

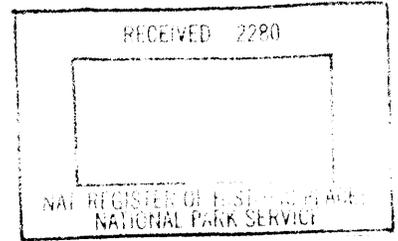
NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

876



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1. Name of Property

historic name Verdigris Club Lodge

other names/site number Skelly Lodge

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2. Location

street & number Route 2, Box 541 not for publication N/A  
city or town Catoosa vicinity X  
state Oklahoma code OK county Rogers code 131  
zip code 74015

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. ( N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 7-21-03  
Signature of certifying official                      Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

     See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_

National Register

     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_

National Register

     removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

     other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of Keeper

SEP 2 2003  
Date of Action

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5. Classification

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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register  0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   SOCIAL   Sub:   clubhouse  

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   DOMESTIC   Sub:   single dwelling  

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

  Swiss Chalet  

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation   concrete  

roof   asphalt shingle  

walls   native stone  

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance  1931-1953 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates \_1931, 1951 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation \_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder \_\_\_ unknown \_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

\_\_\_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

\_\_\_ previously listed in the National Register

\_\_\_ previously determined eligible by the National Register

\_\_\_ designated a National Historic Landmark

\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

\_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office

\_\_\_ Other State agency

\_\_\_ Federal agency

\_\_\_ Local government

\_\_\_ University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_ Tulsa Historical Society \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property \_ less than two acres \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	_ 15 _	_ 263669E _	_ 4010461N _	3	_____
2	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
____ See continuation sheet.					

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By

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name/title \_\_\_ Michael Cassity \_\_\_\_\_

organization \_\_\_ Michael Cassity Historical Research and Photography \_ date \_\_\_ March 10, 2003 \_

street & number \_ 304 West Albuquerque \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_ 918 451-8378 \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_ Broken Arrow \_\_\_\_\_ state \_ OK \_ zip code \_ 74011 \_\_\_\_\_

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Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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Property Owner

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_ Tommy A. Worth \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_ 2455 N. 301 E. Avenue \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_ 317 374-3332 \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_ Catoosa \_\_\_\_\_ state \_ OK \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_ 74015 \_\_\_\_\_

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Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge

Rogers County, Oklahoma

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Description

**SUMMARY**

The Skelly Lodge is an elegant twelve room Swiss Chalet style building constructed of native stone that rests high on a knoll with a commanding view of the Verdigris River valley and the wooded hills of northeastern Oklahoma. Only a few miles northeast of the Tulsa metropolitan area, the two story stone building with a basement is surprisingly secluded. The house is accessed by a private drive of more than a mile from the property boundary on the west and also from the adjacent landscaping by a stone walkway leading from the south. The configuration of the building is technically a cross-shape since the north-south ridgepole of the roof—which slopes down with hipped roofs on the north and south extremes—is also intersected by an east-west gabled roof over a section that projects slightly beyond the east and west elevations. The roof is made of composition shingles and its eaves extend well beyond the elevations below. The building is approximately forty feet at the widest point of its east-west axis (including the attached veranda) and approximately seventy-five feet on its north-south axis. The building has been carefully maintained and it possesses a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**South Elevation**

The south elevation of the building includes the main entrance and consists of a terrazzo porch covered by a balcony that extends the full length of the elevation under a hipped roof with wide eave overhangs. The ground floor terrazzo is light colored, divided into square panels, and is surrounded by a gray terrazzo border around the full perimeter. On the first floor, the coursed rubble elevation is broken symmetrically with a center entrance flanked by matching windows. The entrance, a double door with four lights on each side, is made of wood painted dark brown, matching the window trim. The casement windows are likewise double so that they open outward from a center post. The fenestration, indeed, is distinctive in that the casement windows are large, consist of three square lights in each unit, and are matched by another square clerestory above each casement. This

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configuration is exactly the same on all windows in the building, except that the lintel stonework in these south elevation ground floor windows are coursed flat rubble, where the lintels in most other windows are flat arches with keystones.

The balcony is supported by four square piers rising from the porch along the south and two more at the corners of the house, each pier built of the same varied-color brown rock as the house. A simple wooden rail connects each of the piers except for the central entrance section. The balcony itself, on the second floor, is the same dimensions as the porch, but where the piers on the ground floor are made of stone, the piers on the balcony level are made of square wooden timbers arranged in pairs and connected by a wood rail; the rail is supported by closely spaced, carved baluster planks with graceful cutouts. Carved corner braces at the top of each timber support square ceiling joists. Characteristic of Swiss Chalet Revival style, the wide eaves overhang substantially beyond the balcony with exposed rafters. The south elevation on the balcony level echoes that below, with a centered entrance flanked by similar windows centered between the door and the corners of the building. The only difference is that the entrance on the balcony level is a single door rather than double.

### **East Elevation**

The east elevation, with its dramatic view of the river valley, is divided into two sections, both with terrazzo decking that extends almost the full length of the elevation. The first section, adjacent to the south porch, projects slightly to the east and is built entirely of a combination of coursed and random rubble up to the brown wooden gable, while the second section, immediately north of the first, is made of stone on the ground floor only, with brown clapboard siding above, on the second floor.

On the ground level of the first section, a double door entrance matching that on the south elevation is flanked by casement windows and clerestories also identical to those on the south. A shed roof supported by large ornamental eave braces protects the entrance. The windowsills and lintels, like many others in the building, are flat arches with keystones. On the second level two window units, again identical to the others, are positioned

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symmetrically; the sills are the same flat stone, but the lintels are concealed by the siding of the gable. The siding itself is wood painted brown, and rises from two massive timbers serving as joists, the upper timber sloping down at a low pitch to the north and south from a peak at midpoint. Two ornamental eave braces, positioned approximately above the outside corners of each window, project beyond the eaves and bracket a panel of board and batten wooden siding distinguished by small curved moldings at the top of each batten. Above the board and batten section narrow clapboards are lapped to provide a horizontal contrast to the vertical lines below. The fascia includes only a slight hint of ornamental carving at its lowest points.

The second section, to the north of the first, is defined by its clapboard siding on the upper level and also by its roof which slopes from a north – south ridgepole that intersects with the gable of the first section. The lower level is the same pattern of stone used elsewhere and the upper level is brown clapboard siding. Three evenly spaced openings punctuate the lower level. The first two openings in the rock wall are double door entrances one step above the terrazzo floor, but the third is another pair of center-opening casement windows; unlike the windows in other parts of the house, these do not include clerestories and since they rise to the bottom of the clapboard siding, they also do not have stone lintels. The terrazzo deck reaches to a point past the two entrances and a sloping modern canvas canopy supported by a sturdy, but discreet, metal post frame covers the deck in this section. Although clearly this canopy is modern, it is unclear if it replaces an earlier canopy of similar construction; this feature is non-contributing, but the burgundy color of the canvas enables it to blend with the structure and it is so designed that it does not impair the integrity of the structure visually or structurally. The perimeter of the deck is defined by a rock wall that rises from the sloping ground to the deck level and then continues in segments to form a series of five low piers around the deck. The stone piers are connected with simple wooden rails and balustrades. Above the canopy the clapboard siding contains three window units, each positioned directly above those on the ground level. These units, though, are distinctive in that they contain the same center-opening three-light casements as elsewhere, but here the casements are separated by an additional three-light fixed window in the center.

