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The Live Oak Society

By

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*President, Southwestern Louisiana Institute,
Lafayette, Louisiana*



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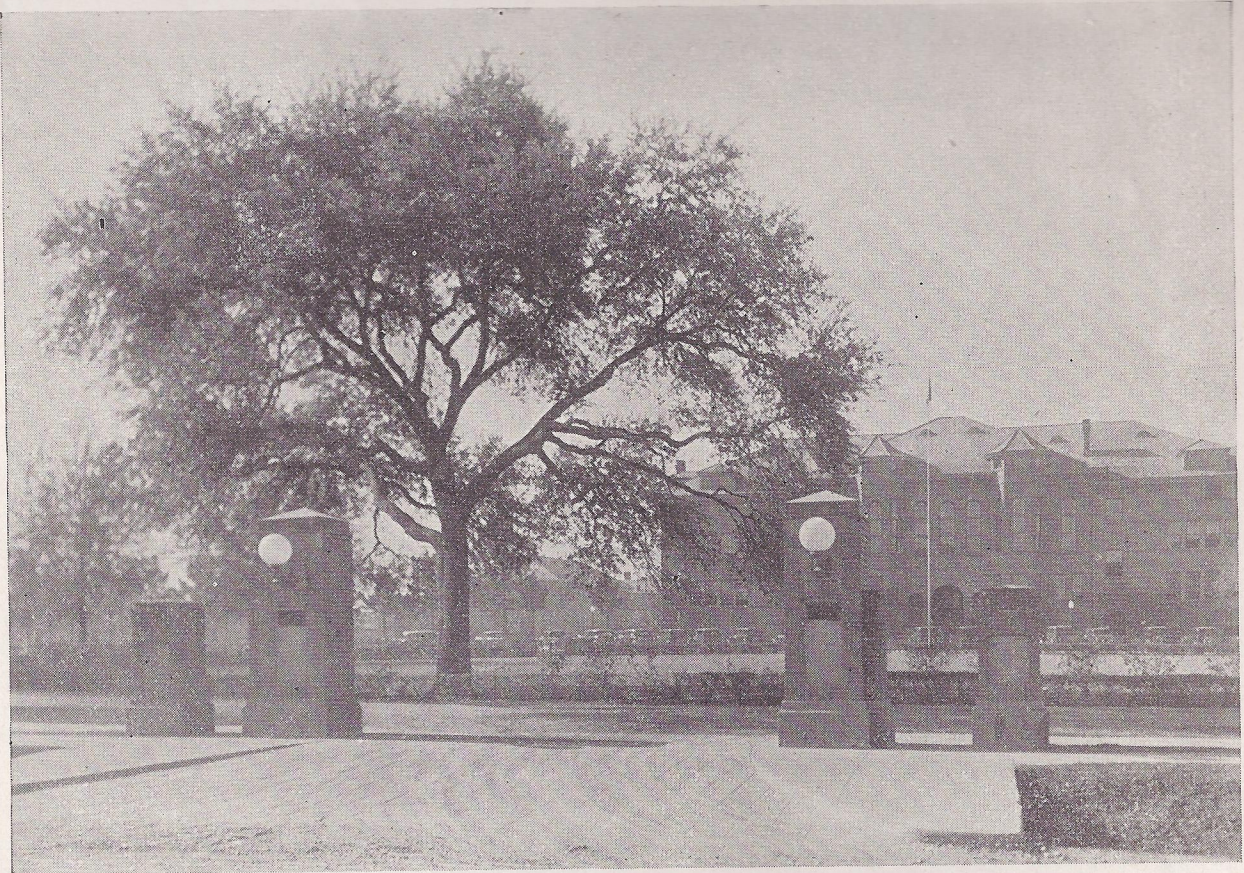
(EDITORIAL NOTE: *Dr. Stephens' "Live Oak Society", which herewith presents its constitution, should find a welcome and a fellowship with the program for State Parks in Louisiana. The State Parks Commission has set forth its policies in "Louisiana State Parks, the Problem and Answer", its recent First Annual Report to Governor Allen. Dr. Stephens' unique and ingenious society, whose membership have both the wisdom of age and the wisdom of silence, will turn the eyes of the Southland again to the beauties of its oaks.*)

