

1981

**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Big Sand Lake Club
other names/site number Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club

2. Location

street & number 4571 Big Sand Lake Club Road N/A **not for publication**
city or town Town of Phelps N/A **vicinity**
state Wisconsin code WI county Vilas code 125 zip code 54554

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 51700 11/12/84
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Big Sand Lake Club

Vilas County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the 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.
- See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

1/12/05

[Signature]

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

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
- structure
- site
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| contributing | noncontributing |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 14 | buildings |
| | sites |
| 3 | structures |
| | objects |
| 17 | 0 total |

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources is previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/ CLUBHOUSE

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

SOCIAL/ CLUBHOUSE

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movement

Foundation concrete

walls log

wood

roof asphalt

other stone

Narrative Description

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

Big Sand Lake Club
Name of Property

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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)

Architecture

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1920-1954

Significant Dates

1920

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Northern Log Cabin Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Big Sand Lake Club
Name of Property

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Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.9 acres

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

1 16 348934 5103516
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

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)

11. Form Prepared By

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------|---------------|
| name/title | Mary Jane Hettinga, Executive Director | date | February 2004 |
| organization | Marathon County Historical Museum | telephone | 715-848-6143 |
| street & number | 403 McIndoe Street | zip code | 54403 |
| city or town | Wausau | state | WI |

Big Sand lake Club
Name of Property

Vilas County
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

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)

Property Owner

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

| | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| name/title | Big Sand Lake Club | date | February 2004 |
| organization | | telephone | 715-545-2486 |
| street&number | 4571 Big Sand Lake Club Road | zip code | 54554 |
| city or town | Phelps | state | WI |

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Big Sand Lake Club

Section 7 Page 1

Town of Phelps, Vilas County, Wisconsin

Start

The 1924/1925 Big Sand Lake Clubhouse and its associated buildings are located on the premier site on the east shore of Big Sand Lake, a 1,480-acre lake near the town of Phelps in Vilas County. Even before the turn of the 20th century, this area was a popular vacation destination for Chicagoans. During the summer months it offered an escape from the heat of the city, as well as a hideaway from the travails of life.

The club is located on roughly three miles of frontage with 617 acres of land, approximately seven miles from the small community of Phelps. The historic core of the club covers nearly five acres on the east shore of Big Sand Lake, this historic core is the focus of this nomination. Phelps is located 15 miles northeast of Eagle River, a major resort center and the county seat for Vilas County. In the early days the journey was extremely arduous and involved traveling by train, wagon and boat. On Highway 17 north, seven miles from the center of Phelps, is a paved road to the south named Big Sand Lake Club Road. Turning onto this road, a small sign on a post to the right reads: "Big Sand Lake Club." Across from that is a sign that reads: "Golf Sand Lake Club." Another sign warns: "Private Road - Members Only." A short distance on the left is a wonderful slab-sided log barn. This historic barn is the remnant from the Andrew Wattilo farm. Wattilo's great-grandson William Koski relates in a conversation on January 29, 2004: "Andrew Wattilo purchased the acreage south of the state line between 1903 and 1906 and farmed there until he sold his farm to the Big Sand Lake Club about the time that the new clubhouse was built."

Next is the nine-hole golf course; a white one-story modular house now stands where the Wattilo farmhouse stood. This is where the golf pro lives. Koski continues: "Highway 70, which is now Highway 17, bisected the farm and was originally a railroad from the logging days. The road location was altered from the center of the golf course to the south shore of Smoky Lake in the early 1940s, resulting in the purchase of right away from the Honkala property and in the process made the golf course an undivided piece of property. I was told the cost to the Sand Lake Club was two cases of whiskey." John Honkala was Mr. Koski's other great-grandfather. The golf course office was situated on the south shore of Smoky Lake and was moved to its present location when the road change was made. The relocation of the road resulted in the removal of the log arch that was the entrance to the clubhouse road.

The Club's air landing strip follows. On the USGS map it reads: "Phelps Municipal Landing Strip." The air strip was originally a part of the Club's property, but in July of 1957 it was turned over to Phelps. The air landing strip was dedicated in 1959 by the township. On December 30, 1985, it was deeded back to the Club and closed as an airstrip in June of 1991.¹

After the air landing strip there is an iron pole gate, which can be pulled across the road to close off the property. Heavily wooded land on either side of the road

¹ Conversation by phone with Carol Kinner, manager of the Big Sand Lake Club, February 25, 2004.

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gives a wilderness ambience. After a slight curve in the road, the private homes begin on the west side, with garages, both private and rentals, on the east.

Rental Garages I and II, 1920's, contributing

Across from the private houses are two rental garages, which are owned by the Club. These are the first buildings within the historic core of the Club. The garages have side gabled roofs with open rafters under the eaves. The roofs are of green asphalt and the clapboard is stained brown. The first garage measures 90 feet in length and 20 feet wide. It has nine stalls; the second garage measures 60 feet by 20 feet and has seven stalls.

The stalls on both garages have double wooden doors of narrow bead board, overlaid with a decorative "x" and are painted white. Each set of double doors has three sets of black wrought-iron hinges.

As the road nears the clubhouse, it becomes a circle drive. Within the circle of land are many mature deciduous and pine trees, a large birdhouse on a pole, and several large boulders on the outer edge of the circle. There are two tennis courts on the north side of the building surrounded by a chain link fence. A row of small fir trees hides the fenced area from the lake.

THE CLUBHOUSE 1925, Contributing

Located less than one mile from the main road is the huge Big Sand Lake Clubhouse, which was reportedly the largest log structure in all of Wisconsin. Legend has it that, at the time it was built, it was second in size to the Old Faithful Lodge in Yellowstone Park.

The 15,000 square foot structure cost \$125,000 to build in 1924/1925. It took the Finnish workmen almost two years to complete the gigantic structure. The front page of the Friday, May 19, 1925 issue of The Iron River, the local newspaper from that Michigan town, stated: "Finnish workmen who with broad ax and native skill fitted so perfectly the timbers into one another. Nary a nail nor a spike were used, like is the custom in Finland. Wooden pegs fasten one log to another while dove-tailing, the building art of the primitives, holds in strong security the ends of the giant hemlock."

The hemlock logs were all peeled and each log was grooved to accept the one above it. Many of these workmen were farmers from the area who were called to be a part of this large project.

When completed the Big Sand Lake Club was heralded as the "finest private resort retreat in the midwest" by the Chicago Sunday Tribune.²

²Chicago Sunday Tribune, August 26, 1928, "Where Politicians While Away Their Time," Part I, p 1.

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The historic core of the Big Sand Lake Club consists of the main clubhouse, 13 other buildings and three structures. The 1924/1925 clubhouse was built in the Rustic Style of architecture, much like what the wealthy East Coast people built in the Adirondacks of New York State. The huge log structure faces west and is two-and-a-half stories in height with an intersecting gabled roof between the two large prominent front gabled sections. On the intersecting roof, which runs between the two front gabled roofs, are four gabled dormers on both the front and rear elevations. Another elongated gable dormer appears over the main entrance; two more small, elongated dormers appear on the north and south elevations on the two main roofs. All of the roofs are covered in green asphalt shingles. An open belfry, complete with bell, is atop the roof ridge.

Overall, the clubhouse measures approximately 93 feet west to east, and 122 feet north to south, not including the kitchen addition.

