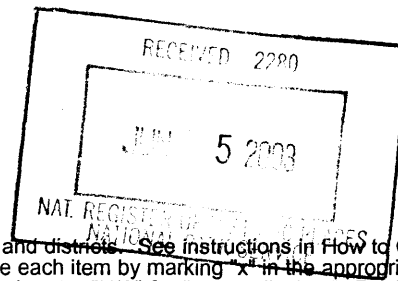


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



728

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 any 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 Old Town Sebastian Historic District East

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Main & Washington Streets, Riverside Drive, FEC Railroad N/A not for publication

city or town Sebastian N/A vicinity

state Florida code FL county Indian River code 061 zip code 32958

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.)

Scott Snyder Matthews 6/18/2003
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources
State or 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 See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

Edson A. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

8/4/03
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Choose as many boxes as apply)

- private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property
(Choose only one box)

- buildings
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, total.

Name of related multiple property listings

(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

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling
DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling
COMMERCE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling
DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling
COMMERCE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

FRAME VERNACULAR
MASONRY VERNACULAR
MODERN

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE PIERS, BRICK
walls WOOD
MASONRY
roof METAL
other ASPHALT SHINGLE
METAL SHINGLE

Narrative Description

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

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.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with checkboxes and descriptions.

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):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, National Historic Landmark, Historic American Buildings Survey, Historic American Engineering Record.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Period of Significance

c.1900 - 1951

Significant Dates

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Approximately 9 acres

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	5 5 2 2 7 0	3 0 7 6 7 8 0
	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 Christiana Jackson-Brady, Consultant; Gary V. Goodwin, Historic Preservation Planner

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June, 2003

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

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 N/A

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 amend 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 Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Old Town Sebastian Historic District East is situated on the Atlantic Coastal ridge in the City of Sebastian, across from the Sebastian Inlet State Park on the west shore of the Indian River Lagoon. The district encompasses historically significant resources on the east side of the Florida East Coast railroad tracks and includes many of Sebastian's first planned streets including Main Street and South Central Avenue (today's U.S. Highway 1). The district consists of additional historical resources located along Washington Street and Riverside Drive and has one of the largest concentration of late 1800's and early 1900's buildings within the city limits of Sebastian. There are eighteen (18) buildings in the district, thirteen (13) of which contribute to the historic character and five (5) that are considered noncontributing resources. Four (4) of these noncontributing resources were constructed after the neighborhood's period of significance and one (1) has been significantly altered. Also, contributing to the significance of the district is a historic city-owned park that was established c.1910.

SETTING

The City of Sebastian is located between the St. Sebastian River and the Indian River Lagoon on the East Coast of central Florida at the northern end of Indian River County. It has a population of 16,125 and is situated approximately twenty miles south of Melbourne and ten miles north of Vero Beach (the county seat). Sebastian has a sub-tropical climate and is principally a resort and residential city. The river, once the major highway for Sebastian's early frontier settlements, remains a major economic vein for the local family-owned fishing businesses and benefits the city as a recreation area. Sebastian is known for its close proximity to Pelican Island, the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge. Paul Kroegel, who was designated the first Federal Game Warden by Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, was one of the Sebastian area's early settlers.

The Old Town Sebastian Historic District is set high on the Atlantic Coastal Ridge with scenic views of the Indian River. It is within a few blocks of the current City Hall that was originally built in 1928 as Sebastian's Grammar and Junior High School.¹ The district developed with the advent of the railroad in 1893 and was the center and focus of the town's daily social and economic activity for many years. Although a portion of the present day U.S.1 is located in the district, the small town atmosphere has been preserved.² Characteristics reflective of the simple, hard-working folks who settled in Sebastian are evident in the details of the rustic architecture, roads and landscapes. The district's architecture exhibits the pattern of growth consistent with the Progressive, Boom and Post-War eras in Florida.