IN an article in the Louisiana Conservation Review last April, under the title of Walt Whitman's line "I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing", I proposed the organization of a Louisiana Live Oak Society. I ventured to set up claims for Louisiana as being preeminently the logical and specially recognized habitation of the live oak. These claims have not yet been overthrown, but they have brought occasional demurrers from some of the other coastal States, such as Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Texas, Virginia, and California! Mr. C. E. Dobson of New Orleans, writes that there is a remarkable grove of live oaks near the Naval Hospital at the Pensacola Naval Aviation Station. I assume that this may be the site of the live oak culture con-

ducted by the administration of President John Quincy Adams a hundred years ago, for the purpose of producing timbers for future American battleships. This scheme, however, was abandoned by the succeeding administration. Mr. H. B. Rust of Baldwin County, Alabama, now in Boston, Massachusetts, and preparing a book on the oaks of the United States, lays claim to some very fine specimens of the live oak in Alabama. Burt Potter, Esq., of Aransas Pass, Texas, writes that a famous live oak in that state, near Rockport, can claim comparison with the best in Louisiana. Doctor James H. Dillard, of Charlottesville, Virginia, writes that he thinks he recalls some grand old specimens on the old campus of William and Mary College, while Professor Mill-



Photograph by E. L. Stephens.
"Surprise Oak" at Pointe-aux-Chenes, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.



Photograph by E. L. Stephens.

"Guardian of the Gate"—the Robert Martin Live Oak on Southwestern campus.

edge L. Bonham of Hamilton College, is pretty sure that the prize among the oldest and finest live oaks would be taken by some aboriginal trees on the military reservation of Fort Monroe in Virginia. And this claim is largely corroborated in a letter from Captain Harrington W. Cochran of the 51st Coast Artillery, Adjutant of the military post at Fort Monroe, who sends an airplane photograph of the location and says the live oaks average 9 feet and that one of them measures 17 feet, 6 inches, in circumference, and that all of them withstood the terrible hurricane of August 3, 1933, with little damage. He said: "We have been told that this is the most northern location of live oaks along the Atlantic seaboard". Mr. Harold P. Huls, City Attorney of Pasadena, California, writes that the live oak trees of the Pacific Coast are of so excellent a character as to rival the best that I have claimed for Louisiana. Then there is Mississippi: Mrs. James R. Leavell of Chicago, writes of a live oak grove of surpassing beauty on her place, "Doonegate", on the Mississippi coast ten miles west of Ocean Springs. This last claim has brought me to book; for upon having occasion to investigate the Mississippi coast, I was obliged to admit that the splendid live oak groves, avenues, and individual trees to be found in and near Ocean Springs and Biloxi

are worthy of a place along with the best we have in Louisiana. So we have decided not to name our organization "The Louisiana Live Oak Society", but simply, "The Live Oak Society", which will include the eligible members from everywhere.

The proposal of such an organization was widely hailed with approval in principle, and many letters of appreciation were received; letters, among others, from my friend the late Leon Locke, of Lake Charles; Mr. H. H. White, of Alexandria, President, State Board of Education; Mr. John M. Caffery of Franklin; Mr. Allen Eaton, of the Department of Surveys and Exhibits of the Russell Sage Foundation, New York; the late Mr. R. B. Mayfield, Editor of the Times-Picayune, who expressed an editorial appreciation in the issue of May 13, 1934; Superintendent Nicholas Bauer of New Orleans; President Richard G. Cox of Gulf Park College; President David M. Key of Millsaps College; President Pat Neff, of Baylor University; Chancellor Alfred Hume of the University of Mississippi; and others. Mr. Locke wrote interestingly from his bed, in almost the last week of his life: "I enjoyed your quotation from Whitman, 'I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing'. I remember these lines in that poem:

