National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received date entered

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See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

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and or common	Handley House			
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state Florid	a code	012 county	Volusia	code 127
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Category district _X building(s) structure site object	Ownership public _X private both Public Acquisition N/A in process N/A being considered	Status _X_ occupied unoccupied work in progress Accessible yes: restricted yes: unrestricted _X_ no	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park X private residence religious scientific transportation other:
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7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

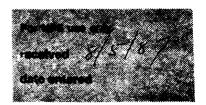
El Real Retiro is a large one and two-story Mediterranean Revival style residential complex occupying an approximately 0.6 acre walled site near the Indian River in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. The city is located on the east coast of Florida, approximately 90 miles south of Jacksonville and has a population of slightly above 16,000. The corporate limits embrace nearly 16 square miles and lie on both the mainland and the peninsula, which are separated by a narrow salt water estuary which forms that part of the intracoastal waterway known as the Indian River. Both the mainland and the peninsula are occupied by residential and commercial structures. El Real Retiro lies in a small residential area near downtown New Smyrna Beach on the mainland.

The main facade and courtyard area of the estate overlooks the 600 block of Faulkner Street which lies to the southwest, away from the river (Photos 1 and 2). To the northeast between the rear of the complex and North Riverside Drive, which parallels the river, one finds the major landscaped area of the property (Photos 3-5). The structures that comprise El Real Retiro include the main residence, a garage apartment, a green house, a tool shed, a detached carport, and a detached former bath house. The major blocks and wings of the sprawling residence are low and boxy, with plain stuccoed walls and hip and gable roofs covered in Spanish barrel tiles. The house is fitted with an abundance of casement windows and French doors, all of which are sheltered from the rainfall by either copper awnings or curvilinear concrete overhangs. Six prominent stuccoed chimneys serve nine interior fireplaces. The property features a wide variety of decorative plantings but is dominated by large live oaks and palmettos. The complex has been divided into two separately owned residences: 1) the so-called South Wing, which forms 636 North Riverside Drive, and 2) the North Wing, which is 647 Faulkner Street. The two units are separated from one another by a blocked doorway at the south end of the "Jungle Hall" (No. 17 on the floor plan) and by a stuccoed masonry wall on the Faulkner Street side of the house.

Interior Appearance (Refer to Floor Plan)

South Wing (636 North Riverside Drive): This one-story wing has three bedrooms (3, 5, and 16), each with its own bathroom (4, 6, and 16). The two eastern bedrooms flank a 48' X 14' raised brick patio that overlooks the landscaped yard along North Riverside Drive (Photo 6). Another full bath (7) is found on the south side of the west patio (8 and 9). Also found in this wing is the former "Music and Ballroom" (10), now a living and dining room (Photos 7 and 8). This 50' X 14' room has a slightly vaulted ceiling, a fireplace with a paneled wooden mantlepiece, and three French doors which open onto the eastern patio. The walls and ceiling feature the same stippled plaster treatment, uninterrupted by a cornice. Perhaps the most interesting room in the south half of the house is the original dining room (12), which now serves as a den (Photos 9-12). As with the former music and ballroom, the walls have been coved into the ceiling, and the ceiling and wall have received the

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same surface treatment. This time, however, the plaster is made to resemble smooth-faced ashlar, rather than being stippled. The room adjoins the former music and ball room on the west. The remaining areas of the wing (13 and 14) are occupied by the kitchen, utility room, and pantry. A stuccoed masonry carport with a flat, built-up roof (1) is found at the south end of the wing.

North Wing (647 Faulkner Street): This one and two-story wing has only one large bedroom and associated bath (24 and 25), the so-called "Royal Suite" (Photos 13 and 14), which is marked by the use of pecky cypress on the walls, ceiling, and exposed beams. The three doors of the bedroom leading to the stair landing, bathroom and closet are also covered with pecky cypress. Moreover, the large door leading to stair landing features wrought metal strap hinges executed in an "antique" Mediterranean style. On the floor below the bedroom, one finds the library (20), which like the bedroom has a ceiling and exposed beams constructed of pecky cypress and an almost identical set of three doors (Photos 15 and 16). Also found in the library are the murals by Robert Lochner depicting scenes from the early history of New Smyrna. To the east, the library opens onto a screened porch. This has a flat roof supported by square posts and a balustrade (Photo 5) Immediately south of the library is a writing room (18), and beyond that is the socalled "Jungle Hall" (17). This was originally the main entrance to the house. This area contains the murals by Lauren Ford that depict Florida wilderness scenes (Photos 17 and 18). East of the writing room and "Jungle Hall" is another full bath (19). North of the library and west of the screened porch is a kitchen/pantry (22), and northwest of the library is an entranceway (23) and a covered walkway leading to the two-story garage apartment (see left side of Photo 19). The garage apartment contains a two car garage (26) with a one-bedroom apartment above. The apartment also features a bathroom, kitchen, and fireplace. It was originally used as the chauffeur's quarters. A small office (27) is found in a one-story addition on the north side of the garage (Photo 19). This originally served as a laundry room.