On the west elevation (front) a large one-story porch, 22 feet by 60 feet, runs between the two main gables. The porch has a shed roof and originally was a screened porch; however, at some point it was glassed. The porch was designed at a slight angle from the two main sections. Four stone pilasters decorate the porch facade: one on either side of the centered entrance; the other two are equal distances from the entrance and it is at this point that the wall tapers slightly to join the main gabled sections. Circular stone posts, capped with a smooth concrete surface are on either side of the seven concrete steps. Stone is repeated on the step risers as well as on the low walls, which are on either side of the steps. The concrete surface that tops the walls is also painted red. This same stone is repeated in the large double interior chimney. All of the stone found on this building has the tinted red mortar and has rolling bead joints. The method used throughout to lay the stone is called "convex joint." Also called rolling bead joints, the stonework is laid up with mortar that matches the color of the stone. "The wet mortar is raked out 3/4 of an inch and then the tinted mortar is pressed into the joint with the rolling bead jointer, and drawn evenly across the face of the joint to obtain a smooth, continuous rolled joint."³

Interestingly enough, the stone used at the Big Sand Lake Club is the same stone that Homer Galpin had trucked in from Southern Wisconsin for his large estate at Fort Eagle, at the opposite end of Big Sand Lake. The masonry work is similar at both places.

The approach to the clubhouse from the lakeside has two huge white pine trees on either side of the sidewalk, which leads to the steps of the clubhouse. The steps begin 81 feet from the shoreline. Following the line of the shoreline is a 5'10"-wide concrete sidewalk which runs along the shoreline for one-half mile. Evenly spaced along the sidewalk are stylized post lamps made of a composite of cement and granite chips. These are said to resemble the early 20th century streetlights in Chicago. There are some legends about these lamps. Helen Adams-Murray said she heard that they were supposedly made for a Chicago street but were "accidentally"

³ Kreh, Richard T. Mastering Advanced Masonry Skills (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1983), p. 333.

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shipped to the Big Sand Lake Club. Or perhaps they were extras that were left over. They were installed at the same time that the sidewalk was constructed for the 1924/1925 clubhouse.⁴

The sidewalk and lights provide a well-lighted place to stroll in the evening or serve as a path to the clubhouse at mealtime. It also provides a place for children to ride their bikes. It seems rather incongruous to have these sidewalks, considering the rustic nature of everything else. But from the early days the Club has had a sidewalk. It is interesting that the terminus of the sidewalk is the woods.

Lining up with the front (lakeside) entrance to the clubhouse is a gigantic wooden dock which is 10 feet wide and 240 feet in length when it terminates in a 70 by 20 foot "T". This dock is an important part of life at the Big Sand Lake Club. During the summer months it is large enough to hold many Club members. Not only is it a resource for fishing, swimming and boating, but also a wonderful gathering place for the Club members. Right from the beginning the Club has had a huge dock. It is an integral part of the Big Sand Lake Club.

The lakeside entrance has French doors with 12 lights in each door, a set of screen doors, and is surrounded by small, multi-paned lights with a narrow transom surmounted. Overhead is a small black and gold sign that read: "Club House."

The fenestration on the porch consists of ribbons of multi-paned casement windows, each with ten lights, grouped in a series of six. Each of the four dormers has a pair of square-shaped windows with nine lights in each square. This same fenestration is repeated in the elongated dormer over the entrance; however, this time there is a triple set. The fenestration on the first floor of the clubhouse matches the porch in that casement windows are used. On the second floor the single windows are double hung throughout, six over six.

Originally, on both the front and rear elevations under each gable, there was a small second floor balcony with a window on either side. Today these balconies are a component of exterior wooden stairways that serve as fire escapes. All but one stairway turns the corner; the exception being in the rear of the south gabled section. This stairway does not turn; it goes straight down. Running on the south side of the wooden stairway railing is a trellis that measures 16 feet in length and 7'6" in height.

The only added trim on the clubhouse are the triangular log brackets found under the main dormers on both the main roofs and the dormer roofs. All trim and these brackets are painted white. The clubhouse logs are painted brown as is the foundation, which is poured concrete. White metal gutters are attached to the horizontal roofs.

There is an open belfry that is centered on the ridge of the intersecting roof. This bell was an important part of the daily life of the Club as it called the

⁴Adams-Murray, Helen Bohnsack, Big Sand Lake Club, Phelps, August 16, 2003.

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members to meals three times a day. It would actually ring one-half hour before the meals were served to allow the members time to prepare for going to the clubhouse. This added to the sense of freedom that the members felt when they were in the northwoods. They left all sense of time in the city; this meant a complete freedom from schedules - except for the meals. Helen Adams Murray said that people began eating meals in their cottages in the 1930s. Most had refrigeration by then. Also, the cottages now included kitchens. The addition of kitchens gave even more freedom to do what they wanted to do. Most continued to eat their evening meal at the Club, however, as this was a part of the socialization.⁵

The rear (east) elevation is similar to the front elevation; however, the two main gables appear to extend further out from the main section, unlike the front elevation, as the back porch is recessed. The rear porch measures 20 feet and runs 61 feet in length and is an open porch with 5'9" curved stone walls on either side of the entrance stairway. The wall is 14" wide and is capped by a concrete surface painted red. The wall terminates with a 2'9" stone post with a 19" square concrete cap, also painted red. The poured concrete floor of the porch is also painted red. Five concrete steps, eight feet in width, have two-inch caps on the risers. Today a wooden handicapped ramp shares half of the width of the steps and runs to the south. A 14-foot shed roof, supported by two log poles and five log rafters, provides a covered entrance. The double screen and French doors are the same as the lakeside entrance. Over the door is another sign, "Club House." The four gabled dormers are present in the middle section, the second floor fenestration being the same as the lakeside, except there are paired windows rather than single. The first floor fenestration is casement, but has four sets of multi-paned lights in each section, rather than six sets.

On the south elevation is a one-story wing that serves as the kitchen. It has a gabled roof, with green asphalt shingles, and a narrow cream-colored brick chimney. The fenestration here is double hung, six over six windows; two paired on the west elevation and two singles on the south, with two square, six light windows under the gable. The same gable trim is found here. Because this wing is used as the kitchen, there is a roof vent and a circular fan vent on the south elevation.

While the wing is original to the clubhouse, a small addition on the east elevation of the wing was added at a later date. It is constructed of concrete block and is painted brown. Its gabled roof intersects the main roof of the wing. The wing measures roughly 30 by 63 feet.

Between the south gabled section and the concrete block addition is a small one-story screened porch with a centered door and a shed roof. Five wooden steps lead to the entrance.

⁵ Adams-Murray, Helen Bohnsack, Big Sand Lake Club, Phelps, August 16, 2003.

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(Kitchen Storage Building, 1940, Contributing)

A one-story storage building of brown-stained clapboard has a front gabled roof with a door on the west elevation. There is no fenestration. It is only a few steps from the screened porch providing easy and quick access from the kitchen to the freezers and other food items that are stored here. The building measures 16 feet by 20 feet.

INTERIOR

The Rustic Style of the exterior is carried into the interior. The plan is irregular.

The spectacular main room or lobby of the Club is three stories in height with open log beams, and measures 52 feet by 60 feet. The logs on the interior form the walls and ceiling. The room dividing walls are also of log. It is of post and beam construction with the eight colossal log columns, equally spaced, which support the second floor hallway and are connected by log cross beams. A wrought-iron chandelier is suspended from these cross beams by three chains. The chandelier is in the shape of a circle and holds seven circular lanterns. Each single lantern has its own chain. Similar lanterns on a single chain hang from the ceiling in the main room. Wall sconces and ceiling-mounted lanterns are on the second floor. The floor is maple tongue and groove throughout the clubhouse.

The dramatic stairway, on the north end of the lobby, has two stairways to reach the landing, a good viewing spot to look at the lobby. From the landing the stairway goes straight to the second floor. The wooden balustrades found on the stairway are not rustic like they are on the second floor. The second floor railing that encircles the second floor hallway, which overlooks the lobby, is of log, with log balustrades. Log columns, smaller than found in the lobby, extend to the second floor ceiling from the outside of the railing.

