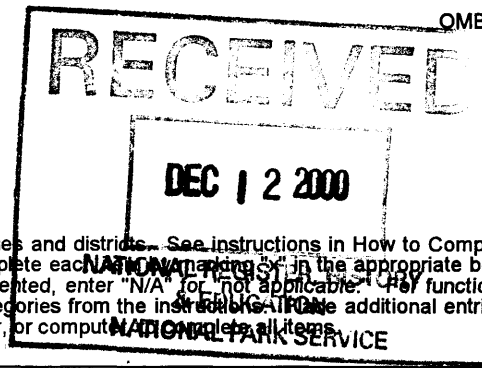


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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  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. Do not include 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 HARDING CIRCLE HISTORIC STREETScape

other names/site number Historic St. Armands Circle

2. Location

street & number N/A N/A  not for publication

city or town Sarasota N/A  vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Sarasota code 115 zip code 34236

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.)

Janet Snyder Matthews 12/11/2000  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 of 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 1.16.01  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
20	10	objects
21	10	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/City Park

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

LANDSCAPE/City Park

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

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, B, C, D, E, F, 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, designated landmark, recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey, recorded by Historic American Engineering Record.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1924-1950

Significant Dates

1924

Significant Person

nN/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arch: Watson, John J.

Blder: Burns Construction Company

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State Agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of Repository

#

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 15 apprx.

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid for Zone 17, Easting 343500, Northing 3022800

UTM grid for Zone 17, Easting 344420, Northing 3022300

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 Mikki Hartig, Historic & Architectural Research Services; Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation date December 2000

street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (850) 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 City of Sarasota

street & number 1565 First Street telephone (941) 365-2200

city or town Sarasota state Florida zip code 34236

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     HARDING CIRCLE HISTORIC STREETScape  
SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
DESCRIPTION

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**SUMMARY**

The Harding Circle Historic Streetscape Site comprises that portion of the original St. Armands Key plat that includes the central park/green space; the roadway surrounding it, known as St. Armands Circle (originally Harding Place); nine of the associated medians; and their bordering streets—John Ringling Boulevard and the Boulevard of the Presidents, which the medians divide into one-way paired traffic arteries. The roadways and medians terminate at Washington Drive, which circles the perimeter of St. Armands Key. There are 22 statuary works found on circle and the medians, 20 of which contribute to the historic character of the site. The circular park also features eight sculptured light standards dating from the 1960s that should be considered noncontributing. The non-historic concrete benches and other minor street furniture, objects, and structures found within the boundaries of the site have not been included in the resource count. No buildings or major structures are included in the resources comprising this nomination. Although most of the statues remain in their original locations, a few have been relocated over time within the boundaries of the site by the City of Sarasota during the course of repairing and improving infrastructure on the island. Encompassing approximately 15 acres, the site is distinguished by palmettos, date palms, cedars, and other trees and ornamental plantings that reflect the intent of the original c. 1925 landscape plan for the St. Armands Key subdivision. Many of the mature palmettos and other large trees date from the 1920s; however, in some cases new trees have replaced those that were lost through disease and weather attrition over the years. Some new tree species, and most of the shrubs and smaller ornamental vegetation, were planted during the 1960s and later. All the major site and landscape design elements lend the central area of St. Armands Key a distinctive sense of time and place that is unique in the city of Sarasota.

**SETTING**

St. Armands Key is an approximately 150 acre island (Photo 1) located in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of the mainland of Sarasota, Florida, which is situated on the west coast of central Florida. St. Armands Key is reached from the Sarasota mainland via the John Ringling Causeway which crosses Coon Key, the location of the Sarasota Yacht Club and some exclusive condominiums and residences. Other causeways and bridges connect St. Armands Key with Lido Key to the west, Longboat Key to the north, and Bird Key to the east. Vistas from the bridges and causeways provide a spectacular view of the downtown Sarasota skyline and the surrounding islands in Sarasota Bay. The oval shaped St. Armands Key has both residential and commercial sections, with the commercial section bordering St. Armands Circle and its immediately adjacent medians. The commercial area contains no historic buildings. Two large vehicle parking lots located northeast and southeast of the commercial center of St. Armands Key serve shoppers and tourists visiting the island. The surrounding residential area, which occupies most of the remaining sections of the island is distinguished by curvilinear streets and contains mainly middle to higher income houses, all but a few of which are less than fifty years old. The residential areas are also feature large palms, palmettos, and a wide variety of ornamental plantings suitable to a subtropical environment.

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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
DESCRIPTION

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**PRESENT AND ORIGINAL DESCRIPTION**

Pre-1960s Deterioration of the Site

Laid out as the major landscape design element of the St. Armands Subdivision during the 1920s, Harding Circle and the landscaped medians were meant to be prime visual focal points for the island, whose development plan called for a central commercial center with generous automobile parking facilities at the rear of the business establishments and for residential blocks of various generous sizes to accommodate moderate to high priced single family residences. The development failed with the collapse of the Florida Real Estate Boom in 1926, and few buildings were actually constructed in the subdivision before the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The subdivision remained largely neglected until after World War II. Today, the island is almost completely built up, with single family dwellings and a thriving commercial center. During the years between 1930 and 1960, the plantings on Harding Circle and its associated medians, or promenades, had suffered from neglect and disease, or had been allowed to be naturally supplanted by other species, and were subsequently lost. Some original trees and plant materials were also destroyed by a 1950s sewer replacement project.

By the 1960s, the deplorable condition of the landscaping and plant materials on Harding Circle and along the medians had drawn public attention and prompted the City of Sarasota to take action for improvements. In 1965, plans were made and work was undertaken to re-landscape Harding Circle and its associated medians utilizing the services of Fred Stresau, landscape architect. Stresau served as the city's landscape consultant beginning in 1960.<sup>1</sup> Stresau's 1965-1966 St. Armands work also included the paving with concrete of the original shell sidewalk areas and the installation of concrete curbing around the medians.

Present Appearance

The entrance to the St. Armands Subdivision proper is marked by a low, divided curving wall at the intersection of Ringling Causeway and Washington Drive which presents a formal gateway to a self-contained community. At the center of this wall stands a statue of an ancient Roman general holding pomegranates and grapes (Photos 2-3). At the west end of the median is the marble statue of a lion, sitting on his haunches, with one of his front paws holding a shield (Photo 4). On the next median is a statue of the god Bacchus (Photo 5), a cluster of grapes in his hand. At the other end of the median, facing St. Armands Circle, is a statue of the Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo (Photo 6), with a chisel in his hand. The major landscaping elements on the medians along John Ringling Boulevard leading to St. Armands Circle and the Circle are Sabal Palm (*Sabal palmetto*), Southern Red Cedars (*Juniperus silicicola*), and Black Olive (*Bucida buceras*) trees.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarasota Herald-Tribune, September 14, 1965.

