary he made a large “X” and wrote, “the light is gone out of my life.”<sup>115</sup>

A few months later, in June 1884, Roosevelt returned to Medora, no doubt searching for solace in the land that he loved. Medora was now a booming town, with eighty-four buildings. The Northern Pacific Railroad now made its stop at the Medora depot, rather than Little Missouri’s depot, and the Marquis’ meatpacking business and Hotel de Mores were up and running. Roosevelt headed to the Maltese Cross to find that his cattle and ranch were prospering.

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<sup>113</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, letter to Alice Lee Roosevelt, 28 September 1883, Alice Roosevelt Longworth Family Papers, 1878-1918, MS Am 1541.9, Harvard University Library.

<sup>114</sup> Alice ultimately died of kidney failure.

<sup>115</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, Personal Diary of Theodore Roosevelt, 14 February 1884, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

During the preceding winter, Ferris and Merrifield had also been successful in constructing a new ranch house for Roosevelt.<sup>116</sup>

The new ranch house, known as the Maltese Cross Cabin, was a 17' x 24' cabin, one and a half stories tall, made out of pine rather than the usual cottonwood that most ranchers in the area used. The cabin was much more refined than the original structure built on the ranch. The new structure had a root cellar for storage, wooden floors, glass-paned windows, factory-cut cedar shingles on the roof, and mortar was used for the chinking between the logs. The cabin had a high-pitched roof, which was designed as a storage area and sleeping quarters for the ranch hands. However, the inhabitants quickly found the area much too hot during the summer months and too cold in the winter months for sleeping. The main floor had three separate rooms, a living room, bedroom, and a kitchen. Roosevelt furnished the living room with a dining table and chairs, a book cupboard, a potbelly stove, and a rocking chair. The bedroom had a homemade bed, a dresser, a washstand, a chair, a small table, and a bookshelf. Roosevelt used sheets on his bed rather than the wool blanket bedrolls used by most of the cowboys in the area. He also had a collapsible rubber bathtub.<sup>117</sup> The kitchen had a cast-iron stove, some shelves, and a worktable.<sup>118</sup>

The cabin was built with pines from a failed business endeavor, something which Roosevelt was unaware of until his presidency. The pine logs had first been destined to be railroad ties for the new Northern Pacific Railroad in the Little Missouri Valley. E.H. Bly, a proprietor of the Sheridan House in Bismarck, and his crew spent eight months cutting the timber

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<sup>116</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 41.

<sup>117</sup> Thompson, *Travels and Tribulations*, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 41.

in the Short Pine Hills near the Black Hills, 125 miles south of Medora.<sup>119</sup> Bly built a log boom across the Little Missouri River south of Medora to catch and hold the logs that his crews had cut in the Short Pine Hills. Due to fluctuating floodwaters, the boom eventually burst, leaving many logs to wash up on sandbars and banks along the river. Bly quit the job after the major losses. The project failure for Bly ended up being a treasure for Ferris and Merrifield. There were a number of logs that had washed up on the shores of the Little Missouri River near the Maltese Cross property, and Ferris decided to use the pre-cut timber for building the Maltese Cross Cabin. Roosevelt did not find out the source of the cabin's timber until years after the construction, when he read about it in a story in the *New-York Tribune*.<sup>120</sup> In 1904, Sylvane Ferris gave an account of the incident to the *Bismarck Daily Tribune*. He told the newspaper that Roosevelt must have thought that the men worked quickly and diligently in order to have the cabin up and running by the time Roosevelt returned to the ranch. If Roosevelt had any suspicions about the building of the cabin, Ferris reported, he never communicated them. Ferris said that "No one mentioned the matter to him because we all knew the logs would have to be returned and new ones hewed if he knew how the material for his cabin had been procured. We never stuck a lick of work in the logs...but the President didn't know it."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *The Bismarck Tribune*, 28 May 1880, 14 January 1881, 25 March 1881, 8 April 1881.

<sup>120</sup> Thompson, *Travels and Tribulations*, 4.

<sup>121</sup> "Roosevelt Cabin Built of Stray Logs Intended for the Northern Pacific Railroad," *The Bismarck Tribune*, 18 August 1904.



Figure 4.1. *Historic Maltese Cross Cabin*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota. Sylvane Ferris and S.N. Lebo pose in front of the Maltese Cross Cabin. Lebo was a rancher with Theodore Roosevelt in the 1880s.

In the 1880s, the range claimed by the Maltese Cross Ranch encompassed the four miles of riverfront on both sides of river, and the land east and west of the river for fifteen miles, a total of around one hundred and twenty square miles. However, tensions quickly arose over the claimed range land. Before Roosevelt's return to the area in the spring season of 1884, the Marquis de Mores ordered his ranch foreman to drive fifteen hundred head of cattle onto a superior section of grazing land across the river from the Maltese Cross Ranch, intending to put a permanent claim to the grazing site. The claim on the land, which laid within the four miles of river range claimed by Roosevelt, quickly received the attention of Ferris and Merrifield. The two men confronted the foreman about the issue, and he refused to budge. He replied "I've got

my orders from the Marquis to keep the cattle here. That's all there is to it."<sup>122</sup> Angered by this, Ferris and Merrifield had planned to stampede the cattle had the Marquis not ordered the removal of the cattle. Although it was late at night, Ferris and Merrifield rode to Medora to confront the Marquis himself. They found the Marquis in his office, explained the issue to him, and the Marquis proposed a compromise. He offered to purchase three weeks of grazing rights on the land for fifteen hundred dollars. Ferris and Merrifield refused the offer, and the Marquis ordered his employees to remove the cattle off the land.<sup>123</sup>

On June 17, 1884, a week after he arrived back in the Badlands, Roosevelt wrote to his sister Anna that he was having a "glorious time" on his ranch, and that business had been very successful. Because of the ranch's success, and the fact that the country continued to "grow" on him, Roosevelt also made plans to expand his ranching operations in the Badlands.<sup>124</sup> In fact, the grief-stricken Roosevelt had already thought about the prospects of expanding his ranching business prior to June 1884. Only three weeks after the double funeral of his wife and mother in February, Roosevelt made plans for an expanded operation in the West. In March, Roosevelt wrote to his old Maine hunting guides, William "Bill" Sewall and Sewall's nephew Wilmot Dow, proposing a ranching venture with the two of them. The following April, Sewall stopped at New York to visit Roosevelt, and the two discussed the cattle business further.<sup>125</sup> After the successful winter season at the Maltese Cross Ranch, Roosevelt decided to increase his investment in ranching. He gave Ferris and Merrifield a twenty-six-thousand-dollar check, which was to be put forth to start a new ranch in the Badlands. With the new investment, Roosevelt

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<sup>122</sup> Hermann Hagedorn, *Roosevelt in the Bad Lands* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 84.

<sup>123</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 80-81.

<sup>124</sup> Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 73-74.

<sup>125</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 90.

now brought his total cash overhead in the ranching business to \$40,000.<sup>126</sup> In order to finish the deal, Roosevelt, Sylvane Ferris, and Bill Merrifield rode to the Lang's to have Gregor Land draw up a contract. The men signed the contract on June 12, 1884. That same day, Roosevelt spoke to Lincoln Lang, Gregor's son, about his desire to hunt antelope and to make a buckskin suit.<sup>127</sup> Roosevelt declared the buckskin hunting suit to be "the most picturesque and distinctively national dress ever worn in America."<sup>128</sup> Lang told Roosevelt about Mrs. Maddox who lived twenty-five miles east of Lang's cabin. She sewed first-class buckskin suits. Lang and Roosevelt rode up to her place, while hunting antelope along the way. After their successful journey to Mrs. Maddox's home, Roosevelt shot his first pronghorn while on his way back to Lang's cabin. Roosevelt was ecstatic, the hunt and his new buckskin suit renewed his confidence.<sup>129</sup>

Roosevelt rode back to the Maltese Cross on June 17, 1884. A few days after his return, with a renewed personal confidence, Roosevelt left for a week long solo hunting trip. He saw the trip as a test, telling his sister Anna, "I wanted to see if I could do perfectly well without a guide, and I succeeded beyond my expectations. I shot a couple antelope and deer, and missed a great many more. I felt absolutely free as a man could feel...One day I would canter hour after hour over the level green grass, or through miles of wild rose thickets, all in bloom, on the next I would be amidst the savage desolation of the Badlands; with their dreary plateaus, fantastically shaped buttes and deep winding canyons. I enjoyed the trip greatly."<sup>130</sup> Roosevelt's confidence only continued to soar with the close of the hunting trip, and with the success of the Maltese Cross Ranch. He was now ready to create his second ranch in the Badlands.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>128</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 55.

<sup>129</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 91-93.

<sup>130</sup> Hagedorn, *Roosevelt in the Bad Lands*, 105-106.

In July 1884, Roosevelt, Sewall, and Dow left New York together to head to Medora, their new joint venture in the Badlands. While the men left for Medora, Merrifield and Ferris left for Minnesota to purchase cattle for the new ranch.<sup>131</sup> In order to break Sewall and Dow in slowly to their new position, Roosevelt had a hundred head of the herd sent to the new ranch as practice for the new men. A local herder named Captain Robins helped the men during their first days as ranchers. Because the shorthorns that the men brought in were new to the ranch, Robins put them on “close herd” to keep them from wandering off. The men kept the herd near the new ranch house on a square mile of land walled in with cliffs. Each day the men drove the herd out of nearby valleys where they had been grazing and bedded them by the chosen spot. The men took shifts riding around the herd throughout the night. Roosevelt also joined in the work, making it the first real work he did on either of his ranches.<sup>132</sup> The Elkhorn Ranch, forty miles north of the Maltese Cross Ranch, was now up and running.<sup>133</sup>

#### **4.2. History of the Elkhorn Ranch**

Theodore Roosevelt’s first survey of the land on which he intended to build his new ranch revealed that the land had already been occupied by a hunter. The hunter built a small log hut only a few miles south of where Roosevelt planned to build his own ranch house. In order to settle any land disputes, Roosevelt paid the man four hundred dollars, although the hunter also had no legal title to the property, only “range rights.”<sup>134</sup> In early August 1884, Roosevelt gained possession of the property and he began to explore the ranch more closely. While exploring his new ranch land, Roosevelt came across two sets of elk antlers. Two bulls had locked their antlers

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<sup>131</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 95, 106.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>133</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt’s Ranches*, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Water rights or grazing rights on the land.

together in a fight for supremacy, and unable to free themselves they perished on the spot.

