

**TOWN OF
PALM BEACH, FLORIDA**

**2010
HISTORIC SITES SURVEY**



Prepared For

The Town of Palm Beach, Florida

Research Atlantica, Inc.
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Without the citizens and property owners of the Town of Palm Beach none of this survey could have been completed. They permitted photographs and site inspections, and answered questions to the best of their knowledge. An historic sites survey is a working tool and as such is never complete. Forms and recommendations should be updated as new information becomes available. It is the hope of the staff of Research Atlantica, Inc. that this survey will be the basis for future historic preservation planning in the Town of Palm Beach and will help the citizens recognize the important place their community holds in South Florida history.



The Palm Beach Hotel and St. Edward's Church, date unknown

INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of Historic Preservation

Increasingly in South Florida, historic and cultural resources are threatened by destruction due to rapid growth in population and ensuing development. Resources are links with the past, they make communities unique, giving them a "sense of place," and provide a source of pride. More importantly, historic resources allow for the education of present and future generations of their place and time in the continuum of the human experience and societal development. The purpose of historic preservation is not to halt growth or change, because it is recognized that both are needed to keep a community alive. The purpose of historic preservation is to integrate the past with the present and the future.

What Are Historic Resources?

Historic resources as defined in Chapter 267 of the Florida Statutes are:

"any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, object, or other real or personal property of historical, architectural, or archaeological value. These properties or resources may include, but are not limited to, monuments, memorials, Indian habitation, ceremonial sites, abandoned settlements, sunken or abandoned ships, engineering works, treasure trove, artifacts, or other objects with intrinsic historical or archaeological value, or any part thereof, relating to the history, government, and culture of the state." (s.267.021(3), F.S. 1986)

Historic resources are the non-renewable visible remains of the past. Once they are lost, they can never be replaced. The preservation and maintenance of historic resources results in a community's sense of stewardship for present and future generations. The analysis and interpretation of historic resources are not undertaken just to understand the past, but to give a community a sense of its unique place in history.

The National Register of Historic Places and the Florida Site File Inventory

Historic resources are defined in a national context by the **National Register of Historic Places** which is maintained by the National Park Service, under the Department of the Interior. The criteria used by the National Register to determine historical significance can also be used as a guideline for local determination and listing. The criteria for listing on the National Register are:

1. A property is associated with events which have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; or
2. A property is associated with the lives of persons significant in the past;
3. A property is significant if it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, for example, it represents the work of a master, or if it possesses high artistic values, or if it represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, such as a district; or
4. A property which yields, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources utilizes the national criteria but is less restrictive about what is included in the Florida Master Site File. The Florida Master Site File (FMSF) inventory is maintained by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and is utilized as a first source information bank for local preservation planning. The general procedure for generating an inventory is to record all resources which are fifty years or older. However, a site does not necessarily have to be fifty years old if an important person or event is associated with the resource, nor does it have to be historically or architecturally significant for recording. All sites, buildings, structures and objects, no matter how insignificant they may seem, should be recorded on a FMSF form to have a comprehensive inventory of historic resources in a community.

Historic site surveys are important because they are the first step in establishing a community's historic preservation program. Surveys are conducted to develop an inventory of historic resources in a community, and are used as the foundation for preservation planning. Surveys identify styles of architecture, dates of construction, and condition of historic resources. When available, surveys identify past and present owners and their place in a community's history. Surveys, therefore, build awareness in a community of the scope and significance of their cultural resources.

Several types of historic resources can be recorded on the FMSF such as buildings, engineering structures, objects, landscapes, and archaeological sites. In the present survey of the Town of Palm Beach buildings and other architectural features such as fountains, entrance piers, and walls were recorded. Each site's physical characteristics and historic significance are recorded in a systematic way on a Florida Master Site File form. With few exceptions, a site needs to be fifty years or older to warrant recording. Each site is assigned its own identification number by the Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State. The site's location is indicated on a map and a photograph is taken. The forms, maps, and photographs are then sent to the Division of Historical Resources for processing. The forms become part of a state wide informational data base and are cross referenced into the state's computerized Geographical Information System. Recording sites on the FMSF does not in any way provide protection for a site or impose any restrictions. Surveys are strictly a means by which a community can inventory their historic resources.