¹ The school is a Mediterranean Revival style building designed by the Ft.Pierce architecture firm Hatcher and Funke. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

² That portion of today's U.S. 1, which is located in the district, was originally called South Central Avenue. It was four-laned in the 1950's when it was known as Dixie Highway.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 2 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

The hilly topography in the district is a prominent characteristic in the landscape. The elevation rises from the Indian River lagoon towards the west atop the sand ridge.³ One major landscape feature in the district is a city park (PHOTO 1) established c.1910 and located near the Indian River Shoreline. Other significant landscape features, adjacent to the district, include the railroad tracks, and the Hardee Oak (PHOTO 3). The Hardee Oak once stood in front of Sebastian's only mansion. A.G. Hardee planted it in 1891 at age 19. His mother spared it from destruction when the sidewalks were installed in the 1920's.⁴ A number of mature trees are scattered throughout the area including silk oaks from the original homesteads. Native Plants associated with the sand ridge, such as scrub oaks, scrub hickory, and scrub pine, still remain in some areas. Other plants include sea grape, hibiscus, bamboo, banana and a variety of palms.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Old Town Sebastian Historic District East is a small area that developed primarily with the advent of the railroad in 1893 and remained the village hub throughout the 1950's. When the train arrived in 1893, this suddenly provided a more efficient mode of transportation that soon changed the settlement pattern that had previously fronted the river. As people moved to Sebastian, homes, churches, businesses and schools were constructed closer to the railroad tracks which were located on the sand ridge less than a mile west of the river. Small agricultural farms and dairies were started on the west side of the tracks and fishing grew into a viable commercial industry. The area continued to develop and evolve with the invention of the automobile and with new construction during the Boom and Post-War eras. Buildings from all periods are scattered throughout the district.

The physical street plans, subdivision names, street names, plot plans, and designated open spaces within the Sebastian Old Town Historic District remain very similar according to area maps from the early 1900's.⁵ Subdivisions that were platted in the early 1900's, Braddock, Vickers and W.A. Martin, retain the original names of those prominent families who settled or purchased property in that area of Sebastian. Louisiana Avenue, Main Street, Palmetto Avenue, and Central Avenue were the only streets in Sebastian for a long time.⁶ Streets that were originally bumpy, dirt roads were paved in the 1920's with shell from the Ais Indian Tribe shell mounds found along the river. Later, they were paved with asphalt to better accommodate automobile traffic and the growing population. Significant streetscapes include sidewalks along Main Street and U.S.1 (South Central Avenue) (PHOTO 3). They were installed in the 1920's when both streets were widened as part of the town's planning efforts. There have been some improvements along U.S.1 (South Central Avenue) over the years to accommodate the increasing traffic; however, low speed limits and beautification efforts help support the integrity of the area.

³ The sand ridge is part of the ancient Atlantic Coastal Ridge, a significant topographical feature in Indian River County.

⁴ *A Historic Tour of the Sebastian Area*, 2nd Edition 1998.

⁵ See attached plat maps of the Sebastian Area.

⁶ *More Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1992]) Preface.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 3 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

Changes in the district reflect the evolution and pattern of Sebastian's historic development. The most significant of these changes have taken place along Main Street. Fires in the 1920's and 1930's destroyed a few prominent buildings such as the first Vickers's store and the Hardee Mansion. The original train depot, once located on the south side of Main Street adjacent to the railroad tracks, was moved after the 1950's and it later burned.

Although Sebastian is now a rapidly growing city, the district retains a small town atmosphere. Buildings historically served a variety of functions, including residential, agricultural, commercial, professional and civic purposes. The pre-dominant use, however, was mixed until the 1950's. During the early 1900's, it was not uncommon for residents to operate businesses and hold community functions and church services from their homes. In fact, the first publicly owned City Hall, which housed the first police department and first volunteer fire department, was not constructed until 1957 (PHOTO 2). Presently, the character of the district is largely mixed use, commercial and professional. Setbacks are fairly regular per street. Buildings range from small one-story cottages to larger two-story dwellings. The two-story buildings in the district are located along U.S. 1 (South Central Avenue). The few masonry buildings in the district are made of concrete block, hollow tile or brick (PHOTO 7).