'All alone it stood and the moss hung
down from its branches;
Without any companion it grew there,
uttering leaves of dark green;

and I enjoyed and appreciated your remark on his 'Leaves of Grass' as being '*dark and shady*'. It is '*shady*' in places. I am reminded of Swinburne's comment; it was many years ago, and I cannot avouch to accuracy—something like this: 'His Venus is a Hottentot wench besotted with Cantharides and Rum'. Someone said he should have exchanged his title (Leaves of Grass) with Bill Nye, who wrote 'Baled Hay'. In attending school as a boy, I wrote 'The Woods of Maine' in rhyme, and it went into the records of Professor Oscar E. Olin, later the president of A. & M. College, Manhattan, Kansas. I hope it never survived, for it was faulty in rhyme and far from excellent in botany; but I made a fine collection of woods, the bark showing with a section of the trunk, and gave it to the school".¹

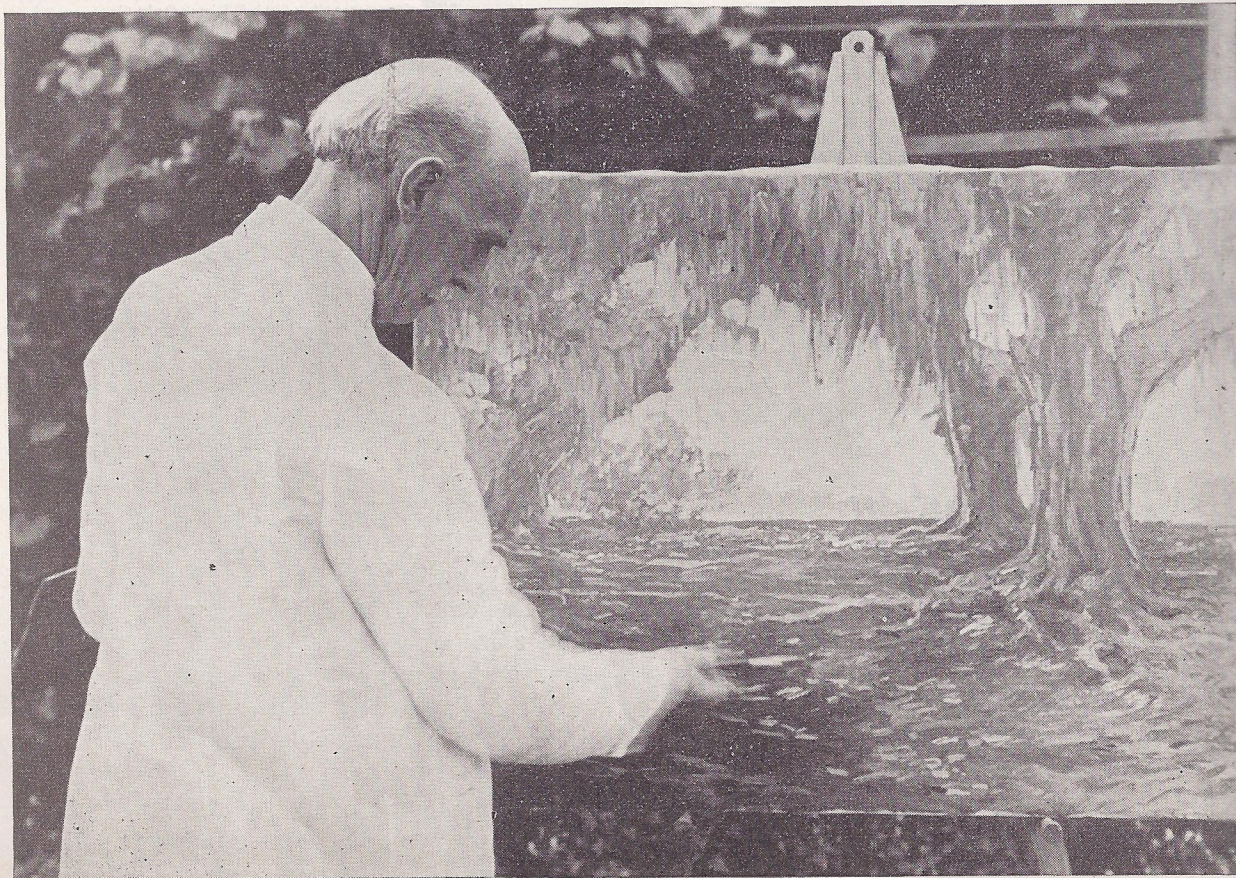
Mr. White wrote: "In your proposed 'Live Oak Society' you have launched a new idea. I expect something to come of it—something worthwhile".