The bedrooms are accessible from this hallway. The stained, wooden doors, with transoms overhead, have frames painted white, the same as the window frames that open into the hallway. Extended over the hallway, the attic floor forms the ceiling for the hallway. Interior windows are found in the attic section. The roof rafters are visible through these small, multi-paned windows.

The first thing one sees on entering the lobby is a large elephant sculpture made of bronze. This is symbolic of the early members who were all staunch Republicans. Many were involved in Chicago politics. Homer Galpin, who was instrumental in the formation and leadership of this Club, had an elephant collection at his estate down the shore at Fort Eagle. Because of his political involvement in Chicago, he was often referred to as "Mr. Republican." It is possible that Galpin donated the elephant to the Club, but this is undocumented.

Another focal point on the south end of the room is the gigantic stone fireplace, with stone mantle, that extends to the ceiling. The furnishings are large leather chairs and sofas and the walls have fur skins and mounted heads of animals and mounted fish. A full-body mounted deer stands in front of the stair landing as if

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he is overlooking the room. It is another way to bring nature into the interior. Other wall decorations are snowshoes and hand-woven Indian rugs. French doors lead to the porch, the dining room, and the card rooms. In the southeast section, an area is separated by counters to serve as the office and reception desk.

The dining room reached from the south end of the lobby runs the length of the gabled roof 30 feet by 93 feet. Another fireplace, which is back to back with the one in the lobby, mimics that one. The huge vertical log columns used for support are in this room also. The same rustic Craftsman-styled light fixtures found in the lobby are also used here; however, they are not hanging lanterns but rather six up-right candle lights with sheep skin shades. The tables are covered with linens, as the tables are only used for breakfast and the evening meal.

Today, the kitchen off of the dining room on the south elevation measures 29 feet by 40 feet. The original kitchen was enlarged at some point.

Opposite the dining room, on the north side of the building running the length of the other gable, are three rooms: the first room from the lakeside is the women's card room and measures 28 feet by 25 feet; the middle room measures 28 feet by 30 feet and is called the men's card room; the third room is the game room which measures 32 feet by 28 feet. The lights in the women's card room are similar to the light fixtures in the dining room, reproduction rustic fixtures with sheepskin shades. In the men's card room, the light fixtures are reproduction square lanterns. Photos of past presidents of the Club and some snapshots of current Club members adorn the walls. The third room is the game room. There is a different ambiance in the pool room, as it has florescent lighting overhead. The room is raised and is reached by a short stairway, four steps up from the lobby. Twelve-light French doors make it possible to close off the room. The reason that the room is raised is because of the cellar space below - the only area available under the building. It is used to store wood for the fireplaces, dry goods; and also houses the water heater.

At the west end of the lobby, French doors lead to the enclosed porch, which has an open log ceiling with log rafters. Four square lanterns serve as light fixtures. The porch is used as a game room with pool tables, rather than a place to lounge as it was when it was built. It was an open porch for lounging when the clubhouse was constructed.

Second Floor

Upstairs are 16 double bedrooms, which measure 12 feet by 14 feet; six single bedrooms which measure roughly 10 feet by 10 feet; two apartments, each 12 feet by 23 feet; and four bathrooms. All of the rooms have outside windows.

Manager's House and Manager's Garage, c1920 Contributing

The manager's garage is located north of the manager's house. It has a front gabled roof and is of the same brown-stained clapboard as the other buildings on the property. A small square four-light window is under the roof peak. The trim

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on this building is painted white. The garage measures 24 feet in width and 40 feet in length. A large overhead door is on the west elevation and a double swinging door painted white is found on the south elevation.

The manager's house is a one-story clapboard house with a side gabled roof of green asphalt shingles. A small central pavilion with front gabled roof is used as the entry. The manager's house is 24 feet in width and 30 feet in length; however, an addition is in progress. The white painted house has green shutters for trim and faces west.

Both buildings were constructed c1920, but the garage had an addition in recent years.

Outbuildings

Next to the house begin the many utilitarian buildings that are needed to run the operation of the Club. All are simple vernacular buildings, one story, with clapboard. The clapboard is stained brown and the trim is painted white. All have either front gabled or side gabled roofs of green asphalt shingles and rafters under the eaves. The one exception is the boiler house, which has a pyramidal roof. The fenestration is either double hung, four over four, or small square four-light windows. The exception is the Club laundry and Club garage, which have casement windows.

Chef's House/Girl's Bathroom/Girl's Annex, c1925/1926 Contributing

The chef's house is next to the manager's house and measures 20 feet by 20 feet; it has a side gabled roof with rafters under the eaves and a centered door on the west elevation. A girl's bathroom, 10 feet by 10 feet, is 7 feet back and is connected to the chef's house and the girl's annex living space, which measures 40 feet by 20 feet. This building has a door on the south and north elevations under the side gabled roof. The roof is of green asphalt shingles with rafters under the eaves. A window is on either side of the door with six windows on the west elevation, all two over two. Because this tripartite arrangement was constructed at one time, it is counted as a single building.

Originally, the girl's annex was for men and the girls were housed in a building that had been an annex to the Club. It was moved when the new clubhouse was built in 1924/25. Evidently it was torn down.

Storage Building, c1925/1926 Contributing

A storage, locker, and dry goods storage building follows the girl's annex. It measures 30 feet by 20 feet, has the same green asphalt shingles, and side gabled roof with rafters under the eaves. The main entrance faces west where the four-light door is centered. Two windows are on each side, double hung, four over four. Two more doors are at the north end, which mimic the main door. Another storage building is adjacent to the kitchen. It has a front gabled roof of green asphalt shingles and a door on the west elevation. There are no windows because it is where the freezers and other things are kept for use in the kitchen.

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Pump House/Water System, 1925/1926 Contributing

This building measures 26 feet by 20 feet and has a door at the north end of the west elevation that advertises air and gas. The windows are double hung, four over four.

Fish House and Gas/Oil House, 1925/1926 Contributing

Two small buildings, both 8 feet by 10 feet are for fish cleaning and for gas and oil for the boats. The small front gabled buildings have a door on the west elevation and a single, square, four light window on the east elevation.

Ice House/Coin Laundry/Boiler House, c1910 Contributing

An ice house storage building, 30 feet by 24 feet, is connected to the 24-foot by 24-foot boiler house by a small laundry set back 11 feet from either side. The ice house appears to be older than the other outbuildings. The roof is steeper and does not have the same green shingle roof; it does have the rafters under the eaves. There is no white painted trim, either. The boiler house is also older, probably the same age as the ice house. It has a pyramidal roof with a huge metal smokestack and a louvered cupola and two windows on each elevation, double hung, three over one. The coin laundry is stepped back and in between the other two wings. Because this is treated as a single unit it is counted as a single building.

Club Laundry/Club Garage, 1925/1926 Contributing

The club laundry house and club garage are next in line and the unit measures 50 feet by 24 feet. The centered three-light door is facing west and has two casement windows, north of the door. South of the door are two overhead garage doors.

Garages, 1940s Contributing

About 14 feet back from the club laundry and the club garage are the rental garages. The three units of garages have a total length of 94 feet, and 24 feet in width. The first unit has three stalls; the second has six stalls and is set back about ten feet from the first; the third is set back from the second and has only two stalls. The garages are identical in style to the other two rental garages near the entrance of the club grounds described earlier in this document; however, these were constructed in the 1940s. The first two garages at the entrance into the Club's property were constructed in the 1920s.

Water Tower, c1910 Contributing

The water tower was installed long before the new clubhouse was constructed in 1924/1925. It is used for fire protection and is an important element of the Club.

