

Olmsted's Tent At Day's End- (Iron Mountain, Fl. 1914 -1915)

The inspiration for this room box was the history of the founding of the of Mountain Lake Club in Florida. The Club first came to my attention from stories told me by my father. Dad, a much decorated WW II B-24 bomber pilot, got his pilot training at the nearby Avon Park Air Base. During those busy stress filled weeks at Avon Park, he and several fellow officers in training were invited by members of the Mountain Lake Club to spend weekends as their house guests where they were welcomed, entertained and treated as family. He never forgot their wonderful hospitality and support. "A Great American Story"

A few years ago, I was reacquainted with the Mountain Lake Club through good friends and became infatuated with the interesting history of its founding, development and beauty.

In 1914 Frederick Ruth, inspired by the Roland Park Company development in Baltimore, traveled south and contracted for thousands of acres at the termination of the railroad in Central Florida near what today is Orlando. He set aside approximately 1,100 acres for a residential development consisting of over 350 home sites, a club house and a golf course. Once he secured the land, Ruth set about raising the necessary investment funds with able help of his brother, a well connected Maryland politician. He also worked to hire an architect/land planner and a golf course architect.

Ruth was very impressed with the work of the Olmsted Company which had planned Central Park in New York City. The firm was then headed by his son, Fredrick Olmsted Junior, who at age 30 had just overseen the work on Vanderbilt's "Baltimore Estate" in North Carolina. At first Olmsted was very reluctant to work with Ruth but later agreed to after getting reassurances from several influential sources. In 1914, he was hired to plan, layout and design the community's club house, The Colony House. This beautiful and iconic clubhouse still gracefully serves the community today. Ruth next hired the golf course designer/architect Seth Raynor, age 40. Raynor, originally from Long Island and a graduate of Princeton University, developed 85 golf courses over his career among them, are the Camargo Club, in Cincinnati, Fishers Club Island on Fishers Island, Yale

University in New Haven and Mid Ocean Club, in Bermuda. Raynor's mentor was golf architect, Charles Blair MacDonald who traveled extensively in England, Scotland and France and developed numerous templates of the popular holes in those countries. When MacDonald designed his courses in America he used many of those template holes and included the same four par 3's on most every course. Later, the golf course which Raynor designed for Ruth in Mountain Lake used many of those same templates including the famous par 3's and is said to be one of the finest courses Raynor ever designed. Further, it is now generally considered to be one of the finest historical golf courses in America.

In 1914 Ruth constructed a tent on the property adjacent to the stables to serve as a kitchen/workspace for the project. My Roombox is my interpretation of what that tent and workspace may have looked like at the time. Although I could not find any evidence that Raynor shared the workspace in the tent with Olmsted; I believe it is reasonable to assume that he also worked there.

Olmsted set about planning a golf club community consisting of over 300 lots where each lot had a view of the lake and was not in the path of his neighbor's view. He envisioned a grand club house surrounded by beautifully landscaped homes designed in the style of both "Spanish Floridian" and "Mediterranean Revival". In order to design a natural and organic layout for the property and determine its natural topography and drainage, he needed to view it from the highest point on the site. He did this by locating his work tent on the the highest elevation on the property, Iron Mountain, elevation 320 feet. He also constructed a ladder at the site to better view the entire property. In order to accomplish this he removed all the limbs from one of the nearby pine trees and nailed boards on its trunk to serve as the ladder's steps. He referred to this make-shift ladder as his "Bug Pole".

Today the Mountain Lake community has it all: great weather, a landscaped park-like setting, a world class golf course, beautiful housing stock, a gracious club house, and the deserved reputation of being one of America's great historical communities.

As so often happens in the world of real estate development, the story has a sad end for Ruth, its founder and creative genius. Because the Mountain Lake Club Development was such a huge financial success, Ruth made

the classic developer mistake of becoming financially overextended by developing more and more properties and borrowing more and more money to finance them. In essence, he succumbed to that dreaded developer disease, "*Developeritis*". When the inevitable economic downturn came, in this case the depression of 1929, Ruth found himself with only \$3,085 of cash to fund large outstanding development loans for both Fisher's Island Club and the Mid Ocean Club. Unable to cope with the financial pressure he checked himself into the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and committed suicide at the age of 48.

A few things for the viewer to note inside my box. The branches that I used to simulate the trees in the box were gathered from branches which I collected at Iron Mountain earlier this year. Olmsted's "Bug Pole Ladder" is reproduced in miniature and can be found in the back right corner of the box. My vision of Olmsted's work table is located in the left front of the box and includes a miniature, electronically modified, photograph depicting the site as it was in 1914 and a miniaturized lot layout of the entire community as well an architectural plan for a residential garden and, of course, Olmsted's ever present pipe.

Raynor's worktable is located in the rear left of the box and contains his field desk as well as copies of miniaturized Raynor designed course blueprints. To the right of work desk are miniaturized story board drawings of Mountain Lake's fourth hole, known as "Long".

I also added various other items, oranges, fishing Rods, indigenous animals and rain/water barrels, to the box to better represent the time, place and to create a more interesting narrative for the viewer.

In closing, I want to thank Andrew C. Mutch, for his extensive research and writings on the history of Mountain Lake.