Mr. John Caffery said: "I am here on account of live oaks. In a way they are my ancestors. My grandfather came to Louisiana a century and a quarter ago as a live oak forest inspector. My

family has had a devotion to live oaks amounting almost to reverence. I look upon these grand old live oaks as my dear old aunts and uncles and great-aunts and great-uncles! What an inspiration a sturdy live oak is to our frail humanity to take on more strength." Mr. Mayfield in his editorial in the Times-Picayune, said: The plan "cannot fail to have both aesthetic and sentimental interest for nature lovers everywhere and especially in New Orleans. This live oak association is to be composed, not of human tree lovers, but of the trees themselves—a thought recalling our childhood days when great trees became giants and ogres and even moved about in the forest * * *

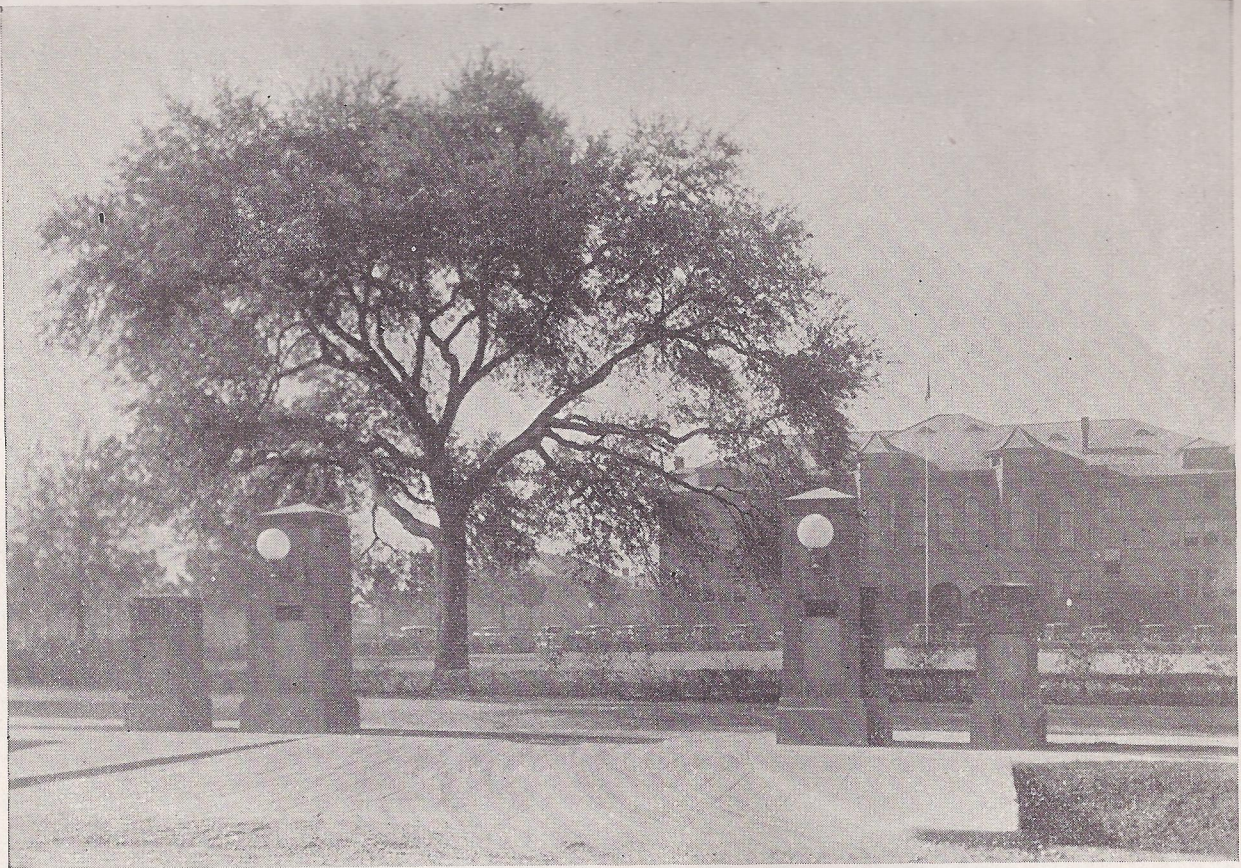
"Although New Orleans cannot claim either first or second place in the hierarchy of trees

