

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District

other names/site number St. Augustine Ostrich and Alligator Farm (8SJ 3230)

2. Location

street & number 999 Anastasia Boulevard (State Road A1A South) N/A  not for publication

city or town St. Augustine N/A  vicinity

state Florida code FL county St. Johns code 109 zip code 32084

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Chase W. Byers 8/5/92  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Alonzo Byers

**entered in the  
National Register**

Date of Action

9/10/92

St. Augustine Alligator Farm  
Name of Property

St. Johns, Florida  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
1		structures
		objects
2		Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/Culture/Zoo

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/Culture/Zoo

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Mediterranean Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Concrete

roof Clay Tile

other Concrete: Porch

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

**Period of Significance**

1937

**Significant Dates**

1937

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Mead, F.B. (architect and builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

St. Augustine Alligator Farm  
Name of Property

St. Johns, Florida  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	17	472160	3305500
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4			

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date August 3, 1992

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

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mr. David Drysdale

street & number P.O. Drawer E telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town St. Augustine state Florida zip code 32085

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

Description

Summary Of Present And Original Physical Appearance

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District comprises less than one acre of the thirty acre complex, located on Anastasia Island, approximately one and a half miles from downtown St. Augustine. The resources in the district include the main building and the large alligator pen located nearby, both of which were constructed in 1937. The remaining grounds of the park contain animal pens, exhibition arenas and buildings, ponds, refreshment stands, and picnic areas, all of which are connected by paths and walkways. The historic building contains the entrance to the attraction, a gift shop, administrative offices and a reptile exhibit. This building is a one and two-story, Mediterranean Revival style structure featuring a square three-story tower at the southeast end. The alligator pen is a large elongated pit bisected by a wooden bridge and bordered by a walkway. It provides a habitat for large alligators and contains a shallow pool and islands, plus a variety of plantings. A number of alteration have been made to the building complex and the main alligator pen since 1937, but these elements of the park largely retain their original physical integrity and historic appearance.

Supporting Narrative

Although the non-contributing area of the Alligator Farm has served approximately the same function since 1937, major changes have been made to the pens and exhibits. The reptile pavilion and the gator arena were constructed in the late 1970s, and the snack bar and new walks were added as recently as 1986. The pavilion housing Gomek, the giant New Guinea crocodile was completed in 1991.

The main building fronts on the west side of State Road A1A (Anastasia Boulevard), the principal coastal highway on the Atlantic seaboard of Florida. The area surrounding the Alligator Farm reflects a pattern of mixed land use. Commercial buildings line both sides of State Road A1A, but residential subdivisions are found immediately to the rear of the commercial section on both sides of the thoroughfare. There is also a buffer zone of undeveloped land in its immediate vicinity of the attraction.

The historic building is a masonry structure with stuccoed walls, both the massing and ground plan are irregular. The building complex consists of four components. The main entrance

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2

Description

to the park and to the gift shop is located in the porte-cochere attached to the loggia. The gift shop occupies most of the space in the main block of the building which also houses the administrative offices, both are located to the left of the entrance. Found north of the loggia and set-back slightly from the main facade is that portion of the building housing the reptile exhibit. Embracing the building on the north and south are parking areas for the customers.

South of the loggia, the building features a two-story rectangular section and a three-story tower housing the administrative offices and storage space. The loggia originally extended the width of the main facade but the south section was enclosed in the 1970s when the gift shop was enlarged. The exterior received a significant addition in the 1950s when the two-story section of the administrative office to the left of the tower was added and the cupola of the tower removed. The addition is, however, so well integrated into the rest of the complex that it appears to be original. The wing of the building housing the reptile exhibit is easily distinguished by its curvilinear parapet. This section of the building originally contained a museum that included a collection of mounted birds and other stuffed wildlife but now contains exhibits of live snakes. The surface of the east wall of the former museum wing is broken by a niche and vent in its curvilinear parapet.

The complex rests on a poured concrete foundation that supports concrete block walls. The exterior and interior walls were originally covered with stucco, but during the 1970s the interior walls were covered with wood paneling, and the ceilings were dropped in order to install a new lighting and air conditioning system. A variety of roof types cover the complex. All of the roof surfaces are covered with clay tile, except the gable roof covering the reptile exhibit which has been fitted with raised seam metal sheeting.