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**North Elevation**

The general configuration of stone on the ground level and clapboard siding on the second story continues on the north elevation. Because of the northward slope of the surrounding terrace, stairs rise to the entrance and a basement window opens on this elevation. The entrance, on the east side of the elevation, is a single door with eight lights, and the concrete steps approaching the entrance are confined by stone and masonry rails on each side. Immediately west of the stairs the elevation projects outward in a small cellular feature to accommodate kitchen and service functions in the interior. This is original to the building, and, while not repeated on other elevations, is integrated into the overall design by being centered on the elevation, by the use of the same stone, and by the use of a sloping roof with exposed rafters. A small casement window with three lights is centered just under the eave on the north elevation of this protrusion. West of this extension of the elevation the basement window indicates how great the slope of the terrace is since that window is a full-sized vertical pair of center-opening casement windows. Moreover, this window has the same stone sill and flat arch stone lintel with keystone found elsewhere on the building. The other windows and door in the north elevation have no lintel, or the lintel is covered, with their tops exactly at the bottom of the clapboard siding of the second floor of the house. The clapboard siding on the second level is interrupted by three sets of windows, the sets on either side consisting of pairs of large three-light casements and the set in the middle being smaller paired casements.

**West Elevation**

Although the main entrance to the building, into the grand lodge room, is on the south elevation, the visitor first sees the west entrance upon approaching the building from the drive. Accordingly, this elevation is the most ornate and imposing façade. The west elevation includes an entrance to the building, but it is smaller than the south entrance and opens into a hallway on the interior; it was therefore of secondary importance in the life of the building. As with the east elevation, the west elevation is divided into two distinct sections, the first, or northernmost, and the second to the south. While the first section is made of stone on the ground level (which includes basement and main floor windows) with

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clapboard siding on the second level, the southern section is built entirely of stone up to the gable that crowns that section and projects slightly outward beyond the plane of the first.

The first section, to the north, is divided horizontally between the first and second interior levels, with coursed rubble of native stone rising from the ground to the clapboard siding of the upper level. Three small horizontal basement openings with stone sills and lintels are located immediately north of a set of stairs that lead to the entrance. The middle opening is a vent from the basement and the other two are three-light casement windows. The stairs that lead up to the entrance rise alongside the elevation but are concealed by a stone rail matching the elevation. The entrance is a single wooden door with a small vision light for viewing arriving guests on the stairhead outside. A porch roof is hipped and supported by eave braces similar to those on the east and north elevations. The three window openings north of the entrance are similar to those elsewhere in the building—vertical paired casements with three lights each that open from the center, except that these lack clerestories above them. They also lack lintels, or the clapboard siding above covers the lintels. In the upper level, four sets of windows are positioned directly above the three sets of windows and entrance below. The first set of windows on the north extreme of the elevation includes a pair of three-light vertical casements separated by a fixed set of three lights in the center and the three units to the south are just the casements without the center lights.

The second, south, section of the west elevation contrasts with the first, north, section because of its vertical lines, projecting outward and rising from the basement to the gable, and because of its stone construction. The prominent feature of this section is the massive chimney in the center of the section which rises to the gable and then through the roof. Projecting outward from the elevation of the section, the chimney tapers abruptly to a smaller dimension on all three sides in the middle of the main interior level. A masonry setoff forms the union where the reduction takes place, and then the chimney continues its ascent, tapering slightly as it rises. Near the base of the chimney to the north (left) is an inconspicuous entrance into the basement; a single door with vision light at the bottom of a short set of stairs is obscured by the adjacent steps south that lead up to the main level entrance. To the south (right) of the chimney a vertical three-light casement window opens into the basement. This door and this window, although not noticeable by themselves, both

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blend into the building further and enhance the vertical appearance of this section of the elevation since above them directly are additional windows on the main and upper levels. Once again, all these windows are paired three-light casements that open vertically from the center, but the units on the main level include clerestories immediately above the casements. These main level windows also feature conspicuous and careful stone masonry in their sills and lintels. Once again, too, the windows on the upper level lack lintels since they are situated immediately beneath the clapboard siding of the gable. The dark brown gable mirrors that on the east elevation except that the chimney replaces the board and batten panel located on the east. The ornamental eave braces, however, and the gestures toward ornamentation in the fascia are repeated.

**Interior**

The interior of the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge includes service and utility rooms in the basement appropriate to a hunting lodge and also rooms that have been utilized for business meetings. The main level is dominated by a spacious lodge room on the south with fireplace and mantle that match exterior design elements and a kitchen area on the north. A hall upstairs bisects the full length of the building, opening onto the balcony, and bedrooms and bathrooms open off the hall.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

**Summary**

The Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A because of its association with the social history of Tulsa, and in particular with a group of prominent individuals who served as civic and economic leaders during the period in which Tulsa achieved its regional distinction as a city dominated by the social order and personalities of the petroleum industry. Constructed about 1931, this building served as the private hunting lodge of a small, very exclusive, club that shunned public notice of the private activities of its members. Thus the lodge building eluded publicity during its active use, but the members of the club included individuals who not only reaped huge rewards from their business activities but who made Tulsa in the 1920s and 1930s the "Oil Capital of the World," and the Verdigris Club Lodge reflected the sumptuous lifestyle and group identity of these community leaders. Likewise, with the demise of the oil bubble in the area in the Depression and World War II, and with the transformation of Tulsa from a swashbuckling town where maverick oilmen ruled by caprice and where individual personalities shaped public life to a more diversified, integrated, and conforming social order, the Verdigris Club Lodge reflected that too. With the fading of the old order, the lodge became the exclusive retreat of one of the members of the club who bought it—William G. Skelly—and thus became known also as the Skelly Lodge. In the course of its history from creation to its final life in private use, it reflected the individualistic, independent, and swaggering presence of the new Tulsa elite, and then as it passed into private hands it also reflected the transformation of the Tulsa economy and social order to a more stable, if less dramatic, structure. In this way, the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge reflected fundamental contours of the broad patterns of history at the local level and is thereby eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

