

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000411

Date Listed: 4/10/91

Meres, E. R., Sponge Packing House
Property Name

Pinellas
County

FLORIDA
State

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus
Signature of the Keeper

6/19/91
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section No. 8

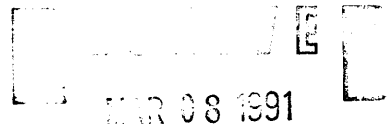
The Section 8 narrative of this nomination is amended to delete reference to Commerce as an area of significance, clarifying that the significance claimed is in the area of Industry.

This amendment was confirmed by phone with Bill Thurston, of the Florida SHPO (6/18/91).

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name E.R. Meres Sponge Packing House
other names/site number N/A 8PT 1594

2. Location

street & number 106 Read Street N/A not for publication
city, town Tarpon Springs N/A vicinity
state Florida code FL county Pinellas code 103 zip code 34688

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Suzanne P. Walker (deputy) 2/28/91
Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer, Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:) _____
Amy Federman 4/10/91
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Industry/Processing Facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Industry/Processing Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No Style/Wood Frame Vernacular

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Masonrywalls Metal

roof Metalother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Industry

Period of Significance

1905-1941

Significant Dates

1905

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property Less than one

UTM References

A 17 327000 3114800
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Tarpon Springs Official Map, Block 54, Lot 1

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary contains all of the structures and property associated with the E.R. Meres Sponge Packing House.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date _____

street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1

Description

Summary Statement

The E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant is a two-story, wood frame, corrugated metal clad building located just north of downtown Tarpon Springs in an area historically occupied by sponge processing plants and other buildings associated with the commercial sponge industry. The rectangular plan structure has a gable main roof and rests on masonry piers that are screened by the metal exterior siding. The building was constructed c. 1905 and is still being used to process sponges. It retains all of its major original features, except for a sponge drying platform which was removed in the 1960s. The vernacular building has no stylistic characteristics or decorative details.

Supporting Narrative

The sponge processing and packing plant is a purely utilitarian structure devoted to preparing natural sponges for shipment to market. The exterior walls of the building are constructed of 7' X 2' sheets of corrugated galvanized iron that have been lapped vertically and nailed to the wooden frame of the structure. The roof of the building is also covered with corrugated metal. The building has no distinguishable main facade, and its elevations are divided into an irregular series of window and door bays. Paralleling the main gable roof is a lower shed roof covering a one-story extension to the building that runs the length of its north elevation. The fenestration of the building consists of original 6/6 and 8/8 light double hung wood sash windows. There are three wide entrances on the east, west, and south elevations fitted with double doors. Sanborn maps also show that there was once a sponge drying platform located on the west and south elevations of the building. This was removed sometime in the 1960s.

The interior of the building contains bins called "sponge cribs" in which to store the various types and sizes of sponges that are ready for packing once they have been cleaned and trimmed. There is also a sponge press--to reduce the bulk of the sponges packed into crates--and a small office located near the northeast corner of the building. The platform that was removed from the exterior of the building in the 1960s was used to dry sponges that had been cleaned and trimmed before sorting them and storing them in the cribs. The sponges now are placed on tarpaulins spread on the ground near the building (Photo 2). The small loft area in the upper story of the building is used for storing crates and equipment.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Photographs

Inventory of Photographs

1. E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant
2. 106 Read Street, Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
3. Paul Weaver
4. 1989
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of South and West Elevation, Looking Northeast
7. Photo No. 1 of 4

1. E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant
2. 106 Read Street, Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
3. Paul Weaver
4. 1989
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of the South Elevation, Looking North
7. Photo No. 2 of 4

1. E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant
2. 106 Read Street, Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
3. Paul Weaver
4. 1989
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of the East Elevation, Looking Southwest
7. Photo No. 3 of 4

1. E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant
2. 106 Read Street, Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
3. Paul Weaver
4. 1989
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of the North Elevation, Looking South
7. Photo No. 4 of 4

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Significance

Summary Statement of Significance

The E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant fulfills criterion A in the area of Commerce for its association with the development of the sponge fishing industry in Tarpon Springs. The building was constructed in 1905 and is oldest surviving packing house still serving its original function in the community. The plant was erected at the very beginning of that era between 1905 and 1941 when Greek settlers in Tarpon Springs made the community a nationally important sponge harvesting center.

Historical Context

The city of Tarpon Springs was founded in 1882 by Hamilton Disston and several business associates as the headquarters of a large scale commercial land development project in Central Florida. In 1881 Disston, a wealthy saw manufacturer from Philadelphia, purchased 4,000,000 acres of swamp and overflow land owned by the State of Florida at a cost of twenty-five cents per acre. The state had sought a purchaser for these unimproved lands to clear the debts of the state's Internal Improvement Fund, an agency vested with the responsibility of managing and developing state owned lands. The Disston Purchase cleared the trust fund of its debts and allowed the state to distribute large land subsidies to railroad companies wishing to construct transportation routes throughout Florida. Disston planned to recoup his investment by the widespread development of agricultural lands in Central Florida, access to which was to be provided by the construction of railroads in which he expected to have a major financial interest.