Roosevelt was so inspired by the sight, he decided to name his new ranch the “Elkhorn Ranch.”<sup>135</sup>

Roosevelt soon returned to the Maltese Cross Ranch after exploring the new Elkhorn land. After visiting the Maltese ranch, Roosevelt headed once again back to the Elkhorn. During his absence, Dow had overheard a discussion between two cowboys about a threat made against Sewall, Roosevelt, and himself. A man from Medora, named E.G. Paddock, threatened to shoot Roosevelt, Sewall, and Dow. Once Roosevelt heard of the threat, he turned his horse around and traveled another thirty-five miles back to Medora to confront Paddock. Roosevelt rode up to Paddock’s home, knocked on his door and said, “I understand you have threatened to shoot me on sight and I have come to see when you want to begin the killing.”<sup>136</sup> Paddock was caught off guard, and replied that he must have been misquoted and that he had made no such threat. There the issue ended. However, this was not the only threat that Roosevelt received concerning his new ranch.

Only a few weeks earlier, at the beginning of October, the Marquis de Mores wrote to Roosevelt informing him of his claim to the range. The Marquis claimed that he had stocked the Elkhorn ranch with twelve thousand sheep the summer of 1883, which constituted a claim on the land. However, the Marquis chose a poor breed of sheep which could not withstand the harsh Dakota winters, and all had died. Roosevelt responded that he had found some dead sheep on the property, but that he did not believe that their corpses established any claim on the land.<sup>137</sup> The Marquis did not respond. A few days later, on October 7, 1884, Roosevelt departed for New

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<sup>135</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt’s Ranches*, 69.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-71.

<sup>137</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 113.

York only to find that in his absence the conflicts with Paddock and the Marquis had not been resolved. When Sewall was writing a letter to his brother, a half-dozen men including Paddock, the Marquis' right-hand man, surrounded the dugout at the Elkhorn Ranch. The men fired their guns outside of the cabin. Sewall, unsure of what to do, offered the men some bread, baked beans, and coffee. Paddock and his men dined with Sewall and loved the food. They asked for more. After the dinner, the party rode off and the incident ended. Roosevelt and Paddock later became friends, with Roosevelt hiring Paddock to deliver building materials to the Elkhorn.<sup>138</sup>

Roosevelt returned to the Badlands on November 16, 1884. He traveled to the Elkhorn Ranch where he assisted Sewall and Dow in cutting timber for the new ranch house. The men spent three days together, cutting down cottonwood trees in the area. On November 19, Roosevelt selected the spot for the Elkhorn Ranch house. He then returned to the Maltese Cross Ranch where he remained for a month, waiting for Sylvane Ferris to return from the Black Hills with newly purchased horses. While he waited, Roosevelt hunted, explored, and worked on his book, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*. He was, however, unable to make much progress on his book. After writing just a few thousand words Roosevelt gave up on the project until his return to New York.<sup>139</sup>

Bill Sewall and Wilmot Dow's first house at the Elkhorn Ranch was a dugout, carved into the western banks of the Little Missouri River. Located only a few feet from the future Elkhorn Ranch house, the dugout was small, only twelve feet by fourteen feet. The eastern wall facing the river was exposed with no walls. The interior was fixed with a couple bunks for

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<sup>138</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 71.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, 73.

sleeping, and a small stove. The roof of the dugout had a low gable which was covered in sod and scoria.<sup>140</sup>

With their living quarters settled, the men continued to work on the Elkhorn Ranch house while Roosevelt returned to the east. The men continued to cut cottonwood trees for the house. The process of preparing just one log was strenuous. After cutting the timber, the men stripped the trees of their bark, cut the timber to length, and dragged the logs to the building site. The logs then had to be cut square on all four sides. The project was all done by hand, with the help of some horses. Before Sewall and Dow could begin construction, however, an even more arduous task faced them. The men had to lay the foundation stones. They selected large sandstone boulders, the flattest that they could find, and dragged them to the building site. They then had to lever the boulders into their final position.<sup>141</sup> The harsh weather added difficulty to the entire building process, as the men worked throughout the winter months to finish the house.<sup>142</sup>

The men were able to take advantage of the natural resources around them for some of the building materials for the new ranch house, but most of the material was shipped from Minneapolis to Medora, and then brought to the site. By February 1885, the roof and the walls of the house were complete. Sewall and Dow also had other projects underway on the ranch. In addition to the house, the pair built a blacksmith shop, a utility shed, a barn, a cattle shed, a chicken coop, horse and cow corrals, fences, a well, and a privy. The men built the blacksmith shop right next to their dugout, making it easy and efficient for completing projects on the ranch. Wilmot Dow was given the responsibility of blacksmithing.<sup>143</sup> Near to the cow and horse corrals,

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>142</sup> Louis Torres, *Theodore Roosevelt National Park Historic Structure Report* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 1980), 58.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 57, 67-70.

on a small piece of land, was the vegetable garden, and next to that was a larger piece of pasture land with water.

The Elkhorn Ranch house was completed in the spring of 1885. It was much more elaborate than the small cabin at the Maltese Cross Ranch and was unique to the Badlands. Roosevelt called the new house his “home ranch house,” but the Maltese Cross Ranch remained his ranching headquarters.<sup>144</sup> When Roosevelt returned to the Badlands in April 1885, he moved into his new home.<sup>145</sup> The house was a one-story structure, made of cottonwood logs. A center hallway ran north and south through the home, dividing the house into eight rooms. Roosevelt’s bedroom was in the southeast corner of the structure, across from a spacious room with a large fireplace which served as Roosevelt’s study and gathering place. Dow constructed the andirons for the fireplace from a steel rail he found floating down the Little Missouri River attached to a yellow pine beam. The fireplace itself had been built by a traveling Swedish mason.<sup>146</sup> Roosevelt described his time by the fireplace writing, “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>147</sup> On the front of the house, facing the river, Sewall and Dow had built a veranda. Roosevelt also mentioned in his letters that he had a separate reading room in the house where he did most of his reading and writing.<sup>148</sup>

Many of the interior furnishings of the Elkhorn Ranch house were similar to Roosevelt’s home at Sagamore Hills. The large fireplace in the ranch home was comparable to his home in

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>145</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 163.

<sup>146</sup> Torres, *Historic Structure Report*, 61-62.

<sup>147</sup> Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips*, 16.

<sup>148</sup> Torres, *Historic Structure Report*, 61-62.

New York. The book shelves aligning the walls of the ranch home were also a personal touch, as Roosevelt cherished his many books. The general size of the ranch house, fairly unique to the Badlands, recalls his affluent lifestyle and his admiration for the privacy and basic comforts that he had become acclimated to in his New York life.<sup>149</sup>



Figure 4.2. *Elkhorn Ranch Verandah*. National Park Service.  
Sigamore Hill National Historic Site.

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



Figure 4.3. *Elkhorn stable*. National Park Service. Sagamore Hill National Historic Site.

Roosevelt had a fondness for the veranda on the front of his Elkhorn house. He described it as a “pleasant place in the summer evenings when a cool breeze stirs along the river and blows in the faces of the tired men, who loll back in their rocking-chairs (what true American does not enjoy a rocking-chair?), book in hand—though they do not often read the books, but rock gently to and fro, gazing sleepingly out at the weird-looking buttes opposite, until their sharp outlines grow indistinct and purple in the after-glow of the sunset.”<sup>150</sup>

Bill Sewall’s daughter claimed in the 1950s that a cellar existed beneath the ranch house which Roosevelt used as a dark room for processing his own photographs. Roosevelt’s photographs proved useful in affirming the presence of the structures described in his and Sewall’s writings. One example of the value of Roosevelt’s photographs is with the Elkhorn Ranch’s cow shed. Keeping milk cows was unusual for most ranches in the Badlands, but the

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<sup>150</sup> Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, 16.

Elkhorn Ranch did keep several cows. There are multiple references to cows and milk uses on the ranch, but little mention of a cow shed. In fact, Roosevelt only once alluded to a cow shed existing on the property. A photograph taken of the Elkhorn Ranch, most likely by Roosevelt, shows another structure to the east of the stables which was most likely the cow shed.

Roosevelt's photographs helped piece together the clues left behind, in order to help historians better understand the history of the site.<sup>151</sup>

Due to the success of Roosevelt's cattle through the winter of 1884-1885, Roosevelt sent Bill Merrifield to Minnesota to purchase another fifteen hundred head of cattle. In April of 1885, Roosevelt sent Sewall, Dow, and Sylvane Ferris to Minnesota to help Bill Merrifield ship the cattle to Medora. Ferris and Merrifield took five hundred head and led them south to the Maltese Cross ranch, and Roosevelt had the other thousand head sent north to the Elkhorn Ranch.<sup>152</sup>

Later that month, Roosevelt participated in his first large roundup in the Badlands. The primary reason for the roundup was to brand calves from the previous year and the current year.

Marketable cattle were driven to Migusville (Wibaux), Dickinson, or Medora to be shipped and sold, or they were driven to the Marquis' packing plant in Medora for slaughter.<sup>153</sup> Roosevelt enjoyed the challenge of the roundup, even after spending many hours and days participating. In his book, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, Roosevelt wrote about his roundup experience: "The work on a round-up is very hard, but although the busiest it is also the pleasantest part of a cowboy's existence. His food is good, though coarse, and his sleep is sound indeed; while the work is very exciting and is done in company."<sup>154</sup> Frank Roberts, a trapper and cowboy from the

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<sup>151</sup> Torres, *Historic Structure Report*, 68.