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### Historical Background

When the Creek, or Muscogee, Indians of Georgia and Alabama were forced to remove to the new Indian Territory in the early 1830s, they clustered for defense and mutual aid along the Arkansas River around the confluence of the Verdigris River. By 1834, when a military post was established higher up the Arkansas, where the Cimarron River joined the larger stream, these people felt more secure from some of their enemies and began to expand their settlements upstream.<sup>1</sup> In the 1830s these groups settled their agricultural communities, widely dispersed towns each of which was centered around a town square for ceremonies and meetings, in places that bore the names of the communities they had left behind. Towns like Coweta, Thlikachka (Broken Arrow), and Lochapoka emerged north of the river. Lochopoka, a daughter town of the larger pre-migration Tallasi and sometimes called such, formed around a new town square laid out beginning at the base of a grand tree, the Council Oak Tree, high on a hill east of where the Arkansas River turned south from its eastward course. Over the next half century this community became gradually something of a ranching and trading center for the area. Lewis Perryman, a mixed-blood Creek, brought his branch of the family to the Lochopoka, or Tallasi, square, and emerged as one of the leaders of that community; when he moved to the new home, he came from an area near the Verdigris River, about eighteen miles to the northeast. While the Verdigris valley retained its sparsely settled agrarian base adjacent to the hilly woodlands rising from the river, the Tallasi village grew until war devastated the area. Caught between the North and South, and victimized by both, in the Civil War, the community had to rebuild after the war. Before long, George Perryman, son of Lewis, built a house made of lumber imported from Kansas, and that home became a showplace, "the white house," and in 1879 it became the post office for the town whose name had been transformed from Tallasi to Tulsey Town and finally to Tulsa. White people filtered into the area, usually illegally, and the railroad soon followed, crossing the Verdigris River at Catoosa from the east and halting at the small town of Tulsa. The ranching community of Tulsa grew, the restrictions on white immigration went unenforced, and at the turn of the century, under the aegis of the

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 151-152.

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allotment process by which tribal land was distributed to individuals and in which townsite land was sold to the existing occupants of that land, the Creek Nation lost the land that had been assured it, and a new order came to dominance.

**A New City and a New Order**

The social structure of Tulsa initially revolved around ranching, with its rural patterns of economy and culture, and Tulsa would likely have remained a small ranching community, smaller even than other communities in the area, had it not been for another development at the turn of the century. Several oil discoveries in the surrounding area launched Tulsa on a distinct course of development, beginning with the Red Fork gusher in 1901, across the Arkansas River from Tulsa. This was followed by discoveries near Cleveland in 1904, and especially by the discovery of the Glenn Pool, south of Tulsa, which, according to historian Carl Coke Rister, “capped all early-day Oklahoma fields.”<sup>2</sup> In 1906—just before statehood—this huge field set off a frenzy of exploration and moved Oklahoma to a position where it produced over half of the region’s oil; the Glenn Pool itself did not yield a single dry hole in its primary producing area in the first two years of production. Locally that activity contributed to a surge in population, and Tulsa grew from 7,298 citizens in 1907 to 18,182 in 1910. More than size, though, this growth reflected a different kind of economy coming to dominance, activity symbolized by the arrival of the *Oil Investors’ Journal*, from Beaumont, Texas, in 1908. This was at first a branch office of the trade journal that reported activity in the nation’s oil fields, but by 1910 the journal’s main office had moved to Tulsa and changed its name to the *Oil and Gas Journal*.<sup>3</sup> In 1912 the giant Cushing oil field west of Tulsa went into production. Oilmen flocked to the area, bringing with them companies that were already established in Pennsylvania and also creating new

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949) 89.

<sup>3</sup> Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 97.

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companies. And the suppliers, the pipelines, and producers came in droves, and refineries began to crop up in West Tulsa and at Sand Springs, both across the Arkansas River from Tulsa. The population soared again. By 1920 Tulsa had 72,075 people—an increase of nearly three hundred percent in the decade. In that year the city telephone book listed 431 oil and gas companies, a number, as historian Danney Goble points out, that was three times the number of grocers and twice the combined sum of doctors and lawyers in the city. And that did not count the oil refineries, the petroleum distribution companies, or gasoline companies.<sup>4</sup> And the growth continued. In 1920 the giant Osage field emerged; while much of the oil from the Burbank field went to Ponca City, as Angie Debo explains, “Tulsa was the oil capital, and the management and wealth of the industry still centered there.”<sup>5</sup> By 1930 the population doubled yet again, reaching a level of 141,258—the second largest city in Oklahoma. Again Professor Goble cogently summarizes what had happened in those years:

By 1927, Tulsa provided the headquarters for fifteen hundred oil-related companies, and the city was at once the nerve center, the heart, and the guts of the mid-continent fields, which produced two-thirds of the nation’s oil. Its refineries furnished more gasoline than any other city in America. Its pipelines ran to each coast. Its producers were directly responsible for 90 percent of the crude oil flowing from Oklahoma fields, which, in turn, accounted for a third of all the oil originating in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Where previously ranchers had dominated the economy and culture of the town, now a group of oilmen set the pace. A distinct group of people emerged as economic leaders and one after another, men associated with the oil industry also served a second role as civic leaders in Tulsa. People like Tom Slick, Waite Phillips, Walter Helmerich, John Catlett,

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<sup>4</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 108.

<sup>5</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 95-96.

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and William G. Skelly had already become familiar names and figures in the community. The famous wildcatter Tom Slick had been the instigator of exploring and developing the fabulous Cushing field. Waite Phillips, one of the three Phillips brothers important in the oil business, ventured on his own and, according to the hagiographic 1921 *History of Tulsa*, “he now owns some of the most valuable producing properties in the mid-continent field and is also successfully engaged in transporting, refining and marketing petroleum products.” A few years later Phillips, with something of a magic touch, sold his holdings for five million dollars, organized a new company, and a year later sold those properties for twenty-five million dollars.<sup>7</sup> Walter Helmerich had moved his drilling company, Helmerich & Payne, from Texas to Tulsa to be in the center of activity in 1924. William G. Skelly was known, according to Rister, as “one of the best-known Mid-Continent oil-field operators of the nineteen-twenties.”<sup>8</sup> In 1923 Tulsa started hosting the International Petroleum Exposition, a regularly-scheduled event that highlighted developments in the industry and brought more attention to Tulsa as the oil capital. The director of the Petroleum Expo was, of course, William G. Skelly. Skelly, Slick, Phillips, Helmerich, and perhaps a dozen others—these were the “Princes of Petroleum.”

But it was not just the men with backgrounds in the oil fields who were prominent in Tulsa. There emerged an alliance between oil interests and banking interests that met the needs of both factions and thereby shaped the contours of the Tulsa establishment. As Angie Debo discreetly observed about the oil boom, “at the same time Tulsa’s banks were developing the specialized functions that were to place them among the leading oil banks of the world.”<sup>9</sup> The board of directors of Tulsa banks included more and more representatives from the petroleum industry. As early as 1921, Clarence Douglas noted the importance of Tulsa’s banking system to the oil business when he reported that “it has become a proverb

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<sup>7</sup> Clarence Douglas, *The History of Tulsa, Oklahoma*, vol. III (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1921), 708; Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 104.

<sup>8</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 127.

<sup>9</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 98.

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that 'Regardless of where a new oil field is found, the money from that field will ultimately flow through the financial channels of Tulsa's banking institutions.'"<sup>10</sup> The alliance brought together in daily discussions downtown the oilmen and the bankers, especially with the Exchange National Bank, which then became National Bank of Tulsa after a series of mergers, where people like A. E. Bradshaw served as president, and the First National Bank where Otis McClintock, president, served on the board of directors with oilmen like Tom Slick, C. C. Herndon, W. L. Kistler, Dennis F. McMahon, Clyde Pape, William G. Skelly, and George Snedden. Waite Phillips personified the bond between oil and money; this oilman also served as chairman of the board of the First National Bank.