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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
DESCRIPTION

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The centerpiece of the historic site is Harding Circle, an approximately two acre park that occupies the middle of the small commercial section of St. Armands Key (Photos 7-10). Two one-way lanes direct traffic from John Ringling Boulevard around the circular roadway known as St. Armands Circle toward those sections of Ringling Boulevard and Boulevard of the Presidents to the causeways linking St. Armands Key with Lido Key and Longboat Key. Harding Circle, is a large formally landscaped park with paved walkways illuminated with sculptured light standards (Photos 11-12) and concrete benches (Photo 13) located near the perimeter of the circle. The lighting fixtures feature a Greek head cast from the collection of John Ringling's art works. Stresau designed a pedestal and capital to support the double-faced head, and a light fixture was placed on top. Eight of these sculptured fixtures are placed around the circle.<sup>2</sup> The other light standards that illuminate the sidewalk areas along the nearby streets are non-historic aluminum light posts. The interior of the circle features an open grassy area (Photo 14) surrounded by mature palmettos, cedars, tulip trees, and other trees suitable to the semitropical climate.

The spaces between the walkways on the circle provide areas for lesser plantings and shrubs. Except for some of the palmettos and a few other mature trees, the planting scheme of the circle dates from the 1960s. Other additions to the circle dating from c. 1965 include a flagpole; the sculptural light fixtures; concrete sidewalks and benches; a bronze bust of John Ringling (Photo 15), the circus magnate who played a prominent role in the development of St. Armands and Sarasota; and bronze memorial markers known as the Circus Walk of Fame (Photos 16-17). The markers have been installed at ground level along the perimeter of the Circle at the major street intersections and have been angled for visibility. They commemorate famous circus performers and personalities. New plaques are added from time to time. Three examples of historic statuary are found on the traffic circle. These are the cast bronze copies of the ancient Greek statues entitled the Hammer Thrower (Photo 18) and the Discus Thrower (Photo 19) and the full-size cast stone image of a lion (Photo 20).

On the median on John Ringling Boulevard immediately southwest of the Circle is a marble statue of Christopher Columbus (Photo 21), identified by his costume, globe, anchor and charts. The statue, surrounded by oleander and other shrubs, was donated by the Knights of Columbus for placement on the site during the 1970s. At the south end of the median is a marble statue of the goddess Venus rising from the sea (Photo 22). The nude female figure exhibits the traditional motif of a large seashell beneath her feet. The boundary of the historic site is found at the nearby intersection of Ringling Boulevard with Washington Drive, even though another statue (Photo 23) stands on the median immediately west of the intersection. The statue, representing a tall woman dressed in a flowing garment, has lost all facial detail. It was moved to its present location in 1998 from the northeast corner of Gulf Stream Avenue and US 41 on the mainland. The median on which the figure stands divides that section of Ringling Boulevard that connects St. Armands Key with Lido Key, an extension of the roadway that does not fully appear on the original plan for St. Armands Key (See Attachment 1).

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<sup>2</sup>“St. Armands”, a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978.

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HARDING CIRCLE HISTORIC STREETScape  
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DESCRIPTION

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Three grassy medians dividing the northern section of Boulevard of the Presidents extend northwest from St. Armands Circle to Washington Drive. The roadway leads to the bridge and causeway linking St. Armands Key with the northern leg of Lido Key and Longboat Key. On the median immediately northwest of the circular roadway is a marble statue of Neptune or Triton (Photo 24). The right foot of the bearded nude male figure stands on the head of fantastic fish, while his left hand grasps the creature's tail. This statue is also surrounded by oleander and other bushes. At the north end of the median, standing on a high travertine marble base, is a full-size marble statue of Venus bathing (Photo 25). On the southern end of the median north of the intersection of Boulevard of the Presidents and Madison Drive is a statue of the god Apollo as a hunter (Photo 26). The loins of the semi-nude male figure are covered in loose drapery. He carries a quiver of arrows over his right shoulder and he leans with his left hand on his bow. At the north end of the median is a marble statue of the Roman goddess Minerva (Photos 27-28). The female figure is shown dressed in ancient Roman armor complete with helmet, breastplate, and a shield bearing the face of a gorgon. Also found on the same median, about 100 feet south of the intersection of Boulevard of the Presidents is a statue depicting a circle of cherubs around the trunk of a tree (Photos 29-30). Melons are placed at its base and one cherub cradles a lamb.

The southeastern section of Boulevard of the Presidents also has three medians. On the northwestern end of the median immediately across from Harding Circle is the statue of a youthful male figure, probably Hercules (Photo 31). At the other end of the median is a statue of a maiden holding a nest of birds in her right hand (Photo 32). Her association with the Roman pantheon (if any) is unclear, but it may be a representation of Proserpina. On the north end of the median south of Monroe Drive is the sculpted figure of the Diana (Photo 33), goddess of the moon, who is often depicted as a hunter. She is shown carrying her bow with a quiver of arrows on her back. Near the center of the same median is the statue of a maiden bearing a garland of flowers in her left hand and having a wreath of flowers about her head (Photo 34). The figure is undoubtedly that of Flora, goddess of springtime, who is usually represented as having a crown of flowers. At the southern end of the median is a massive stone sculpture of a mature bearded man, reportedly Saturn, wrapped in a heavy cloak (Photo 35). There are no iconographical features of the statue that would identify the character as the father of the Roman pantheon, and it is as likely to be a portrait of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the stoic ruler of Ancient Rome (A.D. 161-180) who is often represented as a brooding figure. Another statue of cherubs playing (Photo 36) is found at the north end of the median located just south of the intersection of Boulevard of the Presidents and Jackson Drive. At the south end of the median is a statue of the mythological character Prometheus (Photos 37-38) shown bound to a rock with an eagle tearing at his flesh. According to Greek mythology, Zeus was personally affronted by Prometheus' action of giving mankind the gift of fire which the god Zeus (Jupiter in ancient Rome) had forbidden him to do. Zeus condemned Prometheus to be chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains where every day a great Eagle would come eat his liver, leaving only at nightfall when the liver would begin to grow back once more, only to repeat the process again the next day.