Disston picked the site of Tarpon Springs as his base of operations, because it lay along the major sailing route of the west coast of Florida, approximately half way between Cedar Key and Tampa. Access to the site of the proposed settlement, which lay several miles inland from the coast, was made possible by the Anclote River, which was navigable inland as far as Spring Bayou, a natural spring located near present-day downtown Tarpon Springs. In 1882, Disston and his business partners arrived by ship from Cedar Key at the small fishing village which was then located at the mouth of the Anclote River. They examined the planned townsite near Spring Bayou and before departing left workmen to survey the area and start construction on the first buildings.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

Significance

The town began to receive settlers almost immediately, but the official town plat was not recorded until May 5, 1884. A post office was established the same year, and three years later the settlement--with a population of about 300--was formally incorporated as the Town of Tarpon Springs. The town was laid out in a regular grid, except around Spring Bayou where the blocks and streets conformed to the shape of the most important natural feature of the town. There the town was laid out with streets and blocks that produced scenic vistas of the natural spring.

The year 1887 marked the arrival in Tarpon Springs of the railroad, which began to bring an increasing number of tourists and permanent settlers to the area. Tourism and winter residency played the dominant role in the development of Tarpon Springs between 1887 and 1905. The focal point of the resort was Spring Bayou where wealthy seasonal residents constructed expensive homes overlooking the spring. A number of small hotels and rooming houses were also built in that area. The commercial sector of town grew up along Tarpon and Pinellas avenues, which ran east and south from the spring. The residential area around the spring and the downtown commercial section of the community are now part of a historic district which was listed in the National Register on December 6, 1990.

The major development that would dramatically change the character of Tarpon Springs was the founding of the commercial sponge industry in 1890. Sponges had been commercially harvested in the Florida Keys since 1849, and by the 1880s Florida sponges had become a commodity having world-wide markets. The early spongers used small boats and long grappling poles to collect sponges. The shallow waters of the Florida Reef contained an abundant supply of various types of commercial grade sponges, and the use of diving equipment was unnecessary--at least for several decades.

The sponge beds in the vicinity of Tarpon Springs were discovered in 1873 by fishermen from Key West, Florida, and sponging vessels began to arrive from Key West and the Bahamas to work the beds. In 1889 Tarpon Springs businessman John K. Cheyney went to Key West to learn about the sponge business and upon his return to Tarpon Springs formed a company for processing and selling sponges. He built warehouses and financed the construction of the first sponge hooking boat launched at Tarpon Springs. Soon other businessmen began to follow his example.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3

Significance

Between 1870 and 1890 the center of commercial sponging in the United States had been at Key West. During the 1890s, however, an increasing amount of buying and packing activity began shifting to Tarpon Springs. Packing houses were built, sponge presses installed, and buyers established offices there. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, many of the sponge boats that had operated out of Key West were moved to Tarpon Springs because the U.S. Navy occupied most of the harbor facilities in Key West. A fleet of sponging vessels from points as far distant as Apalachicola and Key West came to sell their sponges in Tarpon Springs. By the early 1900s Tarpon Springs had become the foremost sponge port in the United States.

While the sponge industry had begun to thrive before their arrival, it was the Greek immigrants to Tarpon Springs who expanded and refined it. The person who spearheaded the Greek involvement in sponging was John Cocoris, himself a Greek native, who arrived in Tarpon Springs in 1896 as a buyer for the Lembessi Sponge Company of New York. A year after his arrival he began working for John Cheyney, who financed Cocoris' early efforts to make the industry more efficient. In 1905 Cocoris introduced the first sailing/motor sponge diving boat to Tarpon Springs and brought in a crew of Greek divers to operate it.

In 1905 approximately 500 Greek divers arrived from Greece, and others soon followed, prompting the immigration of a number of their countrymen who came to establish businesses to serve the growing Greek community. These entrepreneurs opened restaurants, bakeries, and retail shops. In their wake came sponge merchants and brokers from Greece who established their own offices and warehouses in Tarpon Springs. These new settlers built their own boats, extended loans to other boat owners, established business houses, and supplied tools and food stuffs to the entire sponge fleet. As the sponge industry boomed, the Greek population extended its interest to yet other businesses, such as finance, insurance, transportation, fishing, lumber, citrus, and building construction.