¹This comment on Whitman reminds me of what Sidney Lanier said about him: "Whitman is poetry's butcher. Huge raw collops slashed from the rump of poetry, and never mind gristle, is what he gives us to feed our souls. His argument seems to be: Since a prairie is wide, therefore debauchery is admirable, and since the Mississippi is long, therefore every American is God!" Lanier must doubtless be considered Live Oak Poet Number One, on account of his live oak lines in many poems, such as "The Marshes of Glynn"; but, on the other hand, we ought to give the title of Live Oak Poet Number Two to Whitman—if for nothing else but that line: "I Saw in Louisiana a Live Oak Growing". It should be remembered that, for all of the curious things in his verse, he did write "Drum Taps", "The Place Where a Great City Stands", "Chanting the Square Deific", "I Sing the Body Electric", and "O Captain! My Captain"—and so much else.—E. L. S.



Photograph by E. L. Stephens.

Dr. Ellsworth Woodward, Director Emeritus of the Newcomb College School of Art, and one of his paintings of live oaks in Paradise Grove, Breau Bridge.



Photograph by E. L. Stephens.

"Guardian of the Gate"—the Robert Martin Live Oak on Southwestern campus.

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Photograph by E. L. Stephens.

Trunk of the Arnaud Robert Live Oak, near Cecilia. 33 feet, 4 inches. "First Vice-President" of the Live Oak Society.

listed among the charter members of the proposed society, it holds third and fifth places in the list, with the 'George Washington' and his wife 'Martha' in Audubon Park. And, even though we are widely outmeasured by the 'Number One' tree, the latter is not far distant from our city. It is the Locke Breaux Live Oak, on the Mississippi River, four miles above Hahnville in St. Charles Parish, and thus only about thirty miles from New Orleans. Not only is this tree largest, with its thirty-five foot girth, and one hundred and sixty-six foot spread of limb, but also it is perhaps the most complete in form of all Louisiana association members".

My friends among college presidents and educational officials, and many others, wrote letters acclaiming the plan and commending the development of the idea of great appreciation for live oaks.