Survey Method

An historic sites survey is a systematic and detailed recording of historic resources. Surveys may be either thematic in scope or geographic. Examples of thematic surveys would record only those resources of a predetermined type (i.e. all Mediterranean Revival Architecture within a predetermined area). A geographic survey, when properly conducted is comprehensive for the area surveyed and includes all historic resources within the area. In the case of Palm Beach, Florida, a geographic survey was conducted using the town's boundaries and every effort was made to be comprehensive in respect to the built environment in that area. The survey area within the town's limits includes an irregular shaped area bordered on the west by Lake Worth and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean. The north end of the island is terminated by a man made channel, the Lake Worth Inlet. The south end of the survey area was at the Town's southern boundary.

The method of conducting an historic sites survey is logical and consists of three important steps. First the historic literature is examined to determine the period of development for the town and the pioneer families involved in this development. Past surveys are reviewed so that comparisons can be made between the past and present condition of historic resources. In the Town of Palm Beach, four past surveys were completed. In 1981, the first "Historic Survey of Palm Beach" was conducted by Landmarks Planning Incorporated. This survey recorded 861 buildings and man made landscape

features. The Historic Palm Beach County Preservation Board updated the original survey in 1988. Although the second survey only extended north to Country Club Road, the Board looked at properties that were built prior to 1947. Research Atlantica, Inc. performed the third and fourth surveys in 1997 and 2004, extending the boundaries of the survey north to the Lake Worth Inlet. The 1997 survey identified 1151 sites built before 1947. In 2004, 1129 sites were recorded that were built before 1955. Since that time updating the survey has been incorporated as a requirement in the Historic Preservation Element of the Town's Comprehensive Plan. It is hoped that an update of the survey will be made every five years.

The second step in an historic site survey is the field work. Windshield and pedestrian surveys were conducted to determine what additional structures from the history of Palm Beach were still intact. Site data was recorded, photographs were taken and confirmation of building dates was attempted by interviewing property owners and by reviewing the records available in the Town of Palm Beach Planning, Zoning & Building Department. This basic information was then recorded on Florida Master Site File forms. Maps were also gathered for every form so that all properties could be easily found by interested parties. All information was entered on the computer by Sandra Norman, Ph.D. on the required State of Florida computer program. All forms will be sent to Tallahassee in both digital and hard copies as required.

Final analysis of the properties was completed and recommendations were made for future action at a regularly scheduled Landmarks Commission meeting on December 16, 2010. The newly identified sites will be reviewed the Landmarks Commission in an effort to identify possible new local landmarks. Final reports are available to the public through the Planning, Zoning & Building Department of the Town of Palm Beach, Florida.

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWN OF PALM BEACH

A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

The topographical area which encompasses the Town of Palm Beach is known as the Atlantic Coastal Ridge. This geographical term is used to describe a narrow ridge that extends along the eastern coast of the United States from Georgia to the southern portion of Dade County. Palm Beach is located within the coastal low lands portion of the ridge where the rock formation is known as the Anastasia Formation. Formed approximately 100,000 years ago, Anastasia is porous bedrock composed of coquina and is known as a fair to good aquifer. The Atlantic Coastal Ridge, considered the youngest rock formation in the United States, is also called the rim of the Everglades.¹

Prior to the sixteenth century discovery of Florida by Spanish explorers, the area around today's Palm Beach was inhabited by Native Americans. Nomadic hunters roamed throughout Florida for 10,000 years before European settlement began. Although the specific Indian group that lived in this area is unknown it is believed that they were either the Jaega or Ais Indians.² These semi-nomadic Indians were hunters and gatherers who settled near streams, inlets and coastal areas where fish and game were plentiful. By the late 1700s all of the native population had died from either European diseases, warfare or slavery.³

Spanish exploration and settlement of Florida began in 1513 with Ponce de Leon. Other sixteenth century Spanish explorers included Panfilo de Narvaez and Hernando de Soto. While no definitive references have been made to the Palm Beach area, it is quite possible that Spanish ships returning to Spain laden with New World treasures sailed past Palm Beach where Gulf Stream currents are close to shore. Frequent hurricanes were responsible for the wrecks of numerous treasure ships which in turn have given Palm Beach County its nickname as the "Gold Coast" or "Treasure Coast".