<sup>152</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 164.

<sup>153</sup> Chester L. Brooks and Ray H. Mattison, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Dakota Badlands* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1958), 34.

<sup>154</sup> Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, 21.

Medora area, was on the roundup trip with Roosevelt. He said that Roosevelt never “shirked” any of his duties, and that he met every challenge given to him. At one point in the roundup, Roosevelt was bucked off a horse. A more experienced rider offered to ride the horse for Roosevelt, but he refused saying, “I know you can ride him, I’ve seen you ride, but I want to find out if I can ride it. If I can’t ride him, I’ll let you ride him.”<sup>155</sup> Roosevelt wanted the authentic experience, no matter the challenges that came with it.

By June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1885, Roosevelt finished the roundup. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, he signed a contract with Sewall and Dow giving them responsibility for the eleven hundred head of cattle at the Elkhorn Ranch. The next day, Roosevelt headed back to New York with Wilmot Dow who was returning to Maine to marry his new bride. When Dow next returned to the ranch on August 8<sup>th</sup>, he brought along his new bride, and Sewall’s wife and his sixteen-month-old daughter. Roosevelt was a changed man after spending eight weeks in the Badlands.<sup>156</sup> According to a reporter for the Pioneer Press, Roosevelt was now “rugged, bronzed and in the prime of health.”<sup>157</sup>

The Elkhorn Ranch women domesticated the ranch after their arrival. They cooked, baked bread and cake, and made jellies and jams from wild plums and buffalo berries. The women also made and installed window curtains to make the ranch house feel more welcoming and intimate.<sup>158</sup>

In mid-September 1885, Roosevelt left the Badlands and returned to New York. He busied himself with Republican politics while in the East. That October, however, would change

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<sup>155</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 170-171.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175, 183.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-175.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

Roosevelt's life. In that month, he visited his sister, Anna, only to find a woman that he was avoiding. That woman was the twenty-four-year-old Edith Carow, a childhood friend whom he may have proposed to prior to meeting his first wife Alice. He avoided her after Alice's death, afraid of what feelings might develop between them. Hoping to honor his late-wife, Roosevelt avoided Carow for almost two years after Alice's death. Their relationship quickly bloomed after the meeting in October. On November 17, 1885, Roosevelt proposed to Edith, and she accepted. Now Roosevelt was confronted with a problem; what career would he choose with marriage in the near future? While Edith traveled to Europe with her family in April, Roosevelt traveled west to sort out his career.<sup>159</sup>

On March 15, 1886, Roosevelt returned to his western ranches hoping to resolve his dilemma. In June, Roosevelt received a letter from New York City's Mayor Grace offering him the presidency of the city board of health. Although it may have been a low-level position, Roosevelt seriously considered accepting it, wishing to start a new life with Edith Carow in the east. His engagement to Edith carried with it a strong influence. Although Roosevelt was reluctant to leave behind his life in the Badlands, he quickly headed back to New York. After spending only three weeks in New York, Roosevelt returned once again to Medora, but the lure of the east was too much for him. On August 5, shortly after his arrival in Medora, Roosevelt wrote to Anna expressing his "melancholy" in saying goodbye to his sister and his daughter, "Baby Lee."<sup>160</sup>

During the summer of 1886, multiple factors also pushed Roosevelt to consider a future in the east more seriously. Within a week of each other in August, Sewall's wife and Dow's wife

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 194-195, 197.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 197, 215, 217.

both gave birth to sons. Perhaps Roosevelt felt out of place with the growing families. He wrote to Anna that “the population of my ranch is increasing in a rather alarming manner,” and he retreated to the Maltese Cross Ranch.<sup>161</sup> A continuing drought that summer was even more alarming to Roosevelt and his ranchers. Sewall feared the end of the ranch due to the drought, writing, “If we have much snow next winter it looks to me as if they would have short picking[,] the grass being all dried up now.”<sup>162</sup> That summer, Roosevelt received more bad news. Dow had taken the Elkhorn’s marketable cattle to Chicago to sell. Dow found out that the prices were low, ten dollars a head, which was less than it cost to buy, raise, and transport the cattle to market. When Roosevelt returned from his hunting trip in the Rockies, Sewall and Dow informed Roosevelt of the crisis. They were ready to give up, and informed Roosevelt that the quicker he removed himself from the cattle business, the less he would lose. Roosevelt had no intention of giving up the cattle business. He understood that cattle prices fluctuated, and asked when Sewall and Dow would be ready to return to Maine. They left the ranch ten days later. Roosevelt then turned the Elkhorn herd over to Bill Merrifield and Sylvane Ferris with a new contract and he returned to the East a day before Sewall and Dow departed.<sup>163</sup>

On December 2, 1886, Roosevelt and Edith were married in London at St. George’s Church in Hannover Square. Following the wedding, the couple took a honeymoon that lasted until March. While Roosevelt enjoyed his marital bliss, he received letters from Medora informing him of a devastating winter season, and a terrible loss of cattle. In April, Roosevelt traveled to the Badlands to assess the damage.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 218, 220.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 231, 234.

In November 1886, snow began to fall over the Badlands. The temperature began to drop, and the wind gained speed, creating the perfect conditions for a blizzard. The mixture of cold, wind, and snow, filled the air with “dry, scouring ice that burned the skin of anyone unlucky enough to be caught outside.”<sup>165</sup> During one night in November, the temperature reached forty below zero. More blizzards followed in the November blizzard’s path. Travel in the Badlands became impossible in December. Snow piled up around the cattle and smothered them. Others froze to death, also buried by drifting snow.<sup>166</sup> January 28 brought with it the worst blizzard that winter season. Children that ventured outdoors froze to death within minutes, men and women living on the ranches went mad, shooting themselves and each other. Older range steers that had survived the conditions thus far wandered onto the streets of Medora, eating the tar paper off the sides of buildings. The townspeople of Medora began nailing planks across their windows to prevent desperate steers from ramming their heads through the glass.<sup>167</sup> Lincoln Lang described the horrific winter as “Death’s cattle roundup.”<sup>168</sup> The spring thaw revealed the destruction of the blizzards. The floods caused by the melting snow revealed carcasses of thousands of cattle. Lang described the experience: “One had only to stand by the river bank for a few minutes and watch the grim procession ceaselessly going down, to realize in full the depth of the tragedy that had been enacted within the past few months.”<sup>169</sup>

Seventy-five percent of the Badlands cattle were dead after the winter of 1886-1887.

Roosevelt had hopes that he could recuperate his losses after a few years if enough of his herd

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 1979), 386.

<sup>168</sup> Lincoln A. Lang, *Ranching with Roosevelt* (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926), 250.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-251.

had survived. Along with Merrifield, he rode for three days in search for cattle, but he did not see a single cow. Roosevelt lost about two-thirds of his overall herd, but the losses were still crippling.<sup>170</sup> He decided to hang onto his ranch and remaining cattle instead of selling them, hoping to cut down on the losses of his eighty-five-thousand-dollar investment. He also decided to put Merrifield in charge of the Elkhorn Ranch. The end of the cattle industry in the area after the winter season proved devastating to the local economy. Medora was nearly a ghost town by February. The Marquis de More shut down his slaughterhouse in the winter of 1886 and never reopened it. Roosevelt was back in New York by early May.<sup>171</sup>

Early in November 1887, Roosevelt went on a hunting trip in the Badlands with his cousin, J. West Roosevelt and a friend, Frank Underhill. After ten days on the trip, West and Frank left for New York City, deciding that life on the plains was too much for them. Roosevelt continued the trip, hunting alone for three more weeks. During this time, he realized that the Badlands were scarce of large game. The bison, elk, grizzly, bighorn sheep, deer, pronghorn, and waterfowl had nearly vanished from the Badlands. This realization left Roosevelt determined to make a difference. The Badlands had shaped Roosevelt's character, and his western experiences would now shape his political activities in the east. When he returned to New York City in December 1887, he worked alongside his friend and wildlife expert George Bird Grinnell, to assemble a group of influential and wealthy men interested in the preservation of wildlife. They called the organization the Boone and Davy Crockett Club.<sup>172</sup> Although Roosevelt's political career in wildlife conservation had just begun, his days at the Badlands were coming to an end. After 1887, Roosevelt only visited the Badlands for hunting trips, with the Elkhorn Ranch house

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<sup>170</sup> Di Silvestro, *Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands*, 238.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-241.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 242, 244-245.

serving as his lodging. He had a new infant son, and he could no longer escape to the west for extended periods.<sup>173</sup>

In the fall of 1889, Roosevelt wrote to Bill Sewall saying that he planned to permanently close the Elkhorn Ranch house the following year. By October 1890, Roosevelt left his cattle in Sylvane Ferris' care after Merrifield left to move to Montana. In December 1897, Roosevelt told Sylvane to part with the remaining Roosevelt cattle. His decision was made by the impending Spanish-American War, in which Roosevelt served in as head of the Rough Riders, a mounted military force. Ferris decided to purchase the cattle and ranch buildings from Roosevelt at both ranches, and with the purchase came Roosevelt's end as a rancher.<sup>174</sup> Sylvane Ferris continued to live at the Maltese Cross Ranch during the Spanish-American War. The Elkhorn Ranch buildings were deserted. The Elkhorn buildings soon disappeared, most likely torn down by neighbors looking for salvageable lumber.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 248, 250.

<sup>175</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 193.