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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
SIGNIFICANCE

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**SUMMARY PARAGRAPH**

Harding Circle and its historically associated traffic medians are significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development. The 1924 design and its features are significant for their association with the original conscious civic planning and development of St. Armands Key. The layout and landscape design of Harding Circle and its radiating roadways and their medians were integral parts of the plan, developed under the auspices of Ringling Isles and John Ringling Estates, Inc., to undertake major development on St. Armands Key and to establish the nearby subdivision of John Ringling Estates as a higher income residential area. As part of the total development plan, Harding Circle and the other landscape elements of St. Armands Key were essential in attracting visitors, investors, and potential residents to the island. Harding Circle was intended to be the central focal point and grand centerpiece of the development of St. Armands Key and nearby Lido and Longboat Keys. The street design and landscape plan were the work of prominent engineer and landscape architect John J. Watson, who created city and landscape plans for many communities throughout the United States.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

Before the advent of the twentieth century, Sarasota's development was mostly limited to settlement by homesteaders and fishermen. In the 1880s, an effort to create a Scottish immigrant community had failed, and for the next 20 years Sarasota saw little growth mainly due to a lack of railroad access to the population and commercial centers to the north. Upon the arrival in 1903 of the Florida West Shore Railroad, Sarasota began to grow; real estate prices began to rise; and Sarasota began to develop an identity as a winter tourist haven. By 1913, Sarasota boasted telephone service, electricity, water and sewer service to most homes within the city limits. The major streets were paved with brick or asphalt, and sidewalks, and sea walls were built of concrete; however, the automobiles using the newly paved streets and roads still often had to share the roads with horse-drawn carriages and wagons.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the tracts of undeveloped property in Sarasota were held by the Florida Mortgage and Investment Company, a group of British developers who had earlier invested heavily in property in Sarasota. In 1910, however, the land holdings were sold to Owen Burns, a businessman, developer, and investor who had come to Sarasota on vacation and liked it so well he decided to make it his permanent home. His purchase of the Sarasota Florida Mortgage and Investment Company properties made him the largest land owner in Sarasota.<sup>4</sup> Between 1910 and 1920, a number of other important persons arrived in Sarasota, setting the stage for development. Among them were the Ringlings of the Ringling Brothers' Circus fame, who in turn brought other influential and prominent residents

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<sup>3</sup>Zender, Kira "Revised Historic Summary for Historic Preservation Element of Sarasota, Florida", March 29, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Grismer, Karl, The Story of Sarasota, The Florida Growers Press, Tampa, Florida, 1946, p. 314.

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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
SIGNIFICANCE

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to Sarasota. Charles and John Ringling, two of the Ringling brothers, purchased property in the area for winter homes.<sup>5</sup>

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

St. Armands Key, originally known as Deer Key, was named for Frenchman Charles A. St. Armand. St. Armand first acquired property on the island in 1887<sup>6</sup> and purchased additional parcels in 1892.<sup>7</sup> In 1893, St. Armand filed a homestead claim for 131.89 acres encompassing three island tracts. In 1894, St. Armand later sold his island property to Angus McGinnis for \$1500, but secured a lease for the use of six acres of the island on which his house stood during his lifetime.<sup>8</sup> On August 1, 1895, a deed was issued to St. Armand as the owner. During the time St. Armand lived on the island, it was isolated and largely undeveloped. Dense stands of mangrove trees lined the shores. The waters of Sarasota Bay around St. Armands Key were too shallow to allow deep draft ships to land at the island, so docks extending hundreds of feet from the shoreline into the bay were constructed to accommodate vessels landing there. Near the center of the island was a high hammock, or dense forest. St. Armand would live on the island until his death on October 12, 1921.<sup>9</sup>

E.M. Arbogast of Marlinton, West Virginia, began purchasing tracts of land on St. Armands Key in 1913.<sup>10</sup> Arbogast also acquired real estate on other islands in Sarasota Bay, in particular, nearby Siesta Key and Bay Island. He initially cleared 30 acres on St. Armands Key for use in truck farming, and made plans to dredge a channel six feet deep and twenty feet wide to allow for the passage of boats to and from the Sarasota mainland.<sup>11</sup> He purchased additional land on St. Armand Key in 1914.<sup>12</sup> In October, 1923, Arbogast transferred his land holdings to Owen Burns.<sup>13</sup> In May of 1924, Burns sold the same property to John Ringling who, in July of 1925, placed the land under the ownership of John Ringling Estates, Inc.<sup>14</sup>

Spurred by the Florida Land Boom, residential subdivisions were platted throughout an expanded Sarasota city limits during the 1920s. The lure of cheap land and the promise of quick profits to be made in developing it swept

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<sup>5</sup> Grismer, Karl H., The Story of Sarasota, Sarasota, Florida, M.E. Russell, 1946, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Deed Book "R", Page 637, dated April 1, 1887, filed March 7, 1893, Public Records of Manatee County, Florida.

<sup>7</sup> Deed Book "R", Page 637, of the Public Records of Manatee County, Florida, dated October 1, 1893, filed March 7, 1893.

<sup>8</sup> Deed Book "R", Page 988, Public Records of Manatee County, dated March 13, 1894, filed May 29, 1894.

<sup>9</sup> The Times, May 21, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Deed Book 38, Page 476, of the Public Records of Manatee County, Florida, dated July 3, 1913, filed July 7, 1913.

<sup>11</sup> Sarasota Times, April 5, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Deed Book 26, Page 486, Public Records of Manatee County, dated and filed April 8, 1914.

<sup>13</sup> Deed Book 12, Page 160, of the Public Records of Sarasota County, dated October 4, 1923 and filed December 11, 1923.

<sup>14</sup> Deed Book 12, Page 160, dated October 4, 1923, filed December 11, 1923, and Deed Book, 15, Page 401, dated May 2, 1924, filed May 12, 1924, and Deed Book 43, Page 484, dated July 1, 1925, filed July 13, 1925, of the Public Records of Sarasota County, Florida.

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the city into a fever of development. Sarasota's rapid downtown development was coupled with the growth of new suburban residential areas, and a burgeoning City having the image of a fast-developing resort community was fast replacing the fishing village that preceded it. Between 1925 and 1926, over five hundred structures were built in Sarasota, half of them residences.<sup>15</sup>

Circus magnate, John Ringling first came to Sarasota in 1912 at the urging of his friend Ralph Caples, an officer of the New York Central Railroad Company. Caples had come to Sarasota on his honeymoon in 1899 and decided to build a winter residence there. Both men envisioned Sarasota as a future metropolitan resort that could attract many people of wealth.<sup>16</sup> In 1917, John Ringling purchased his first offshore property, Cedar Point, today's Golden Gate Point, and in 1922, he began dredging and filling that island. Ringling also acquired property on Bird, St. Armands, Otter, Coon, and Lido keys in 1921. At the same time, with assistance from Owen Burns, Ringling began to purchase property on other islands in Sarasota Bay, just west of the downtown commercial district.<sup>17</sup> Burns had established himself as a major Sarasota landowner and developer, and both he and Ringling were recognized as successful entrepreneurs in the Sarasota business and financial community. Ringling wanted to buy all of St. Armands Key, Lido Key, and as much of Longboat Key as he could secure to create the "Ringling Isles Development."<sup>18</sup>

Initially Ringling called his development Ringling Isles, but in 1924, Ringling and Burns incorporated John Ringling Estates, Inc. and refined plans for the development of the islands where construction work had already begun. Ringling was president and treasurer and his wife, Mable, was appointed a vice-president. Burns, with a 25 percent share of the development company, became vice president and secretary. The corporate charter included plans to construct electric and water services, hotels, golf courses, and to provide steamboat transportation between the islands and the mainland. The development of all of the islands was to encompass six thousand acres and was expected to cost \$15,000,000.<sup>19</sup> Three large dredges were used to build up the St. Armands Key and the surrounding mangrove islands to make the land more suitable for large scale construction. The appearance of St. Armands and Lido keys and the southern end of Longboat Key were entirely changed. Millions of cubic yards of fill dirt were used.<sup>20</sup>

Work had begun in late 1923 in laying out the streets on St. Armands Key (Historic Photos 39-40), although a formal plat for the St. Armands Subdivision of the John Ringling Estates was not filed by John Ringling Estates, Inc. until September of 1925.<sup>21</sup> The plan for St. Armands called for the construction of a casino and wooden pier to help

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<sup>15</sup> "Historic Preservation Element, City of Sarasota Comprehensive Plan", City of Sarasota, Florida, July, 1986, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Matthews, Janet Snyder, Sarasota Journey to Centennial, Continental Heritage Press, Inc., Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1985, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> Public Records of Sarasota County, Deed Book 12, Page 160.

