

HENRY J. STUART'S ROUND HOUSE

Tolstoy Park



HENRY JAMES STUART. 1858-1946

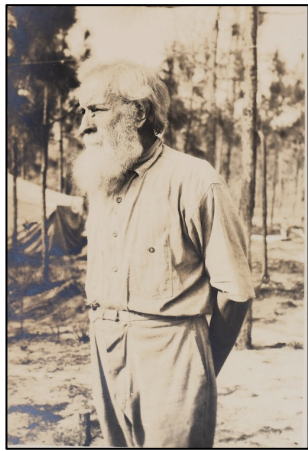
In 1923, Henry James Stuart (1858-1946) moved to Montrose, Alabama from Idaho for health reasons, choosing the site for its climate and close proximity to the single tax colony of Fairhope. He bought ten acres, immediately cleared the land, built a cabin and work pavilion, and quickly made friends in the Montrose and Fairhope area.

He designed and built the famous Round House starting in 1925 and completed it the following year. It was practical and comfortable for Stuart, and an oddity for the many visitors who came to buy his rugs or just look at his cement and brick home with the domed roof.

Stuart advocated and lived a simple and purposeful life. He was a vegetarian, growing food in an irrigated "concrete garden." He was a voracious reader with an extensive library; Tolstoy occupied a place of honor on his bookshelves. He had a wide circle of people with whom he corresponded. He was interested in the theories of the economist Henry George on which the colony of Fairhope was founded. He attended and participated in the weekly Fairhope Forum speaker programs and regularly socialized with neighbors and friends. He was an accomplished weaver of beautiful rugs, a craft he learned in Idaho and taught at the Organic School. The simple life he lived in Baldwin County restored his health and spirit.

He had many visitors (belying his "Hermit" label) and kept a visitor book which had famous names such as Clarence Darrow, Sinclair Lewis, and others. We now have his diaries, photographs taken by him, and many articles of interest that have shed new light on his life. Mr. Stuart lived in Montrose from 1923 until 1944, when he left Baldwin County to move to Oregon where his two sons lived. Mr. Stuart died in 1946.

Local author Sonny Brewer fictionalized his Stuart's life in the popular novel "The Poet of Tolstoy Park" which was published in 2005. Brewer has been the unofficial caretaker of Henry Stuart's house for a quarter century. He has kept a guest register for visitors –numbering over 5,000 visitors from all over the globe – all amazed by the small Round House of Henry James Stuart.



The Importance of the Round House

The Round House was constructed between 1925 and 1926 by Henry Stuart. The small domed concrete building, located on Parker Road in Montrose, is the only surviving portion of the 10 acres Mr. Stuart bought and named Tolstoy Park. It is the sole physical reminder of the man known as *a Modern Thoreau, the Hermit of Montrose* and *Ye Old Weaver*.

