



Edith circa 1916.

Edith Moore 1973.



LITTLE CABIN IN THE WOODS (Excerpted from *THE MOORE LOG HOUSE*, a history researched and written by Dorothy (Gregg) Mueller, August, 1995 – with commentary from reminiscences of Edith L. Moore, ca. 1960-1974.)

In the 1920s the land west of Houston was still heavily timbered with second-growth trees, lightly populated, and attractive to Jesse and Edith Moore who wanted to get out of the city to the rural life they both preferred. In 1926 and 1927 they purchased two tracts of land west of the present West Belt, accessible only through fields and gates from the trolley on Katy Road. These 140.86 acres along Rummel Creek... in the E. Williams Survey A-834 just north of Buffalo Bayou cost a total of \$6793.

We bought out in the country 17 mi from down town the loveliest place where yellow jasmine climbed to the top of pines, the dogwood and holly were so numerous and I loved it. Got acquainted with cattle, little animals, turkeys were pets and we only ate the eggs of chickens. There were foxes. Even little pigs were pets.

The Moores would later acquire much more land in the vicinity, but these acres along Rummel Creek were to be the site of their home for many years. Here they set up a small gasoline-powered sawmill, where they prepared the logs for their log home, and built a 24-stall dairy barn on the east bank of the creek. In 1931 they began construction of their home across the creek. Significantly, the dwelling was built at the end of the era when a log house would not have been an unusual house. A home for Edith Moore for 43 years and the headquarters for the Houston Audubon Society for 36, the hand-crafted log house (called a house instead of a cabin because of its size and sophistication) is the last of its kind in the area, a living



a small gasoline-powered sawmill...

reminder of a time that is past, still in the woods where it was conceived and built, and still being used and enjoyed.

Early in 1932 the log cabin was finished. There was no saw mill at this time but the workmen were cutting, skinning off the bark, and polishing off the logs during 1931 at the present site. Eighteen lovely dog wood trees were wonderful blooming early around the site in the spring. Holly trees and the lovely dripping moss was everywhere.

The yellow jasmine climbing over the trees, plum blossoms with their fragrance were over all. Grapevines with their fruit tempting the birds & animals. I thought it was heaven. I could forget the worries in town and only see the loveliness.

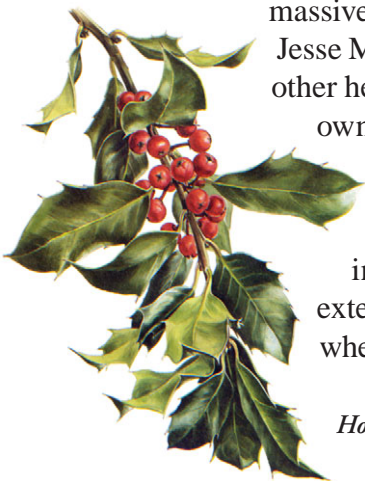


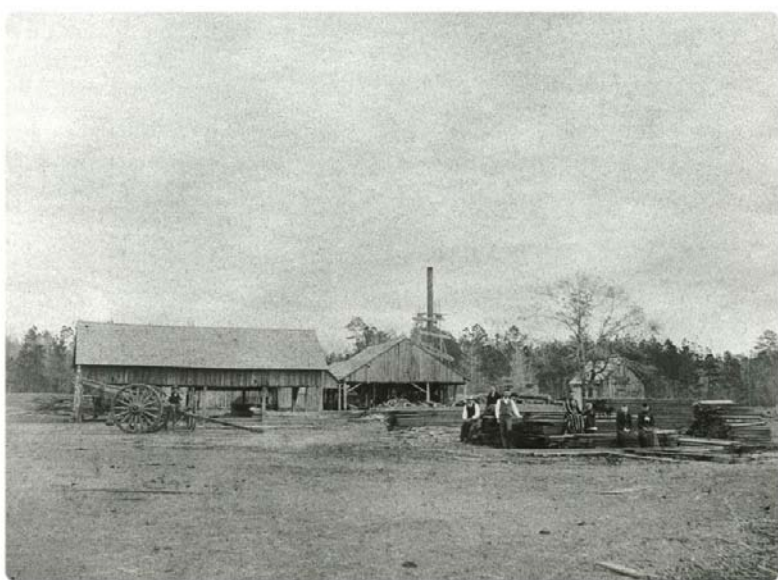
The original plans for the modified single-pen structure, subdivided by a log partition wall into three rooms... do not exist today. To make space for the building, over 100 loblolly pine trees, dense, straight, and slightly tapered, none less than eight inches in diameter, were cut and debarked on the site on the westside of Rummel Creek. The growth rings show that the trees were about 50 years old when they were cut, probably second-growth after an early logging operation had been abandoned in the mid-1880s. The outside dimensions of the house measured 36'x25', its logs saddle-notched with no wall covering inside or out. Piled rocks topped with square sill logs comprised the foundation, and the chinking was cement. An uninterrupted sweep of roof, gabled at the north and south ends, covered the house. There was no ridge pole, just square hewn rafters. Square sedimentary sandstone blocks formed the chimney and fireplace centered on the gable end of the large living room. They also are part of Houston's history, curbstones salvaged by the Moores when Milam Street in downtown Houston was elevated to level the intersection at Preston Street. A small brick interior chimney in the kitchen provided the flue for the iron wood-burning cookstove.