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Dock, 1924/1925 Contributing

The dock is a very important resource for the Big Sand Lake Club members. It was built as an integral part of the Club. It is constructed of wood planking and is 10 feet wide, 240 feet long when it terminates in a "T" that is 20 feet wide and 70 feet long. Not only is it a place to swim and boat, it is also an important gathering place for the members. Fishing is the most important activity on the dock. It is a favorite spot because of the fishing crib created under the 20 x 70 end portion. Because of the stone wall used for support in the previous dock, it has created an artificial fish crib. The Club has always had a dock, but for the grand new clubhouse it was decided to build a new, larger one. They also positioned it so that it lined up with the entrance of the clubhouse. The dock has been updated and repaired over the years as necessary.

Tennis Courts, 1924/1925, Contributing

Two attached tennis courts are located to the north of the main clubhouse building. These were constructed at the same time as the clubhouse.

Resource List

| | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|--------------|
| 1. | Big Sand Lake Clubhouse | 1924/1925 | Contributing |
| 2. | Dock | 1924/1925 | Contributing |
| 3. | Tennis Courts | 1924/1925 | Contributing |
| 4. | Water Tower | c1910 | Contributing |
| 5. | Nine-Stall Garage | 1924/1925 | Contributing |
| 6. | Seven-Stall Garage | 1920s | Contributing |
| 7. | Eleven-Stall Garage | c1940 | Contributing |
| 8. | Manager's House | c1920 | Contributing |
| 9. | Manager's Garage | c1920 | Contributing |
| 10. | Chef's House/Girl's Bathroom/Girl's Annex | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 11. | Storage Building | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 12. | Pump House/Water System | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 13. | Club Laundry/Club Garage | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 14. | Ice House/Coin Laundry/Boiler House | c1910 | Contributing |
| 15. | Fish House | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 16. | Gas/Oil House | 1925/1926 | Contributing |
| 17. | Kitchen Storage | c1940 | Contributing |

The Big Sand Lake Club was such a fine example of the work of the Northern Log Cabin Company that they advertised in their catalog (undated), "Northern Log Cabins and Cottages." They advertised that "Michigan Woodsmen" built all their log structures. The Big Sand Lake Club House featured "Finnish Grooving and Mortised Corners." The preface of the catalog is directed to "Nature Lovers." They state that the company will build any floor plan and that they are not interested in the marketing of building material, but rather they promote the skill of their workmen. "As comfortable as old clothes, as neat as a new car, they

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satisfy your soul. Our policy is simply this: Every cabin must be a good one--an unsolicited advertisement of our workmanship."⁶

On the following page, the construction material is explained. All of their log cabins were built of straight, even tapering and of sound softwoods such as pine, balsam, cedar, spruce, and tamarack. All logs were peeled to ensure seasoning and durability and made up of even sized logs. It further states: "We employ the Finnish method of grooving and peaking the logs thru-out their entire length when this class of construction is desired. In this method the top of each log is trimmed to a sharp apex, the bottom of the next upper log is grooved to fit tightly over this apex, forming, when packed with oakum, an almost water tight junction. An example of this construction is illustrated in 'The Sand Lake Club-House' pictured in one of the following pages."⁷

The corner construction had two options for corner fittings: the square mortise and the round notch. The Big Sand Lake Clubhouse was done with the mortised corners. Their experienced stoneworkers could also do the stonework. The job also included the staining or painting of the logs.

The last two pages of the catalog had a place where people who were interested in having a log cabin built could choose what they wanted and get an estimate from the company.

Summary

The Big Sand Lake Club is a unique property located in the northwoods of Wisconsin, in Vilas County close to the border of Michigan. It is an excellent example of a twentieth century Rustic Style retreat. The natural building materials, log and stone, used to construct the clubhouse, plus the natural furnishings are all representative of the Rustic Style. It has excellent historical integrity and is architecturally significant.

The Big Sand Lake Club and all of the buildings and resources that make up the complex are important to the history of the Club. While the clubhouse is a fine example of the Rustic Style, the outbuildings in their simple structure and vernacular style were important support buildings for these large lodges. They were ancillary buildings that provided service for the Club so that it could be run efficiently for the members.

⁶ Northern Log Cabin Company, Iron River, Michigan, "Northern Log Cabins and Cottages" catalog, n.d., no pagination.

⁷ Ibid.

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Insert
Significance

The Big Sand Lake Club is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for its local significance under NRHP Criteria A and C. The complex is worthy of nomination under Criterion C because it is an excellent example of the Rustic Style of architecture with significant Craftsman Style elements, and because the complex is largely intact and now a very unique and rare example of a Northern Wisconsin clubhouse, one of many which were established during the early part of the 20th century by wealthy Chicagoans.

The Big Sand Lake Clubhouse is being nominated under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation because of the important role that these Clubs played in the development of tourism in Vilas County. Through the establishment of the Big Sand Lake Club, wealthy Chicagoans began coming to this area. Important political figures such as Homer Galpin brought politicians, judges, and other professional people to the area. A large article in the Chicago Sunday Tribune, August 1928, describes the area as the "playground" for the powerful politicians of Chicago.⁸ The period of significance is between 1920, the year that the first extant buildings were constructed, to 1954, the National Register cutoff date.

Historical Background

Vilas County, located in the heart of Wisconsin's northwoods, was formed in 1893, under Chapter 150, from territory that was originally a part of Oneida County.⁹

Early settlers in this area encountered a wild and diverse environment. Most of the area consisted of a highland plateau scoured by ancient glaciers. Covering it was a spectacular forest in which scattered pines towered over the surrounding birches, maples and basswoods.

This abundance of trees fueled Wisconsin's lumber industry, which reached its peak in 1892, with northern mills producing an astonishing four billion board feet of lumber. The white pine that attracted the loggers was totally depleted by the late 1890s. Most strongly believed that farming would replace lumbering as a livelihood. In spite of efforts to clear land and develop agriculture, many found the soil too sandy and the growing season too short.¹⁰

One thing that the landscape did provide with its wonderful lakes and forests was a respite from the heat of the city during the summer months. And because of the

⁸ Chicago Sunday Tribune, August 26, 1928, "Chicago Public Folk 'At Ease' in Eagle River," Part I, p. 1.

⁹ O'Jones, George; McVean, Norman S., and others. The History of Lincoln, Oneida, and Vilas Counties, Minneapolis: H.C. Cooper, Jr., and Company, 1924, p. 92.

¹⁰ Davis, Mark - Wisconsin Magazine of History, Volume 79, Autumn 1995, #1, "Northern Choices: Rural Forest County in the 1920s," p. 5.

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wilderness conditions, a less strict dress code was observed. Vilas County had 941 lakes, so it became a natural attraction for sports fishermen.

The loggers and lumbermen who worked in the woods were well aware of the beauty of the lakes and the limitless supply of fish. Many of these same men began using the abandoned logging camps for their fishing and hunting trips. At first it was only the men who did this, but gradually the women and children were allowed to join the men. Soon it became apparent that many people loved the northwoods. The great event which opened up this whole territory was the railroad. The Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western arrived in 1883 and became a part of the Chicago NorthWestern system on June 30, 1893. The railroad reached Eagle River in 1883 and abruptly changed the status quo.¹¹

The first visitors after logging were the sport fishermen who came by train. From 1891 to 1905, transportation from the Chicago area to Eagle River was by rail and then a day's journey to the Phelps area. In 1905, a spur line was built to Phelps.

According to Mark Davis' article in Wisconsin Magazine of History: "In the 1920s two new entrepreneurial options emerged to help the struggling families in the north country. The first, based on America's unquenchable thirst for alcohol, was the illegal but apparently profitable traffic in moonshine. The other was rooted in a new perception of the region's forest and lakes. The boosters of logging, railroads and agriculture began to see that their most valuable resources lay all around them, and with typical enthusiasm and hyperbole they turned to promoting tourism."¹²

Around the turn of the century another phenomenon began. Private clubs began to spring up in Northern Wisconsin. Lumbermen who became acquainted with the northwoods realized the potential for a sportsman's paradise. Many used abandoned lumber camps for their lodging. More and more men found out about the wonderful fishing and wanted to participate. Several men who were friends or business acquaintances banded together to buy large tracts of land to establish a fishing camp. At first the conditions were very primitive at these camps, but as more and more women insisted on being included, they improved.