## CHAPTER FIVE. PRESERVATION AND INTERPRETATION

### 5.1. Preserving Human History at Theodore Roosevelt National Park

Unlike many other national parks, Theodore Roosevelt National Park has always placed value in preserving the human history of the park. However, this unique concern for human history is primarily due to the purpose of the park, that is the memorialization of President Theodore Roosevelt through the preservation and interpretation of the historic sites and features associated with him in the North Dakota Badlands.

In the 1967 Master Plan for Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Park, the first item listed under the park's objectives is interpretation. It describes the interpretive theme of the park as follows: "To tell the story of Theodore Roosevelt's experiences in the Little Missouri Badlands, his associations with the early ranching industry, his adventures in and contributions to a frontier community; to illustrate general aspects of the range cattle industry and frontier life on the northern Great Plains; to interpret those geological, biological, ecological and scenic aspects of the Badlands, which helped to influence his thinking as our 'first conservation president.'"<sup>176</sup> Just as with Grand Teton National Park, this early master plan focused the park's cultural interpretation on the 1883 to 1898 ranching period when Roosevelt was associated with the region. American Indian and frontier history of the area were only to be interpreted "only as required to provide general orientation" for the visitor.<sup>177</sup> In this early master plan, the highest priority of the park was to make the Elkhorn Ranch site "accessible," as well as reconstructing and interpreting the site and encouraging legislation to acquire additional lands to provide access to the historic ranch. At this point in the park's history, the Elkhorn Unit was underdeveloped

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<sup>176</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Master Plan for Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park* (North Dakota: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1967), 4.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

primarily due to the lack of highway access to the site.<sup>178</sup> The 1967 Master Plan also discussed the use of archaeology at the Elkhorn Ranch site to assist in the “future restoration of the ranch.”<sup>179</sup> In the 1950s, two archaeological surveys and excavations were conducted by Midwest Regional Archaeologist Paul Beaubien and Dr. Dee C. Taylor from the University of Montana. The results of their work were identification of the ranch structure locations, and sketches of each ranch structure.<sup>180</sup>

In 1970, park officials at TRNP developed another master plan. The interpretive theme and period of historic importance emphasized in the park remained the same. However, an architectural theme was added to the park in this later plan. To support the interpretive theme of the park, the architectural theme is described as a “general western or ranch atmosphere.”<sup>181</sup> The architectural theme also called for the reconstruction and furnishing of the Elkhorn Ranch to serve as an interpretive center of the park. The plan called for the construction of a parking-overlook site located across the river about a half mile east of the site. A working ranch would be built, with visitor parking and seasonal housing also proposed nearby. The development plan for the site proposed the building and furnishing of one structure at the site. Overall, forty acres would need to be acquired to build the overlook, visitor parking, seasonal housing, and an entry road to the site. Seasonal staff members would be housed on the east side of the river and would provide interpretation to the site.<sup>182</sup> However, these plans for the Elkhorn Ranch site changed with time.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 4, 6.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Master Plan for Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park* (North Dakota: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1970), 4.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 27.

The General Management Plan released by TRNP officials in 1986 changed the proposed plans for the Elkhorn ranch site. Instead of reconstructing any historic structures at the site, Park Service officials now decided that the Elkhorn ranch site would remain as it existed at that moment, barren of almost any historic structures.<sup>183</sup> Financial limitations prevented the reconstruction of the Elkhorn ranch house and stable, as the plan lists required legislation from Congress to increase the \$40,000 expenditure limitation in order to complete the project. Current NPS policy at the time, reflected in the “Cultural Resource Management Guidelines” (NPS-28), also stated that “the Service does not endorse, support, or encourage the reconstruction of historic or prehistoric structures.”<sup>184</sup> The management plan claims that because a lack of funding and a lack of policy support, reconstruction would not likely be approved. In the south unit, however, the Park Service proposed a new museum and library collection areas in the visitor center to support the Maltese Cross Cabin.<sup>185</sup> Visitors would now have access to additional data and information about the cultural resources of the park, while also being able to visit the historic Maltese Cross Cabin located behind the visitor’s center.<sup>186</sup>

The finished general management plan published in 1987 addressed the need for more of a balance between the interpretation of the park’s natural and cultural resources. Previously, the park had been managed more as a cultural historic area, and park officials now called for more interpretation of the park’s natural history.<sup>187</sup> This push for balance between the interpretation of natural and cultural resources continues today. Later park statements for management declare

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<sup>183</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1986, 83.

<sup>184</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan, Development Concept Plans, Land Protection Plan, Environmental Assessment* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 1987), 32.

<sup>185</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1986, 89.

<sup>186</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1987, 32.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

that TRNP places the “maintenance and restoration of the natural environment and protection and interpretation of human history, with special emphasis on Theodore Roosevelt” as its top management priority.<sup>188</sup> Cultural resources remain a major emphasis in the park’s interpretation, especially those resources relating to Theodore Roosevelt’s history in the area. Today, the Elkhorn Ranch remains absent of its historic structures, however the Park Service keeps the remains of Bill Sewall and Wilmot Dow’s construction on the site. Visitors can still see the foundation stones of the ranch house and the well. The park keeps the outline and location of the ranch’s structures visible by trimming the grass at the sites, and has installed wayside panels to explain the history and significance of the site. Park visitors can see the same cottonwood trees and Little Missouri River that Roosevelt saw from the veranda of his ranch home. Visitors can still hear the same sounds that Roosevelt heard in the 1800s as the songbirds sing, the river trickles, and the leaves of nearby trees rustle from the breeze. The landscape remains the same as the one that shaped President Roosevelt’s character and attitudes toward environmental conservation. The Maltese Cross Cabin has also been preserved at TRNP. Visitors can tour the inside of the cabin, read panels explaining its history and importance, and join tours of park interpreters on the history of the cabin.<sup>189</sup>

The changes in TRNP’s management plans and policy concerning the park’s cultural and natural resources is also illustrative of a larger debate in the late twentieth century about wilderness. One of the most significant critics of 1960s and ‘70s wilderness thought was William Cronon. In his essay “The Trouble with Wilderness,” Cronon argued that environmentalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were too focused on rescuing wild lands, places that were

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<sup>188</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Resource Management Plan* (North Dakota: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1994), 2.

<sup>189</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt’s Ranches*, 213, 52.

interpreted as remaining untouched by human civilization.<sup>190</sup> This concept of wilderness that many nineteenth and twentieth century environmentalists promoted was problematic. These environmentalists became too concerned with environmental challenges in remote wild lands, rather than challenges close to home. They wanted Americans to conserve and value wilderness lands far away from their homes in remote places of the U.S., instead of the natural landscapes in their own backyards. The concept that these lands were untouched by humans was also incorrect, as American Indians and their ancestors had altered the land for thousands of years.<sup>191</sup>

In his essay, Cronon argued that the nineteenth century brought about new concepts of wilderness. In prior centuries wilderness was described as “deserted,” “savage,” “desolate,” “barren,” even evil itself.<sup>192</sup> In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, wilderness was likened to the Garden of Eden and was considered sacred. This change occurred because of two sources, “the sublime and the frontier.”<sup>193</sup> Wilderness became sacred, and sublime landscapes “were those rare places on earth where one had more chance than elsewhere to glimpse the face of God.”<sup>194</sup> At the same time, wilderness was being “tamed” as European immigrants moved to settle the wild lands of the frontier. Cronon argues that these frontiers not only became places of “religious redemption,” but they also became locations to experience “what it meant to be an American.”<sup>195</sup> Naturally, as increasing numbers of immigrants settled the frontier, the myth of the “vanishing frontier” grew. This myth greatly contributed to the wilderness preservation concepts of the United States. Cronon argues that nineteenth and twentieth century Americans thought that the

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<sup>190</sup> Cronon, “*Trouble with Wilderness*,” 7.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

frontier itself may be disappearing or gone forever, but the frontier experience could be preserved if wilderness was preserved.<sup>196</sup>

Environmentalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries began to privilege certain parts of nature at the expense of others because of the myth of the vanishing frontier. This concept of wilderness became a form of cultural imperialism, forcibly removing native peoples from their ancient homes in order to preserve American notions of wilderness.<sup>197</sup> Cronon's solution to the problem was to teach humankind to broaden our sense of the "otherness" that wilderness attempts to protect. Wilderness, he said, can teach humans humility and respect for our fellow beings and for the Earth, and is a place that we should "try to withhold our power to dominate."<sup>198</sup> Cronon argued that humans must come to understand that we can experience wilderness anywhere, even in ourselves and in our own homes, and that this understanding might be enough to address the troublesome nineteenth and twentieth centuries' concepts of wilderness.

Howard Zahniser, the principal author and advocate of the Wilderness Act of 1964, was also challenging these earlier concepts of wilderness in the 1960s. Zahniser said that, "The idea of wilderness as an area without man's influence is man's own concept."<sup>199</sup> Zahniser did not disregard environmental challenges close to home, addressing many environmental issues such as water pollution and pesticides in the journal, *The Living Wilderness*. As for an ethnocentric concept of wilderness, Zahniser altered the wilderness bill to clarify the autonomy of tribal councils, ensuring their authority over wilderness on their reservations. If Zahniser had lived when Cronon's essay was published, he would also agree with Cronon that wilderness should not

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>199</sup> Mark Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 249.

be viewed as simply an escape from an urbanized civilization, but rather as an experience with the wild that puts one in touch “with the whole community of life on earth.”<sup>200</sup>

Cronon and Zahniser critiqued the attempts by the NPS to separate human and natural history. They both saw the idea of a pristine wilderness as problematic, emphasizing the fact that land designated as wilderness was not untouched by human activity, but rather was altered by American Indian people and their ancestors for thousands of years. These critiques by Cronon and Zahniser most likely had an impact on NPS policy and thought on wilderness. Perhaps the men’s words convinced some NPS officials to move towards a more balanced management policy in their parks, emphasizing both the significance of their natural and cultural resources, instead of a complete “rewilding” of the land which attempted to erase evidence of human activity on the land.