These men of power, the princes of oil in Tulsa, made their marks in several ways. One was the downtown skyline. Angie Debo commented that in 1927 more than a million dollars a month was being spent on downtown construction: "Tulsans at this time erected skyscrapers not so much because ground space was at a premium, but because they liked to see them rise."<sup>11</sup> The Philtower Building, the Philcade, the Mayo Hotel, the Petroleum Building, the Oklahoma Natural Gas Building, the Sinclair Building, the Midcontinent Building, the Exchange National Bank Building, and the First National Bank Building were office buildings matched in the community by the Boston Avenue Methodist Church, the Holy Family Church, the Medical Arts Building, the First Presbyterian Church, and a host of smaller buildings, often with a distinctive Art Deco style of architecture and with the same ultimate source of funding and inspiration—the new elite based on oil and banking. At least one study maintains that "By the end of the decade [of the 1920s] Tulsa had more 'skyscrapers' (buildings at least ten-stories high) than any other city of its size in the world."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, vol. I, 592.

<sup>11</sup> [Angie Debo], *Tulsa: A Guide to the Oil Capital* (Tulsa: The Mid-West Printing Co., 1938); American Guide Series, Compiled by Workers of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Oklahoma; 44; Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 105.

<sup>12</sup> Tulsa Foundation for Architecture, *Tulsa Art Deco* (Tulsa: Tulsa Foundation for

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Another mark can be found in the homes they built. If the downtown came to be the structural symbol of rising energy, the homes where the princes lived reflected the domestic aspirations they held and showed what money could buy. Where the earlier elite of Tulsa lived north of the M.K.&T. Railroad, the expansion during Tulsa's boom opened up whole new neighborhoods, places like Riverview and Riverside, and like Maple Ridge, a neighborhood that placed a minimum size on houses to be built there. As John Brooks Walton, foremost authority on Tulsa's architectural heritage in homes, noted of Maple Ridge, "... its development parallels the growth of the banking and oil industry in Tulsa during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The men and women whose wealth was created by the Glenn Pool Oil strike of 1905 and the Cushing strike of 1912 were the people who built their homes in Maple Ridge."<sup>13</sup> One after another of the princes constructed elaborate homes that were mansions in every sense—large, handsome, elegant, expensive, and often ostentatious. That the Tulsa Garden Center and the Philbrook Art Museum of modern Tulsa fit into the homes of these people indicates the scale, the taste, and the size of these domiciles. They had the best that money could buy.

### **The Verdigris Club and Tulsa's Elite**

A third legacy was much less noticeable, is seldom visited, and is usually neglected in discussions of the dynamics of the oil boom in Tulsa. These members of Tulsa's elite formed an obscure organization and into it they invested their money, found a refuge, and participated individually, stepping out of the public spotlight to do so. The Verdigris Club consisted of twenty-one carefully selected individuals, each paying five thousand dollars for the privilege of joining. The ostensible purpose of the organization was to own a large tract of land eighteen miles northeast of Tulsa along the Verdigris River—a hilly, wooded area not far from the location where Lewis Perryman had farmed before moving to the

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Architecture, 2001), 32.

<sup>13</sup> John Brooks Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes* (Tulsa: HCE Publications, 2000), 67.

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location that would become the future oil capital. On May 5, 1930 the Verdigris Club was incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the laws of Oklahoma in documents filed with the Secretary of State's Office. Before and after that date, A. E. Bradshaw, the President of the club, busied himself with the purchase and aggregation of tracts of land along the Verdigris River which he subsequently transferred to the Verdigris Club.<sup>14</sup>

The activities of the Verdigris Club are not included in the annals of Tulsa's history. The organization did not receive notice in the local newspaper. The club was not listed in the directories of fraternal and charitable organizations. Located outside the city limits, it missed the usual recording of Sanborn maps, of building permits, and official filings. The newspaper coverage, and even the obituaries, of the members listed their many private and public accomplishments but they rarely—if ever—mentioned their affiliation with the Verdigris Club. Not only was the Verdigris Club the most exclusive organization in Tulsa, it was also probably the most private—in every sense.

Most of what is known about the Verdigris Club is drawn from information about its small coterie of members. The twenty-one individuals who made up the Verdigris Club represented the pinnacle of Tulsa society, the wealthiest and most prominent men in town (and they were all men). But it was even narrower than that, for these people mostly came from the oil industry and the banking industry in Tulsa and were often linked together in business, sometimes literally with corporate interlocks and sometimes only by sharing the general experience from their separate empires. They lived in much the same neighborhood in houses that have commanded attention and attracted admiration in the seven decades since. Not only are many of their houses located in the Maple Ridge Historic Residential District, but some of them, like the William G. Skelly house and the Waite Phillips Mansion (Philbrook), have achieved National Register listing individually and more of their homes are certainly eligible. At least nine, and possibly more, of their residences are included in the first volume of John Brooks Walton's sumptuous celebration of historic homes in Tulsa—the homes of William Skelly, Waite Phillips, George Snedden, Otis McClintock, Henry Greiss, Clarence H. Wright, Cass Mayo, Arthur L. Farmer, and

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<sup>14</sup> Rogers County Clerk property files and index.

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Clyde Pape.<sup>15</sup> Most of them achieved their wealth and prominence directly in the oil industry. The names of Skelly and Phillips again immediately suggest the pattern, but others like Walter Helmerich, Tom Slick, C. H. Wright, Clyde Pape, and others were well known as drillers, wildcatters, refiners, and suppliers, equally critical to the oil industry. A smaller group derived from the banking sector. The president of the club, A. E. Bradshaw served as Executive Vice President of the Exchange National Bank before becoming director and chairman of the board for Oklahoma Natural Gas and then becoming President of the reorganized National Bank of Tulsa in 1933. Otis McClintock became president of the First National Bank in 1926. J. C. Pinkerton, a prominent figure in his own right, also served as counsel and trust officer for the First National Bank.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the First National's directors in 1929 included ten of the future members of the Verdigris Club.<sup>17</sup> Only a few members were not Tulsa residents (most notably Tom Slick and Walter Urschel of Oklahoma City and H. V. Foster of Bartlesville all of whom had business interests in Tulsa and frequented the city often), but their connection was nonetheless clear and their credentials impeccable.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*.

<sup>16</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1929* (n.p., n.d.), *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1930* (n.p., n.d.); *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1931* (n.p., n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> First National Bank and Trust Company advertisement listing directors, back cover, *Tulsa Spirit* (Official publication of Tulsa Chamber of Commerce), June 1929.

<sup>18</sup> H. V. Foster of Bartlesville held an oil and gas lease on the entire 2208 square mile reservation owned by the Osage Nation. Even though Foster subleased some of the land, and even though in 1906 the government restricted his leases to 680,000 acres, and even though his second lease expired in 1916, the oil discoveries on that land brought great wealth not only to Foster but to others like Frank and L. E. Phillips and George Getty who had subleased the mineral rights. Foster went on to rework the Seminole field, and amassed a huge fortune, which he then put into the Oklahoma City field, where he made an even more profitable strike. His earnings from his Oklahoma City wells provided him an income of \$224,000 a day. At one point, with a fortune that exceeded \$120 million, H. V.