<sup>18</sup> Weeks, David C., Ringling The Florida Years, 1911-1936, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, Florida, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> Sarasota Times, October 16, 1924.

<sup>20</sup> Grismer, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> Plat Book 2, Pages 30-31, Public Records of Sarasota County, dated August 23, 1925, filed September 16, 1925.

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promote residential development on the island.<sup>22</sup> Burns' and Ringling's plan initially included the placement of statues of all the U.S. Presidents along the boulevards.<sup>23</sup> Even though most of the streets on St. Armands Key were named for American presidents from George Washington to William Henry Harrison, the plan for honoring the presidents with statuary was abandoned early in favor of using subjects from ancient Roman and Greek mythology.

Ringling and Burns continued their buying efforts until they held all the islands, except for Sarasota Island (Siesta Key) between the mainland and the Gulf.<sup>24</sup> Most of the property on that island already had been secured by an earlier developer. Some of Ringling's land purchases were easily acquired but a few property owners held out for higher prices. Nevertheless, he and his firm did acquire all of the property necessary for the planned development. The cost of acquiring land was low compared to the projected cost of developing and marketing the intended homes, shops, and hotels.<sup>25</sup>

Most of John Ringling's land on St. Armands was held by one of Ringling's corporations, Ringling Isles, with the purchase money coming from Ringling's own available capital. He held a mortgage on the John Ringling Estates, Inc. property. The main role of Owen Burns, his venture partner in the development of St. Armands and other islands off Sarasota, was mainly as a builder and land developer. The John Ringling Estates collaboration was to be concentrated on the development of St. Armands, even though the subdivision was only a fraction of the much larger Ringling Isles development plan.

In Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus by Gene Plowden, published in 1969, a conversation between Julius W. Boehler, a Swiss art dealer whom Ringling had met in New York during a visit to the island together before its development was underway, is reported. Ringling is quoted as saying, "I want to put in a park here, with a bandstand and benches, and I plan on cutting it up into lots and making a residential section-exclusive as hell, you see? What do you think of it?" Boehler replied "I like it very much. Landscape it with some native palms and shrubbery, put in some fountains and arches, perhaps? You should have a double driveway with a park in the center." Boehler went on to recommend that Ringling go to Italy and Spain to get good copies of old fountains and all kinds of decorative stones. He said, "I think it could be beautiful like a plaza," after which, Ringling invited him to accompany him to pick out what might be needed.<sup>26</sup>

In harmony with his vision for the St. Armands and that conversation with Boehler, in late 1924 Ringling commissioned nationally prominent landscape architect, planner and engineer, John J. Watson, of Toledo, Ohio, and

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<sup>22</sup> Matthews, Janet Snyder, Journey to Centennial, Continental Heritage Press, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1985, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> This Week in Sarasota, February 5, 1925.

<sup>24</sup> Plowden, Gene, Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus, Bonanza Books, New York, 1967, p. 145.

<sup>25</sup> Weeks, David C., Ringling The Florida Years, 1911-1936, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, p. 90-92.

<sup>26</sup> Plowden, pp. 15-2-153.

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St. Petersburg, Florida, to oversee the landscaping work on St. Armands. The project now called for the construction of motor vehicle bridges and causeways to link the development with the mainland, and it was anticipated that thousands of men would be employed by the summer of 1925 in their construction. The Gibson Catlett Studios of Chicago, Illinois, prepared a panoramic five thousand dollar oil painting in 1925 for John Ringling, depicting his highly idealized development plans for the keys up to the planned location for a Ritz Carlton Hotel on Longboat Key. The painting depicted an as yet to be built apartment and "high class" stores surrounding Harding Circle to make it comparable to Palm Beach. Elegant Spanish style residential buildings also appeared in the elaborate panorama. Promenades and boulevards, and an arrangement of water fronts and estates were expected to make St. Armands a renowned resort.<sup>27</sup>

Based on an interview with an unidentified relative of John Ringling in 1982, former Sarasota County historian John McCarthy wrote that Ringling wanted a combination business and residential subdivision focused around Harding Circle. An upscale shopping area would be created to provide fine shops for wealthy customers, eliminating the need for them to travel to Palm Beach.<sup>28</sup> Ringling wanted the adjacent residential section to be the finest residential area in all Florida for the "yacht-owning" segment.<sup>29</sup>

It was for President Warren G. Harding that Harding Circle was named. Ringling named the connecting streets in honor of other Presidents such as Adams, Madison, Jefferson, Harrison, and Van Buren. One of Ringling's most fascinating plans involved the establishment of a winter White House on Bird Key, between St. Armands and the Sarasota mainland, for President Harding. Ringling purchased Bird Key from the estate of Cincinnati industrialist Thomas Worcester. The purchase included Worcester's winter home, the mansion called Edzell Castle, which had been built at a cost of \$100,000.<sup>30</sup> At the time Ringling acquired the property in 1922, Bird Key could only be reached by water, and he envisioned it as ideal for security purposes. The spacious white mansion even incorporated a circle veranda with Corinthian columns like the south portico of the real White House. Ringling had established a friendship with President Warren G. Harding during the time Harding was a United States Senator from Ohio and a publisher of a Marion, Ohio newspaper. Ringling's friend, Ralph Caples, had been in charge of President Harding's campaign train during his bid for the presidency in 1920.<sup>31</sup>

In 1923, Harding made a trip to Miami where John Ringling visited the President in his cottage at the Flamingo Hotel and invited him to be a guest at Ringling's home, Ca'd'Zan, in Sarasota. Harding reportedly said he

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<sup>27</sup> This Week in Sarasota, February 26, 1925.

<sup>28</sup> Copy of notes by John McCarthy on file at the Sarasota County Department of Historic Resources.

<sup>29</sup> Plowden, p. 153.

<sup>30</sup> Sarasota Times, March 16, 1922.

<sup>31</sup> Plowden, Gene, Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus, Bonanza Books, New York, 1967, pp. 144-145, and The Times, December 18, 1988.