The district is significant locally for its representation of this community's historical development. It reflects a pattern of growth consistent with the advent of the railroad in 1893 and the subsequent historical events and innovations, such as the automobile, which continue to shape our social lives. Significant buildings that remain within the district's boundaries include Sebastian's first library, town hall, theatre and the first brick house, which was also the first house to have a refrigeration unit. The majority of the contributing buildings in the district are wood frame vernacular and were built by the area's early settlers. The district contains the largest concentration of early twentieth century buildings within Sebastian's city limits east of the railroad tracks and reflects patterns of growth associated with Florida history.

Architectural Styles

WOOD FRAME VERNACULAR

The wood frame vernacular is a folk type of architecture that utilizes local building materials and has no other apparent visible style. Usually these were modest dwellings built by local craftsmen constructed without architectural plans. The vernacular was a common method of construction in early Florida and buildings characterized with this style usually lack distinct architectural features or ornamentation characteristic of a defined style. Generally, wood vernacular buildings were constructed in response to their surroundings. Porches, large windows and well-ventilated rooms are some common characteristics. The wood vernacular

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 4 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

style was commonly used in Sebastian in the late 1800's and early 1900's, and was practiced by the hard-working families who settled there.

The Bamma Vickers Lawson house 1133 U.S. 1 (NR 1990), was built circa 1900 is an excellent example of a wood vernacular building in Sebastian from the early twentieth century (PHOTO 6). The building is a two-story wood-sided, side-gabled plan structure with original 2/2 double hung sash windows. The house features a steeply pitched metal roof and has decorative latticework underneath the wood L-shaped porch on the east elevation.

The Stephen Vickers House, next door, is another excellent example of the wood vernacular style. Tapered wood porch supports supported by brick piers on the front porch are an element characteristic of the Craftsman style popular from 1905-1930⁷ (PHOTO 4).

Other Wood Vernacular structures include the first Town Hall built by the Woodmen of the World in 1913, and the Maurice Braddock House, circa 1920 (PHOTOS 8 & 10).

MASONRY VERNACULAR

Masonry Vernacular is another common form of architecture found in Florida. Vernacular architecture refers to structures built of local materials in a functional style devised to meet the needs of common people in their time and place. These structures were usually built by self-taught builders and without a professional designer or architect. They are generally composed of brick, stone, hollow clay tile or concrete.

According to Stephen Olausen in 1989, in his description of the masonry vernacular style in the Hallstrom House Master Site File record, "With the coming of the American Industrial Revolution, mass manufacturers became the pervasive influence over vernacular house design. In Florida, most examples pre-dating 1920 were brick, but a number of older examples feature rough faced, cast concrete block popularized by Henry Hobson Richardson in his Romanesque buildings of the late 19th century."⁸ Hollow clay tile and concrete block were commonly used in the Masonry Vernacular buildings of the 1920's and 1930's. After World War II until the present, concrete block became the most popular building component of the Masonry Vernacular style."

An example of the Masonry Vernacular style in the district is the William Braddock House on U.S.1 (PHOTO 5). It has largely original 1/1 double hung sash windows. Like the Stephens Vickers house across the street (U.S.1, formerly South Central Avenue), this building has some Craftsman style-like features such as triangular

⁷Virginia McAlister and Lee McAlister, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 454.

⁸ Stephen Olausen, *The Hallstrom House*, Research as part of the Master Site File Record on the Hallstrom House located in Tallhaasse, Florida, the Bureau of Historic Preservation.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 5 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

knee braces at the gable ends of the main building and front porch roof. The house was built circa 1919, and was the first brick house in Sebastian. In addition, it is the only house in Sebastian known to have a cellar. This house is also associated with having the first refrigeration unit in the city. Members of the Braddock family built other large dwellings outside the district and owned a substantial amount of property in the area.