The downstairs space was divided by a log partition wall into a living area and a smaller bedroom and kitchen. Against this wall steep log stairs from the livingroom reached a 16'x12' half-story above the kitchen and bedroom, used mostly for storage. A screened porch ten feet deep wrapped around the south and east sides of the house. Heavy plank doors opening into the living room on the east and the kitchen on the south provided access to the porch. A gasoline generator and a 12-volt Delco battery system housed in a shed outside the back door – from which a single wire ran to the house – supplied power for the house and water well. Except for the massive stone chimney built by an experienced stone mason, the house was constructed by Jesse Moore, Edith's nephew Lawrence Smith, and Mr. Mosely, a hand at the dairy, and one other helper. No records of the total cost remain, but with most materials fabricated in their own sawmill and lumberyard, the cost must have been low. In 1932 the Moores moved in.

Unhappy at being surrounded by the expanding city where they lived on Park Street near downtown Houston, both Edith and Jesse were well prepared for this change in their lives. As a young college woman, Edith Lotz (born on July 12, 1884) spent an extended time living in a tent with but one companion at Christmas Lake in Minnesota, where she recuperated from a serious bout with pneumonia. There, isolated from family

Holly trees everywhere.





and friends, she was no stranger to a simple and lonely life: perhaps it was there that her devotion to nature began to grow into the dream of living among the animals and trees she loved. At the University of Minnesota, Edith trained to become a bacteriologist and pathologist. During the flu epidemic of 1918, eager to do her part in the Great War, Edith moved to Houston to work for the United States Health Service at Camp Logan. After the war she worked in Public Health Service laboratories in Beaumont, Texas, studying control of malaria and bubonic plague. In 1920 Edith moved to Houston to become a bacteriologist for the City of Houston. It was here that she met Jesse Moore, a city milk inspector, whom she married in 1921.

It must have been in 1920 that a doctor died in Galveston from what was diagnosed as bubonic plague.... I stayed in Galveston a week learning what I could of rats and fleas carrying bubonic plague. In a week or two later spent two weeks in Beaumont and under the tutelage of Dr. White, Dr. Eaton and a local doctor... became more aware of the importance of rats in plague and learned the lesions found in them & other experimental animals. Also had plenty of nice dinners where the doctors were hosts. Came back to Houston where the rat catchers had long tables of dead rats ready to inspect. No signs of plague in rats in Houston....

Ten years Edith's junior, Jesse Moore was born in 1894 near Hallettsville, Texas, to a farming family. With no more than a highschool education, he joined the United States Navy, attaining the rank of Chief Petty Officer in World War I (and again in World War II). Back in civilian life after World War I, Jesse took a job in Houston as City Milk Inspector which he kept until he and Edith moved to the country in 1932. His farm background was never forgotten. Jesse had always dreamt of living in a log cabin, and was obsessive about living on the land. So in 1926 he and Edith began to accumulate land west of Houston, eventually owning many acres between Buffalo Bayou and Old Katy Road in the vicinity of the present West Belt. There they operated their small sawmill and lumberyard and a dairy farm – even, briefly, a frog “farm” to produce frogs for sale to Houston restaurants.