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The Verdigris Club did not bring these people together to cement their fraternal bonds or to rub shoulders in rituals. They did not need an organization to mark their status and they did not need to find new friends. Indeed, these people were aggressive and highly individualistic, even notoriously so, and in business they probably fought each other as much as they stood together. Sometimes the conflict was philosophical. Tom Slick, the famous wildcatter who brought in the Cushing field, reflected some of that independent philosophy when he loudly proclaimed what was called "free-for-all production and spacing" and bluntly rejected all governmental regulation of the oil industry, even when production limits were urged by other producers, his colleagues in the industry, to prevent a glut of the market, generate higher prices, and reduce waste.<sup>19</sup> Tom Slick was a member of the Verdigris Club. Sometimes the disagreements were personal. The story is legendary of the time in 1929 when, in the lobby of the Mayo Hotel which many of the oil men made their informal headquarters, Frank Phillips called William Skelly a liar, and Skelly lunged at Phillips and a fist fight began.<sup>20</sup> Skelly was a member of the Verdigris Club, as was the principal witness to the affray, A. E. Bradshaw. Frank Phillips was not a member, as best as can be determined, but his brother Waite was. Sometimes the conflicts were strictly business. In December 22, 1932, Waite Phillips, chairman of the board of the First National Bank, persuaded his board to secure the resignation of Robert C. Sharp as president of the Independent Oil & Gas Company, a company in which the bank, and its chairman, had invested heavily. Phillips and Sharp were both members of the Verdigris Club. This was not a group known for its deference to social convention or manners or

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Foster was identified as the richest man west of the Mississippi. Joe Williams, *Bartlesville: Remembrances of Times Past, Reflections of Today* (Bartlesville: TRW Reda Pump Division, 1978), 81-88, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 256.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Gregory, *Oil in Oklahoma* (Muskogee, Oklahoma: James C. Leake Industries, 1976), 47.

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who allowed friendship to stand in the way of business. This was the group that comprised the Verdigris Club—a paradox of an organization of fiercely independent individuals.

There were, however, some bonds between these people, bonds that usually predated their membership. Tom Slick's business interests in Tulsa were represented by E. E. Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick, a close ally of Slick, was also a member of the Verdigris Club, and he distinguished himself in the group when he wrote and published both prose and poetry, usually about the oil industry, but also about pastoral settings like that of the Verdigris Club itself.<sup>21</sup> After Tom Slick died in 1930, his widow in 1932 married oilman and fellow Verdigris Club member Charles Urschel; Urschel, in fact, employed by Slick, had also been married to Slick's sister Flored until she died in 1931.<sup>22</sup> In 1933 when Urschel was kidnapped by Machine Gun Kelly, Ernest Kirkpatrick delivered the ransom money for his release, and then wrote a book about the incident (Urschel was safely returned and the kidnappers captured).<sup>23</sup> There were some who were neighbors not just in the same neighborhood, but even across the street, like Skelly and Dennis McMahon. There were longtime friends and business associates, like McClintock and Waite Phillips, close confidants and president and chairman, respectively, of the First National Bank. But these bonds existed independent of the relationship produced by membership in the Verdigris Club. Given the aggressive personalities, economic independence, and eye for

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<sup>21</sup> See in particular his *Geese Flying South: A Collection of Poems* (May, Texas: Published by Ben H. Moore, n.d.), a limited edition volume published with etched wooden covers. Included in the volume are Kirkpatrick's poems "Solitudes" and "Geese Flying South," which contain bucolic reveries suggestive of the isolated riverine wetlands at the Verdigris Lodge, but also his homage to his patron, "To Tom Slick."

<sup>22</sup> Ray Miles, *"King of the Wildcatters": The Life and Times of Tom Slick, 1883-1930* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M Press, 1996), 122.

<sup>23</sup> E. E. Kirkpatrick, *Crimes' Paradise: The Authentic Story of the Urschel Kidnapping* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1934).

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the main chance that characterized this group, probably no organization could have inspired them to find bonds that had eluded them elsewhere in life.

The legal documents chartering the organization and the skimpy news reports surrounding it permit a reconstruction of the membership roll of the Verdigris Club, at least at its beginning. The members included the following individuals and two others who have not been identified.<sup>24</sup>

1. A.E. Bradshaw, president of Verdigris Club; president, National Bank of Tulsa; director and chairman of board, Oklahoma Natural Gas Company; president, Oklahoma Bankers' Association<sup>25</sup>
2. William G. Skelly, president Skelly Oil Company, director, First National Bank, director International Oil Exposition, many local civic honors<sup>26</sup>
3. Otis McClintock, former oilman associate of Waite Phillips, president of First National Bank<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A partial list of members can be found in "Skelly Buys Exclusive Verdigris Hunting Club," undated newsclipping [February 1951], in William G. Skelly vertical file, Tulsa City County Library and a list of the eleven directors can be found in Articles of Incorporation for The Verdigris Club, filed with the Oklahoma Secretary of State, May 22, 1930, file #66850.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, II, 91; Clarence Allen, *Who's Who in Tulsa* (n.p., 1950); First National Bank and Trust Company advertisement listing directors, back cover, *Tulsa Spirit* (Official publication of Tulsa Chamber of Commerce), June 1929; Nina Lane Dunn, *Tulsa's Magic Roots* (Tulsa: N.L.D. Corporation, 1979), 188-189.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, II, 166; Gregory, *Oil in Oklahoma*, 45-52; Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*; Roberta Louise Ironside, *An Adventure Called Skelly: A History of Skelly Oil Company through Fifty Years, 1919-1969* (New York: Appleton - Century - Crofts, 1970); *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Skelly biography file at Tulsa City / County Library.

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4. Waite Phillips, oilman and philanthropist, chairman of board, First National Bank<sup>28</sup>
  5. Tom P. Slick, Oklahoma City wildcatter, oil producer, director, First National Bank<sup>29</sup>
  6. John Catlett, Tulsa, oil industry<sup>30</sup>
  7. E. E. Kirkpatrick, geologist, attorney, landman; Tulsa representative for Tom Slick, poet, author<sup>31</sup>
  8. Henry Greiss, oil and gas producer<sup>32</sup>
  9. Walter Helmerich, drilling contractor<sup>33</sup>
  10. C. H. Wright, president of Sunray Oil Corp<sup>34</sup>
  11. H. V. Foster, oil producer, of Bartlesville<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Who's Who in Tulsa; Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; *The First Seventy-Five: A Story of a City and Its Bank* (Tulsa: First National Bank & Trust Company of Tulsa, 1970), 16-17; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, III, 708; Franks, 227-229; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 115.

<sup>29</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 119-122; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929.

<sup>30</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1931*.