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would accept Ringling's invitation at a later date following an already planned trip to Alaska. In preparation of the visit, Ringling bought European art and silver and other decorations for the Worcester house. Ringling purchased a Pierce-Arrow automobile built for the late Czar Nicholas II for the President's use. Ringling's plan for the house, however, was never realized because Harding died on August 2, 1923.<sup>32</sup>

Landscape designer and city planner, John J. Watson, completed preliminary plans for both St. Armands and Lido keys. In February of 1925, he formally released his plans for St. Armands.<sup>33</sup> His design included a central landscaped traffic circle that was to be a focal point of the commercial area of development (Historic Photos 41-44). The original plan identifies the Circle as a "Main Centre." President Harding had died a year and half earlier, and Ringling was determined to name the centerpiece of his St. Armands development Harding Circle. He planned the construction within the circle of a marble memorial to the deceased president, with an anticipated cost of \$30,000.<sup>34</sup> Development plans for St. Armands also called for the construction opposite the circle of four large buildings with shops on the first floor and apartments above;<sup>35</sup> however, neither the memorial nor the buildings were ever constructed.

In April of 1925, Ringling's landscape architect John Watson filed suit against John Ringling's St. Armands property for Ringling's failure to pay his fee for services. His claim remained outstanding until October of 1925.<sup>36</sup> By this time, architect Ralph Twitchell was associated with Dwight Baum, Ringling's primary architect and office partner. Twitchell became involved in the St. Armands project.

Dwight James Baum, a New York society architect, was hired by John Ringling in 1924 to design and build a new Sarasota home for the Ringlings, Ca'd'Zan. Baum established a Sarasota office and was quickly inundated with work. He realized a need for an on-site Sarasota architect. An employee suggested a talented fraternity brother from Columbia University, Ralph Twitchell. Baum contacted Twitchell in Naples, Italy, and offered him a job in Sarasota. Twitchell accepted and in 1925 came to Sarasota. Baum's office employed between thirty and forty people, and Twitchell quickly became involved in all of Baum's operations on Florida's west coast and also took on the duties of supervising of the Sarasota office. Initially, Twitchell was not licensed in the State of Florida and his design work was credited to Baum. It was during this period that Ringling was underway with his development of St. Armands Key and

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<sup>32</sup>Plowden, Gene, Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus, Bonanza Books, New York, 1967, pp. 144-145, and The Times, December 18, 1988.

<sup>33</sup>Copies of original landscape design plans of John Watson in possession of Lillian Burns, daughter of Owen Burns, John Ringling's partner in the St. Armands development venture.

<sup>34</sup>This Week in Sarasota, February 19, 1925.

<sup>35</sup>Sarasota County Times, October 16, 1924.

<sup>36</sup>Notice of Lien, April 24, 1925, Lis Pendens 2, Page 112, and Court Files, Bond for Release of Lien, filed October 24, 1925, of the Public Records of Sarasota County, Florida.

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Twitchell became involved in overseeing the laying out of the main roadway linking the island development to the mainland.<sup>37</sup>

Ringling realized during the early stages of his development project, that the islands would need easier access than was available solely by water. On January 3, 1924, Owen Burns, acting as John Ringling's agent, announced plans for the construction of a causeway with a draw span approximately two miles long, starting from the foot of Pineapple Street in downtown Sarasota. A causeway would extend from that point across Golden Gate Point (at the time called Cedar Point) to a location where a bridge would be constructed across Sarasota Bay to the islands beyond. The dredge Florida, the largest on the west coast of Florida had been acquired to provide fill for the causeway. The cost of the bridge was anticipated at over two million dollars.<sup>38</sup> In May of 1924, a headline on the front page of the Sarasota Times mentioned that Ringling anticipated the start of construction of the concrete causeway to begin immediately after a permit was obtained from the War Department.<sup>39</sup> On January 1, 1925, the first pile for the bridge was driven. Piles were made on the shore of the mainland and transported by barge to the point where they were to be inserted. The first span of the bridge measured 2,000 feet, followed by a 60 foot draw span, then followed by a 100 foot span all 25 feet wide. The draw span was to operated with two ten horsepower electric motors. For emergencies, the bridge could be lifted by hand. The causeway itself was 100 feet wide.<sup>40</sup> Fifty-three percent of the expanse bridging the mainland with the outer islands would be over water with the remainder over fill. The dredging of the channel for fill would have a secondary advantage of bringing it to a depth of twenty-five feet.<sup>41</sup>

Burns Construction Company carried out the actual labor of land preparation on St. Armands Key: the laying of streets and sidewalks, landscaping, and the building of the causeway. Leon Pickett served as the company's engineer. Circus elephants hauled bridge timbers to link the mainland to the St. Armands development. Hundreds of palmettos, coconut palms, and Australian pines were planted lining the streets. Ringling maintained his own nursery for trees and other plantings on nearby Longboat Key.<sup>42</sup> He took great effort to provide the key with a completely tropical and maturely developed appearance to attract northern buyers who would not be required to only envision the island's heavily landscaped appearance several years into the future. A double roadway extended east and west of the

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35. Twitchell, Ralph. Personal interview with Paula B. Twitchell, 1975g, N. pg. from the private collection of Paula B. Twitchell, Sarasota, Florida, and "Interpreting Moods in Sticks, Stones, and Sunshine; The Life and Architecture of Ralph Spencer Twitchell, Patty Jo S. Rice, a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master Arts in the Department of American Studies in the University of South, Florida, May, 1992, Major Professor: Priscilla J. Brewer, Ph.D.

<sup>38</sup> Sarasota Herald Tribune, January 3, 1924.

<sup>39</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Sarasota Herald Tribune, January 10, 1926.

<sup>41</sup> Sarasota Times, October 16, 1924.

<sup>42</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, p. 41.

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central circle, forming a park. The park was two hundred yards long by fifty feet wide. Walks, colored clustered lights, and statuary adorned the circle and these two tree lined park-like promenades at either side to the east and west. A bandstand with a cupola that stood in the center of the circle was completed in late December or early January of 1925.<sup>43</sup> To add color and variety, rows of hedge plants, including poinsettias, hibiscus and oleander, mixed with ixoria and flame vine, were also planted in the circle and along the boulevards.<sup>44</sup>

The efforts to develop the residential section of the island and promote it to potential property buyers required major expenditures of capital. Burns Realty Company became sole agent for the sale of property. Prospective buyers were often taken to the island on John Ringling's yacht, the Zalophus, Jr. and on the Lotus, a utility boat traveling from a pier on Gulf Stream Avenue on the Sarasota mainland.<sup>45</sup>

Planning, engineering, and landscape design were important elements for the completion of the development of St. Armands Key. Much expense was incurred in the landscape and design of Harding Circle, the focal point of the central shopping area of St. Armands Key. Ringling was proud of the elegant design of the subdivision, with its masses of palmettos, coconut palms, Australian pines, and other colorful plant varieties planted on the island itself and along the causeways leading to and from Harding Circle. Italian statuary purchased by Ringling, was also made part of the scheme (Historic Photos 42-43, 45). In December, 1925, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune reported that Ringling had returned to Sarasota after a two month tour of Europe with statuary reportedly valued at \$500,000<sup>46</sup> for St. Armand's Key. On the island, workmen laid miles of water and sewer mains, and paved roads and streets.<sup>47</sup> Approximately \$50,000 in paving costs for streets were expended.<sup>48</sup> On December 7, 1925, the Sarasota Herald reported that 3,500 Coconut Palms were set out on St. Armands.<sup>49</sup>

When the bridge leading from the Sarasota mainland to St. Armands was completed in late 1925, Ringling chose January 1, 1926 for his maiden crossing of the bridge and for the official opening of John Ringling Estates; however, the bridge would not be opened to the public until February 7, 1926.<sup>50</sup> On that day, Ringling led a parade to the island in an open car. Ringling Estates, Inc. provided free transportation by bus to the island from the company's

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<sup>43</sup>Sarasota Herald Tribune, December 25, 1925.