Mr. Allen Eaton, who is in the office of the Department of Surveys and Exhibits of the Russell Sage Foundation, New York, comes through with financial support for our suggestion that the beautiful Paradise Grove near Breaux Bridge should be purchased and converted into a public park. He enclosed a one-dollar bill as a contribution to that end. When we raise ninety-nine more he will give another, then another for each

ninety-nine more until we reach five hundred dollars. "This seems a little thing", he says, but suggests that from such small beginnings sometimes come large results—as in the case of an oak tree from an acorn. I have placed this dollar on deposit in the First National Bank to the credit of the Paradise Grove Fund. And I have had some correspondence with Mr. Alexis Voorhies of New Iberia, upon the question of the lowest price at which he would sell the grove property. He says that he formerly held it at \$10,000, when times were booming, but that now he would sell it for \$7,000. If this is the "low down", and if we can get the city of Breaux Bridge and the parish of St. Martin to pay the greater part of the cost (the grove is right on the edge of Breaux Bridge), perhaps we may be able to get friends of the live oak to follow the example of Mr. Eaton and raise a sufficient amount to buy this property and convert it into a public park. If we could do it quickly, perhaps the ERA would help to fix it up. This would be a worthy first project of the new Society.

The membership plan of the Live Oak Society is, that to become a regular member, one must be a live oak either known or suspected to be a hundred years old. Young live oaks are eligible to form branches of the Junior League. The first

branch of the Junior League is that of Southwestern campus, which now has more than one hundred live oaks, including eighteen that are exactly the age of the Twentieth Century, having been set out on January 1, 1901. Plantings have been made from the acorns of its principal member (The Robert Martin Live Oak, guardian of the gate), and a wide distribution of the off-spring of this tree has been made among Southwestern alumni. A number of these trees have been given to Audubon Park, at the instance of Mr. Claude Rordam; and Mr. Neelis, the Superintendent, has planted them in a special Southwestern Row in the southwestern corner of the Park. We also gave more than a hundred young oaks to our friend, the late Clarence Pierson, who was Superintendent of the State Hospital at Pineville; he placed them on the beautiful hospital grounds. We sold three hundred young live oaks from acorns of one of these "Twentieth Century" oaks to the Young Men's Business Club of Beaumont, Texas, where they were planted in various parks of that city about five years ago. Since 1928 I have been measuring the circumference of the eighteen "Twentieth Century" live oaks on the campus each New Year's Day. The measurements for 1929 and 1932 have been mislaid, but the following is a tabulation of the measurements for the other years:

No.	Remarks	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
1	Robert Martin...	6-0	..	6-4	6-6	..	7-2	7-3	7-4
2		5-1	..	5-7	5-10	..	6-7	6-9	7-0
3		5-7	..	6-1	6-4	..	7-0	7-3	7-3
4		5-10	..	7-0	7-2	..	7-3	7-5	7-7
5	Corner	6-6	..	7-0	7-3	..	7-10	7-11	8-0
6		5-6	..	6-1	6-3	..	6-9	7-0	7-1
7		5-5	..	6-1	6-3	..	6-5	6-9	6-9
8		5-6	..	6-1	6-3	..	6-9	6-11	7-0
9		6-1	..	6-10	7-1	..	7-3	7-5	7-7
10		4-11	..	5-3	5-4	..	5-9	5-11	6-0
11		6-1	..	6-5	6-6	..	7-1	7-4	7-6
12		4-11	..	5-4	5-6	..	6-0	6-3	6-5
13		5-8	..	6-2	6-4	..	6-11	7-1	7-4
14		7-11	..	8-1	8-2	..	8-4	8-8	8-8
15	A double; cannot be accurately measured for comparison here.....	9-0	..	10-0	10-4	..	11-1	11-7	10-9
16		6-0	..	6-2	6-3	..	7-1	7-2	7-4
17		6-5	..	6-9	6-11	..	7-3	7-5	7-8
18		5-3	..	5-6	5-8	..	6-2	6-3	6-5



Photograph by E. L. Stephens.
Avenue of live oaks, St. Charles College, Grand Coteau, La.