As early as the 1870s Chicago businessmen began looking further north. The photographs of H. H. Bennett depicting the raw beauty of Wisconsin Dells brought people to that area in southern Wisconsin. After 1873 the people began taking the train to remote areas to commune with nature. Led by the philosophy of James Fennimore Cooper who felt that an individual becomes stronger physically and mentally by communing with nature fueled the back-to-nature movement. Half of the tourists coming north were from Chicago.¹³

¹¹ Bawden, Timothy. Landscape of Northern Wisconsin, 1890-1920, pp. 1-4.

¹² Davis, Mark - Wisconsin Magazine of History, Volume 79, Autumn 1995, #1, "Northern Choices: Rural Forest County in the 1920s," p. 5.

¹³ Video. "A State of Escape," 2002. Dave Erickson, writer/producer.

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Another promoter of communing with nature was Edward Carpenter. He wrote on simplifying life in his book, England's Ideal, from London, 1885. He believed that the only place that one could have right living and clear thinking was if one was close to nature's ways, and simplified their life. The Arts and Crafts movement fit into this theory, calling for the simplification of building, but by incorporating the talents of the craftsman into the building structure rather than adorning the building with decorated pieces. Nature became synonymous with purity and truth as a part of the simplification movement.

One of the early villages in Vilas County was Phelps. Situated on the northeast shore of Big Twin Lake in township 41 north, range 11 east, it was created and named Hackley on May 1, 1905. A large landholder in this area at the turn of the century was the company of Hackley and Bonnell. In December 1901 the Wisconsin Lumber and Bark Company was incorporated by John H. Bonnell, William A. Phelps, Charles A. Phelps, Charles H. Hackley, O. A. Felger, Dustin Oakes and George C. Covell. The name of the company became known as Hackley Phelps and Bonnell Co. These three men were responsible for the founding of Phelps.¹⁴

The town remained Hackley until 1913 when it was changed to Phelps. The reason given was that Hackley was constantly being confused with Hatley, a lumber town in central Wisconsin. George Herman, a Chicago businessman, began leading a group of sports fishermen to the Hackley area about 1884. They traveled by rail to Eagle River and probably followed the Wausau to Ontonagon Trail to present-day Phelps. From Phelps they had to take logging and Indian trails to reach the shores of Big Sand Lake.¹⁵

Brown Brothers from Rhinelander had established a lumber camp on the northeastern shore of Big Sand Lake, and by 1891 they had completely logged it.¹⁶ George Herman and his circle of fishermen got other Chicago sportsmen interested in purchasing property, and in 1891 the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club was organized and incorporated in Illinois.¹⁷

The group bought 800 acres for \$1 an acre. Memberships were sold to their Chicago friends. Members could not own the land, but could lease it for 99 years and build cottages.

When the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club was organized, they used the primitive remnants of the logging camp for their housing. Gradually the women and children were allowed to accompany the fishermen to this remote wilderness. In 1900 the first clubhouse was erected; it was affectionately nicknamed "The Flop." It was used until 1924 when it was destroyed by fire.¹⁸

¹⁴ Albrech, Joseph F., The History of Phelps, WI, 1976, p. 3.

¹⁵ Bohnsack Adams, Helen, The History of Big Sand Lake Club, Vilas County, Phelps, WI, 1976, p. 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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Many of the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club meetings were held in Chicago. Without exception the members were from the Chicago area and many of the men were involved in Illinois politics.

In a c1975 interview with Francis Bohnsack, the first child to come to Big Sand Lake Club with her father, Otto Hartwig, Jim O'Shaughnesy asks: "How did the Club get itself put together?" Her answer: "It was only the good will of the people all through the years." Bohnsack goes on to say that Homer Galpin became very dominant (in the Club) in the 1910s and throughout the 1920s, and that the Club kept improving because of Homer Galpin's influence in the Club.¹⁹

Galpin had political connections in Chicago and was chairman of the Republican Party of Cook County. Galpin was a great and enthusiastic promoter of the northwoods of Wisconsin. He was instrumental in drawing the Chicago politicians, such as Judge William Thompson; Mayor Robert Crowe and Hugh Smith, Assistant Secretary of the State of Illinois, to the Big Sand Lake Club. Galpin was nicknamed "Mr. Republican" and the Big Sand Lake Club was often called the "Republican Club." Galpin must have liked his image because he kept a huge collection of elephant statues in his living room at Fort Eagle. They were in all sizes and carved from such things as ivory, wood, and marble.²⁰

Galpin, in 1909, built a small primitive cabin on land he owned on nearby Smoky Lake. He owned two large parcels, lots 21 and 22, at the northwest corner of the lake. This small cabin would be used as a hideout for Galpin and Al Capone in the 1920s. In a telephone interview, Bill Koski, a life-long resident of Smoky Lake, related the following: "Homer Galpin and Al Capone used to keep a boat on the end of Smoky Lake. They would take a boat or walk along the shore to Big Sand Lake Club and then cross over the road and walk on a logging trail a short distance until they got to the south end of Smoky Lake. A boat was kept there and they would row the boat to the north end of Smoky Lake where Galpin had his primitive fishing shack in the woods."²¹

Galpin retained his membership in the Big Sand Lake Club (Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club) even though he did not live on the grounds. As his political power grew in Chicago, his leadership grew stronger in the Club.

On May 22, 1891, the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club of Chicago, Illinois, was legally organized as a corporation in the state of Illinois.²² According to the Constitution and the Bylaws of the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club, the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Telephone interview with Mary Jane (Perterson) Ludwig of Ludington, MI, February 1997.

²¹ Telephone interview with William Koski, Smoky Lake Reserve, Phelps, WI, March 3, 1997.

²² Vol. 17 p. 614 certificate number 21034.

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principal office was in Chicago.²³ The purpose of the Club was: "To aid in the protection of game and fish, and to cultivate friendly relations among its members, their guests and friends." It was not to be for pecuniary profit. The three directors were Charles G. Hutchinson, Alexander White and E. W. Rich.²⁴

Membership required that you be a male citizen of the United States of good moral character. There were two classes: life members not to exceed 15; regular members not to exceed 85; total membership was never to exceed 100.²⁵

Membership was not transferable and if it was necessary to resign it must be done by writing to the Board of Directors. New prospects also had to write for an application so that the board could vote it upon. It was totally at the board's discretion whether or not the applicant was accepted.²⁶

Members could be expelled from the Club for conduct or misdemeanors, which were damaging "to the peace, interest and welfare of the Club." It would take a three-fifths vote to expel a member. If they were expelled they were never again allowed on the Club grounds.²⁷

The life members paid no annual dues, but regular members paid \$30 a year. If the dues were not paid on time they would be suspended.²⁸

The Board of Directors consisted of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer, plus a few other members. Nothing in the Club's Bylaws tells how many were on the board; however, it was necessary to have three members to constitute a quorum.²⁹

A House Committee was responsible for the furnishings and property of the Club, including repairs, purchases, the rate for food, and supervision of the manager. This committee also had the duty to report any misconduct in writing.³⁰

The Membership Committee was created to investigate the character, habits and reputation of the prospective members.³¹

Guests needed to have a card signed by the secretary of the Club in order to be allowed at the Club. These guests were, of course, only male and they could stay no longer than two weeks.³²

²³ Constitution and Bylaws of the Eagle River Fishing & Shooting Club, undated.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