<sup>31</sup> Ray Miles, "King of the Wildcatters": *The Life and Times of Tom Slick, 1883-1930*, 79 1931; *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1931*; E. E. Kirkpatrick, *Crimes' Paradise: The Authentic Story of the Urschel Kidnapping*; Kirkpatrick, *Geese Flying South: A Collection of Poems*.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, III, 530; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 120.

<sup>33</sup> Wesley Brown, "Tulsa Driller," in *Tulsa World*, January 12, 1998, special issue.

<sup>34</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 267; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 65. In 1954 Wright retired to a farm near Catoosa not far from the lodge.

<sup>35</sup> See note 18, above, on Foster, and also Williams, *Bartlesville: Remembrances of Times*

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12. Robert Sharp, vice president Oklahoma Natural Gas Company, president of Independent Oil & Gas Company, president of Southern Natural Gas Corporation, director, First National Bank<sup>36</sup>
  13. Cass A. Mayo, president of Mayos' Incorporated, director of First National Bank, Tulsa builder<sup>37</sup>
  14. Dennis F. McMahon, oil producer, member of board of First National Bank<sup>38</sup>
  15. Clyde Pape, secretary and treasurer, Selby Oil & Gas Company, director, First National Bank<sup>39</sup>
  16. Charles F. Urschel, Oklahoma City oil producer (Tom Slick associate)<sup>40</sup>
  17. George Snedden, vice president, Western Oil Corporation, director First National Bank<sup>41</sup>
  18. Arthur L. Farmer, insurance business (Farmer and Duran) and real estate developer of upscale residential neighborhoods associated with the oil industry; president, Sunbeam Petroleum Company; director, First National Bank<sup>42</sup>

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*Past, Reflections of Today*, 81-88, 101.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, III, 731; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, III, 523; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 55.

<sup>38</sup> *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1931*.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas, *History of Tulsa*, II, 47; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Ray Miles, "King of the Wildcatters": *The Life and Times of Tom Slick, 1883-1930*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 112ff.

<sup>42</sup> Walton, *One Hundred Historic Tulsa Homes*, 103-4; *Tulsa Spirit*, June 1929; Douglas,

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19. J. C. Pinkerton, Associate Counsel and Trust Officer, First National Bank; Pinkerton filed the articles of incorporation for the club<sup>43</sup>

While the individual members of the club had distinctive personalities, their business associations betrayed a common background and perspective on the world. These were the people who shaped and benefited from the oil boom of the 1910s and 1920s, and into the 1930s, in Oklahoma, and especially in Tulsa.

Unlike the very public identities of the members of the Verdigris Club, the activities of the organization remain hidden from historical inquiry as if a veil has been pulled over them. One reason for the lack of information is that the "club," while legally incorporated and recognized by the state of Oklahoma, was not a social organization in the usual sense, with regular meetings, agendas, or organized activities. It was instead, a facility that could be used by its members for their own individual purposes, namely duck hunting, hardly an organized sporting event. It was, in other words, an organization of individuals, not a place to go to observe social conventions and rituals of bonding. It was a place, exactly, to find refuge from those pressures of civilization. When entertaining their guests, again, they did not seek public attention. Venues aplenty existed downtown and at their palatial manses for the more public socializing and this provided a private alternative. There was no reason for the organization to attract attention and there was every reason not to do so.

Probably shortly after organizing their club in 1930 and acquiring nearly 4000 acres of land near the Verdigris River, the members constructed a clubhouse or lodge on the property. Appropriate for a private sanctuary, a refuge from public scrutiny, the construction of this palatial building received as little attention as did the organization itself. The lodge was constructed and equipped to serve well the needs of gentlemen hunters; at some point a landing strip for small planes was cleared a safe distance from the lodge. In addition to hunting waterfowl, residents in the area still report sighting descendants of exotic deer

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*History of Tulsa*, Vol. II, 183-184.

<sup>43</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1929; Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1930; Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1931.*

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introduced on the club's refuge. For more than two decades, the hunters drew upon the lodge as a common resource in a shared pursuit.

What other activities took place at the lodge, to what other purposes it was put, and who was able to use it, however, are questions whose answers remain elusive, although that has not slowed the speculation by people familiar with the property. In fact, there is a small body of local lore about the organization and its building, although tracking the stories often leads to dead ends. Several such stories can be explored.

One story is that President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill stayed there. While no documents or contemporary accounts of such visits have been located, it is impossible to rule out such a possibility. Franklin Roosevelt appears to have visited Tulsa only once. During World War II, he made an unannounced visit to the Douglas Aircraft plant in Tulsa. This visit lasted just a few hours on April 19, 1943, as Roosevelt, who had spent the previous day at Camp Gruber near Muskogee traveled by a special seven-car train to Claremore and then to Tulsa, and after his inspection of the aircraft plant, continued south to Sapulpa on his way to Monterrey, Mexico for a meeting with President Avila Camacho.<sup>44</sup> The itinerary, published afterwards in the local paper, seems to have left no opportunity for a visit at the Verdigris Club Lodge. While this was Roosevelt's second trip to Oklahoma, it was his first to the Tulsa area, and he appears not to have returned before his death in 1945. Eleanor Roosevelt had visited Tulsa previously and her detailed itinerary included public speaking to various groups and inspections of public works projects; she stayed at the Mayo Hotel. No accounts have been identified of a visit by Winston Churchill to the Tulsa area. The closest he likely came was in March 1946 when he delivered his "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri. An examination of his itinerary indicates that he did not use that opportunity to venture into Oklahoma.<sup>45</sup> There remains, however, the

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<sup>44</sup> "President Inspects Bomber Plant, but 'Secret' Visit Is Tipped off by Concentrations of Soldiers; Executive Is First on Record to Come to Oil Capital," *Tulsa World*, April 21, 1943.

<sup>45</sup> *Tulsa World*, March 6, 1946.

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possibility that Churchill visited the area later, before his death in 1965; he served a second tenure as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1955. While the Roosevelt and Churchill visits can not be corroborated, that does not detract from the significance of the Verdigris Club Lodge. Indeed, the common understanding that they *could have* stayed there is sufficient to reflect the exclusivity and privileged nature of this sanctuary of the elite. Moreover, even if they did not stay at the Verdigris Club, there is every reason to believe that others of national and international prominence visited the site and that they did so without public fanfare.<sup>46</sup>

It is also widely believed that important, though unspecified, business deals were negotiated there. This is doubtless true and certainly as true as the legendary golf course transactions. Hunting lodges owned by individuals or exclusive groups have long been used for business purposes, for developing and cementing relationships on a personal basis that have their origins and implications in the world of business. If they did not use the lodge facility in this way, the members of the club would have uncharacteristically missed an opportunity to conduct business in the comfortable, sequestered quarters they maintained for their exclusive use.

As with any private organization with an aura of discretion and activities out of public view, there are stories of wild parties and liaisons at the lodge. Because of the obvious lack of documentation for such activities, those stories can be neither confirmed nor

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<sup>46</sup> Even a check of President Harry Truman's schedule of his speedy train trip through Oklahoma in the 1948 campaign, with stops at Tulsa and places like Claremore, Chelsea, Afton, and Vinita, does not reveal such a visit to the lodge, even if he had been welcome, which, given the political climate of the area's business community at the time, can be doubted; nor has anyone suggested that Truman stayed at the lodge. *Tulsa Daily World*, September 30, 1948. So too with President Dwight Eisenhower: by 1953, when Eisenhower became President, the lodge belonged to William Skelly. Although a fervent Republican, Skelly consistently and passionately sided with the Taft wing of the party against the Dewey and Eisenhower wing.