The fenestration of the complex is irregular and its window types vary. The section containing the administrative offices has three grouped casement windows at the second story level. The tower has two 6/6 light double hung sash windows, one in each story of the its facade. On its third story, it has paired vents on all four sides. The gift shop has fixed windows in the arched openings which originally formed part of the loggia.

The architectural style of the building is simple and restrained. Its design, materials, and individual features

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 3

Description

reflect the influence of the Mission style which had been popular in Florida since about 1915. Its overall form is simple and straightforward. Its color is derived from the barrel tile roof surface and from the painted impost mouldings and string courses on various parts of the building. Its exterior finish is stucco. Moreover, it includes numerous architectural features that characterize the Mission style: the tower, the arcaded loggia, and the curvilinear parapet.

Considering the volume of visitors to the attraction and the exigencies of maintenance and modernization, the building complex has remained remarkably intact. Any detrimental impact that the alterations and additions described above might have had to the original design has, nonetheless, been mitigated by the use of in-kind materials and compatible design forms. While the interior of the complex has also been altered, the floor plan and uses of each component remain essentially the same. All of the interior alterations are reversible since the original walls and ceiling have simply been masked. Even the enclosure of the southern half of the loggia can be restored.

Beyond the building complex are the grounds of the attraction. They encompass thirty acres and consist of bridges and trails leading to series of structures designed for public presentations or for housing wildlife. The trails pass through a wooded area composed of domestic and exotic planted flora. Although many features of the grounds have seen significant changes since 1937, the massive, poured concrete pen at the center of the attraction may actually date from the 1920s when the Alligator Farm was moved from its original location at South Beach. In general, the pen that forms the historic focal point of the attraction retains its original physical integrity.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

Photographs

List of Photographs

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Looking West
7. Photo No. 1 of 13

1. South Beach Alligator Farm
2. South Beach, Anastasia Island (Exact Location Unknown)
3. Unknown
4. ca. 1909
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of Alligator Pens, Looking Southeast (?)
7. Photo No. 2 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. Unknown
4. ca. 1942
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Looking West
7. Photo No. 3 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Looking Northwest
7. Photo No. 4 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Looking Southeast
7. Photo No. 5 of 13



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 5

Photographs

---

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Detail, Looking Southwest
7. Photo No. 6 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Detail, Looking Southwest
7. Photo No. 7 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main (Northeast) Facade, Detail, Looking Northwest
7. Photo No. 8 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main Alligator Pen, Looking Southeast
7. Photo No. 9 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Main Alligator Pen, Looking Northwest
7. Photo No. 10 of 13

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 6

Photographs

---

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. View of Alligator Swamp and Bird Rookery from Catwalk,  
Looking Northwest
7. Photo No. 11 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Walkway, Looking Southeast Toward Gator Arena
7. Photo No. 12 of 13

1. St. Augustine Alligator Farm Historic District
2. 999 Anastasia Boulevard (St. Johns County), St. Augustine
3. William R. Adams
4. 1991
5. Historic Property Associates
6. Macaw Pen, Looking Southwest
7. Photo No. 13 of 13

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1

Significance

Summary Statement of Significance

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm is significant under criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation for being one of the oldest private zoos and continuously operated tourist attractions in the state of Florida. The facility will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding in 1993, and it still draws thousands of curious tourists each year. As well as providing a habitat for alligators, crocodiles, and various other animal species, the "farm" plays an important role in the study and conservation of the American alligator through its cooperative efforts with the University of Florida in Gainesville. Although its commercial success and the changing attitudes toward animal habitats have necessarily led to the modernization of many of the features of the property, the St. Augustine Alligator Farm essentially retains its historical purpose and intent.

Supporting Narrative

The significance of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm rests principally in its place as one of the premier tourist attraction in the city of St. Augustine, Florida--rivaling even the Castillo de San Marco, the ancient Spanish fort that is the symbol of the city--in the number of visitors it draws each year. The importance of the site can only be appreciated in relation to the prominent role that St. Augustine played in the history of Florida, both in the colonial period and later. The city has the distinction of being oldest continuously occupied settlement in that part of North America that now comprises the United States, and until the end of the nineteenth century it was the focus of civilized life and cultural variety on a peninsula largely covered by wilderness. The "Ancient City" was a major commercial center in Florida and one of its first choices as a resort for wealthy tourists and a refuge for invalids seeking relief from the frigid winters of the northern United States.