So many children were around the place during one winter when the lumber mill was working full time. The milk was prepared for marketing. Some of the milk crew were living in front of the milking barn with a tent attached for cooking & sleeping. Children, one a 16 yr. old boy, the others less than that to a baby still nursing. The mother preparing for another not yet born.... A woman with one of her own was working on the saw mill also. I think she was running the “edger.” She seemed at home when working, and enjoyed the “repartee.”

...when the lumber mill was working full time



The field out behind a barn used for storing feed had tents around the entire space. The campfires lit up the entire area and altho there was snow and ice, the tent flaps were open. It was around Christmas and it was quite a festive place as the voices talked and joked as they ate and drank. A Christmas tree was in the tent at the milk barn. There were gifts but the prize was a pair of high boots for the 16 year old boy, and it was a gift from the log cutters. He was not going to run the risk of having the boots soiled but held them up high and was walking barefoot in the snow, face shining and eyes aglow, from tent to tent. I do not remember his name but will not forget him. I believe that was the last winter before the flood of 1935, about the time in Dec. of the next year.



On December 6, 1935, their home and their various enterprises faced calamity from Houston's worst flood in fifty years. A downpour at the western edge of Harris County," the birthplace of floods," continued for two days, after which the normal banks of nearby Buffalo Bayou were under twenty feet of water. The Moores had moved their cattle out, but the sawmill along the creek was inundated, logs swept away, and the frogs loosed to the flood. Ten feet of water flooded their house, floating Edith's grand piano to the level of the loft. The family, along with dogs, cats, chickens, and a passing pig later named Noah, was forced to the porch roof, where they were later rescued by their nephew who came in a motorboat over the fencetops from Katy Road. Although their furniture was ruined and the house covered with mud, the solid log building was undamaged. After the flood, they gave up their sawmill on Rummel Creek, but operated a lumberyard and small store on Old Katy Road, and continued to run their dairy farm for a few years and live in their home by the creek.

After the flood it was much nicer no noise and birds all over the place. Animals of all kinds came back, even the foxes. I became acquainted with the cows, bulls, horses, pigs and found out they were all intelligent and eager to be friends. I could take my sketch book and paint with a delighted audience, a white Brahma bull looking over my shoulder and tasting the green paint on my palette. Such fun My two dogs were constant companions except when they chased rabbits....

In 1958, the year before the Moores divorced, they donated five acres across Rummel Creek for a new United Methodist Church. As part of the divorce settlement Edith received the dwelling and 74.40 acres surrounding it, but she gradually sold most of the land for subdivisions, keeping only her log home and twenty-five acres along the creek. (After the divorce, Jesse had no further connection with the history of the house. He lived to the age of 99, dying in 1993.) Edith's love of all wildlife fed her determination to make her small acreage a nature preserve. As she had in the past, she permitted groups of children and adults to come and enjoy her woods, even offering her home and the land along the creek to the National Audubon Society to be dedicated as an urban wildlife refuge. Considered too small for the Society to manage efficiently, her offer was not accepted.



...while she continued to live there. (1960s?)

December 28, 1961 – Christmas passed – cool, crisp and beautifully clear. This was a very lovely Christmas. Was to communion at the new little church Christmas eve. It is a lovely little church snuggling among the trees as if it had always been there. Dear Lord, bless this little church. May it never have the stain of materialism. May all who enter feel thy strength and leave



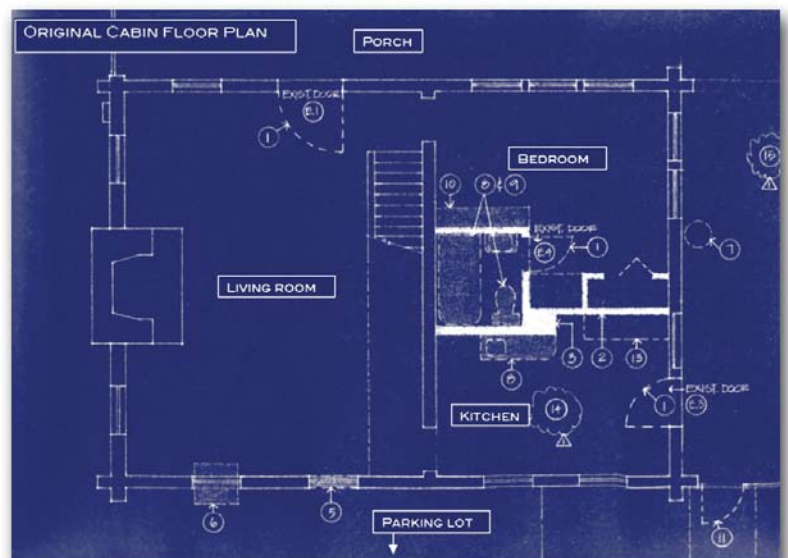
there a new person. May the children who grow up there feel thy presence always.