In the 1970s, the NPS policy-makers generally expressed their discomfort and disapproval for reconstructions of historic structures in the national parks. They believed that these projects were typically inadequately researched, inauthentic, and were funded with money that could be used into to provide new structures, such as roads and visitor centers in the parks.<sup>201</sup> These officials believed that reconstructed buildings illustrate “how the past may have looked, not how it did look.”<sup>202</sup> Some NPS officials, however, did not agree with this new policy that opposed reconstruction. Top and middle-level NPS managers, policy-makers, field personnel, Friends groups, and local governments pushed for approval of some reconstruction projects. An example is the reconstruction of the Fort Union Trading Post in North Dakota. After

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 62, 249.

<sup>201</sup> Paul L. Hedren, “Field Notes: Why We Reconstructed Fort Union,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* XXIII, no. 3 (1992): 350.

<sup>202</sup> Richard Sellers and Dwight Pitcaithley, “Reconstructions--Expensive, Life-Size Toys?,” *CRM Bulletin* Vol. 2, no. 4 (December 1979): 6.

persistent advocacy from these support groups, most likely for the prospect of tourism profits, Congress approved of four annual appropriations for the development of the site in 1985.<sup>203</sup>

In the late 1970s and '80s, some national park visitors strongly supported cultural resources in national parks and wanted to see more Park Service structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places be preserved and interpreted.<sup>204</sup> However, NPS policy in the 1970s did not “endorse, support, or encourage the reconstruction of historic structures.”<sup>205</sup> NPS management at TRNP lists this management policy as one of their primary reasons for deciding against reconstruction of the Elkhorn Ranch house. Although this management decision places an emphasis on preserving natural resources at the park, the fact that Park Service officials still emphasize Roosevelt’s history on the land and preserve the archaeological remains at the site are significant. This shows a different approach, one in line with Cronon and Zahniser’s concept of wilderness, that still embraces the human history of the site.

## **5.2. The Journey of the Maltese Cross Cabin**

Theodore Roosevelt’s Maltese Cross Ranch cabin, stables, and corrals were built on an odd-numbered section of land owned by the Northern Pacific Railroad. When Roosevelt sold his ranches in 1898, he only sold the cattle, not any land. This was because the land was not his to sell. The Northern Pacific Railroad Company owned the tract of land until 1905. In December 1905, the railroad sold a section of the land, totaling 2,744-acres. Joe and Sylvane Ferris, Roosevelt’s old friends, were the buyers. Looking to make some quick money, the Ferris

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<sup>203</sup> Hedren, “Field Notes,” 352. And William J. Hunt, Jr., “Letter to the Editor,” *CRM Bulletin* Vol. 13, no. 1 (1990): 3.

<sup>204</sup> Sellers and Pitcaithley, “Reconstructions,” 5.

<sup>205</sup> National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1987, 32.

brothers purchased the land for thirty-six hundred dollars and sold the property one month later to O.J. de Lendrecie of Fargo for \$8,919.<sup>206</sup>

In December of 1933, de Lendrecie sold a 600-acre section of the estate, which included the original site of the Maltese Cross Ranch to J.E. “Ed” Harding of Medora for twenty-one hundred dollars. The next day, Harding sold the same land to W.O. Trenor of Roanoke, Virginia for seventy-five hundred dollars, but he remained in charge of the operations of the ranch. In the early 1950s, Trenor sold the ranch to his son. However, a few years later Ed Harding sued the Trenors claiming that he had not received his payment for the land. The Federal Court ruled in the favor of Harding and ordered the U.S. Marshal to sell the ranch. On December 30, 1958, the Maltese Cross Ranch was sold from the Billings County Courthouse. Ed Harding was the highest bidder, regaining his title to the property. In February 1959, only two months after the sale, Harding sold the Maltese Cross Ranch to a ranch hand named Joe Hild. Hild and his family first made their home at the ranch in 1956, and eventually sold the ranch to their son, John, in 1981. John Hild and his family still live on and operate the ranch today.<sup>207</sup>

Hild had a dream after gaining ownership of the ranch to reunite the Maltese Cross brand, which was used on the Maltese Cross Ranch in Roosevelt’s day, with the current ranch. After years of waiting, on February 25, 2000, Hild received a telephone call informing him that the brand had become available for buffalo at certain locations. Hild quickly drove to Bismarck to purchase the brands. However, Hild was not in the business of bison ranching. He raised cattle and horses, just as Roosevelt did. The Nature Conservancy held the Maltese Cross brand for cattle at that time, and Hild proposed a trade to them. Knowing that the Conservancy raised

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<sup>206</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt’s Ranches*, 203.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-205.

bison, Hild offered them three bison brand locations for one left hip location on horses, and one left rib location on cattle.<sup>208</sup> The Conservancy agreed, and a deal was made on February 20, 2001. The Maltese Cross brand had finally returned home to Theodore Roosevelt's old ranch.<sup>209</sup>

As for the Maltese Cross Cabin, Roosevelt's first home in the Badlands, the journey home was much longer. In 1901, Sylvane Ferris sold the cabin to a man named Jack Snyder. Snyder wasted no time making changes to the cabin. He added a lean-to on the backside to add a kitchen and lowered the roof. He also covered the roof with sod in order to make the cabin easier and cheaper to heat. Snyder decided to sell the cabin in 1903 to the state of North Dakota. The State desired to purchase the house in order to put it on display at the 1904 World's Fair. In 1904, the State had the cabin dismantled and shipped to St. Louis where it was put on display, with the changes that Snyder had made to it, in the North Dakota Agricultural display area. It was a fan favorite, viewed by over a million people.<sup>210</sup> In June 1904, then President Roosevelt and his children, Alice, Theodore Jr., and Kermit visited the cabin at the World's Fair. Roosevelt agreed that the cabin was his old Maltese Cross Cabin, basing his recognition, allegedly, on the Maltese Cross brand which had been burned and imbedded with shell casings into a log on the front ride side of the building.<sup>211</sup> At the end of the 1904 World's Fair, the Maltese Cross Cabin was dismantled and shipped to Portland, Oregon, to be shown at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition. Here, the cabin was displayed with the North Dakota exhibit in the Palace of

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<sup>208</sup> These brand locations refer to the location on an animal that the rancher places their brand. The Conservancy and Hild both owned rights to the Maltese Cross brand, just for different locations on different animals. Because Hild owned the bison and horse Maltese Cross brand locations and the Conservancy owned the Maltese Cross brand rights to cattle brand locations, Hild proposed the trade.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-209.

<sup>210</sup> Thompson, *Travels and Tribulations*, 30.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Agriculture for 137 days. Once again it was immensely popular, with over a quarter million people having seen it.<sup>212</sup> In 1906, after the closing of the Lewis and Clark Exposition, the Maltese Cross Cabin was dismantled again, loaded on a train, and sent to Bismarck. Before the Cabin could be reassembled in Bismarck, it was put on loan to the Children's Home Society in Fargo, North Dakota. It journeyed another one hundred and eighty miles to Fargo. Here it was reassembled and used for two years as an exhibit at the State Fair Grounds from 1906-1907.<sup>213</sup> In 1908, the cabin was sent back to the North Dakota State Capital Grounds in Bismarck, North Dakota. After traveling more than five thousand miles and being viewed by almost two million people in a period of four years, the cabin was placed in a more permanent home. Here the cabin stood, on a cement slab, for eleven years. It was left unprotected to face the harsh North Dakota weather. After the eleven years, the cabin was in a state of disrepair, almost beyond any hope of restoration. At its darkest hour, hope for the cabin was restored. The Bismarck Minishoshe Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) assumed responsibility for the repair, restoration, and maintenance of the cabin.<sup>214</sup> The group of women held a variety of fundraisers to support their mission, including tea and card parties, basket socials, and luncheons. In 1920, the cabin was moved to a new location on the Capital grounds to make room for the Liberty Memorial Building. Due to the efforts of the DAR, the restoration work was completed by 1923, and the cabin opened for the public to view.<sup>215</sup> Between 1930 and 1935, over 75,400 people visited the Cabin and signed its register.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>215</sup> Sletten, *Roosevelt's Ranches*, 211.

<sup>216</sup> Thompson, *Travels and Tribulations*, 41.

On March 9, 1949, the Thirty-First Legislative Assembly of North Dakota authorized the state to move the Maltese Cross Cabin to the newly established Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. The National Park Service was given ownership of and responsibility for the cabin. However, the Minishoshe Chapter continued to care for and conduct tours of the cabin for another ten years. In 1959, the cabin was loaded up on a large truck and shipped back to Medora to be put on display at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Once it arrived, the cabin was dismantled one last time. Some of the logs were replaced, and the remaining original logs were soaked in a mixture of pentane and fuel oil for three or four days in order to preserve them. The replacement logs came from old Civilian Conservation Corps buildings in the Medora area. Rot was removed from some of the original logs, and wooden patches or epoxy putty were used to fill in the cavities. The cabin, the National Park Service decided, was to be returned back to its original state when Theodore Roosevelt lived in it. The NPS decided to restore the shingled, pitched roof and attic. Attic flooring, and new twelve glass pane windows were also added back to the cabin. The reconstruction project took four months to complete.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 46, 53.



Figure 5.1. *Moving the Cabin*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota. In 1959 the National Park Service acquired the Maltese Cross Cabin and moved it to Medora on a flatbed.