The State's tourist industry, of such proportions today that Florida ranks as the second most frequented destination in the world, traces its beginnings to the 1820s, shortly after the United States acquired Florida., St. Augustine quickly began to attract visitors who arrived for a variety of reasons. Some were consumptives seeking relief in the allegedly healthful climate; others were seasonal residents taking refuge from cold northern winters; and a number of the arrivals were genuine tourists fascinated by tales of an exotic city reflecting the style and

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 2 Significance

fascinated by tales of an exotic city reflecting the style and culture old Europe, a legacy of the long era of Spanish colonial occupation. Despite the appealing qualities of the city, however, the tourist trade was slow to develop. The Seminole wars that dominated the first half of the nineteenth century, and later the Civil War, discouraged casual visitors. Following the national conflict, other Florida cities were quick to compete with St. Augustine for tourists and winter residents. But the "old world charm" of St. Augustine's quaint buildings and European heritage gave the Ancient City the upper hand over these new cities--some of them not even a decade old--in attracting excursionists.

Although St. Augustine is located on the eastern seaboard, large ships were unable to navigate the shallow inlet through the barrier island that separated the Matanzas River from the Atlantic Ocean, making access to the city by sea difficult. Overland travel was time-consuming and extremely uncomfortable for travelers in the absence of reliable roads or rail facilities, leaving the community nearly isolated until the first railroad connection with the outside world was completed in 1883. Construction of the Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Halifax Railroad by magnate Henry Morrison Flagler, a former partner of John D. Rockefeller in the Standard Oil Company, initiated the development of Florida's statewide rail network. Flagler also financed the construction in St. Augustine of two large and ornate hotels to accommodate northern tourists brought to the city by his railroad. These two fabulous structures, now part of Flagler College, remain historic visual landmarks in the community.

For a time the city flourished as the "Winter Newport," where the rich and famous--or the merely curious--took their Florida vacation. St. Augustine's preeminence as a tourist center lasted less than two decades, but the relatively small city (its permanent population never exceeded three thousand during the nineteenth century) offered its visitors what has now become familiar fare in Florida distractions. Hunting and fishing attracted the hardy outdoorsman. Visits to the nearby beaches and viewing the city's antiquities, plus attending social functions with other seasonal residents appealed to the more sedentary. As today, the sale of curios and souvenirs native to Florida found a brisk trade among tourists, especially those items associated with the state's most popular symbol, the alligator.

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

Significance

Stuffed baby alligators and items made from the reptile's hide and teeth proved particularly popular. Steamboat excursions allowed tourists to view the awesome monsters from the safety of the boat decks, and "sportsmen" aboard the boats took to shooting alligators encountered during the trip, usually without bothering to collect the carcasses. Guidebooks and published accounts of travels in Florida invariably made reference to the alligator as a fearsome beast whose terrifying bellowing could be heard issuing from the dark swamps that were their lair. It was natural, therefore, that enterprising businessmen began to offer the less adventurous tourists the opportunity to view this primeval creature closely, but safely, in private zoos and exhibitions. Such was the origin of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm and other similar attractions.

The precise location and founding date of the first St. Augustine Alligator Farm is sketchy, but the present facility finds its antecedent in an attraction developed on Anastasia Island ca. 1893 by St. Augustine resident Everett C. Whitney. Initially known as Whitney's Alligator Farm and Zoo, the attraction was billed as the "only real live alligator farm in the United States." This claim was certainly excessive; private zoos featuring alligators and other animals native to Florida seemed to spring up in every new winter resort community. Tourists delighted in seeing close-up all sorts of caged or semi-domesticated wild creatures, preferably set in "tropical" surroundings. A favorite activity among visitors was having their photograph taken standing next to, or even sitting atop, a "live" alligator with its mouth gaping in a monstrous and menacing fashion. Of course, the fearsome reptile was usually quite dead and stuffed, the taxidermist's art giving it the semblance of life.