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denied. In a state where Prohibition lasted until 1959, and where the sale of alcohol continued in a highly organized, but just under the counter, manner with minimal intrusion by law enforcement officers, it would be remarkable only if this lodge was exempt from what was happening elsewhere in the city and state.

### **Tulsa Transformed and The Decline of the Verdigris Club**

In 1951 ownership of the Lodge of the Verdigris Club changed. Even though the club now belonged to a single individual instead of to a group, the lodge remained significant for its association with the social history of the area. Indeed, the change of ownership reflected the larger change in the lifeways of society. As the exclusive retreat of the princes of petroleum, the lodge had symbolized the collective dominion of the masters of Tulsa society; as the private property of one person, the shift in ownership symbolized the fragmentation of the petroleum empire and the fading of the old order. It would continue to be used for the same purposes—as a private hunting retreat—and some of the same people would frequent the lodge and its grounds. As with its new owner, however, the lodge reflected the glory days of the past instead of the heady days of the future. Both were becoming anachronisms in the modern world.

The shift in ownership, but not a shift in use, came dramatically in 1951 when the Verdigris Club sold its lodge to one of its members—William G. Skelly. In February of that year, Skelly bought the property for \$75,000 in a transaction that included 3400 acres of land and the twelve-room lodge on it. At this time information about the property became public, although, as one news account reported, “Sale of the club means finish for the organization that was established by a group of ardent duck hunters . . . .” By 1951 the group had declined and it was presumed that it would cease operation with no longer a facility. Investigation in the Office of the Oklahoma Secretary of State, however, indicates that the organization never officially dissolved, and because it was created as a not-for-profit corporation in perpetuity, the Verdigris Club remains in 2003 an organization in good standing as a legal entity.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in the process of exploring the history of this

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, Certification Department, Oklahoma Secretary of State Office, January 9,

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opaque group, it became clear that some people in Tulsa believe it still exists, as exclusive and as tight-lipped as ever. One person, rumored to be a member, admitted to only a hazy knowledge of the organization when approached.

The ostensible reason for the sale in 1951 was, according to one member, "During the past few years duck hunting has become a farce with the small number of flocks and reduced bag limits."<sup>48</sup> Just as duck hunting was not the only reason for the club to organize, so too was the decline of duck hunting not the only reason for the decline of the club. By 1951 the organization's roll had dwindled to a point where it held only twelve members. Some of the members had died, declining fortunes had taken their toll on others, and at least one had moved to the West Coast. And those who remained were advanced in age, making it difficult for only a dozen members to sustain the lodge and its upkeep.

More important, however, the society and economy of Tulsa had changed. The boom days were over and the princes of petroleum and the world they represented had been replaced with yet another dominant order. The years of depression and war and recovery had transformed the oil industry and had transformed Tulsa. The price of oil had dropped dramatically during the depression and did not climb back to its previous levels. Some businesses had vanished; others had merged. National businesses had taken over smaller operations, and the oil business looked dramatically different, like the morning after a binge. Gone were the years of oilfield buccaneers following the tenets of the farcical "creekology" and intuition and hunches to find the next gusher. Gone was the day of the romantic, or piratical, swashbuckling wildcatter, up to his neck in debts one day, and in oil the next—and vice versa. Gone were the colorful personalities that shaped businesses and communities and states with the stroke of a pen or the drilling of a well. Gone also were the most egregious practices of waste and unregulated production. Gone were the years of multiple independents. Gone were the days of the wildcatter traipsing to one

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<sup>48</sup> "Skelly Buys Exclusive Verdigris Hunting Club," Undated newsclipping, [February 1951] in William G. Skelly vertical file, Tulsa City County Library.

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banker and then another to secure financing for the next prospect. The modern petroleum industry after World War II was an integrated, coordinated, highly structured international business organization characterized by diversification, consolidation, specialization, planning, scientific approaches to exploration, production, refining, and horizontal integration in marketing and the movement of the oil companies into the “breath-taking miracles now being performed with hydrocarbon molecules of gas and oil.”<sup>49</sup>

The oil business was not the same and neither was the town that had claimed to be its capital. As early as 1940, the directors of the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce included not a single oilman; instead they were retailers or manufacturers or local managers of branches of wider firms.<sup>50</sup> And World War II and its aftermath failed to rejuvenate the position of oil in Tulsa. As historian Danney Goble observes about the consequences of World War II’s prosperity for Tulsa:

Several things were striking and fresh about this renewed prosperity. One was that it was not oil based. Oil still accounted for a significant portion of the city’s economic well-being, and the enormous demands of global war made themselves felt in everything from refinery workers’ paychecks to oil executives’ country-club dues. The fact was, though, that neither oil’s contribution to Tulsa’s wartime recovery nor the city’s contribution to the Allies’ war effort justified its claim to being a seat of global economic power. Tulsans and others might still think of the city as the Oil Capital of the World, but it was, at best, a provincial seat for part of America.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 391.

<sup>50</sup> Walton, *One Hundred More Historic Tulsa Homes* (Tulsa: HCE Publications, 2001), 75.

<sup>51</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 162-163.

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There was another change, too. As Goble notes,

Like the oil-fueled boom of the 1920s, the economic upswing of the war and postwar period brought more things to more Tulsans. The difference was that the latter generation of Tulsans seemed unsatisfied with mere things. They contemplated not the quantity of their belongings but the quality of their lives. To their parents' devotion to accumulating the goods of life, they added a dedication to achieving the good life.<sup>52</sup>

It was also, it would be fair to add, that they were living in a culture that valued belonging and placed a premium on security, that not only were they trying to achieve the good life but they were equally dedicated to the safe and secure life of middle management in larger corporations. The rapacious world of the "nineteenth century buccaneer," in William H. Whyte's trenchant term that could have been formulated by examining the oil barons of Tulsa, had been replaced with the world of the Organization Man.<sup>53</sup>

In that context, the imposing manse that formed the facility for the Verdigris Club was now an anachronism, a relic of an earlier time, a time of boom and bust, a time of quick and immense fortunes, and a time of ostentation. The times had changed, the individuals associated with the earlier order had passed. There was little reason left to continue, if not

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<sup>52</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 163.

<sup>53</sup> William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 21. Reaching deeper into the new social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that he described, Whyte, assistant managing editor of *Fortune*, lamented that "No matter what the name the process is called—permissive management, multiple management, the art of administration—the committee way simply can't be equated with the 'rugged' individualism that is supposed to be the business of business." "Although they cannot bring themselves to use the word bureaucrat, the approved term—the 'administrator'—is not signally different in its implications."