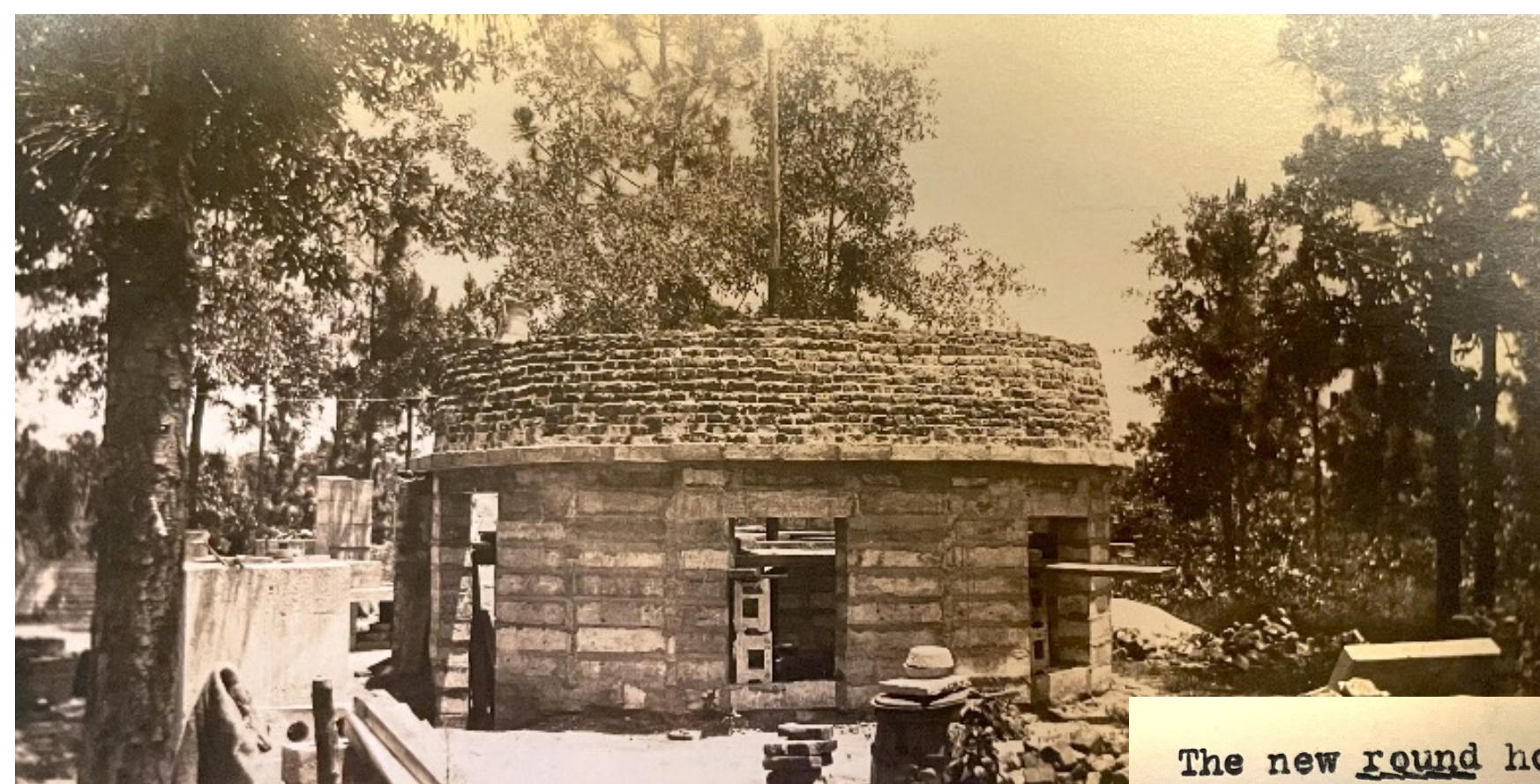


Stuart's house is on both the National Register of Historic Places and the Baldwin County Register of Historic Places. It is architecturally significant as the only structure of its kind on the Gulf Coast. Set two feet into the ground, the house was comfortable year-round from the insulation of the earth and good ventilation from windows and skylights. The solid concrete block structure (blocks handmade by Stuart) has withstood hurricanes for a century. Mr. Stuart designed and built the house himself from local materials: sand, bricks, wood from his property and found objects on the beach. It is a unique structure with a story to tell.

We have the opportunity to move the Round House to a new permanent location a short distance away, in the peaceful woods of the Flying Creek Nature Preserve. The house is now surrounded by commercial businesses and a parking lot, which is not the setting Mr. Stuart intended. **Let's Move Henry Stuart's Round House** to a secure and beautiful location where it will be preserved and his interesting life story can continue to be told.

Open Daily – off Highway 98 Parker Road. In cluster of small office buildings. 8/24





The new round house as it looks from the S.

A concrete rim will be added to the water-table and the rain water discharged into a cistern or tank which is to be built in the future. The dome is to be plastered inside and out with white sand which is being brot a half mile from a bank north of Rock Creek.

The large white block by tree at left is my concrete mold for 30" square slabs ---- of any thickness I want. A 3½" slab is in the mold as it stands. Taken 'bout 11:30. June 25, 1926