About 1909, Whitney sold the alligator farm to Felix Fire and George Reddington, also St. Augustine residents, who had developed their own rival wildlife attraction. The men apparently became interested in the business while working for the South Beach Railway, which connected the mainland city of St. Augustine with the beach area on the east side of Anastasia Island. The year in which Fire and Reddington began operating their alligator attraction also remains unrecorded. Initially they collected specimens for the zoo in the vicinity of the railroad tracks and carried them to pens at a location on South Beach not far from Whitney's facility. In 1909, Fire and Reddington incorporated the South Beach Alligator Farm and Museum of Marine Curiosities. They abandoned the site used by Whitney

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4

Significance

and consolidated all of the exhibits and activities at their South Beach location. Between 1909 and 1937 the partners remained the principal owners and operators of this new version of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. Fire eventually sold his interest in the facility to Reddington, and in 1937 Reddington sold the property to W.I. Drysdale and F. Charles Usina.

The years between 1909 and 1921 witnessed many physical changes to the attraction, some of them precipitated disasters, both natural and man-made. A fire destroyed part of the original alligator farm in December of 1920. Scarcely four months later another fire completed the devastation, consuming the remaining buildings at South Beach, including the museum, and the remnants of the original stockade surrounding the alligator pens. A late summer storm completed the destruction, washing what remained into the sea. Although many of the animals perished, some were saved and were housed in temporary facilities until work on an entirely new zoo could be completed.

Construction of a new alligator farm on the site of the present one at the intersection of State Road A1A and Old Quarry Road began shortly thereafter. This complex consisted of a wooden museum and gift shop, a large alligator pit, and pens for the other animals. On Christmas Day, 1936, the structures of this latest version of the tourist attraction also succumbed to fire. Drysdale and Usina purchased the property and in February 1937 began construction of a new complex. They also donated to the State of Florida a strip of land directly in front of the property for use in locating State Road 140, known today as Anastasia Boulevard (State Road A1A). This action insured access to the attraction via one of the principal coastal highways in the eastern part of the state. The person responsible for designing the main building of the Alligator Farm was local contractor F.B. Mead, who is also credited with the design and construction of other significant buildings in St. Augustine.

Drysdale and Usina were intelligent and aggressive businessmen who developed an attractive and lucrative facility that they promoted locally and nationally in ingenious ways to capitalize on the public fascination with the alligator. Both were only in their late twenties, but they were already involved in numerous business, civic, and political activities when they purchased the Alligator Farm. As the years went on, Drysdale devoted himself almost exclusively to the attraction while Usina served in other capacities, including that of state representative, a position that he held intermittently for

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 5

Significance

twenty-two years. While representing the area in 1959, he played an important legislative role in establishing the Historic St. Augustine Restoration and Preservation Commission, which led a concerted effort to preserve what was left of the city's colonial heritage and restore a major portion of it.

As chairman of the Mental Health Committee, Usina also made major contributions to the development of the State School for the Deaf and Blind, which had been located in St. Augustine since 1884. He nevertheless remained a full partner in the Alligator Farm until his death in 1966. For his part, Drysdale, who maintained a lifelong friendship and business association with Usina, involved himself in numerous community activities while managing the Alligator Farm. The City Commission named Drysdale president of the 1965 Quadricentennial Celebration, an event of national significance honoring the founding of St. Augustine. In that capacity, he helped found the local restoration movement and served on the first board of directors of the St. Augustine Restoration Foundation.

Through a skillful rebuilding process and a wide-spread publicity campaign, Drysdale and Usina quickly developed the St. Augustine Alligator Farm into a major state tourist attraction. Despite the fact that they had the facility in the midst of the Great Depression, the pair immediately undertook construction of a new building complex to house administrative offices, a gift shop, and museum exhibits. Despite the desperate economic conditions that prevailed in Florida and much of the nation, they managed to make the Alligator Farm a consistently profitable enterprise. A consistent high level of attendance was maintained by arranging to be one of the stops included in package bus tours and through publicity disseminated by various travel agencies.

In addition to developing the attraction's marketing strategies, Drysdale and Usina took considerable pains to build up its collection of wildlife specimens for exhibit. Some of these were purchased from existing private zoos and animal preserves in Florida and included not only alligators but also, ostriches, crocodiles, Galapagos tortoises, a variety of monkeys and birds, and many examples of exotic wildlife. The attraction also featured a museum (now used to house a live snake exhibit) that contained a number of mounted marine and terrestrial animals.