MODERN

After World War II, traditional styles were not as popular as variations of modern styles that began just before the war. According to "A Field Guide to American Houses" by Virginia and Lee McAlister, the Minimal Traditional, Ranch, Split-level, Contemporary and Shed were the most common modern styles since 1940's. The minimal traditional style, dominant in the 1940's and 1950's, were generally one story and had simplified detailing, dominant front gables, and low roof pitches.

Significant examples exist from the post-war period in Sebastian. It was a time of growth and change for the city. Examples of the modern style in the district are the Harbor Lights Motel and the Sebastian Methodist Church (PHOTOS 9 & 11).

Contributing Resources:

There are a total of 14 contributing resources, including outbuildings and the historic city park, in the Sebastian Old Town Historic District East and 12 are primary buildings. Many were significant to the development of the town and were associated with Sebastian's early citizens. One, the Bamma Vickers Lawson house at 1133 U.S. 1, is already listed in the National Register.

Noncontributing Resources:

Noncontributing buildings are found scattered throughout the district. There are 5 noncontributing buildings and 4 are primary structures. The starkest noncontributing resource is the Bell South Telephone Commercial building located at 1137 U.S.1. Other noncontributing buildings include historical buildings that have endured significant alterations or were built after the period of significance. Although 700 Main Street does not meet the criteria of being 50 years or older, it holds great significance to the local history. It was built in 1957 and was the first publicly owned City Hall and will probably qualify for listing in future years.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 6 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

List of Contributing Resources

	MSF#	Street Address/TRS	Name	Function	Style	Yr.Built
		U.S.1				
1		1206 U.S.1		Mult.Family	Mod	c.1951
2		1210 U.S. 1		Comm.	Mod	c.1951
3	IR00111	1208 U.S.1	William Braddock House	Mixed	MV	c.1919
4		1208A U.S.1	William Braddock House	Outbuilding	FV	c. 1920
5	IR00151	1141 U.S.1	Stephen Vickers House	Res.	FV	c.1919
6	IR00149	1133 U.S.1	Bamma Vickers Lawson (NR)	Comm.	FV	c.1900
7	IR00110	1125 U.S.1	Sebastian Town Hall	Comm.	FV	c. 1913
8		1117 U.S. 1	Sebastian River Baptist	Church	Mod	c. 1950
		Washington				
9	IR00147	709 Washington St.	Maurice Braddock House	Comm.	FV	c.1920
		Riverside Drive				
10		1215 Riverside	Harbour Lights Motel	Office	Mod	c. 1951
11		1215A Riverside	Harbour Lights Motel	Rooms	Mod	c.1951
12		1215B Riverside	Harbour Lights Motel	Rooms	Mod	c.1951
13		1215C Riverside	Harbour Lights Motel	Rooms	Mod	c. 1951
14			City Park	Site		Est.1910

Code to Styles: FV-Frame Vernacular, MV- Masonry Vernacular, Mod- Modern

List of Noncontributing Resources:

		Main St.			
1		700 Main Street	City Hall/Firehouse	Professional	c.1957
		U.S.1			
2		1137 U.S. 1	Southern Bell Telephone	Comm.	c. 1979
3		1209 U.S. 1	Vickers Store/Real Estate	Comm.	c. 1920
4		1141A U.S.1	Stephen Vickers House	Garage	c. 1980

