



# CADDO LAKE NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER CADDO LAKE ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

November 2018

On the web: [www.gclaoftx.com](http://www.gclaoftx.com)



[Greater Caddo Lake Association of Texas](http://www.gclaoftx.com)

Donna McCann, Editor

## A Successful 2018 GCLA Barbeque

By Donna McCann

The 40th annual GCLA barbeque, held on September 1, 2018 brought together a big crowd of Caddo Lake supporters for food and fellowship in support of our efforts to protect Caddo Lake in its natural state. 290 tickets were sold as hungry folks found their way to Crip's Camp under a beautiful, clear sky. With 220 lbs of brisket and 50 lbs of sausage served along with beans and slaw, the cooks, who had been smoking meat and simmering beans since the day before, received many compliments. Combined with sales of raffle tickets and membership renewals, the event raised \$7543 to support the efforts of the GCLA and related organizations in caring for our beloved lake and swamp, particularly in the ongoing fight against invasive plant species such as Giant Salvinia. The GCLA board greatly appreciates the support of the community in making this event a big success.



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**GCLA Christmas Party and Meeting**  
GCLA invites all members and want-to-be-members to our annual Christmas pot-luck gala, at the Karnack Community Center (behind the fire department) on December 12 at 6PM. We will provide the meats and ask that those attending bring a favorite vegetable, side, or dessert to share.  
While we eat, members of the board will give an update on what the group has accomplished over the past year and attempt to answer any questions from the audience.

# After the Raft - the Savior of Caddo Lake

By Donna McCann

The previous issue of the GCLA News featured some history of the Great Raft of the Red River, which formed Caddo and numerous other lakes of the Great Swamp from lowlands along the Red River and tributary bayous before and during the 1800s.

When the raft of logs was finally removed above Shreveport in the 1870s, water flow through the original Red River bed increased and flow through upstream distributaries into Caddo Lake from the north began declining. The Army Corps of Engineers began closing off the remaining distributaries by building levees along the river, leaving the Cypress bayou system as the only source of flow into Caddo Lake. Sediment had built up over the years of the raft in the Twelve Mile Bayou floodplain, forming a natural "dam" to keep the depression that formed Caddo Lake flooded. This sediment steadily channelized and deepened. During the 1880s and 1890s, while one part of the Corps of Engineers was building levees on the Red River, starving the lake of water from the Red, another part of that agency was trying to keep boat navigation open to Jefferson. They cleared stumps to make boat roads and dredged shortcuts, like Government Ditch, originally known as the Bois d'Arc Canal Cut, in the 1880s. But lake navigation became more and more dependent on seasonal high water flow, and as the turn of the century approached, it became nearly impossible to take a boat upstream from Shreveport.

Over many years, the Cypress Bayou would clearly continue to consolidate into a simple river channel, draining even more of the lowland that forms Caddo Lake. There were some people who wanted this to happen, since it would result in many acres of rich alluvial farm land that could be planted in cotton. Ownership of the newly drained land was hotly disputed, and during the years of low water levels, mud flats provided perfect habitat for freshwater mussels, sparking a pearl hunting boom for several years after George Murata found the first large pearl in 1909 near Potter's Point.

Water flowing into Twelve Mile Bayou, the outlet to Caddo Lake, continued to deepen the channel in the early 1900s, with a "waterfall" several feet high developing and migrating upstream as the soil eroded. As it approached Mooringsport, it was clear that the lake would eventually completely cease to exist if nothing was done, so as early as 1905, people began talking about building a dam to keep the water level up.

A congressman from northeast Texas, Morris Sheppard, joined the chorus calling for a dam, first as a water supply for Shreveport, but also to include a lock for navigation from the Red River and a power plant to generate electricity. Like any good politician, Sheppard tried every angle to get support for the idea. The *Jefferson Jimplecute* of April 19, 1907 published a letter from Morris to Mayor Bernstein of Shreveport with all the details of his plan. The letter is long, but some of the descriptive prose was lovely, so two excerpts are included at right.

Oil had been discovered on the land near the Louisiana end of Caddo Lake in 1905, and as exploration of the oil field continued, the first successful oil well over water was drilled by Gulf Oil in 1911. The over water wells required pilings and platforms, so local people were happy to harvest the old growth cypress trees from around the lake edge as the water level had dropped and drained the land. Gulf built hundreds more platforms for wells, each of which required over a hundred large cypress trees. Fortunately, the lower water level was also favorable to new seedlings sprouting in the clear cut areas, replenishing much of the bald cypress forest we enjoy today.