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm has more than just commercial significance, for it has been associated with

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 6

## Significance

scientific studies of the alligator. Drysdale and Usina systematically recorded information about the life cycle of the alligator, including its eating and mating habits, growth rate, and diseases. The success of their research was due in some measure to the fact that their facility still possessed alligators from the previous incarnations of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, so that they were able to observe specimens that had been living in a controlled environment for decades. Their observations and basic facts about the alligators at the Alligator Farm were published in trade journals, scientific publications, and popular magazines, including Nature, the Saturday Evening Post, Herpetologica, Future, the Toronto Star Weekly, the American Weekly, the New York Times, and Florida Wildlife. Information and publicity about the St. Augustine Alligator Farm was spread to a national audience on television programs such as "What's My Line?" and "We the People."

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm played a role in the conservation of the species, which came perilously close to extinction in Florida by the end of World War II. Aggressive hunting for hides and the destruction of the reptile's natural habitat by turning "useless" swampland into vast agricultural areas reduced the alligator population dramatically. The alligator had long been prized for its beautiful and durable hide, which was used in the manufacture of a wide variety of leather goods. Since the late nineteenth century, the reptiles had been indiscriminately slaughtered by hunters on an unimaginable scale, perhaps equal to that of the buffalo and the passenger pigeon.

The Florida Fish and Game Commission reported in 1891 that an estimated 2.5 million alligator had been killed in the previous decade. They had few places of refuge. By 1947, the alligator population in Florida had dropped to barely 12,000. Of that number, approximately 2,000 were kept in safety at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. Not until the 1970s did the alligator begin to reappear in appreciable numbers, thanks to stringent state and federal conservation laws and a strong publicity effort, in which the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, through its own educational and advertising means, played an active role.

Historic properties are reflections of our national, state and local heritage. The St. Augustine Alligator Farm is a historic monument to the development of Florida's most important industry: tourism. The completion of Disney World at Orlando in the late 1960s, established Florida as one of the major vacation



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

Significance

---

destinations world-wide. Inspired by the success of Walt Disney's venture, other ambitious attraction projects have since been developed in Florida which, in their size and scope of amusements, have eclipsed some of the more traditional spots of interest. Tourism in Florida provides direct employment to thousands of the state's residents and brings in billions of dollars in tax revenue for state and local governments.

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm has had rivals and imitators, among them Gatorland Zoo (founded 1948) located near Orlando and other private parks found mainly in Central Florida. Alligators can also be seen in a "natural" setting at such tourist havens as Wakulla Springs, Cypress Gardens, Marineland, and Silver Springs, although these parks are not devoted specifically to the large reptile. The St. Augustine Alligator Farm, moreover, is the oldest and most enduring of such commercial tourist attractions, and has the further advantage of being located in the ancient city of St. Augustine.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

---

Major Bibliographical Resources

- Adams William R., et al. Historic Sties and Buildings Survey of St. Augustine, Florida. St. Augustine, 1980.
- Anderson, Robert. Guide to Florida Alligator and Crocodile. St. Petersburg: Winner Enterprises, 1985.
- Bothwell, Dick. Alligators. St. Petersburg: Great Outdoors Publishing Co., 1962.
- Florida Times Union 28 July 1940.
- Graham, Thomas. The Awakening of St. Augustine. St. Augustine: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1978.
- Mahoney, Lawrence T. Gator!. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1991.
- Nolan, David. Fifty Feet in Paradise (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984
- St. Augustine Record, 1903-1991.
- Usina F. Charles and Drysdale W.I. Alligator. St. Augustine: St. Augustine Alligator Farm, 1952.
- Volbrecht, John Loudon. "From Swamp to Swank," Nature, vol.XL, no. 5, American Nature Association.
- Waterbury, Jean Parker , ed. The Oldest City (St. Augustine: The St. Augustine Historical Society, 1984.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description & Justification

Boundary Description

Begin approximately 280 feet northwest of the intersection of State Road A1A and Old Quarry Road at the southeast corner of the main building (Gift Shop) of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, then run southwest along the outside wall of said building and continue along the outside walls of the structure until said line intersects the walkway leading to the main alligator pen, then run approximately southwest along the south side of the walkway and continue until said line intersect the south side of the main alligator pen, then continue west and north along the outer perimeter of the and proceed along the remaining perimeter until said line meets the north side of the walkway, then continue north and west along the outside walls of the gift shop and proceed along the remaining exterior walls and outermost points of the loggia and porte-cocher until you reach the southeast corner of the building, the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The boundary described above encompasses all of the historic resources dating from the period of significance (ca. 1937) that retain sufficient physical and historical integrity to be included in the district.