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 7

**OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

		Riverside Drive			
5		1201 Riverside Drive		Mixed Use	c. 1980

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Old Town Sebastian Historic District East in Sebastian, Florida, is significant under Criterion A at the local level in the area of community planning. The district contains one of the largest concentrations of early twentieth century buildings within the city limits, which reflect significant characteristics, and periods of development. Daily life centered on many of these buildings for decades and several are associated with local historical events and the private and public lives of citizens who shaped the community. Many of Sebastian's leading citizens lived within the districts' boundaries at one time and a few homes still remain under family ownership. This area was the central focus of community life as Sebastian was transformed from a village, to a town, and then to a city. The district's significant period ran from c.1900 to 1951, encompassing various growth and architectural trends in Indian River County. Original street plans, prominent landscapes and a distinctive topography along the Atlantic coastal ridge strengthen the district's significance.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The land of early Sebastian was the site of settlements dating back thousands of years. Archaeological studies indicate there were prehistoric inhabitants living in the area as early as 850 B.C. One of the earliest written records of the Sebastian area dates to a map recorded in 1605 by the Spanish soldier Captain Alvera Mexia who was sent by the Spanish governor of St. Augustine to improve relations with the Ais Indian Tribe. During Mexia's visit, he documented and recorded the area and named the St. Sebastian River.¹ The Ais Indians, whose tribes once dominated Florida's east coast, found the land between the St. Sebastian River and the Indian River Lagoon ideal for their survival with plenty of fish and game. Eventually, however, in the 1700's they were nearly decimated. Evidence of their existence has been found in the shell mounds, pottery and other artifacts they left behind.

Settlement was sparse in Florida even after it was ceded to the U.S. and then became a territory in 1821. A few people moved to the area after the passage of the Armed Occupation Act in 1842; however, the events of the Civil War deterred many persons from settling permanently until the late 1880's. In 1882, Thomas New, a retired Methodist minister from Detroit, Michigan, established a post office in Sebastian and gave the area its first official name, "Newhaven."² Two years later, in 1884, Sylvanus Kitching, a native of Warrington, England, became the postmaster and changed the name from Newhaven to Sebastian after the St. Sebastian River. Settlement grew at a slow pace and according to the Florida State Census of 1885, 26 adults and 16 children lived in Sebastian.³

¹ *Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, Inc., [1990]), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, Sebastian Area Chronology.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 2 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

Progress remained gradual until the coming of the railroad, which arrived in Sebastian in 1893. Fishing had already begun as a means of survival, and now became increasingly important to the local economy as a commercial industry. The first shipment of fish by rail took place in 1895. Sebastian was one of nine fishing industry headquarters along the Indian River Lagoon, shipping fish to markets as far north as New York. The introduction of the railroad helped spawn the construction of buildings closer to the tracks situated along the sand ridge just west of the Indian River. Louisiana Avenue, once a wagon trail that ran parallel to the tracks, was the first named street in Sebastian. Palmetto Avenue and Main Street followed. The area quickly became the site of a new church, school, homes and businesses in the late 1800's and early twentieth century.

In 1905 Sebastian was located in St. Lucie County, a jurisdiction created out of Brevard County. Ft. Pierce was chosen as the county seat and according to the Census of 1910, 321 people lived in Sebastian, making it the largest community in the immediate area.⁴ Citrus and pineapples were the dominant cash crops in the agricultural industry. The community's activities centered on social events at the church and school, which were both located in the middle of town. By 1918, Sebastian had grown to include a Woman's Club, a doctor's office, a wooden road bridge across the St. Sebastian River, two church buildings, a hotel, and a two-story wooden schoolhouse. Still, Sebastian remained fairly rural in comparison to its neighbors Vero and Fellsmere.

Like the rest of Florida, St. Lucie County residents experienced prosperity and growth during the Florida Land Boom of the 1920's. This, naturally, led to significant expansions. In Sebastian, economic expansion was influenced by the construction of Dixie Highway and US 1. Improved access meant an increase in population and growth of the area, which led directly to the incorporation of Sebastian as a municipality in 1924.⁵ Meetings of the Town Council were held regularly and records from that time indicate the town's desire to hire engineers for survey and planning purposes.⁶ Businesses, modest homes and large two-story residences were built along the river and in town when the Bank of Sebastian opened its doors on Main Street in 1924.