Furnishing the Maltese Cross Cabin was the next step in interpreting and preserving the history of the cabin. In 1969, the NPS at TRNP created a furnishing plan for the Maltese Cross Cabin in which they studied ranch house furnishings in the Little Missouri area from the 1800s and 1900s to best decide what historic furnishings belonged in each room of the cabin. The plan divides the ranch house into four sections: the kitchen-dining room, living room or parlor, bedrooms, and general furnishings. Using newspaper advertisements, court case files of nearby ranch houses which included reports on losses after an accused theft, letters and papers from Little Missouri area ranchers, Lang's book *Ranching with Roosevelt*, manuscripts, personal

interviews, archaeological work at Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, and Roosevelt's own autobiography, the NPS officials at TRNP were able to gain a good understanding of what the interior furnishings of the Maltese Cross Cabin would have been during Roosevelt's occupation of the house.<sup>218</sup>

A report prepared by NPS employee Michele Farmer, and the Maltese Cross Cabin catalog records from TRNP discuss the details of the items furnishing the Maltese Cross Cabin today. When visitors first enter the kitchen of the cabin, a ladder adorns the far wall. This ladder would have been used by the ranch men to enter the attic. A kitchen cupboard now stands in the room, providing storage for miscellaneous dishes and kitchen utensils. The cupboard also houses canned tomatoes, coffee beans, dried beans, and other staples required by the ranch hands.<sup>219</sup> The kitchen dishes include a muffin pan, a coffee grinder, rolling pin, a waffle iron used on Matthias Magnus' homestead in North Dakota in the early 1900s, a cutting board, frying pan, cups, coffeepots, mixing spoons, flour canisters, a sieve, pie pan, teakettle, jug, potato masher, baking pan, dishpan, wash bowl, bread pan, bowl, white basin, and a tin nutmeg grater. All of these items could have been purchased in Roosevelt's day. The silverware pieces found in the cabin bear the initials L.A.E. for Lizzie A. Edwards, Wilmot Dow's wife. These pieces were most likely a wedding present to her from Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>220</sup> The kitchen cupboard is reputed to have come from the bunkhouse at the Elkhorn Ranch, however there is no means discovered that authenticate this claim. The cupboard was given to William Campbell in 1910 by a rancher

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<sup>218</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of History, *Furnishing Plan for a Badlands Ranch House* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 1969).

<sup>219</sup> Michele Farmer, *Maltese Cross Cabin* (North Dakota: National Park Service).

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

named Powell.<sup>221</sup> A wash bench and kitchen table were custom made for the cabin. During Theodore Roosevelt's time, a traveling carpenter would have made these items for use in the cabin. The Maltese Cross Cabin contained a cellar under the cabin, and on the original ranch site one can still see the depressions from this root cellar. The cellar's trap door is still visible on the floor of the cabin today, beneath the ladder mentioned earlier. A Miami kitchen range originally owned by the Marquis de Mores in his Chateau de Mores kitchen also sits in the kitchen today. Ranchers in Medora most likely went out into the surrounding hills and extracted the coal they needed for the stoves.<sup>222</sup> A Dutch oven can also be found in the cabin's kitchen. The ranchers and their wives would have cooked most of their meals in the Dutch oven.<sup>223</sup>

Although the ranchers may have eaten at the small kitchen table, it was more likely that the meals at the Maltese Cross Ranch were eaten in the main room or the living room. Tin dishes and enameled graniteware were frequently found in cabins from Roosevelt's time, so NPS officials also decorated the Maltese Cross Cabin with these dishes. During the nineteenth century it was common to turn the ranch's dishes upside down to prevent dust from collecting on them, and therefore the dishes seen on the living room's table are also turned upside down. An oil lamp sits on a shelf above the table, used to light up the living room. Also found in the living room is a set of French Whist playing cards. These cards are more extravagant than what area cowboys might have had, but they serve as a reminder of the forms of entertainment Roosevelt and his men enjoyed while living on the ranch.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Maltese Cross Cabin Catalog* (North Dakota: National Park Service, 2012).

<sup>222</sup> Farmer, *Maltese Cross Cabin*.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

A set of “steelyard” weighing scales adorn the wall of the living room. One scale held up to one hundred and fifty pounds, the other fifty pounds. The scale is over one hundred years old, given to a local Medora man named Madzo by an old grocer. The desk sitting in the Maltese Cross Cabin was originally Theodore Roosevelt’s from his Elkhorn Ranch. Roosevelt used the desk for correspondence and to write his books. In the corner of the living room sits a desk-cupboard combination, allegedly used by Roosevelt in the Maltese Cross Cabin. It was gifted to the park in 1959 by the state of North Dakota. The pot belly stove found behind the living room table is originally from the Northern Pacific depot in Medora. The depot burned down in 1920. After that the donor took the stove and used it in her ranch until the mid-1950s. Also located in the living room are two rockers. The platform rocker was brought from Wyoming to Medora around 1890 by Mr. Tutley, Mrs. Madzo’s father.<sup>225</sup> The second rocker was possibly used by Roosevelt himself, and is reported to have come from the Ferris store in the 1880s.

Saddle bags can be found in Theodore Roosevelt’s old bedroom in the cabin. These bags are around ninety years old and most likely belonged to Dr. Hugo Stickney, a physician who practiced in Dickinson and the surrounding country. Dr. Stickney treated Roosevelt’s blistered feet after a long march to capture boat thieves. Roosevelt probably carried a book, a toothbrush, clean shirt, and a spare pair of glasses in his saddle bags.<sup>226</sup> In front of the bed in the bedroom, a soapstone foot warmer is visible. This item could be heated on a stove, wrapped in rags, and tucked in the covers of a bed or a wagon to heat the space. A wooden boot jack is also visible in the bedroom, used for removing tight or muddy boots.<sup>227</sup> The Theodore Roosevelt Association of New York donated a wooden cased compass that may have belonged to Roosevelt. This compass

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<sup>225</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Maltese Cross Cabin Catalog*.

<sup>226</sup> Farmer, *Maltese Cross Cabin*.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

can be seen on the cottage-style dresser in the bedroom. Possibly the most significant item in the bedroom, however, is a trunk that belonged to Roosevelt. On the top and right sides of the trunk, Roosevelt's initials are visible. The trunk has a wicker basket structure, encased in black painted canvas and leather. Metal handles are located on both ends. The trunk was brought to North Dakota by Roosevelt on one of his early trips to the area.<sup>228</sup> Inside the trunk, a miniature diary was found with Roosevelt's initials on them.<sup>229</sup>



Figure 5.2. *Kitchen*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

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<sup>228</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, *Maltese Cross Cabin Catalog*.

<sup>229</sup> Farmer, *Maltese Cross Cabin*.



Figure 5.3. *Living Room*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.



Figure 5.4. *TR's Bedroom*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.



Figure 5.5. *Maltese Cross Cabin in Fall*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

Today park visitors can tour Theodore Roosevelt's first ranch home in the Badlands and educate themselves about ranching history by examining and reading about the different furnishings and uses that are included inside the cabin. In the summer, guided tours by NPS employees of the park are provided. TRNP's employees also created a fifteen-minute video about Theodore Roosevelt, the Maltese Cross Cabin and its significance, and the reasons behind the creation of the national park. Located behind the south unit visitor's center, the Maltese Cross Cabin is one of the first historic structures park visitors see and experience at TRNP. Its history is well preserved and will continued to be viewed by visitors for years to come.

### 5.3. Roosevelt's "Home Ranch": The Preservation and Interpretation of the Elkhorn

Over one hundred and thirty years later, Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch appears almost the same as it did when Roosevelt first found it. Due to the significance of the site to Theodore Roosevelt, one of America's most influential conservationists, NPS officials decided to manage the site as Roosevelt first knew it, as "unimpaired" as possible. Reconstruction of the Elkhorn Ranch house or other structures on the site are currently not a part of the park's long-term plan for the site.<sup>230</sup> Today, the Elkhorn Ranch unit of TRNP is two hundred and eighteen acres, only a small portion of Roosevelt's original Elkhorn Ranch. Although the exact acreage of Roosevelt's ranch is unknown, his book *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* describes the massive size of the Elkhorn. Roosevelt writes that the Elkhorn Ranch "lies on both sides of the Little Missouri, the nearest ranch man above me being about twelve, and the nearest below me about ten, miles distant."<sup>231</sup> The remaining Elkhorn Ranch lands around the NPS' two hundred and eighteen acres are either privately owned, or managed by the U.S. Forest Service as part of the Little Missouri National Grasslands, or the state of North Dakota. Although Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch house is gone, and no reconstruction of the house exists, the foundation stones of the sixty by thirty-foot cabin and the blacksmith shop and dugout remain at the Elkhorn Ranch site.<sup>232</sup> The water well and protective grill built by Sewall and Dow are also still visible at the site. Some of the cottonwood trees east of the cabin foundations date to Roosevelt's time, and the Little Missouri River still flows about one hundred and fifty yards east of the cabin site.<sup>233</sup> Today, a six-sided

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<sup>230</sup> National Park Service, "Elkhorn Ranch Handout," Theodore Roosevelt National Park, <https://www.nps.gov/thro/planyourvisit/upload/Elkhorn%20Ranch.nbl.pdf>.

<sup>231</sup> Roosevelt, *Ranch Life*, 25.

<sup>232</sup> National Park Service, "Elkhorn Ranch Handout."

<sup>233</sup> Theodore Roosevelt Center, "Theodore Roosevelt in North Dakota: Elkhorn Ranch," Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University,

barb wire fence encloses the area surrounding the Elkhorn Ranch house, well, utility shed, chicken coop, and barn locations. Former locations of the other structures of the ranch are marked by metal posts.<sup>234</sup> Seven wayside panels also stand at the Elkhorn Ranch Site today, providing quotes of Theodore Roosevelt to assist visitor's experience and understanding of the history of the site.