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General rules were: no dogs allowed except for a bird dog during the hunting season if approved; no members or guests could sell or trade game or fish; no members or guests were to instruct or direct the employees, including the keeper (manager); complaints were to be directed to the House Committee; no members or guests were allowed in the kitchen or laundry; no special food was allowed; no member or guest was allowed to pay or give a gratuity to employees of the Club. Any violation would lead to expulsion.³³

If a member wanted to construct a private residence he had to make an application to the Board of Directors. Each building on their property had to be approved. The taxes and insurance costs would be paid to the Club. If these assessments were not paid at the fixed time, the Club could sell the property.³⁴

The annual meeting was held in Chicago the second Monday of December and it was necessary to have at least 10 members present.³⁵

A new 2003 book was published for the Big Sand Lake Club. The book is now 80 pages rather than 16 like the original one. The latest booklet includes members' names, names of the Board of Directors, the general rules, golf course rules, the bylaws, rates and fees.³⁶

The objective of the Club in 2003 is to: "Foster a social club, to encourage fishing, athletic events, contests and amusements; to aid in the protection of game and fish; and to buy, sell, own, lease, mortgage, pledge and deal generally in real personal and mixed property as may be necessary to the furtherance of said object."³⁷

The membership classification has four groups: equity, lodge, junior, and social. Presently the membership includes 64 equity members, 8 lodge members, 29 social, and 10 junior members. The private houses number 37, including the condominiums. Today the Board of Directors consists of 11 members. The annual meeting is now held any Sunday in January. It does not state where it is to be held. The committees today are: nominating, membership, house, and buildings and grounds. A large part of the booklet is devoted to the leaseholders and real estate.³⁸

Many things have changed. Hunting is no longer permitted; pets are allowed but must be leashed; guests must always stop at the desk and sign in - even if they are visiting someone in a home.³⁹

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The Big Sand Lake Club, Inc., 2003, Phelps, WI, Membership Booklet.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

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Quiet hours are observed in the clubhouse every day (except when it is raining) from 2:30 to 4:30pm.⁴⁰

A forty-page section covers the rules for leaseholders. According to Helen Adams-Murray, the leaseholders are not just from Chicago or Illinois any more. "There are people who have property here from all over the United States; there is even a family from Switzerland."⁴¹

The members feel so strongly about keeping this Club together that they have established an endowment. The interest income will be used to fund capital improvements for the Club.

The new Club celebrated its opening June 11, 1925. The 15,000 square foot full-log clubhouse is still extant today. A full-page cover story in the Eagle River Review reported that the \$125,000 clubhouse was the epitome of style in Northern Wisconsin.⁴² Built by the Finnish farmers who lived in the area it is a massive Rustic-styled log building. Galpin, the president, during the building of the clubhouse, hosted 24 guests at the opening dinner - all 24 guests were residents of Phelps.⁴³

Mr. Charles A. McCulloch, owner of the Parmelee Company of Chicago and treasurer and partner in the Yellow Taxi Company, spoke of Galpin in glowing terms: "Know that Mr. Galpin is a good politician in Cook County, holding 'the chairmanship' of the Republican Party for the past nine years, that we rather expected that he was getting ready to be the next mayor of Phelps, and for that reason we were going to present him with a large Tom Mix hat so he could throw it in the ring." He went on to say that he was sure no one would dare to oppose him because he was sure he would be the people's choice, unless Mrs. Galpin should decide to be a candidate.⁴⁴

From several personal and telephone interviews with people who knew Homer K. Galpin, a picture emerges of a man who was larger than life. In Phelps he was held in high esteem because of his great interest in the welfare of Phelps and the surrounding area. He personally took on the role of promoting the Phelps area as a vacation land. The economy of Phelps was greatly affected when the wealthy Chicagoans either visited or built summer homes in the area.

Galpin was responsible for and credited with starting the special weekend train services that began April 17, 1926. Galpin worked on this project for many years. He pushed for a winter weekend train that would bring people from Chicago to the northwoods during all seasons, not just summer. Galpin and a Mr. Vilas (General

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Oral interview with Helen Adams-Murray, August 16, 2003, Phelps, WI, Big Sand Lake Club.

⁴² Eagle River Review, June 11, 1925.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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Manager of the Chicago Northwestern Railroad) met at the Union League Club in Chicago to discuss this matter. Galpin invited dignitaries from Chicago who traveled north frequently: a Mr. Johnson, who was vice president of the Northwestern Railroad; and also C.M. Christiansen from Phelps, owner of a large sawmill. Mr. Frankenthal, the owner of a large estate on Long Lake, near Phelps, was also invited.⁴⁵

The result of this meeting was a promise for the first weekend run to begin April 17, 1926, which it did. Mr. Galpin felt that it would be a great help in the further development and economy of this area in Northern Wisconsin.

To further show the admiration held for Homer Galpin the paper stated: "Early special train service due to efforts of well-known Phelps man" in a small headline. The first paragraph states: "When our first special train service comes up on April 17 we will know that someone, although not here in the winter, was thinking of the Big North Woods in Vilas County. Homer K. Galpin, chairman of the Republican Central County Committee and president of the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club, has been working for several years and has never given up the idea that a weekend train during the winter would be a paying proposition and give an opportunity for those who own summer homes to enjoy winter sports here also."

A fascinating article is in the August 26, 1928, issue of the Chicago Sunday Tribune entitled: "Where Politicians While Away Their Time." A photo of the Big Sand Lake Club is pictured below the caption. The article is written in a rather sarcastic style, comparing the Chicago politicians who built mansions in the "wooded wilds" to the French Courtiers of the past. "Sequestered in sumptuous rendezvous, most of them in Vilas County are the lake and forest chateaux of Chicago, Cook County, and Illinois courtiers."

The first politician to be discussed is Homer K. Galpin, chairman of the Cook County Republican Committee. "A visitor will follow the long drive through the woods and brave the storm of 'Private Keep Out' signs along the way. And Mr. Galpin is there, far from the great and madding crowd." It goes on to talk about Mayor Thompson, Robert Crowe and other Chicago politicians at the Big Sand Lake Club. Big Sand Lake was definitely a refuge for Chicago politicians.

Robert E. Crowe, also a Republican party leader and close friend of Bill Thompson and Galpin, became well known as the Cook County state's attorney who was the prosecutor in the infamous trial of Leopold and Loeb. During the 1924 trial, Crowe crossed swords with Clarence Darrow, the famous criminal lawyer who represented Leopold and Loeb. Crowe won the state's case. The pair was given 99 years for kidnapping and life imprisonment for the murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks.⁴⁶ After the trial, Crowe feared for his life. Lowell Buell, town treasurer says, "Crowe always brought his body guards with him to the Big Sand Lake Club."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Eagle River Review, April 15, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Chicago Daily Tribune, obituary of Robert Crowe, June 20, 1958, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Personal Interview with Lowell Buell, December 6, 1996, Phelps, WI.

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During the "roaring twenties," Big Sand Lake Club became an extension of Chicago's high society. Formal dinner dances, bridge parties, and other social activities became weekly events. It was a flamboyant time and probably the most flamboyant member was Homer K. Galpin.

In 1927 the Eagle River Fishing and Shooting Club changed its name to the Big Sand Lake Club. Perhaps the Club recognized, with their handsome new clubhouse and their more sophisticated activities, that they needed a new name. It was no longer just a fishing and hunting club.

ARCHITECTURE

"During the period from 1870 to 1930, a style of domestic architecture evolved in the Adirondack region of northern New York State. The building complexes in the style were comfortably set on a lakeshore or a river, against a background of forests and mountains. They were characterized by use of logs and indigenous stone, shingled roofs with broad overhangs and porches, and simply proportioned windows and door openings."⁴⁸

These buildings were most often summer vacation homes or lodges. Usually they found local craftsmen to build the homes of native materials, such as logs and stone to fit into the natural environment.