The onset of the Great Depression, beginning in 1929, was as deeply felt in Tarpon Springs as it was in other Florida communities. The city's delinquent tax rolls grew and resulted in an inability of the municipal government to pay its bonded indebtedness. The sponge industry continued to operate at nearly its normal level for a while, but in 1938, a blight infested the sponge beds and many of the sponges were killed or rendered commercially useless. By 1941, the damage to the sponge beds and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

Significance

the outbreak of world war had seriously reduced the harvesting and processing of sponges at Tarpon Springs. The sponge beds were again devastated by an infestation of red tide in 1948, and the development of cheap synthetic sponges made the large-scale gathering of natural sponges unprofitable. Today, tourism has largely replaced sponging as the major economic activity in Tarpon Springs. Some sponges are still harvested commercially, but most of these are sold locally to tourists who visit the city. Tourism focusing on Greek culture and food have largely replaced sponging as the mainstay of the economy. Particularly successful in attracting tourists has been the annual blessing of the shipping fleet in harbor at Tarpon Springs and diving for the cross during the celebration of Epiphany.

Statement of Significance

The E.R. Meres Sponge Packing Plant is the oldest extant example of a sponge packing plant in Tarpon Springs still in operation. The interior of the c. 1905 building is arranged to serve the various steps involved with processing natural sponges. At the height of sponge industry activity in the 1920s there were nearly two dozen such packing houses in Tarpon Springs, but now only four of these businesses remain in operation. Of these, the N.G. Arfaras Packing Plant--erected c. 1930--is the only other such structure in the community known to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The Arfaras building is also in the process of being nominated to the Register.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Major Bibliographical References

Buxbaum, Edwin Clarence. The Greek-American Group of Tarpon Springs, Florida: A Study of Ethnic Identification and Acculturation. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1967.

Frantzis, George Th. Strangers at Ithaca. St. Petersburg, 1962.

Halley, Helen. A Historical Functional Approach to the Study of the Greek Community of Tarpon Springs. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1952.

Interview with Gus Tsourakis by Paul Weaver, Tarpon Springs, Florida, July 14, 1988.

Lovejoy, Gordon William. The Greeks of Tarpon Springs. M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1938.

Pent, Robert F. History of Tarpon Springs. St. Petersburg, 1964.

Sanborn Map Company. Fire Insurance Maps of Tarpon Springs, Florida. New York, 1913-1930.

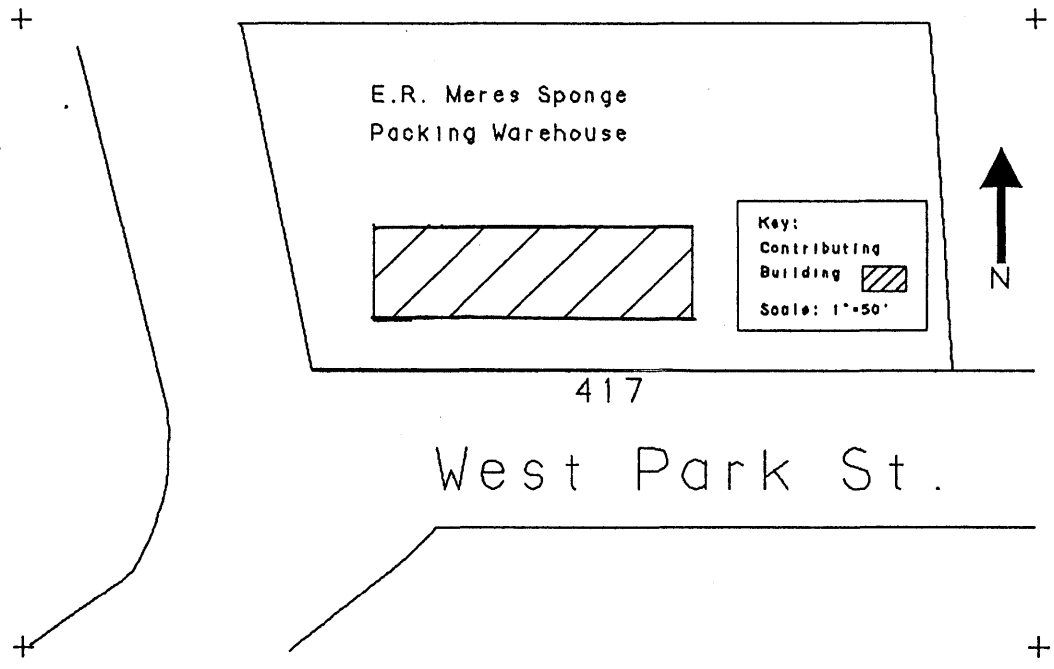
Shubow, David. The Florida Sponge Industry. M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1969.

Stoughton, Gertrude. Tarpon Springs, Florida. The Early Years. 1975.

Straub, W.L.. History of Pinellas County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical. St. Augustine, 1929.


Tarpon Springs Truth's Pocket Manual and Guide to the West Coast of Hillsborough County, Florida. Tarpon Springs, 1890.

Tebeau, Charlton W. A History of Florida. Coral Gables, 1971.



E.R. Meres Sponge
Packing Warehouse



Key:
Contributing
Building 
Scale: 1"=50'



417

West Park St.

FLOOR PLAN