Using Roosevelt's writings of the Elkhorn Ranch, photographs of the original structures that he himself possibly took and archaeological studies, park officials at TRNP were able to identify the locations of these historic structures at the site and provide additional information to visitors about Theodore Roosevelt, ranching history in the area, and life at the Elkhorn Ranch. The first archaeological fieldwork at the site included the excavation of the horse corral, dugout, portions of the blacksmith shop, and the barn. The majority of the fieldwork was done in 1959 under the direction of Dee Taylor from Montana State University. The goal of this excavation project was to "(1) find the subsurface remains of all the ranch buildings; (2) outline, map, and photograph the features; and (3) mark each structure so that it could be easily relocated for future construction work."<sup>235</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that Taylor's 1950s research focused on the earlier trends in American archaeological interpretation, emphasizing the significance of the white men's historical record at the ranch site. This approach to archaeological interpretation most likely directed Taylor and his team's research at the Elkhorn Ranch site and may have influenced some of his findings. Prior to the civil rights movement in the 1960s, American archaeology focused

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<http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Learn-About-TR/TR-Trail/Theodore-Roosevelt-in-North-Dakota/Elkhorn-Ranch>.

<sup>234</sup> National Park Service, "Elkhorn Ranch Handout."

<sup>235</sup> Dennis L. Toom and Michael A. Jackson, *Elkhorn Ranch Site (32BI8) 2009 Precision Mapping Project* (Grand Forks, ND: University of North Dakota, 2010), 3.

on white, male history, and Taylor's archaeological research fit this categorization with a focus on Theodore Roosevelt and his male ranch hands. With the civil rights movement came a shift in archaeological interpretation to focus on the stories of the "poor, powerless, and 'inarticulate'" Americans who had been forgotten in the previous written record of American history.<sup>236</sup> In the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, archaeologists began examining "plantation archaeology, archaeologies of inequality, dominance and resistance, ideology, the archaeology of capitalism, and the archaeology of the African Diaspora."<sup>237</sup> The 1960s also brought new interpretations of gender to the archaeological field, giving autonomy to women in the historical record.<sup>238</sup>

Prior to the 1959 excavation of the Elkhorn Ranch, nine sandstone boulders were visible on the subsurface marking the general outline of the ranch house. During the excavation, the location and dimensions of the house's veranda were confirmed. A back-door stoop and cellar entrance were also found on the west wall of the house. Taylor and his team also excavated the house cellar which led to the discovery of a darkroom that Roosevelt himself maintained and most likely used. During this excavation, the rock-lined water well was located, as well as the location of the barn, chicken coop, utility shed, corral fence posts and other fence lines, blacksmith shop, dugout, and horse corral. During the excavation of the cellar, Taylor's team found wooden flooring, benches, heavy supporting beams and timbers, and partitions. The team treated this wood with a solution of paraffin, melted in gasoline, to attempt to preserve the wood

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<sup>236</sup> Jamie C. Brandon, "A North American Perspective on Race and Class in Historical Archaeology," in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, (New York: Springer, 2011), 4.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> James A. Delle, "Gender, Power, and Space: Negotiating Social Relations under Slavery on Coffee Plantations in Jamaica, 1790-1834," in *Lines that Divide: Historical Archaeologies of Race, Class, and Gender*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 197.

for photographs and later visitor displays.<sup>239</sup> The archaeology team discovered a mass of small seeds in the blacksmith shop. After having three separate biologists examine the seeds, they were identified as buffaloberry. Ray Mattison, a National Park Service Historian, informed the 1959 team that the making of buffaloberry jelly was a common practice in North Dakota and Montana, and that Mrs. Sewall and Mrs. Dow most likely made the jelly at the ranch.<sup>240</sup>

As for the Elkhorn Ranch house itself, the 1959 archaeological study revealed much about its history. No complete bricks were found in the upper debris of the house, suggesting that the higher parts of the chimney or fireplace were dismantled for the bricks. This gives credit to earlier claims that neighboring ranchers recycled the building materials at the Elkhorn Ranch after it was abandoned. In the cellar of the house, a row of four cedar posts had boards nailed across them dividing the cellar into two rooms. The smaller cellar room was only four feet wide and eleven feet long, and narrow boards were nailed over cracks between the room partitioning, a measure most likely taken by Roosevelt to keep light out of the photograph laboratory.<sup>241</sup>

Although all that remains at the site are small archaeological ruins of the ranch, the location itself is “wholly intact” and tells a clear story of its significant past to all those who view it.<sup>242</sup> The artifacts recovered from previous archaeological studies provide insight into the private life of Theodore Roosevelt and his ranch hands in the Badlands. Taylor argues that the various items discovered, cans of Maine oysters, an apothecary bottle from Ottawa, Dr. Pierce’s Favorite Prescription, a lard bucket from N.K. Fairbank Company in New York, wine bottles, shoes, boots, suspenders, cartridge cases, Hood’s sarsaparilla bottles, a coyote skull, and the many other

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<sup>239</sup> Dee C. Taylor, *Archaeological Investigations of the Elkhorn Ranch Site* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State University, 1959), 18.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-40.

<sup>242</sup> Toom and Jackson, *Elkhorn Ranch Site (32BI8)*, 3-4, 8.

items found portray the “minutiae of daily life” at the Elkhorn Ranch during its operation from 1885 to 1890.<sup>243</sup>



Figure 5.6. *Elkhorn Site B, neg 1382*. National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota.

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<sup>243</sup> Taylor, *Archaeological Investigations*, 70.



Figure 5.7. *Posing in Front of a Hearthstone or Stepping Stone at the Elkhorn Ranch, 1959.* National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota. Mr. Cushman, editor, Carl Olson, and Joseph Kitchen, Billings county superintendent of schools, pose in front of a hearthstone or stepping stone at the Elkhorn Ranch, 20 June 1959.

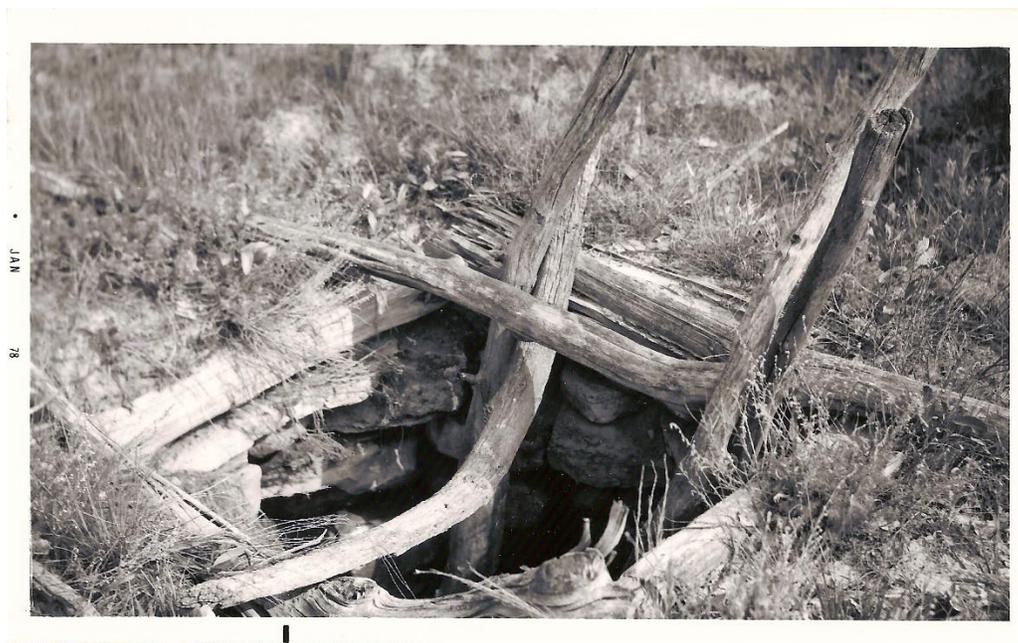


Figure 5.8. *Elkhorn Ranch Site 1947, neg 343.* National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota. The water well built by Sewall and Dow that still stands at the Elkhorn Ranch Site.



Figure 5.9. *Visitors Explore the Elkhorn Ranch Site.* National Park Service. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota. Visitors explore the Elkhorn Ranch Site at TRNP. The remaining sandstone foundations of the historic structures are visible.

Although park officials at TRNP have decided not to reconstruct the historic structures at the Elkhorn Ranch site, the importance of the site is apparent. Threatened by outside development, the Friends of the Elkhorn Ranch in partnership with the Boone and Crockett Club and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation joined together to purchase the largest area of Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, 5,201-acres, that was still in private hands owned by the Eberts family. These groups, along with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Forest Service raised funds to purchase the land in May of 2007. The U.S. Forest Service manages the now Elkhorn Ranchlands National Historic District with public involvement and with the

assistance of TRNP.<sup>244</sup> Continued threats to the Elkhorn Ranch and Ranchlands led to the NPS seeking designation for the site on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2012, Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch and greater ranchlands were approved for designation on the National Register of Historic Places. The site was deemed applicable for designation due to its association “with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history,” for including property that belonged to Theodore Roosevelt, and for including property that has “yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”<sup>245</sup> Although the site was approved for protection under the National Register, it is still threatened by outside development. Since 2000, the entire Little Missouri region has been transformed by one of the largest oil booms in the nation. Trucks and heavy equipment occupy the highways that cross the region, and oil drilling rigs dot the landscape. The North and Elkhorn units of TRNP are particularly vulnerable to growing development in the area. Today several oil wells pump on the Bell Lake Road leading to the Elkhorn Ranch. While visiting the ranch today, visitors can see the faint outline of one of these oil rigs dipping and rising along the ridge of one of the nearby buttes. Previous Superintendent of TRNP, Valerie Naylor prevented a well from being installed just yards away from the hand gate that leads into the ranch. After inviting the executive of developer XTO, a subsidiary of ExxonMobil, out to see the Elkhorn Ranch site, she was able to convince the developer to look for a different site.<sup>246</sup> Because oil companies can still

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<sup>244</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, “USDA Forest Service Purchases Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota,” U.S. Forest Service, 07 May 2007, <https://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/usda-forest-service-purchases-elkhorn-ranch-north-dakota>.

<sup>245</sup> Thomas J. Turck and Mervin G. Floodman, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch and Greater Elkhorn Ranchlands* (Billings County, North Dakota: U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, 2012), 5.