"It's characterized by the definition of rustic: appropriate to the country. Some link the style to European influences (particularly Alpine chalets). But fundamentally, it's the logical, inevitable convergence of local traditions and readily available materials."⁴⁹

The simple structures being built in the wilderness needed no architects and used readily available indigenous material, which made the structures less expensive than if material had to be shipped. It was a natural process, and a necessity, because the building sites were usually in remote locations. Considered a unique vernacular architectural style, the construction form depended entirely upon the length of the available logs.

As the style became more popular, architects were hired by the wealthy. Consequently, these architects designed more complicated log structures, which received national attention through publications in architectural journals and popular magazines. The style became the accepted architecture for vacation homes around the country. In 1916 the National Park Service began to use this style for their lodges in the National Parks.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Old-House Journal, January/February, 1983, "The Adirondack Rustic Style" by Harvey Kaiser, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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The wealthy people who were building these large structures had the means to build with other materials; however, the logs fitted the romantic notion of the simple life in the unspoiled wilderness. Even though it was not really the simple life, they wanted to make it appear as though they were "roughing it."

The Rustic Style was also continued into the interior. The walls, ceilings and beams were log, the floor was wood, and the fireplaces stone. It was a part of the plan to bring nature inside. Everything was natural to the environment. At the Big Sand Lake Club, the furniture is leather, another natural product. The walls are adorned with mounted heads and skins of animals, mounted fish, hand-woven rugs, and snowshoes.

The aesthetic statement was the beauty of the wood rather than adorning the walls with plaster and wallpaper. Craftsman-styled wrought-iron light fixtures were usually a part of the interior decor. These wrought-iron light fixtures are found at the Big Sand Lake Club.

Early settlers in Wisconsin took advantage of Wisconsin's native forests to construct small log cabins. During the mid-nineteenth century many immigrants came to Wisconsin from Germany. The Germans constructed timber structures in logs and half-timbering. They used the square logs laid horizontally upon each other, notched and joined at the ends to form a solid wall.⁵¹

"The Finns were far less numerous than the Germans in Wisconsin, and tended to settle in Northern Wisconsin near Lake Superior beginning in the late 1880s. Their log construction seems more precise than that employed by the Germans, requiring careful fitting of whole logs so that no chinking was necessary. The Finns built entire farms of log buildings, including houses, root cellars, stables, barns, and saunas. The Finns continued to use log structures in the twentieth century."⁵²

William Koski, a lifetime resident of the Phelps area, states: "The families who settled the area beginning in the early 1900s were predominately of Finnish extraction; some were straight from Finland."

Wisconsin also had the fieldstone left over from the glacial times when retreating sheets of ice left boulder deposits. These natural products were used by early settlers for building fences, roads, houses, barns, silos, churches, and even commercial structures.⁵³

At the beginning of the 20th century, the design trend of the camp shifted from a collection of small individual buildings to an emphasis on main lodges of large

⁵¹Wyatt, Barbara, Cultural Resource Management, Volume II, p. 4-2. Wyatt, Barbara, Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid, p. 4-6.

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size.⁵⁴ While the Rustic Style calls to mind a rural setting, living in the pioneer spirit, and the simple life, in reality the camps or lodges were far from the rustic images conveyed. To ease the burden of coping with the wild, household staffs and caretakers gave guests the care and attention they were used to in their mansions in the city.⁵⁵ This is certainly true at the Big Sand Lake Club, even today, but after the new Clubhouse was finished in 1925, the activities became more sophisticated. They began having formal dinner parties where the men had to dress in black tie. Not a common event when you are "roughing it."

Reflecting the change with the new Clubhouse was the fact that the name was changed from The Eagle River Hunting and Fishing Club to the Big Sand Lake Club. The Iron River newspaper article about the opening of the Club states: "Luxury, rustic beauty and quiet comfort are combined in this great edifice erected in the heart of the great vacation land of Wisconsin and upper Michigan."⁵⁶

When the National Park Service adopted the building style in "harmony with landscape," it became accepted as a national style of architecture. During the Depression the Rustic Style was the choice for Park Service projects and designs of Civilian Conservation Corps. Here again the interiors were integrated with the outdoors, with emphasis on natural materials and handcrafted furnishings. One of the most famous designs is the President's retreat at Camp David.⁵⁷

The English Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was formed in 1888 by a group of artists and architects who were dedicated to reviving the tradition of craftsmanship.⁵⁸

The late 19th century protest against machine-age artificiality, which spawned the Arts and Crafts movement in England, engendered a distinct American offshoot: the Craftsman or Mission style. Gustav Stickley became the voice of this style through his magazine, The Craftsman (1901-19160). His ideas were to seek beauty and creativity in simplicity and organic harmony.

The Craftsman ideas and principles promoted by Gustav Stickley were simplicity, durability, fitness for life, and harmony with its natural surroundings. When he discusses a structure, he says it can be any size, but it must be durable so that

⁵⁴ Old-House Journal, January/February, 1983, "The Adirondack Rustic Style" by Harvey Kaiser, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 45

⁵⁶ The Iron River, Friday May, 1925, p. 1, "Gay Events Planned for Opening of \$125,000 Club House on Sand Lake, Vilas County, Today: Lowden is Guest."

⁵⁷ Wyatt, Barbara, Cultural Resource Management, Volume II, pp. 4-8, Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

⁵⁸ McAlester, Virginia and Lee, A Field Guide to American Houses, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1984, p. 454.

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there is freedom from repairs. Another component was for plenty of space on the interior by doing away with unnecessary partitions.⁵⁹

Log buildings are in harmony with the natural surroundings. They are perfect for the woodland area. The advantage of building a log structure is that, if carefully planned and built, it should last for generations. In discussing the logs he believes that after the bark is stripped off, the logs should be stained to the color of the bark that has been removed. It restores the logs to a color that harmonizes with their surroundings.⁶⁰

In discussing the log building, Stickley says that the logs must be set upon an excellent foundation of stone or cement; the interior should blend with the exterior and should have large open spaces; the fireplaces should be of split stone (the same as the outside chimney).

To truly follow the Craftsman's ideal: "It is of the utmost importance that the metal accessories should be of a character that fits into the picture."⁶¹ Furniture should blend with the building; they cannot be two separate schemes.

Stickley writes: "What is there about a log cabin that appeals to our imagination, that seems so alluring and full of the suggestion of romance? Is it not because the house of logs is a part of our heredity? It is a primitive home to man, a rudimentary sheltering of domestic life, a place of safety where love and friendship could be shut in and danger shut out."⁶²

"A house built of wood and has not been metamorphosed into boards and shingle, but still bears the semblance of the tree, rouses in us the old instinctive feelings of kinship with the elemental worked that is our natural heritage."⁶³

The log structure, which played such a large part in our past history, is very American in spirit. It has intrinsic beauty in its spirit. There is the bare beauty of the logs themselves with their long and firm curves. Plus the open charm of the structural features which are not hidden under plaster and other adornments, but are clearly visible.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The Big Sand Lake Club is a fine example of the Rustic Style, as well as of the philosophy that is so much a part of the style. The natural setting in the northwoods on the shore of a natural lake and the use of indigenous materials from

⁵⁹ Wyatt, Barbara, Cultural Resource Management, Volume II, pp. 2-24, Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

⁶⁰ The Craftsman, March 1907 issue by Gustav Stickley, pp. 162-163.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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the northwoods follows the "rules" laid out in the back-to-nature movement and philosophy.