The average rate of growth in circumference of each tree during the past seven years is shown from this table to have been 17.3 inches. This is found by subtracting the sum of the 1928 measurements from the sum of the 1935 measurements and dividing by 18 (the number of trees). This gives an average of 17.3 inches per tree for the seven years, or 2.4 inches per year.

The Stanley Martin Oak, dedicated to our Great War hero, which was set out February 22, 1919, has increased in circumference of trunk, four feet above the ground, from 18 inches on January 1, 1928, to 39 inches on January 1, 1935. This tree has been given a stone marker by the Stanley Martin Post of the American Legion.

Southwestern campus donated two live oaks to the campus of Baylor University during the past

year, to be set out in honor of the late Professor James F. Greer, and the late President S. Palmer Brooks of that institution, who were my warm personal friends for many years past—the former being one of my best-loved teachers fifty years ago, the latter an associate college student forty-two years ago.

A sad story has come out of Natchitoches in connection with the famous St. Denis Oak, which I named in the article referred to, of last year, as being an eligible charter member of the Live Oak Society. Professor W. J. Avery of the State Normal College informed me that everything would be all right if the big tree in the American Graveyard were a live oak—but, alas! it is a red oak! That is just too bad! The only chance I see now for Natchitoches to get into the charter membership is to boost the Rich Williams live oak on Second Street. Its trunk is only 12 feet, 3 inches in circumference, but it is a real live oak and may be it is a hundred years old—I don't know.

The Live Oak Society is now an established fact. The annual dues for the past year have already been paid by the Miramar Oak of Pass Christian, Mississippi. It was too late for them to send acorns, so they shipped us twenty-five live oak seedlings taken from under its noble 140-foot spread. The Constitution and By-Laws are hereby officially published, as follows:

THE LIVE OAK SOCIETY CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

Preamble

Whereas the Live Oak is one of God's creatures that has been keeping quiet for a long time, just standing there contemplating the situation without having very much to say, but only increasing in size, beauty, strength, and firmness, day by day, without getting the attention and appreciation that it merits from its anthropomorphic fellow-mortals; and

Whereas it has been found that organization and publication are a good means of promoting influence and service in the world; therefore

This Constitution for an universal association of Live Oaks is hereby ordained and established.

ARTICLE I

Name

The name of this association shall be The Live Oak Society.

ARTICLE II

Domicile

Its domicile shall be Lafayette, Louisiana.

ARTICLE III

Branches

Branches of the Society may be formed in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, Pointe-aux-Chenes, New Orleans, and other places on the map, wherever the F. L. O. gets itself sufficiently expressed (F. L. O., i. e., Feeling for the Live Oak).

ARTICLE IV

Object

The purpose of the Live Oak Society shall be to promote the culture, distribution, and appreciation of the live oak.

ARTICLE V

Membership

The membership of the Society shall consist of designated individual live oak trees, known or suspected to be more than one hundred years old.

Live oaks less than one hundred years old, possessing honorable qualifications, will be eligible to be enlisted in the *Junior League*.

ARTICLE VI

Officers

Section 1. Officers of the Society shall be (1) a President, (2) some Vice-Presidents, (3) a Committee of Elders, and (4) a Group of Illustrious Individual Specimens.

Section 2. The Locke Breaux Live Oak near Hahnville, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, shall be the first President. Thereafter the largest live oak in the Society shall be declared President at the next Semi-Occasional meeting after its description and location shall be ascertained.