By 1925, the town of Vero had expanded such that it became the City of Vero Beach. It was chosen as the county seat of the newly formed Indian River County, which included Sebastian in its jurisdiction. Also in 1925, Main Street in Sebastian was paved and a municipal power and ice plant was built to supply electricity and ice to the area. In 1926, designs were completed for a modern Sebastian grammar and junior high school.

⁴ Florida State Census, St. Lucie County, 1910.

⁵ *Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1990]), 5.

⁶ *More Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1992]), 60.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 3 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

The building, located along Main Street, was completed in 1928, and the former two-story wooden school on Louisiana Avenue was dismantled and sold.

The effects of the Depression were widespread in Indian River County. In 1929, the Bank of Sebastian closed, selling their assets to the Farmers Bank of Vero Beach for \$21,628.72.⁷ In 1933, despite the economic downturn in previous years, Sebastian was created as a City by an Indian River County ordinance.⁸ The town experienced little growth until after World War II. During the 1950's several new residences were constructed, highways were widened and improved, and large new subdivisions were platted west of the original town area. In 1968, Sebastian was characterized as a quiet, peaceful, happy and dignified community reflecting a steady growth. Today, it is currently one of the fastest growing communities in Indian River County. Increasing development and consistent pressures on historical resources have prompted city officials to order a draft preservation ordinance.

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

When the Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railroad began offering service to Sebastian in 1893, the development of the community changed. The central focus of the community's daily activities grew less dependent upon the river and the focus shifted to an area along the ridge closer to the railroad. Trains provided a more advanced means of transportation, which increased the number of settlers and visitors to Sebastian. It also provided a faster means of shipping which resulted in the growth of the local agricultural and fishing industries. The Florida East Coast trains facilitated the area's development by making it easier to haul agricultural products to market and provide dry goods and building products to the area's early settlers. In 1894, a depot was constructed on the east side of the tracks near the junction of Main Street and Louisiana Avenue.⁹ In 1905, the first two-story wood vernacular schoolhouse was built on the west side of Louisiana across from the depot.¹⁰ Early resident Lydia Edwards Gulledge described her memories, "In those days Louisiana was like Park Avenue. The church, the schoolhouse and Baughman's store and post office were all on the west side. The Groves, the Fosters, and the Council's lived there."¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁸ *More Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1992]), Preface.

⁹ *A History of Indian River County: A Sense of Place* (Vero Beach: Indian River County Historical Society, [2000]), 42.

¹¹ *More Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1992]), 53.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 4 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

During the early 1900's, Sebastian continued to develop along Main Street, Palmetto and Central Avenue (the south portion is present-day U.S.1).¹² Buildings were, for the most part, built by locals in the Frame vernacular style. Subdivisions were platted and named after the families who first purchased land there. In 1913, the first town hall was established along South Central Avenue. It was built by the Woodmen of the World and also served as a community center. The school's first graduation ceremony was held there in 1918 with a total of six students in the graduating class.¹³ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, life remained hard and the landscape was mostly rural. Carbide lights, cisterns, wood stoves, and out-houses were not uncommon sights. Social life was centered around the school and church.

Cash flow improved during the Boom period of the 1920's as was typical in other Florida towns. This was a significant period of development for Sebastian. The Bank of Sebastian was built and opened in 1924 and Sebastian became incorporated as a town in 1925. A municipal power and ice plant were constructed that same year. Some ordinances at the time forbid the following:

- “To ride a bicycle on the streets of the Town at a faster rate of speed than 15 miles per hour.
- To maintain, manage or control any lottery, wheel of fortune, or any other gambling device.
- To hitch any horse, mule or any other animal to any of the shade trees upon the streets or within public parks, or on any private premises without the permission of the owner.”¹⁴