Commercial fishing was a big business during these years, as the shrunken lake area forced the fish population into a smaller volume, and tons of fish were caught with hoop and gill nets and shipped out in iced barrels to distant cities by rail every week.

Though he didn't get everything he wanted, Sheppard eventually secured federal funding to allow the Corps of Engineers to build a simple dam in 1914, saving the lake from drying up completely.

In 1934, as the Civilian Conservation Corps was building many of the structures in the new Caddo Lake State Park during the Great Depression, the *Marshall News Messenger* ran a 24 page supplement promoting and celebrating Caddo Lake. One of the many articles was a tribute to the efforts of Congressman Sheppard, calling him the "Savior of Caddo Lake." That article is included on the next page in its entirety.

Texarkana, Tex., April 10, 1907.  
My Dear Mr. Bernstein:

Pursuant to our conference of this morning I proceed at once upon my arrival home to present my views more fully concerning your water situation and its relation to the project for the restoration of navigation between Shreveport and Jefferson. I recognize the fact that you have reached a distinct crisis in the history of your active and growing community. Nothing is more indispensable to the development and maintenance of a city than a pure and extensive water supply. About twenty miles northwest of Shreveport on the Jefferson-Shreveport waterway there is an immense natural reservoir of pure and wholesome water. I refer to Caddo Lake. It is about twenty miles in length, from two to twenty feet in depth, and from one to six miles wide. It is fed by Cypress Bayou, which pours into its bosom a limpid and health-laden stream filtered in the sands and gathered from the hills and skies of the Italy of America. Northeastern Texas.

There is another phase of this interesting subject which ought not to be overlooked. The erection of this dam will make Caddo Lake one of the most fascinating recreation grounds in America. Yesterday afternoon I stood on the broad veranda of the club house which has recently been erected by the Mooringsport Hunting and Fishing Club, composed principally of Shreveport citizens, on the south bank of the lake. From that commanding eminence I was thrilled to the heart by a panorama of lake and hill and sky unsurpassed in many respects on this continent. As is well known, the waters of this lake are fairly alive with fish. I doubt whether in any other city in our country has so splendid a playground within so little a distance.

Let me say finally, that unless this dam is built within the next few years the lake, even as it exists today, will become a thing of the past. The falls which are working through the bed of Soda Lake and concentrating its scattered waters into a single channel, leaving the bed absolutely dry, will, when they reach the foot of Caddo Lake, produce a similar result with reference to it. If your water company

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By J. H. T. BIBB, SR.

**N**O history of Caddo Lake would be complete without innumerable references to the activities of Marris Sheppard toward the maintenance, support and promotion of the lake. His name is linked with every important project connected with Caddo Lake for the past thirty or thirty-five years.

It is a part of the history of Caddo Lake that Morris Sheppard, long before he became one of the greatest statesmen and had endeared himself to the people of East Texas, and especially those who are interested in Caddo Lake, was a member of an engineering corps which surveyed the lake, and especially the channel from Shreveport to Jefferson.

#### Learned to Love Caddo

As a young engineer, with a fondness for the great outdoors, Senator Sheppard, like many others, learned to love Caddo Lake, and through his activities in the surveying corps came to know the lake, and especially that part of it from Mooringsport to Jefferson, better than almost any man in East Texas. This knowledge, and his fondness for the unusual body of water, though it was not known at the time, was to be and did become of untold benefit to Caddo Lake after Senator Sheppard reached the position in our national government where his dreams and hopes with reference to the lake could be at least partially realized.

Senator Sheppard was deeply interested in the lake being made navigable, and for years after he first became a member of Congress, he succeeded in obtaining appropriations from year to year for removing stumps from and dredging the channel of the lake, especially from Mooringsport to Jefferson, and to old-timers on the lake, it was a familiar sight to see the boat, "Senator Sheppard," plying up and down the lake, blasting or pulling stumps, logs and obstructions from the channel, marking out or designating the channel, and doing other work tending to make the lake navigable.

United States Senator Morris Sheppard, who is generally recognized as the "savior of Caddo Lake." His efforts for preserving the lake and for the park project have been consistent over a period of many years.

#### Secured Present Dam

Later on in his career, Senator Sheppard, through his influence in Congress, procured the appropriation and had passed the bill providing for the construction of the present dam located about three miles east of Mooringsport on Caddo Lake, the intention at the time being to construct locks so as to make the lake navigable, but other influences prevented Senator Sheppard's success in this respect. Nevertheless, the dam itself was completed and raised the normal depth of the water in the lake approximately four feet.