<sup>44</sup>Plowden, Gene, Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus, Bonanza Books, New York, 1967, and Weeks, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup>Burns, Lillian G. Burns, daughter of Owen Burns. Correspondence to Marion Almay Chairman, Sarasota County Historical Commission, dated August 16, 1988, and Plowden, Gene, Those Amazing Ringlings and Their Circus, Bonanza Books, New York, 1967, p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> The cost stated in the newspaper seems to be an exaggeration, even by today's standards. The true cost was probably more like \$100,000, including the cost of shipping.

<sup>47</sup>Grismer, pg. 212, and Sarasota Herald, March 20, 1927.

<sup>48</sup>Original undated paving cost estimate submitted to Owen Burns from project engineer, Leon Pickett, in possession of Lillian Burns.

<sup>49</sup>A gross exaggeration, as any examination of historic photos of Armands Key will show. Most of the trees are palmettos which do not bear coconuts.

<sup>50</sup>"This Week in Sarasota", May 21, 1925, The Sarasota Times, February 8, 1926, and Grismer, p. 212.



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business office throughout the day, every hour on the hour.<sup>51</sup> Thousands of people crossed the causeway to view the new development and enjoy refreshments that were served to visitors.<sup>52</sup> A band played music from the gazebo located at the center of Harding Circle. Initial land sales, including some that had been made prior to the formal opening of the development, were reported to exceed one million dollars.<sup>53</sup>

Ringling Estates was heralded locally as one of the best planned developments in Florida and was heavily advertised throughout the state. It was credited with bringing many new visitors and prospective residents to Sarasota.<sup>54</sup> Lots were being advertised for sale \$3,000 and up.<sup>55</sup> Once the bridge was formally opened on February 7, 1926, John Ringling began promoting the island even more heavily. By May of 1926, it was reported that sales in John Ringling Estates had reached \$1,500,000,<sup>56</sup> and by October of that year, the value of the development of the subdivision was given as \$2,000,000.<sup>57</sup>

The citizens of Sarasota looked to Ringling's development project with great pride. On February 6, 1927, a full page editorial praising the Ringling development appeared in the Sarasota Herald, calling Ringling's St. Armands (and Lido) development projects the most outstanding real estate enterprise of the entire state of Florida. The article also stated Ringling's intention to make St. Armands (and Lido) the beauty spot of America and a great social center for people of the North who would come there to spend their winters. The report went on to say that the construction of the John Ringling causeway, the building of the beautiful avenues and boulevards on the islands, and the elaborate horticultural ornamentation of the John Ringling Estates were an expression of Ringling's ambition to make the islands around Sarasota Bay "an enchanted land." The editorial further proclaimed that the development had already attracted national attention.

The praise heaped on the development and its apparently successful promotion came at a time when John Ringling's fortunes were beginning to wane. The project was not sold out, and only a small down payment had been made on many land transactions. A large number of buyers decided to back out of sales as the overheated Florida real estate market began to collapse. In response to the deflated market, John Ringling Estates announced a "readjustment" in the plan to beautify St. Armand's and Lido Keys, also noting that the real estate company would reduce the

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<sup>51</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Plowden, p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> Grismer, p. 213, and Plowden, p. 156.

<sup>54</sup> Grismer, Karl, pg. 211.

<sup>55</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, pp. 23 & 24.

<sup>56</sup> This Week in Sarasota, May 21, 1926.

<sup>57</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, p. 24.

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purchase price of lots by more than half, including those that already had been partially paid for. New sales prices were reduced. Lots that had been advertised for \$3,000 could now be acquired for less than \$1500.<sup>58</sup> An announcement that the Prudence Bond Company, at the time one of the largest mortgage and bond companies in the world, would make building loans to those who had purchased lots in John Ringling Estates, was heralded to demonstrate the continued soundness of the Ringling development. To reinforce the determination of the lending company to make the venture successful, William Greve, president of the company, and some of the company's officers visited the site.<sup>59</sup> This show of confidence, however, did little to boost sales.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to troubles caused by a downturn in the real estate market, John Ringling and Owen Burns became legally at odds with each other in 1927. Both experienced individual financial losses and legal challenges as their land holdings in the subdivision were swept up in a flurry of lawsuits and financial problems.<sup>61</sup> The further development of St. Armands by Ringling and Burns ceased. On June 13, 1927 Ringling bestowed the \$750,000 Ringling Causeway to the City of Sarasota in exchange for unpaid property taxes.<sup>62</sup> The city officially accepted the deal on February 1, 1928.<sup>63</sup> The deed conveying the bridge and its associated causeways stipulated that ownership of the causeway would revert to John Ringling Estates, Inc. if the city failed to keep it in good repair.

Ringling continued his efforts to sell property on the St. Armands Key during the first part of 1928. Once again, band concerts and other promotions were held on the island to attract potential property purchasers. In a January newspaper advertisement that year, Ringling continued to offer easy terms for St. Armands land, including first mortgage loans to builders made by the Trust Company of Sarasota, of which he was a bank director.<sup>64</sup> Payments on lots previously sold by John Ringling Estates, however, were not forthcoming and, despite his best efforts at assisting buyers in various ways, Ringling would not see live to see his plans fulfilled.

The years of the Depression adversely impacted any further development of the island. The Ringling Causeway was temporarily closed to traffic in 1932 due to rotten wood planks on the bridge. The city had no funds for repairs. In 1933, a Depression era construction project was initiated, and the bridge was redecked.<sup>65</sup> Subsequent

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<sup>58</sup> Sarasota Herald, February 6, February 20, and March 13, 1927.

<sup>59</sup> Sarasota Herald, and March 6, 1927.

<sup>60</sup> Sarasota Herald, March 15, 1927.

<sup>61</sup> Weeks, David C., Ringling The Florida Years, 1911-1936, University of Florida Press, Gainesville, Florida, pp. 224-225.

<sup>62</sup> Grismer, p. and Plowden, p. 161.

<sup>63</sup> Dced Book 119, Pages 454-461, Public Records of Sarasota County.

<sup>64</sup> "John and Mable Ringling In Sarasota Newspaper Survey", produced by The Education and State Services Department, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1984, p. not numbered.