The availability of the automobile made Sebastian more accessible to tourists during the 1920's. City officials made a concerted effort to improve and widen roads as well as establish sidewalks on Main Street and Central Avenue (U.S.1). Main Street was extended a few blocks west of Louisiana and a modern school designed in the Mediterranean Revival style was constructed and opened there in 1928. Bamma Lawson established the first library at a time when there were no public libraries in the county. She started a children's library in her home on Central Avenue located in her father's subdivision. Her husband was a carpenter and helped build a number of buildings in Sebastian. He also served the town as city clerk and councilman. During the “Boom” period, additional subdivisions such as Edgewater were platted, but growth did not extend much farther west of Louisiana Avenue. That area remained largely citrus groves until the 1950's. Community life revolved around the downtown. Sunday school picnics, civic affairs and public gatherings, such as plays and political rallies were common. The highlight however, was hand-cranked movies run by Rodney Kroegel in the original town

¹² In the 1950's the Federal Government four-laned Dixie Highway. This included the South part of Central Avenue (as it was called in the city) and later became U.S.1.

¹³ A Historic Tour of the Sebastian Area, 2nd Edition 1998.

¹⁴ *More Tales of Sebastian* (Sebastian River Area Historical Society, [1992]), Preface.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 5 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

hall. By 1930, Sebastian was a happy little community despite the negative impacts of the Great Depression. As one resident recalled,

“Main Street was “ more busy than we are now... Within a few blocks were the grocery, a dry goods store, a hardware store, a laundry, an ice house, the post office, the railroad station and the city jail....and there was a drug store on the corner of US1 and Main.”¹⁵

Major fires during the 1930's destroyed buildings along Main Street, including the Hardee mansion. A plaque was placed in front of the Hardee Oak as a remembrance of the site. Bob Hardee, whose family moved to Sebastian in 1889, was the first tax collector for St. Lucie County when it was formed in 1905 and served twice on the Sebastian City Council.¹⁶ Bob's daughter, Meta, was the first woman to serve on the Sebastian City Council.¹⁷ The Eagle Company dock, which belonged to the Hardee's, was located at the bottom of Main Street where a city dock stands today. Both locals and visitors used it.

Few buildings were constructed in Sebastian during the 1930's and 1940's and the area experienced little growth. The new school, which featured a large baseball field and an upstairs auditorium, was a major recreation area for the local children. The community gathered at Christmastime in the park on the corner of Main Street and South Central for the lighting of the tree, a tradition started by Bamma Lawson. It began with a simple holly tree that she planted in the 1920's and by the 1930's the tree had grown tall enough for lights and a special handmade star that she purchased in Orlando.¹⁸ Local families continued this tradition in that location until the 1950's when the first publicly owned city building was erected.

The post-war period in Sebastian was the third era of significant physical development of the city. During the early 1950's, a few modern homes, duplexes and efficiencies were built on vacant lots next to the older vernacular structures downtown. The ensuing decades resulted in a somewhat urban atmosphere on the west side of the railroad tracks along Main Street and U.S. 1 (South Central Ave.), while Palmetto and Louisiana Avenue remained quaint residential streets with well-kept residences. The adjacent orange groves and a dense landscape added to the charm and warmth of the neighborhood.

The most significant change came in the late 1950's when the Federal Government extended U.S.1 through the middle of town along part of Central Avenue. The second City Hall, located on Main Street, was demolished. The Volunteer Fire Department, which had organized in 1949, and the city government needed office space. Consequently, in 1957, the first publicly owned City Hall building was built housing the first Volunteer Fire

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 93.

¹⁷ Ibid., 94.

¹⁸ Ibid., 33

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 6 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

Department, and First Police Department. It was placed on the corner of Main Street and U.S.1 in the City Park.

In 1982, the city outgrew the building and moved to the first floor of the former 1928 school building on Main Street. The former City Hall then became the home of the first publicly owned library in the City of Sebastian. Today, it serves as office space for the Chamber of Commerce and the Sebastian Historical Society.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The district is significant locally for its representation of growth patterns and architectural trends associated with the Progressive, Boom and Post-War eras in Florida. It contains one of the largest concentrations of early twentieth century buildings within Sebastian's city limits, many of which were built by Sebastian's first settlers. The buildings, streetscapes and landscapes in the district reflect the community's growth and development since the early 20th century and they are significant for their association with local historical events and the citizens who have contributed to shaping this community.