Some years ago this dam became damaged and was in grave danger of giving way. Some interested parties in Louisiana who realized that if the dam did break, it would result in thousands of acres of land, now covered by water, being entirely drained and subject to agricultural uses. This was true by reason of the fact that since the construction of the dam below Mooringsport, erosion had occurred below the dam to the extent that the bed of the stream below the dam is now from eight to twelve feet lower than the bed of Caddo Lake. Therefore, if the dam should break, it would drain all of Caddo Lake, leaving nothing of the lake except the main bayou from Jefferson to Mooringsport; or, in other words, a stream from one hundred to two hundred feet in width, and leaving the rest of what is now Caddo Lake dry land.

The Louisiana parties were interested in this project and had planned to acquire the bed of the lake in Louisiana, consisting of thousands of acres, for a small sum and dispose of it for agricultural purposes at a profit. These parties, through their influence, had practically convinced the engineers of the War Department that the maintenance of the dam was useless, and should be abandoned, and a move was on foot for the United States government to abandon the dam and thereby relinquish all its interest in Caddo Lake. Of course, if the dam had been abandoned in its condition, it would have broken and drained the lake as above explained.

#### Senator Joins Fight

Interested citizen of East Texas and West Louisiana, and especially of Marshall and Shreveport, called a meeting and planed a boat trip from Mooringsport to Jefferson over Caddo Lake. The matter was taken up with Senator Sheppard, and he immediately put his shoulder to the wheel and exerted every effort to prevent the government from abandoning the dam. He attended this meeting in person and brought with him General Ashton, then head of the Inland Waterways of the United States, and with many prominent citizens a great meeting was held at Mooringsport and the trip was made from Mooringsport to Jefferson.

General Ashton was induced to take

an interest in Caddo Lake, and as a result, the War Department, instead of abandoning the dam on the lake and abandoning the lake as a navigable stream, made a large appropriation for repairing the dam, with which appropriation, together with a large contribution from the Gulf Refining Company, owner of most of the oil wells in Caddo Lake, the dam was repaired and made safe by the construction of a steel wall some distance below the dam. The dumping of hundreds of tons of granite rock and a willow mat between such steel wall and the dam itself, also was part of the project, and Caddo Lake was thereby saved to the people of East Texas, and saved through the efforts of Senator Morris Sheppard working with local interested citizens.

Subsequent to this, and through Senator Sheppard's efforts, a United States mail route was established on Caddo Lake from Mooringsport to Long Point, which is a regular mail route except that the carrier travels daily by boat instead of over land. This mail route has the effect, of course, of keeping the government interested in the preservation of the lake, and will, in all probability, prevent a recurrence of the efforts to have the War Department abandon the lake and the lake dam.

#### Unceasing Efforts

Senator Sheppard's efforts in behalf of Caddo Lake have never ceased. He has always responded to every request and exerted all his influence in favor of every project that had in view the preservation and improvement of the lake and the surrounding territory. In the last few years, during the organization and establishment of the CCC camps, Senator Sheppard has been in almost constant contact with the Marshall Chamber of Commerce and its Park Board by letters, telegrams, or in person, and in like contact with the National Park Service and his efforts have resulted in securing the first CCC camp on Caddo Lake. Not only was he successful in doing this, but it is through his efforts that the present CCC camp, with the two hundred or more boys, is located on the State Park on Caddo Lake.

After the first CCC camp on Caddo Lake, it became apparent that the location of the camp should be changed and the building program for the camp altered. Again Senator Sheppard came to the rescue. Through his efforts and through his personal contact with General Howland, the War Department was persuaded to abandon the old location of the camp and the old building program, and as a result the camp was changed to its present and more desirable location, and a new building program agreed upon that will result in vast improvement of a permanent nature to the State Park on Caddo Lake.

Surely no one man has done more for Caddo Lake than has Senator Sheppard, and all East Texas and West Louisiana, and those from other localities who love and believe in the preservation of the great outdoors hail Senator Marris Sheppard as the Savior of Caddo Lake.

# KEEP CADDO LAKE NATURAL!

## Join GCLA

Dues are only \$10.00 per person per year. This includes membership in The Greater Caddo Lake Association of Texas, plus you will receive our newsletters which are printed on a semi-regular basis; more often if needed. There is no better way to keep up with the issues that concern the lake.

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**Please check the date printed above your name and address - it shows when your membership expires. If you are past due, this may be your last newsletter!**

\*Your email address is voluntary. It will only be used to keep you informed of developments on the lake. It will not be given or sold to anyone. We will send one newsletter per address, unless otherwise instructed. This allows us to mail copies to our politicians and government entities to let them know how we feel on the issues!

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