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the Verdigris Club itself, certainly the lodge that it owned. It was only appropriate that it passed into the hands of a man who still represented the earlier days. Skelly, one of the last of the independent oilmen (or one of the “so-called independents,” as Rister points out, independent only in the sense that Skelly Oil was not owned by a parent company<sup>54</sup>) clung to the old ways. He exercised his clout in civic and economic and political circles and he possessed the same goals that he always did, finding opportunities to enter new fields (like broadcasting with KVOO radio) and also bestowing his largesse on worthy community projects. But the lodge, the building that to some extent had defined the public elite of Tulsa, faded as a reflection of a social order and emerged simply as the property of one man. In this way, during the remainder of the period of its historic significance, until 1953, the lodge reflected the basic transformation in the area’s social history.

It would still be decades before the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge would be visited by more than a handful of people. William G. Skelly used the clubhouse, evidently, for his own exclusive retreat through the remainder of the period of historic significance (1953), but Skelly himself declined in health and died in 1957. A firm, Southwestern Sales Corporation, which operated KVOO and was run by Skelly’s son-in-law Harold Stuart, purchased the property from the estate and used it for a period. After changing hands yet again, the property came into the hands of Terrance P. Dillon in the early 1990s. Dillon reportedly renovated the lodge, turning it into the Diamond Bar D Bed and Breakfast and also the Woods & Water Hunting Retreat. Dillon’s own ownership, though, ended in bankruptcy court and the estate was auctioned off in May 2000. That auction, attended by over five thousand people in a carnival-like atmosphere complete with barbecue and soft drink vendors and employees directing traffic with vehicles parked around the lodge, doubtless enabled more people to see the building than had ever seen it before in its cumulative history. When the purchaser then defaulted, it went on the auction block again three months later.<sup>55</sup> The property ultimately came into possession of its current owner who uses it as a private residence.

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<sup>54</sup> Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 189.

<sup>55</sup> Dana Simon, “Skelly Lodge Back on the Market,” *Tulsa World*, August 18, 2000; Simon, “Skelly Ranch Land Brings \$8.1 Million,” *Tulsa World*, May 20, 2000; Simon, “Ranch up for Auction,” *Tulsa World*, May 18, 2000.

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The remnants of the oil boom in Tulsa are many and some of them are buildings of grandeur and national, even international, renown, and the legends of the individuals associated with that phenomenal period are equally grand and colorful. Each of the marks these people left has its own distinguishing characteristics, but the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge holds a special place in the history of the community because it represents not just the business success of very public people, but the private aspirations and personalities of a small group of individuals set apart from the rest of society by their wealth and also by their personalities and ambitions. Indeed, because of its distinct combination of a self-defined group and the individuality of the members of that group, sometimes romanticized and sometimes reviled, the lodge in both its origins and its final transfer to the hands of one of its members, reflects the social and economic developments of the oil boom in Tulsa in a way that their other legacies can not suggest. When that generation passed, an entire epoch in Tulsa's history, and in the social history of the nation, had passed. In that way, the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

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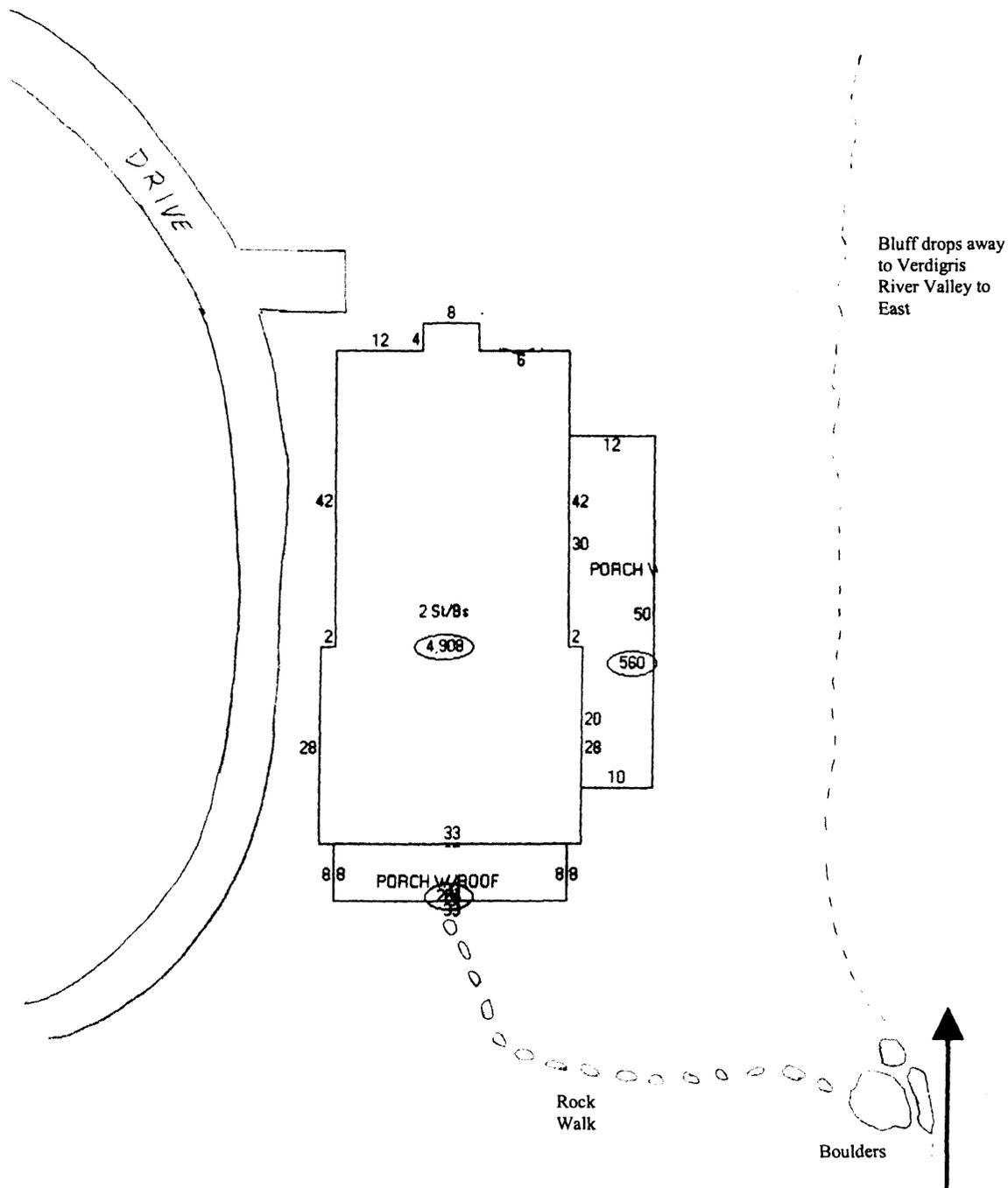
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Verbal Boundary Description

The property is a rectangular parcel measuring one hundred seventy-five feet on its east and west dimensions and one hundred forty feet on its north and south dimensions, an area that includes adjacent usage areas fifty feet on each side of the building.

Boundary Justification

This boundary includes the property historically associated with the Verdigris Club / Skelly Lodge.



**VERDIGRIS CLUB LODGE /  
 SKELLY LODGE**