<sup>65</sup> "St. Armands", a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978, on file at the Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources.

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to Ringling's death in 1936, his St. Armands, Lido, and Golden Gate island land holdings were placed under the control of the St. Armands-Lido Realty Corporation, with A.S. Skinner as Sales Director. In early March of 1937, the local newspaper announced that sale of Ringling's island property would begin on March 10th.<sup>66</sup> Few buyers, however, came forward following the renewal of the sale of lots on St. Armands.<sup>67</sup>

Despite Ringling's grandiose vision and elaborate plans for the complete development of the St. Armands central shopping district facing Harding Circle, no buildings other than one or two frame buildings for use as temporary construction offices and the Ringling Estates Sales Office (Photo 46), were constructed facing the circle for over twenty years. Streets and sidewalks deteriorated, and wild native vegetation overran much of the landscaping of the circle and medians. In 1940, a circus family opened a restaurant in the former John Ringling Estates sales office on St. Armands Key. The building was purchased by a German couple in the 1950s, and it became the Coconut Palms Restaurant. In 1956, it was reincarnated as the Columbus Restaurant. In 1972, the building was remodeled to house Cafe L'Europe<sup>68</sup> which remains the building's occupant to date. The building has been altered significantly since the 1920s and bears no visible resemblance to the original structure.

Further development of the island remained dormant until after World War II. In early 1946, efforts were made to liquidate the remaining assets of John Ringling's estate. This involved the sale of a number of residential lots to various prominent and wealthy buyers who perpetuated and fulfilled Ringling's plan for the island to be an upscale residential area populated by wealthy residents. At the time, the island was described as one of the most attractive potential developments on the west coast. The palms that were planted during its early development in the 1920s had matured and still lined the broad parkways.<sup>69</sup> Streets, residential area sidewalks, curbs, electricity, water and planted parkways were already in existence from John Ringling Estates, Inc.'s earlier development. The bandstand that stood on the circle had become dilapidated and was removed in the late 1940s. A few new residences were constructed on St. Armands Key during the immediate post-World War II era, and in 1946, \$150,000 in new homes were under construction on the island.<sup>70</sup>

Development of the commercial property began in earnest in the 1950s. The business section adjacent to the circle saw the construction of store buildings, most of which were described at the time as being in the style of the "Bahamas." Stores and other businesses included exclusive apparel shops, gift stores, restaurants, cocktail lounges,

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<sup>66</sup> Sarasota Herald, March 7, 1937.

<sup>67</sup> Sarasota Herald march 12, 1937.

<sup>68</sup> "St. Armands", a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978, on file at the Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. and historic photos.

<sup>70</sup> Sarasota Herald, February 3, 1946.

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and food shops.<sup>71</sup> New sewers were installed on the island by the City of Sarasota in 1954. In 1955, the St. Armands Key Merchants Association was founded with a dozen businessmen as members. A year later, it was incorporated with 100 members.<sup>72</sup> By 1957, there were 35 businesses on or near the circle. Land values increased dramatically by the late 1950s. Lots that had sold only a few years before sold for \$100 or less per foot of frontage were selling for \$400 or more a foot.<sup>73</sup> In March of 1957, it was reported that the city was considering converting the circle into a parking lot. Merchants Association members immediately made written opposition to the plan.<sup>74</sup>

The original Ringling Bridge, extending from Golden Gate Point to Bird Key had deteriorated severely by the 1950s and was inadequate to handle the increased automobile traffic. In 1959, the 1925 bridge was demolished and a new drawbridge span was constructed north of the site of the original Ringling Bridge. The new bridge extended from U.S. 41 and Gulf Stream Avenue to Bird Key. Beyond Bird Key, a smaller and lower fixed span bridge was constructed to St. Armands Key.

With the exception of John Ringling and Owen Burns' early development activities, the largest physical impacts on St. Armands, Lido, and Bird Key took place beginning in 1959. In May of 1959, the Arvida Corporation, headed by Arthur Vining Davis as board chairman, purchased this very desirable land prize on Florida's West Coast. Prior to coming to Sarasota, Arvida activities had been confined to large developments on the East Coast, where the firm owned the elaborate Boca Raton Club and had developed the Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club. It was the largest land transaction in Sarasota's history. The sale price was \$13.5 million.

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<sup>71</sup>Sarasota Herald-Tribune, November 15, 1953, and "St. Armands", a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978, on file at the Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources.

<sup>72</sup>"St. Armands", a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978.

<sup>73</sup>Sarasota Herald-Tribune, January 27, 1957.

<sup>74</sup>Sarasota Journal, March 14, 1947

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Arvida constructed five new buildings with multiple stores and office units on St. Armands Circle, which were completed and occupied before the 1959-1960 winter season opened.<sup>75</sup> Commercial construction for restaurant and retail use around the traffic circle continued through the 1950s and 1960s, and the last vacant lot on the Circle was developed in 1972 with the construction of the Grenadier and Burl Furniture Company Building. Harding Circle, which has been called St. Armands Circle only since about 1969, has grown into a year-round upscale shopping area.<sup>76</sup> The Circle remains a park-like public space and focal point of the island. Numerous community events, such as art shows, antique car shows, etc., take place in the area. With its landscaped green space, it provides a place of repose from the commercial and tourist activity that surrounds it. It continues to serve as a gathering place, an area of passive recreation, and a venue of musical performances, fulfilling Ringling's original plan for the community.

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<sup>75</sup> *Panorama Magazine*, 1960, page unnumbered.

<sup>76</sup> "St. Armands", a promotional brochure printed for the St. Armands Merchants Association, Gan Eden Publishing Co., Inc. by Arcade Lithographing Corp., Sarasota, FL, First Edition, 1978, on file at the Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources.

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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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### **Verbal Boundary Description**

See attached site map. The site boundaries encompass Harding Circle, St. Armands Circle, and the roadways known as John Ringling Boulevard and Boulevard of the Presidents and their associated landscaped medians extending to the circular roadway known as Washington Drive.

### **Boundary Justification**

The above described boundaries encompass all of the major existing streetscape features, statuary and other physical elements associated with the design plan of the area and its execution c. 1927.

