

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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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 16). 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 Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI other names/site number N/A / SPI 1705

2. Location

street & number Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, Dodecanese Blvd. N/A not for publication city, town Tarpon Springs N/A vicinity state Florida code FL county Pinellas code 103 zip code 34684

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [X] private, [ ] public-local, [ ] public-State, [ ] public-Federal. Category of Property: [ ] building(s), [ ] district, [ ] site, [X] structure, [ ] object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (1), Noncontributing (0), Total (1).

Name of related multiple property listing: Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] 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 [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. [ ] See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 6/24/90. 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:). Signature of the Keeper: [Signature] Date of Action: 8/3/90

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Industry/Sponge Fishing  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Moored/Laid Up  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A  
walls N/A  
N/A  
roof N/A  
other Wood: Hull  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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)

Architecture (Naval)  
Maritime History  
Industry (Sponge Fishing)  
Recreation/Entertainment (Tourism)

Period of Significance

1927-ca. 1947

Significant Dates

1927  
ca. 1947

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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**

Acreeage of property \_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

N/A

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

N/A

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist  
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 27, 1990  
street & number 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333  
city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

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Description

Summary

The sponge diving boat St. Nicholas VI was built in 1927 to gather sponges in the Gulf of Mexico. Its design is based on a Mediterranean prototype that predates the beginning of the Christian era and is one of only five remaining boats of the many constructed in Tarpon Springs between ca. 1907 and ca. 1940 to serve the sponging industry. It last functioned as an excursion boat used to demonstrate traditional sponging techniques to tourists. It is a deep draft vessel with a squared stern and wide hull tapering to a sharp, raised bow. It has two masts. The foremast is the taller of the two and, before the installation of the wooden canopy to protect passengers from the elements, carried a triangular sail. The short aftermast had a spanker sail. The keel and ribs are constructed of heart pine and the planking is cypress. The ship is powered by a diesel engine and controlled by a tiller attached to a wooden rudder at the stern of the craft.

Setting

Home port for the St. Nicholas VI is the sponge docks of Tarpon Springs, Florida, located along the Anclote River in the northern part of town just west of U.S. Alternate Highway 19. The boat is moored at the St. Nicholas Boat Lines Office on Dodecanese Boulevard in the vicinity of the former Tarpon Springs Sponge Exchange. The side of Dodecanese Boulevard opposite the docks is lined primarily with retail shops dealing in novelty items related to Greek culture and the sponging industry. Some restaurants, tourist excursion offices, and commercial maritime offices stand immediately along the wharf.

Present and Original Appearance

The St. Nicholas VI is presently unused and is moored along the Tarpon Springs Sponge docks at the St. Nicholas Boat Lines berth. The boat requires extensive repairs and refitting and at present is not seaworthy. The St. Nicholas VI shares many of the features associated with the traditional design of sponge boats built at Tarpon Springs. Its deck length is 42 feet, 5 inches, and the height of the mainmast is approximately 26 feet. At the stern the boat has a short, rudder, samson posts, and a cockpit in which the helmsman sits. Amidships are the rear and forward companionways and scuppers. The companionway housings, however, have been removed, the one for the rear companionway lying on its

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Description

side on deck. The forward companionway cover is not on board. The mainmast is found forward of the crews' companionway, rising almost from the bow. The boat does not feature the usual, round line and hose tenders hatch in the bow, but does have the square storage hatch. It is also missing the diver's ladder, and anchor hoist.

None of the auxiliary equipment normally associated with sponge boats are presently found on the St. Nicholas VI. This includes buoys for marking the diver's position, a collapsible propeller cage for protecting life lines and air hoses, tools benches and work tables for the cleaning of sponges, and lines for stringing sponges. The benches along the rail on which the tour passengers once sat are also absent.

After ca. 1947, both the St. Nicholas VI and its newer companion craft, the St. Nicholas III (constructed 1939) were operated as tour boats. The two worked together until the late 1970s when the St. Nicholas VI was taken out of service. The boat was evidently used to provide and parts for the newer craft. The boat is in only fair condition but does remain in the water, and there are tentative plans to have it restored and returned to service. Its conversion to a touring boat involved the construction of the wooden canopy to protect the passengers from sun and rain, and the installation of benches along the rails on which the tourists sit. However, the boat still retains many of the significant features it had when it was constructed in 1927.

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Photographs

Inventory of Photographs

1. Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI
  2. Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, Dodecanese Blvd., Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
  3. Paul Weaver
  4. 1989
  5. Historic Property Associates
  6. View of Starboard Side, Looking Northwest
  7. Photo No. 1 of 4
- 
1. Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI
  2. Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, Dodecanese Blvd., Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
  3. Paul Weaver
  4. 1989
  5. Historic Property Associates
  6. View of Starboard Side, Looking Northwest
  7. Photo No. 2 of 4
- 
1. Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI
  2. Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, Dodecanese Blvd., Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
  3. Paul Weaver
  4. 1989
  5. Historic Property Associates
  6. View of Stern, Looking East
  7. Photo No. 3 of 4
- 
1. Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI
  2. Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks, Dodecanese Blvd., Tarpon Springs (Pinellas County), FL
  3. Paul Weaver
  4. 1989
  5. Historic Property Associates
  6. Deck Detail, Starboard Side, Looking Northwest
  7. Photo No. 4 of 4