As suburbia increasingly surrounded her and vandalism and trespassing became problems, neighbors began watching out for their elderly neighbor and her home. Knowing she was a long-time member of the Houston Audubon Society, they eventually suggested that Edith formalize an agreement with the Society to allow them to protect and supervise the grounds while she continued to live there. This was accomplished in 1973 when she was 89 years old.

January, 1973 – The police arrested a bunch of boys on my place. It came after I called them in the middle of a Sunday night, in fact 2:30 AM because someone was shooting at my house. The police found marijuana in a tree house and a bunch of boys. The father of one of them came to me a couple of weeks after I had called the police because his “boy” was over age and would have to go to jail....

When Edith Moore died in 1975, she left her house and seventeen and a half acres on Rummel Creek to the Houston Audubon Society, with the stipulation that the land be used forever as a bird sanctuary and the log house be made available to civic organizations “as a meeting place or otherwise [sic].... The house soon became its education and administrative center, the focus of the chapter’s work in children’s education and its involvement in Southeast Texas’ environmental issues. The house is heavily used by the public, both children and adults, for classes, meetings and the gathering point for tours of the sanctuary. The privately owned, tax-exempt chapter of the National Audubon Society depends entirely on dues and donations for its operating funds, but membership is not a requirement for participation in any activity of the Houston Audubon Society.

October 7, 1974 – Still alive and wondering at feeling so well and being about to paint & compose, found an old



uncompleted song and altho it took a long time was able to finish it. I like the last part best but without the rest it would not make sense. The first part was written so many years ago. The "south wind" was always asking me "why I was alive" – so I laid the song away and at last "The south wind sighed from a passing cloud to a lark high in the air etc. [This was the last entry. E.L.M. died March 22, 1975.]

Since its construction the building had had no significant repairs. By the mid-1980s it was apparent that major work must be done to rescue and preserve the structure which attracted so much attention. The wooden underpinnings were rotting. Both chimneys leaked at their juncture with the log walls. The original cement chinking had pulled away from the logs, letting daylight and cold winter wind through the cracks, and the whole roof needed to be replaced. Money for a major restoration was raised and in late 1988 proposals for the work were submitted and approved. Interestingly, the construction company selected to carry out the work was Bauer Construction, Inc., the "descendant" of long-time sawmills operated by the Bauer family in the Spring Branch neighborhood when the Moores came to the area.

To stabilize and level the structure, additional concrete pads and CMU blocks were installed to augment the remaining rock supports of the original sill logs; rotten joists and wood shims were replaced with treated 4"x6" and 2"x6" members; and the sagging roof was replaced. The original porch decking was replaced, and rusted, vandalized screening removed from the porch perimeter. The original cement chinking between the logs was replaced throughout with Perma-Chink latex caulking and backing rods. The central brick chimney, long unused and leaking, was removed. To accommodate sanctuary visitors, part of the original kitchen was converted to an entry hall opening to the west, and the rest became a bathroom with a south-facing outside entrance [the original kitchen door]. The small upstairs room remained, becoming the Society office.

Total changes were minor – both inside and out – the original log construction remaining as it had been built in 1931, the only exception being the opening cut for a door opening to the new parking area on the west. Even the original window frames and glass and hardware have not been replaced. The south porch was extended to provide cover for the new west entry. Eventually an open teaching deck was built on the north end, connecting to the original porch. Additionally a central air conditioning and heating system was installed, and the logs were treated to repel insects and water.



Since completion of the 1989 renovation the log house and the surrounding sanctuary have continued to be the heart of Houston Audubon Society's broad educational role in helping preserve the natural world in the Houston area. The house, which everyone calls "The Cabin," arouses the curiosity of its visitors – when was it built? Who built it? Why was it built? The old log home is a living reminder of the history of the western outskirts of old Houston and a vanished way of life.

...but it can use a bit of help.