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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

**Current Photos**

1. Harding Circle Historic Parkway
  2. Sarasota, Florida
  3. Unknown
  4. 1998
  5. City of Sarasota, City Manager's Office
  6. Aerial View of St. Armands Key, Looking North
  7. Photo 1 of 46
- 
3. Mikki Hartig
  4. 1999
  5. Historical and Architectural Research Services
  6. Streetscape, John Ringling Boulevard at Washington Drive, Looking West
  7. Photo 2 of 46
- 
3. Mikki Hartig
  4. 1999
  5. Historical and Architectural Research Services
  6. Statue of Roman General, Intersection of John Ringling Boulevard and Washington Drive, Looking West
  7. Photo 3 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of a Lion, Intersection of Ringling Boulevard and S. Adams Drive, Looking North
  7. Photo 4 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Bacchus, Intersection of Ringling Boulevard and S. Adams Drive, Looking Southwest
  7. Photo 5 of 46

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Statue of Michelangelo, Intersection of Ringling Boulevard and St. Armands Circle, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 6 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. St. Armands Circle at Boulevard of the Presidents, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 7 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Intersection of St. Armands Circle and Boulevard of the Presidents, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 8 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Intersection of St. Armands Circle and Boulevard of the Presidents, Looking Southwest
7. Photo 9 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Looking East
7. Photo 10 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Sculptural Light Standard, Harding Circle, Looking West
7. Photo 11 of 46

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SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA  
PHOTOGRAPHS

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3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Sculptural Light Standard, Detail, Harding Circle, Looking Southwest
7. Photo 12 of 46

3. Mikki Hartig
4. 1999
5. Historical and Architectural Research Services
6. Typical Concrete Park Bench on Harding Circle, Looking West
7. Photo 13 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Central Grassy Area, Looking East
7. Photo 14 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Bronze Bust of John Ringling, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 15 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Bronze Plaques, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 16 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Harding Circle, Bronze Plaques, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 17 of 46

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Harding Circle, Statue of Hammer Thrower, Looking Southeast  
7. Photo 18 of 46

3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Harding Circle, Statue of Discus Thrower, Looking Southwest  
7. Photo 19 of 46

3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Harding Circle, Statue of Lion, Looking Northwest  
7. Photo 20 of 46

3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Statue of Christopher Columbus, Looking Southwest  
7. Photo 21 of 46

3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Statue of Venus Rising from the Sea, Looking Southeast  
7. Photo 22 of 46

3. Carl Shiver  
4. 2000  
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation  
6. Statue of Faceless Woman, Looking Southwest  
7. Photo 23 of 46

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Statue of Neptune, Looking Northwest

7. Photo 24 of 46

3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Statue of Venus Bathing, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 25 of 46

3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Statue Apollo Hunting, Looking Northwest

7. Photo 26 of 46

3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Statue of Minerva, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 27 of 46

3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Streetscape, Palmettos, Looking Southeast on Boulevard of the Presidents from Arthur Drive.

7. Photo 28 of 46

3. Carl Shiver

4. 2000

5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

6. Streetscape, Intersection of N. Washington Drive and Boulevard of the Presidents, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 29 of 46



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PHOTOGRAPHS

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3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue Cherubs Playing, Looking Southeast
  7. Photo 30 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Hercules, Looking Southeast
  7. Photo 31 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Maiden with Nest of Birds, Looking Northwest
  7. Photo 32 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Diana, Looking Southeast
  7. Photo 33 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Flora, Looking Northeast
  7. Photo 34 of 46
- 
3. Carl Shiver
  4. 2000
  5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. Statue of Saturn (?), Looking Northwest
  7. Photo 35 of 46

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3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Circle of Cherubs, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 36 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Statue of Prometheus, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 37 of 46

3. Carl Shiver
4. 2000
5. Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Statue of Prometheus, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 38 of 46

**Historic Photos**

Note: Because the direction of the views given below may be conjectural, they have not been keyed to the site map.

3. Unknown
4. c.1924
5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources
6. John Ringling Boulevard, Looking Southwest from Harding Circle (?)
7. Photo 39 of 46

3. Unknown
4. c.1924
5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources
6. John Ringling Boulevard, Looking Southwest from Washington Drive (?)
7. Photo 40 of 46

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3. Unknown

4. c.1924

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. Harding Circle, Looking Northeast Toward John Ringling Boulevard

7. Photo 41 of 46

3. Unknown

4. c.1924

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. John Ringling Boulevard, Looking Northeast Toward Harding Circle

7. Photo 42 of 46

4. c.1924

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. John Ringling Boulevard at St. Armands Circle, Looking Northeast Toward Harding Circle

7. Photo 43 of 46

3. Unknown

4. c.1924

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. St. Armands Circle, Looking North Toward John Ringling Boulevard (?)

7. Photo 44 of 46

3. Unknown

4. c.1926

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. Boulevard of the Presidents, Looking Southwest Toward Harding Circle from S. Adams Drive

7. Photo 45 of 46

3. Leon Pickett, Project Engineer for Burns Construction Company

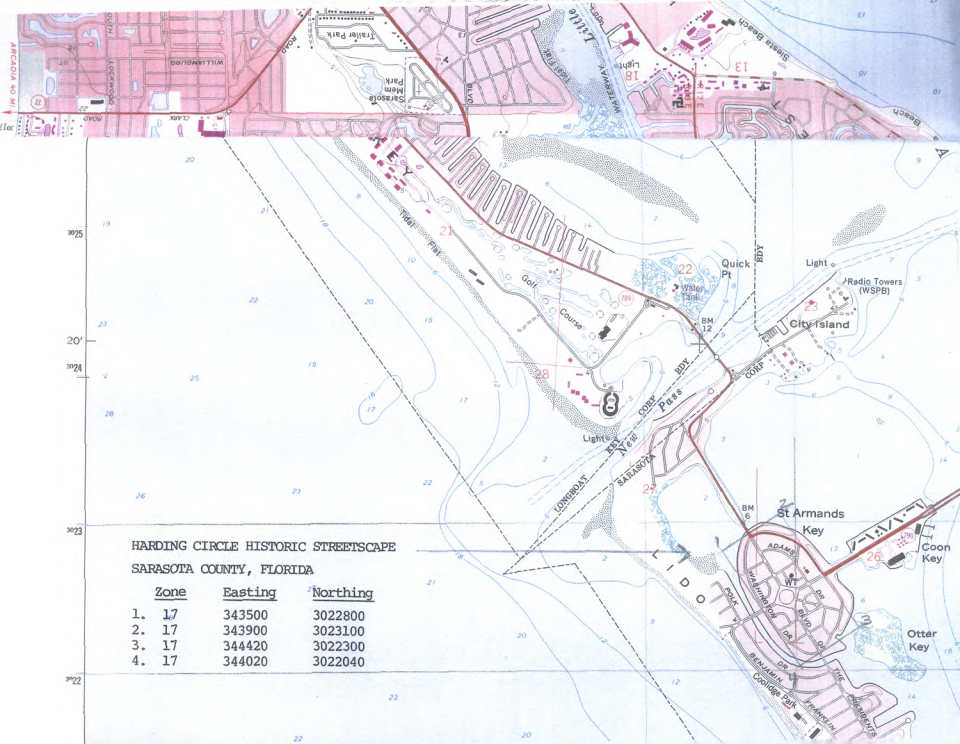
4. Summer of 1925

5. Sarasota County Department of Historical Resources

6. John Ringling Estates Sales Office on Northwest Side of Harding Circle Place, Looking Northeast

7. Photo 46 of 46





**HARDING CIRCLE HISTORIC STREETScape**  
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<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
1. 17	343500	3022800
2. 17	343900	3023100
3. 17	344420	3022300
4. 17	344020	3022040