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Key to Illustrations

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TARPON SPRINGS SPONGE BOATS

Identification Key for Boat Diagrams

1. STERN SAIL MAST - steadying boat in rough weater
2. RUDDER
3. TILLER
4. PROPELLER CAGE - for protecting lines and air hoses
5. BRIDGE OR PIPE - for hanging sponges
6. STERN SAMSON POSTS - for tying boat lines and holding tiller
7. CONTROL RODS - engine and air compressor controls
8. DECK SCUPPERS - for deck water drainage
9. STOOLS - for sitting and as work tables for cleaning sponges
10. NAVIGATION LIGHTS
11. FRESH WATER BARREL
12. DIVER'S LADDER
13. BOW SAMSON POST - for securing anchor and lines
14. ROUND BOW HATCH - for lifeline tender during rough weather  
and to store diving equipment
15. SQUARE BOW HATCH - for sponge storage
16. FORWARD COMPANIONWAY - crew's sleeping quarters
17. REAR COMPANIONWAY - engine room
18. REAR DECK PIT - helmsman's cockpit
19. CENTER BOOM - forward to rear - for hanging sponges and  
propeller cage
20. ANCHOR HOIST

NOTE: Some items on this list may not be found on the St. Nicholas VI.



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Significance

Summary

The sponge diving boat St. Nicholas VI is significant under criteria A and C as one of only five remaining watercraft constructed in Tarpon Springs expressly for the harvesting of sponges in the Gulf of Mexico. The unusual and functional design of the Tarpon Springs sponge diving boat developed as a result of modifying a traditional Mediterranean prototype to combine the benefits of a highly maneuverable sailing craft with the efficiency of motorized power. The boat was built by Greek craftsmen, and with other similar ships played an important role in the maritime history of Florida. Between 1905 and 1945 Tarpon Springs was internationally important as a commercial sponging center. The ship also has exceptional significance under criteria consideration G in the area of recreation/entertainment for remaining a visible reminder of the role it played in the past when ca. 1947 it began to demonstrate to tourists the traditional techniques of sponge diving.

Supporting Narrative

In 1907, two small boats of the double-ender type were brought from Greece on the deck of a steamship, and the construction of sponge diving boats in Tarpon Springs dates from that time. The work was done by Greek craftsmen from models, rather than drawn plans, with full-scale construction proceeding by rule of thumb. The first boats were sail powered "double-enders," a Greek type called a "sacoleve." Broad beamed, with little free board amidships, they had a decided shear fore and aft, rising sharply at the bow to the distinctive stem piece. Forward, their lines were quite convex differing in this way from the northern type of double-ender, by having a hollow waterline entry.

With the advent of gasoline engines, the shape of the stern was altered, and the boats using engines were built with a transom stern in order to house the bulky power plant and fuel tanks. Eventually, diesel power began to replace the earlier gasoline system. The lateen sail characteristic of the Greek and Turkish prototypes was soon supplanted by the two masted gaff-headed yawl rig, making the handling of the vessel easier and allowing the captain to switch between sail and motor power--or use a combination of the two--depending upon conditions. Nearly all of the diving ships constructed in Tarpon Springs after 1920 combined the use of sail and engine power.

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Significance

When the St. Nicholas VI was constructed in the shipyards along the Anclote River in 1927, there were nearly 100 similar vessels operating out of Tarpon Springs, most of them similar in design. Even then, some of the boats spent part of their time during the height of the winter tourist season ferrying excursion passengers to the nearby sponge grounds to demonstrate the technique of harvesting sponges. This popular pastime was an additional source of income for some boat owners and grew in importance as the sponge industry declined.

The dramatic fall in the demand for Tarpon Springs sponges after 1946 and the microbiotic diseases that devastated the sponging grounds a short time later left the industry in shambles. Little more than a decade later, the sponge boats that had once lined the wharf a Tarpon Springs had largely vanished. The St. Nicholas VI was fitted with its canopy and benches some time after 1947 and began to work year-round as a tour boat. It was removed from service in the late 1970s. Today five vessels are all that remain of the great sponge fleet at Tarpon Springs: four diving boats and one hooking boat. The St. Nicholas VI is the only one of the diving boats not seaworthy.

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Bibliography

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Lovejoy, Gordon. The Greeks of Tarpon Springs. Masters Thesis, University of Florida, 1938.

Olausen, Steve. Interview with George Brillis, June 21, 1988, Tarpon Springs.

Pent, R.F. A History of Tarpon Springs. St. Petersburg, 1964.

Rozees, Eileen and Lou. Sponge Docks Tarpon Springs, Florida; America's Sponge Diving Birthplace. Tarpon Springs, 1973.

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

Work Projects Administration. Florida Merchant Marine Survey. (typescript). Tallahassee: Florida State Library Board, 1938.