<sup>246</sup> Reed Karaim, “Roosevelt’s Retreat at Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, 01 November 2013, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/roosevelts-retreat-at-elkhorn-ranch#.Wo7oYajwZPZ>.

bid for leases to drill for oil on public lands, the Elkhorn Ranch site remains threatened by this outside development.<sup>247</sup> During her service as superintendent of the park, Naylor focused much of her attention on researching which oil and gas leases would affect the park, and then she met with the energy companies to try and persuade them to drill elsewhere in order to protect the park and its resources. In 2013, the National Parks Conservation Association awarded Naylor the Stephen T. Mather conservation award for her “steadfast dedication to protecting Theodore Roosevelt National Park from the impacts of energy development,” and for her “ongoing work to safeguard and elevate the importance of Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch.”<sup>248</sup>

Oil wells are not the only threat to the Elkhorn Ranch today. Plans to place a gravel pit across the river from the ranch and plans to build a bridge across the Little Missouri River have also been proposed. In 2015, the U.S. Forest Service decided to approve the plan to place a twenty-five-acre gravel pit within the Elkhorn Ranch and Greater Elkhorn Ranchlands National Register Historic District.<sup>249</sup> The proposed location of the pit was within a mile of the Elkhorn Ranch house. Soon after the approval, the National Parks Conservation Association filed a federal lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service for violating the National Environmental Policy Act.<sup>250</sup> Despite the lawsuit, Montana businessman Roger Lothspeich, owner of the mineral rights on the Forest Service land, was tired waiting for the government to make a decision and he began

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<sup>247</sup> Terry Tempest Williams, *The Hour of Land: A Personal Topography of America’s National Parks* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2016), 64-65.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 61.

<sup>249</sup> Jenny Buddenborg, “U.S. Forest Service Approves Elkhorn Gravel Pit at Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, 09 January 2015, <https://savingplaces.org/places/theodore-roosevelt-s-elkhorn-ranch/updates/u-s-forest-service-approves-elkhorn-gravel-pit-at-theodore-roosevelt-s-elkhorn-ranch#.Wo8P7ajwZPY>.

<sup>250</sup> Kati Schmidt, “Incomplete Environmental Review Prompts Lawsuit to Protect President Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch,” National Parks Conservation Association, 29 September 2015, <https://www.npca.org/articles/852-incomplete-environmental-review-prompts-lawsuit-to-protect-president>.

mining gravel at the site. In January 2016, federal district court judge Amit Mehta said that he could find no irreparable harm in allowing the first five acres of gravel to be mined because the judge believed the mining was to begin when visitation to the site was limited. The judge allowed Lothspeich to continue mining, but he had to do so in approved five-acre increments, subject to conditions and inspections.<sup>251</sup>

Although mining has occurred so close to the historic site, conservationists have rallied around the site in order to protect it from future threats.<sup>252</sup> One group, the National Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library, with support of other like-minded organizations, saw the significance and importance of the Elkhorn Ranch and decided to reconstruct the Elkhorn Ranch house in Dickinson, North Dakota. Construction on the house began in the summer of 2016. The group plans to reconstruct the house to be historically accurate so that scholars and visitors alike can enjoy and experience the history behind the structure.<sup>253</sup> Using Roosevelt's diary entries, the construction team was able to learn the building techniques that Roosevelt, Sewall, and Dow used to construct the ranch home, and are now using those techniques themselves. Visitors and scholars will soon be able to visit TRNP and get a sense of what the ranch landscape looked like through Roosevelt's own eyes, and visit Roosevelt's reconstructed ranch home to get a sense of

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<sup>251</sup> Lauren Donovan, "Judge Denies Gravel Pit Injunction," *The Bismarck Tribune*, 27 January 2016, [http://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/judge-denies-gravel-pit-injunction/article\\_ecbce598-5c89-5ec5-a92e-328fbe1c9259.html](http://bismarcktribune.com/news/state-and-regional/judge-denies-gravel-pit-injunction/article_ecbce598-5c89-5ec5-a92e-328fbe1c9259.html).

<sup>252</sup> "Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch," National Trust for Historic Places, <https://savingplaces.org/places/theodore-roosevelt-s-elkhorn-ranch#.Wo8g6ajwZPZ>.

<sup>253</sup> Clay Jenkinson, "Re-Building Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch House," JLG Architects, 09 May 2016, <http://jlgarchitects.com/article/050916/re-building-theodore-roosevelt-s-elkhorn-ranch-house>.

the historic architecture, building processes, and the daily life of Roosevelt and his ranch hands.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Tim Mikulski, “Work Begins to Recreate Teddy Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch Cabin,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, 04 October 2016, <https://savingplaces.org/places/theodore-roosevelt-s-elkhorn-ranch/updates/work-begins-to-recreate-teddy-roosevelts-elkhorn-ranch-cabin#.Wo8hK6jwZPY>.

## CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSION

No national park is the same when it comes to making difficult decisions between the preservation and interpretation of its cultural and natural resources. Theodore Roosevelt National Park, a park unique for its close relationship to a significant character in American history, is illustrative of this struggle between culture and nature. TRNP was among a small number of similar parks that decided early in the park's history to place more significance on the human history of the park rather than the natural history. Not until forty years after the creation of the park did NPS officials at TRNP decide to create more of a balance between the preservation and interpretation of cultural and natural resources. The late shift in NPS policy is visible in the park's preservation and interpretation of the Elkhorn Ranch. Initial park management plans proposed the reconstruction, preservation, and interpretation of the site's historic structures. A shift in the late 1980s brought a new management plan aimed at preserving the site's cultural and natural history by preserving what cultural remains still exist at the site, creating interpretive panels for visitors, providing occasional tours of the site, and deciding against the reconstruction of the historic structures. The NPS's preservation and interpretation of the Maltese Cross Cabin is illustrative of the park's earlier management plan that emphasized human history over natural history. When ownership of the cabin transferred to the park in 1949, the Park Service officials decided to restore the cabin to its original dimensions, and put time, effort, and funding into furnishing the cabin with authentic late nineteenth century items, some of which were originals belonging to Roosevelt, or historically accurate replicas. Park Service decisions on these matters at TRNP and other national parks have been influenced by financial struggles, NPS policy changes, leadership changes, and outside development, and they will continue to be influenced by these factors in the future.

The National Park Service, as explained in this essay, has a tradition of trying to separate human and natural history from one another. However as Cronon, and now some national parks like TRNP are demonstrating, it is impossible to do so. Even environmentalists, as Cronon explained, are sometimes guilty of the belief that human culture is now “permanently divorced” from nature.<sup>255</sup> Environmental historian, Dan Flores, explains that historians should examine human history by acknowledging that humans “*are biological*” like all other animals on the planet.<sup>256</sup> Humans then, are not separate from the rest of the ecological world as Judeo-Christian teachings argue. Flores explains that the Judeo-Christian beliefs that humans have souls and culture to elevate us above the beasts of nature are set aside with the realization that we are, at the core, the same.<sup>257</sup> If we examine human history through the lens of biology, evolution, and nature, one reaches the conclusion that humans are the same selfish beings that our ancestors *Homo erectus* and *Homo habilis* were. We still engage with the world around us with selfish motives that natural selection provided us.<sup>258</sup> When read negatively, this understanding provides a bleak outlook on the future of environmental conservation. However, Flores sees a positive outlook with this understanding. Once humanity concedes that it is not a “special creation,” and that instead “we’re merely evolved animals” that fit into the web of kinship with the rest of nature, we have an opportunity to put our cultural ethics to good use and work to conserve nature.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Dan Flores, *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

The NPS has attempted to separate human and natural history in the past, but arguments from environmental historians Cronon, Flores, and Feldman show that this cannot be done. The attempts at parks like Grand Teton and Theodore Roosevelt to combine the preservation and interpretation of human and natural history can serve as examples to other parks aspiring to do the same. This study shows a trend in NPS policy towards limiting the value of cultural resources in NPS history, and in certain circumstances, still to this day. TRNP is a unique example of NPS policy that reversed that trend. The park's early emphasis on the value of its cultural resources because of their connection to Theodore Roosevelt, and its later shift to emphasize the value of its natural resources shows how balancing the significance of the two resources is possible.

This debate in the National Park Service over the value it places on cultural and natural resources is a unique one and is in need of further research. This is a significant debate that impacts the very purpose of the national parks, their development, resources, aesthetics, and significance to future generations of visitors. Historian Robert Righter's book, *Peaks, Politics & Passion: Grand Teton National Park Comes of Age*, and historian James Feldman's book, *A Storied Wilderness: Rewilding the Apostle Islands*, contain discussions of these topics, however no other published book discusses these themes in great detail. With three hundred and eighty-eight national parks now in existence, each with its own cultural and natural history, the benefit of future research is clear. At Theodore Roosevelt National Park alone, additional studies could examine the Long X Cattle Trail, the Old East Entrance Station and other CCC structures, and the Peaceful Valley Dude Ranch. The Peaceful Valley Dude Ranch is a particularly interesting and significant historic site for further research. The ranch site contains multiple historic structures including a ranch house, bunkhouse, and barn. In June of 2014, the NPS released a Historic Structures Report for the site which highlights the need for repairs, and possible

renovation and interpretation for the historic structures. In 1993, the NPS also published an extensive history of the site. These resources would accelerate the beginning stages of research on the preservation and interpretation of the site, and significance of the site to the cultural mission of the park.

Theodore Roosevelt National Park's decisions about its cultural and natural resources will continue to shift and develop over time as the NPS also changes and adopts new administrative missions and policies. However, NPS management at TRNP has demonstrated its willingness to balance the value placed on the preservation and interpretation of its cultural and natural resources and should serve as an example to other national parks aspiring to do the same. TRNP has embraced the concept that human and natural history cannot and should not be separated, and with the benefit of this type of scholarship coming forth, one can hope that the NPS does the same.

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