Ownership of Florida changed frequently. Spain, Great Britain and France wrestled for control of the peninsula from the late 1500s through the early 1800s. By 1814 the United States gained control and the Adams-Otis Treaty of 1819 solidified the American position.

Exploration and Early Settlement

Because of Lake Worth's remote location and the difficulty of transportation, settlement of the area today known as Palm Beach did not occur until the last half of the nineteenth century. General Worth, whose name was given to the lake camped on the island at the end of the Second Seminole War in 1841 "but left the place unknown and unnamed."⁴

¹John Edward Hoffmeister, Land from the Sea: The Geologic Story of South Florida, (Coral Gables: 1974), 21.

²Interview with Robert Carr, Dade County Archaeologist, Miami, FL, 8 April 1996.

³Joan E. Gill and Beth R. Read, eds., Born of the Sun, (Hollywood, Florida: Florida Bicentennial Commemorative Journal, Inc., 1975) 41.

⁴"Pioneer Life," Palm Beach Life, 15, March, 1932.

The first evidence of settlement on Palm Beach Island occurred under the Armed Occupation Act. This legislation offered 160 acres to settlers who would live in and defend the area in response to a still threatening Indian presence. Three men stacked claims: James H. Russell, John S. Hutchinson, and William W. Loring.⁵ Other early settlers who lived in the area include a fugitive named Lang who was murdered in 1870, William Lanehart, M. B. Lyman and H.F. Hammon.⁶

The first families to move to today's Palm Beach arrived in 1876. The original intent of the move was "to colonize and seek that flowery land where Ponce de Leon so faithfully sought the fabled spring of eternal youth"⁷ and to improve the health of the family's patriarch, Moore W. Dimick, who suffered from incipient tuberculosis. Dimick brought his wife, Parthenia, sons, Elisha "Cap" Newton and Franklin L. Dimick with their spouses, and daughter Marion (Mrs. Albert) Geer and family. The David Brown family also accompanied the group.⁸

The early settlers purchased land for \$1.00 an acre in sections that went from Lake Worth to the Atlantic Ocean. The island was a jungle of foliage with a fresh water slew in the center. The pioneers built their homes on the lake front. All did not go well, however during the first season. Marion Geer wrote:

A place was quickly cleared for our first house, which was completed in three weeks. A hurricane, soon after our arrival, scattered our goods hither and yon - table, stove, chairs and bureau were blown about and dropped far and near, which was not in accordance with our ideas of the gentle zephyrs we had been told fanned the checks of those who live in this favored region.⁹

Despite the hardships, however, the group persevered. Each family had a small sailboat. They grew bananas, tomatoes, sweet potatoes and other produce. They tried to plant sugar cane, but the harvest was too salty. Pineapples were too labor intensive. To supplement what they could grow, the men fished and hunted for venison, wild turkeys and turtles. Life was simple and the settlement was remote but this small band of settlers was determined to see the area grow and expand.¹⁰

One of the improvements that enhanced the island was the planting of coconut palms which occurred quite by accident. In 1878, the 175-ton brig Providencia, on its way from Trinidad to Spain wrecked on the reef with twenty thousand coconuts aboard. Salvaged from the wreck by Will Lanehart and H.F. Hammon, the coconuts were sold to the settlers for \$2.50 per hundred. The Dimicks bought one

⁵United State House of Representative. Document #70, "Actual Settlements in Florida, Under Armed Occupation Law." (Washington D.C.: 28th Congress, 1st Session, 1843) p. 42.

⁶"Pioneer Reminiscences," Palm Beach Life. 15 March, 1932, pp.22-23.

⁷Marion Dimick Geer, The Lake Worth Historian. 1896. n.p.

⁸Susan J. Oldfather, Elisha Newton Dimick and His Influence on the Development of Palm Beach. (Boca Raton, Florida: Florida Atlantic University, Thesis, 1989) pp. 11-15.

⁹Geer, op.cit.

¹⁰Ibid. and "Days of Early Settlement on Lake Recalled." 15 January, 1937, On file at the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.