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Sponge Diving Boat St. Nicholas VI

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**10. Geographical Data**

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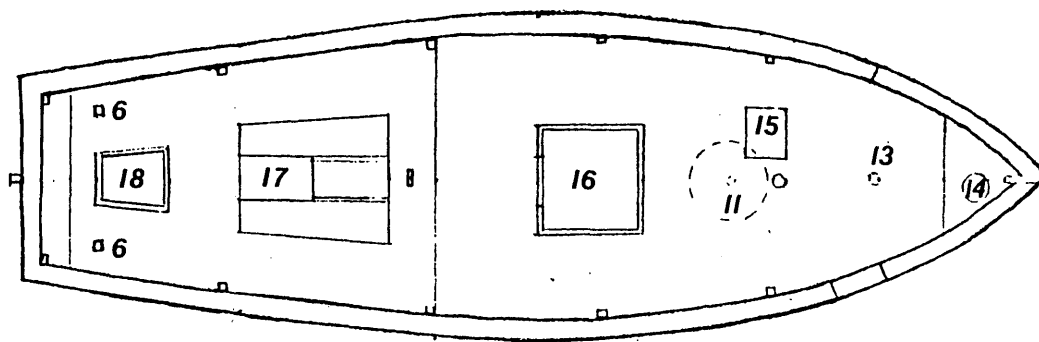
Acreeage of property: Less than one

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the historic resource is limited to the extreme dimensions occupied by the vessel only. No other spaces or geographical location shall be considered as contributing or necessary to the significance of the property.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary limits are made sufficient by the physical integrity of the vessel which is maintained in changes of location, since it is a floating vessel and not associated specifically with a constrained physical location such as a museum or unchangeable mooring berth.



ST. NICHOLAS VI

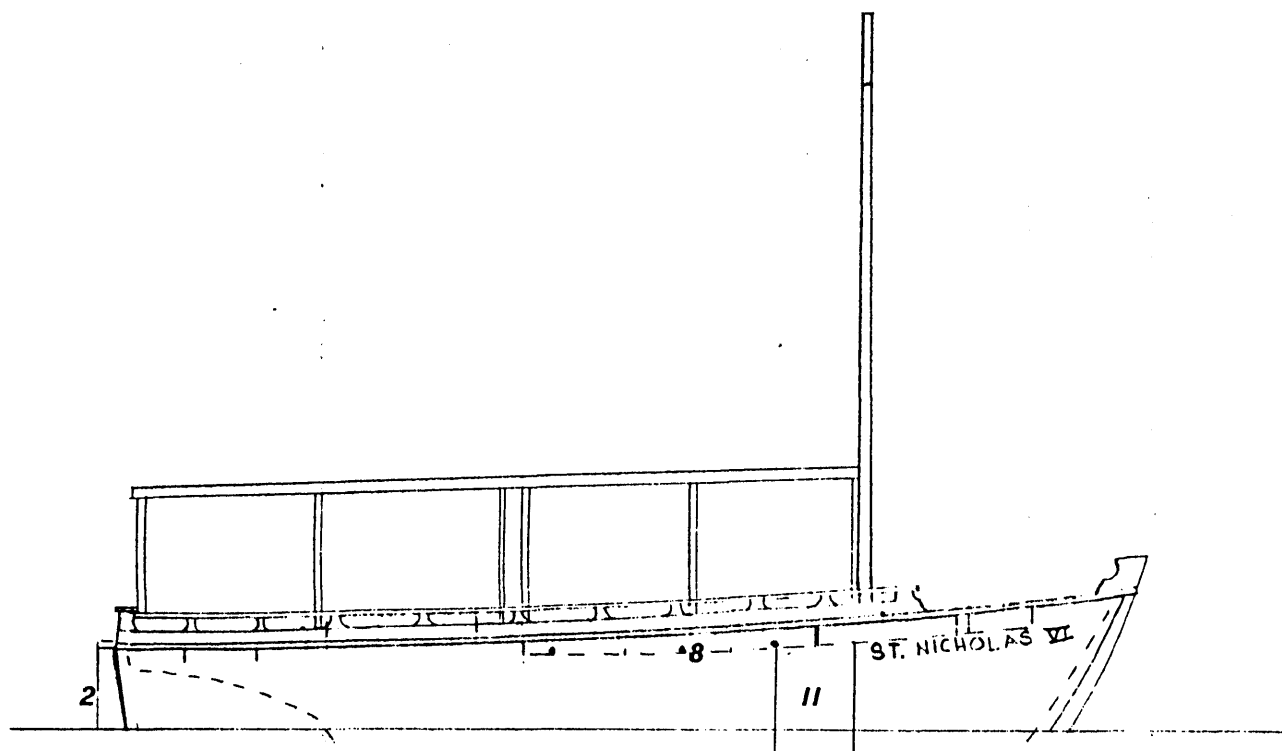
DECK LENGTH: 42'-5"

MAST HEIGHT: ± 26'

SPONGE BOATS - TARPON SPRINGS, FLORIDA

SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

JUNE 1989 R. SPAIN



ST. NICHOLAS VI

DECK LENGTH: 42'-5"

MAST HEIGHT: ± 26'

SPONGE BOATS - TARPON SPRINGS, FLORIDA

SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

JUNE 1981 H.SPAIN