An excellent example of early twentieth century wood vernacular buildings is the Bamma Lawson House, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Several existing contributing structures were at one time associated with Sebastian's leading citizens. Those families and their descendents operated businesses, served on town councils and school boards. District residents and business owners were instrumental in the development of this small fishing village during the period of significance (c.1900 - 1951). One example is Stephen Vickers, who moved his family to Sebastian around 1906. He started one of the first dry good stores, which stood along Main Street and eventually constructed a large two-story home at 1141 U.S.1 (South Central Avenue). He built a house for his daughter Bamma, which they later moved next door in the 1910's. Bamma Vickers Lawson was one of Sebastian's leading citizens who provided a library in the house during the 1920's and 30's for the local children when there was none in the county.¹⁹ Her husband Parris, a carpenter, served as the Sebastian city clerk, election clerk and city councilman. Stephen's grandson Jack was involved in starting the first Volunteer Fire Department. The store, located at 1209 U.S.1, had remained under family ownership for many years and operated as a hardware store. Recent renovations by new owners, unfortunately, did not preserve the integrity of the entire building.

Although a few historical buildings in the district have been lost throughout the years, the area has retained much of its small-town character. Existing contributing buildings and streetscapes are a stark remembrance of the settlement, which developed, with the advent of the railroad. Sebastian area residents have a strong appreciation for their history and there is a momentum to preserve and restore this historical setting. The larger

¹⁹ *A Historic Tour of the Sebastian Area*, 2nd Edition 1998.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 7

**OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

contributing structures located along U.S.1 (South Central) have been preserved and given a “new-life” by owners who appreciate their history. A few operate as antique stores and café-type restaurants.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Page 1 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 10 Page 1 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the Old Town Sebastian Historic District East are those shown on the accompanying historic district map.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries surround the largest concentration of intact historical buildings associated with the development of Old Town Sebastian on the East side of the Florida East Coast Railroad tracks. Blocks to the North and South were not included since they did not retain the same density of historic structures. Although several historic buildings exist to the north and south of the district, the historic context and density of that area has been altered extensively with new construction making it difficult to tie into the Old Town Historic District East.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number PHOTOS Page 1 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida**

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1 City Park, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
2. Sebastian, Florida
3. Anna Jackson-Brady, Historic Preservation Consultant
4. October 2002
5. City of Sebastian Engineering Department
6. Looking south from Main Street, showing historic City Park
7. PHOTO 1 of 11

Note: Items 2 through 5 are the same for all photographs; refer to Photo Location building sketches for camera locations. (numbers in circles are photo numbers).

1. 700 Main Street (NC), Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. North (Main) Façade, Looking South
7. PHOTO 2 of 11

1. Topography, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. Looking East on Main Street
7. PHOTO 3 of 11

1. 1141 U.S.1, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. East (Main) Façade, Looking West
7. PHOTO 4 of 11

1. 1208 U.S.1, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. West (Main) Façade, Looking East
7. PHOTO 5 of 11

1. 1133 U.S. 1, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. East (Main) Façade, Looking West
7. PHOTO 6 of 11

1. 1206 U.S.1, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. West (Main) Façade, Looking East
7. PHOTO 7 of 11

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number PHOTOS Page 2 **OLD TOWN SEBASTIAN HISTORIC DISTRICT EAST**
Sebastian, Indian River County, Florida

1. 1125 U.S.1 (Original Town Hall), Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. East (Main) Façade, Looking West
7. PHOTO 8
8. Photo 8 of 11

1. 1117 U.S.1, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. East (Main) Façade, Looking West
7. PHOTO 9 of 11

- 1.709 Washington Street, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. South (Main) Façade, Looking North
7. PHOTO 10 of 11

1. 1215 Riverside Drive, Old Town Sebastian Historic District East
6. East (Main) Façade, Looking West
7. PHOTO 11 of 11