Section 3. The first roster of officers shall be as follows: President, the Locke Breaux Live Oak (near Hahnville); 1st Vice-President, the Arnaud Robert Live Oak (above Breaux Bridge); 2nd Vice-President, the George Washington Live Oak (Audubon Park); 3rd Vice-President, the Luling Live Oak; 4th Vice-President, the Martha Washington Live Oak (Audubon Park). Committee of Elders: The Mays Live Oak (Rosedale), Chairman; the Jamison Live Oak (Thibodaux); the Kaplan Live Oak (near Intracoastal City); the Maryland Live Oak (New Roads); the Potier Live Oak (Parks, La.). Group of Illustrious Individual Specimens: The Gebert Live Oak (New Iberia), Chairman; the Kenner Ferry Live Oak (west bank); the Joe Jefferson Live Oak (Jefferson Island); the Grover Cleveland Live Oak (Avery Island); the McDonogh Live Oak (City Park, New Orleans); the Cathedral Live Oak (Lafayette); the Mossler Live Oak (BonFouca); the Miramar Live Oak (Pass Christian); the

John Ruskin Live Oak (Ocean Springs); the Lorna Doone Live Oak (Pointe-aux-Chenes); the Henry Watkins Allen Live Oak (near Baton Rouge); the Thomas D. Boyd Live Oak (Baton Rouge); the Evangeline Live Oak (St. Martinville); and the Archangel Live Oak (Paradise Grove, Breaux Bridge).

Section 4. Officers shall be designated at the Semi-Occasional meetings.

ARTICLE VII

Representation

For the conduct of the Society's Human-Relations business, a representative (either the owner or some other interested person), shall be designated as Attorney for each member.

ARTICLE VIII

Meetings

Meetings shall be held somewhere, semi-occasionally.

ARTICLE IX

Annual Dues

The annual dues shall be twenty-five (25) acorns from each member, payable on or about New Year's Day—preferably, sometime previous or subsequent to the day, or else on the day itself. These acorns shall be planted in the Live Oak Nursery of the Southwestern Louisiana Institute Farm, Lafayette, Louisiana, and shall be distributed before the end of each year, to make room for the next year's crop. Small seedlings may be accepted instead of acorns.

Small live oaks will be shipped to the people from this nursery at any time upon application, without cost other than the actual cost of handling and transportation.

ARTICLE X

Amendments

This Constitution can be amended at any Semi-Occasional meeting.

BY-LAWS

1. *Acting Secretary*

The records and correspondence of the Society shall be attended to for the first little while by the President of Southwestern Louisiana Institute, who shall be designated as the Acting Secretary (there will be no real Secretary!).

2. *Official Organ*

The official organ of the Society shall be the *Louisiana Conservation Review*.

3. *Quercometrical Data*

Representatives shall be required to obtain and report accurate data as to (1) Circumference of members (measurement of trunk in feet and inches, four feet above the ground); (2) Approximate height; (3) Diameter of spread; (4) Date of measurements. And these data shall be recorded by the Acting Secretary in a suitable book and preserved for future comparison to show rate of growth of live oaks.

4. *The Live Oak in Song and Story*

Friends of live oaks everywhere are to be encouraged to contribute not only descriptions, photographs, and statistics of measurement, but also poems and stories of historic and literary interest concerning live oaks.

5. *The Live Oak in Libraries*

Librarians are requested to specialize on live oaks in their collections, and assist in extending live oak appreciation among the people.

6. *No Whitewash*

Members shall not be whitewashed. Violations of this law shall be punished by expulsion—and the attorneys for such members shall be disbarred from practice.

7. *No Advertisements*

No member of the Society shall be desecrated with advertisements.

8. *No Quercocide*

Thou shalt not kill! This law shall apply to members of the Live Oak Society and the Junior League. Destruction of a live oak will not be permitted except by Act of the Legislature.

9. *Amendments*

These By-Laws shall not be amended except on a Sunday or holiday or some secular day of the week, or else some night.

Notarial Record

Done before me, the Robert Martin Live Oak, at my official position at the front gate of Southwestern Louisiana Institute, this first day of February, A. D., 1935, in the presence of the Stanley Martin Live Oak (set out February 22, 1919), and also of seventeen "Twentieth Century" live oaks besides myself (set out January 1, 1901), together with one hundred other small live oaks on Southwestern Campus (about ten years old).

(Signed) THE ROBERT MARTIN LIVE OAK.
(Seal)