The interior furnishings and decorations follow the Arts and Crafts ideals that Stickley advocated. The concept of "beauty through elimination" in philosophy and style was promoted in his publication, The Craftsman, from 1901 to 1916. Like the English Arts and Crafts movement, the craftsman aesthetic was the visible token of a moral commitment to the betterment of hearth, home, family and society through art.⁶⁵

The private clubs that grew up in the beginning of the 20th century began to disappear as people began to build their own private residences. That was one reason that the Big Sand Lake Club survived. Families could build their private homes and still belong to the Club. One of the oldest private clubs in Northern Wisconsin is in Three Lakes and is called the Three Lakes Rod and Gun Club. In 1884, a group of sportsmen from Batavia, Illinois, began camping on Lake Gogebic in Michigan. They called themselves "The Gogebic Club." They began looking for a spot to establish a permanent and private club for fishing, hunting, and getting away from everyday life. The group came to Three Lakes and began camping on French's Point, now called Denby Island.⁶⁶

On September 27, 1898, an organizational meeting was held. On January 3, 1899, an Illinois charter was issued for the Three Lakes Rod and Gun Club. They thought that they had purchased 148 acres of land, but it turned out to be only 60 acres because of the 1916 installation of the dam on the Eagle River Chain of Lakes. The dam caused the water to rise several feet.⁶⁷

Two other private clubs, no longer active, are the Indianapolis Outing Club and the Norway Club. Both of these clubs were turned into private family cottages.

The Big Sand Lake Club is being nominated to the NRHP for its local association with the northwoods tourism in Wisconsin. Such clubs and resorts had a tremendous effect on the economy of the area. Not only were local people employed to work at the Club, local stores and craftsmen profited from the wealthy people who resided deep in the northwoods each summer. The impact of this Club is still being felt today in the area's economy.

The Big Sand Lake Club is architecturally and historically an important resource in Northern Wisconsin. Architecturally, is an excellent example of the Rustic Style that was being built in the Adirondacks and in the National Parks. It is

⁶⁵ Wyatt, Barbara, Cultural Resource Management, Volume II, pp. 2-24. Wyatt, Barbara, Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986.

⁶⁶ Three Lakes Historical Society. The Pine, The Plow, and The Pioneer, A History of Three Lakes, Clearwater Lake, Gagen, Hiles and Monico, Wisconsin, Volume II, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

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still original. Historically, it is a unique and fine example of the clubs that sprang up after the white pine was cut in Northern Wisconsin. After the pine was cut, people tried farming but that was not successful. Three important components were against farming: ubiquitous pine stumps, poor soil and a short growing season. As the loggers and lumbermen left the northwoods, they still remembered the wonderful lakes and abundant fish in every lake. They told their families and acquaintances about this fisherman's paradise and consequently groups were organized to buy land and fund the construction of these clubhouses. While statistically it is hard to document the impact of these large clubs upon the local economy, it is obvious that it was significant.

Summary

The Big Sand Lake Club is a unique property located in the northwoods of Wisconsin, close to the border of Michigan in Vilas County. It represents the most excellent example of a twentieth century Rustic Style retreat. The natural building materials, log and stone, that were used to construct the clubhouse, and the natural furnishings are all representative of the Rustic Style. It has excellent historical integrity and is architecturally significant under Criterion C.

The Big Sand Lake Club and all of the buildings and resources that make up the complex are important to the history of the Club. While the clubhouse is a fine example of the Rustic Style, the outbuildings in their simple structure and vernacular style were a part of the construction method for these large lodges. They were ancillary buildings that provided service for the Club so that it could be run efficiently for the members.

The Big Sand Lake Club is locally significant under Criterion A as an alternative organizational form for northwoods recreation. After logging ceased, northern Wisconsin made a short-lived transition to farming, followed by a much more successful economy based on tourism. The Club has had a great impact on the economy of Phelps. Many of the people from the area have been employed either directly or indirectly by the Club. While it is impossible to document the total effect statistically, it is a well-known fact how a small town is affected by the influx of wealthy summer people who need services and products.

Early recreational history in this part of the state was dominated by the emergence of privately operated summer resorts, until the advent of the automobile fueled the construction of individual summer homes. The hunting and fishing club was an alternative economic model for recreation based upon the voluntary organization of individuals to form a cooperative corporate entity for the purpose of purchasing and maintaining recreational property. Unlike many of the other private clubs in the region, the Big Sand Lake continued even when improved transportation made it easier for individuals to purchase their own parcels and to build their own summer residences. The Big Sand Lake Club was able to combine the two - having the elements of the private resort, while allowing members to build private residences on the larger property. The historic core of the Big Sand Lake

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Club contains an intact assemblage of buildings relating to the early history of the Club.

 End

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Insert

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

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Verbal Boundary Description

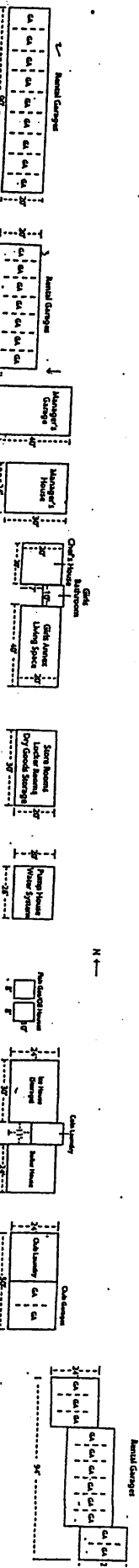
The boundary of the historic core of buildings is described as follows: Beginning 20 feet north of the northwest corner of the most northerly garage and turning west proceed 20 feet. Then turn a 90 degree angle and proceed south 295 feet along the clubhouse road, turn west and proceed 360 feet past the two tennis courts to the edge of the shoreline, turn south and proceed along the shoreline for 320 feet (except where the boundary juts out into the water following the edge of the historic dock-the dock is included within the boundary), turn east and proceed 360 feet past the water tower to the underground pipe from the pump house, turn south and proceed south 295 feet, turn east and proceed 110' which is approximately 50 feet from the southeast edge of the most southerly garage and proceed north 910 feet to 20 feet past the northeast corner of the most northerly garage, turn west to point of beginning. (see enclosed boundary map)

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

The boundary encompasses the extant buildings associated with the historic core of the Big Sand Lake Club and excludes the acreage not related to the historic buildings of the club.

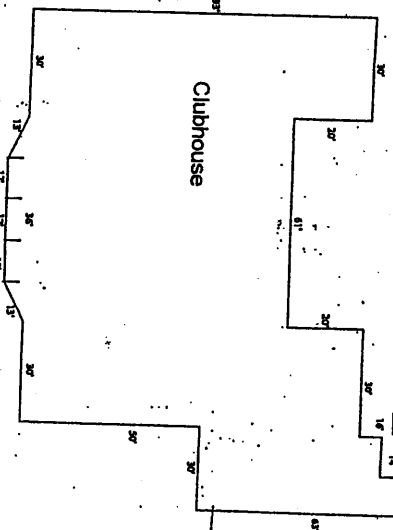
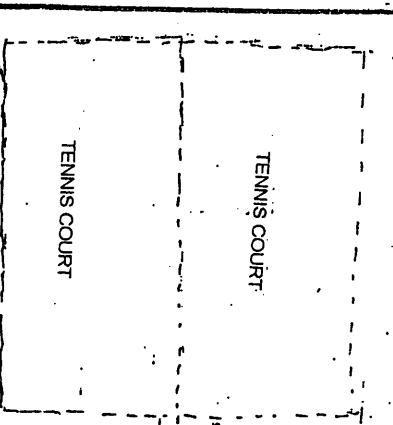
___End

910'



295' Big Sand Lake Club Road

4.94 acres



Kitchen Storage

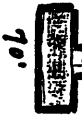
Water Tower



← NORTH

BIG SAND LAKE CLUB
TOWN OF PHELPS, VILAS COUNTY
WISCONSIN

- boundaries
- Contributing
- All buildings and structures are contributing
- no scale



Dock 260'

LAKE

N ←

1101

Aerial Photo
Villa County
Phelps, CO
Marilyn Jane Phelps

Big Sand Lake Club Historic Core