Major Alterations

The most important alterations to the property, in addition to those mentioned above, have been the modernization of kitchens and bathrooms. Also the present kitchen/pantry of the north residence was added after 1951, when the house became two residences, by converting a former wet bar recreation area.

Non-Contributing Resources

The non-contributing properties comprise four structures erected in the 1950s. These are: A) a storage shed and pump house (29) containing the water pump for the lawn irrigation system, B) a greenhouse (30) constructed of a wooden framework with plastic covering, C) a one-story, stuccoed masonry laundry room (31), and D) a wooden one car capacity carport (32) located along Faulkner Street.

Resources Count

Contributing: 1
Non-Contributing: 4

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1799 1800–1899 X 1900–	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agricultureX architecture artX commerce communications		landscape architectur law literature military music philosophy politics/government	re religion science sculpture _X social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1923-1937	Builder/Architect v	nknown	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

El Real Retiro fulfills criteria "A" and "B" and "C" for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The house is associated with the development of New Smyrna during the 1920s and 30s and with the lives of two of its early residents, who were significant figures in the areas of finances and commerce. The house is further significant architecturally for being a large and rambling example of "Spanish eclectic" style Mediterranean Revival style architecture containing a number of unusual and distinctive interior features, including murals depicting scenes from the early history of New Smyrna and native Florida Landscapes.

El Real Retiro was built in 1923 by Robert Handley, a financier and stockbroker from Long Island, New York, who had amassed a fortune in the financial markets of New York City. At the age of fourteen Handley began work as an office boy and messenger in the stock brokerage firm of Smith, Graham & Rockwell, becoming a partner in 1917. Two years later he founded his own firm of Handley & Associates. Handley became interested in Florida as a result of the real estate boom following World War I. The period immediately succeeding the war brought about widespread interest in settlement and tourism in Florida. This was assisted by increasing automobile ownership by ordinary Americans and a concurrent increase in the number and quality of roads and highways.

Thousands of Americans began to spend their vacations in Florida. Many of these were the so-called "tin canners" who gathered in tourist camps where they cooked their own food and provided their own inexpensive entertainment. Those persons with greater financial resources stayed in the new resort hotels that had been constructed along the seashore, and still others, drawn by the prospect of citrus farming or making a living from the new tourist trade, came to stay. Enterprising businessmen saw the opportunity to make fortunes by acquiring tracts of undeveloped land for little more than the downpayment, hoping to pay the balance—and make a profit—by subdividing the property and finding the financial backing to improve it. It was to men such as Handley that these entrepreneurs turned to borrow the money for such projects. Such efforts had already produced astounding results by 1921 in Miami Beach, Coral Gables, and Palm Beach.

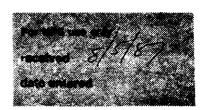
It was the expanding real estate market that brought Handley to New Smyrna Beach, which seemed a good prospect for residential and commercial exploitation because of the availability of undeveloped land in close proximity to both an existing town and nearby beaches. Moreover, New Smyrna Beach lay on the main rail and traffic arteries between St. Augustine and Miami, which seemed to promise a steady supply of tourists and prospective property owners. Handley visited New Smyrna Beach in 1920 to oversee his business interests and decided to make his permanent home there.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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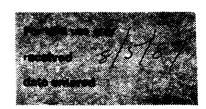
The settlement of New Smyrna had been founded in 1768, during the twenty years that Florida was a British Colony (1764-1784), by Andrew Turnbull who attempted to establish a series of plantations on the 20,000 acres granted to him by the British Crown. The colony was named New Smyrna in honor of the city (now called Izmir) in Turkey where Turnbull's wife was born. Attempts to produce commercial crops of indigo, rice, and cotton ultimately proved unsuccessful, and after nine years the project was abandoned. When Florida returned to Spanish control, most of the remaining settlers had relocated in St. Augustine or had left Florida. During the Second Spanish Period (1784-1821), no attempt was made to revive Turnbull's former plantations, and by the time that Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, the site of the present-day city of New Smyrna Beach had been deserted.

The modern settlement of New Smyrna Beach began only in the late nineteenth century. The Florida State Gazeteer for 1884-85 boasted that New Smyrna was "becoming noted as both a summer and winter resort." However, the community still only had seven houses on the west bank of the river and three on the peninsula. More rapid development of the community seemed assured with the arrival of the Florida East Coast Railway in 1892. The railroad was owned by Henry Flagler, an associate of John D.Rockefeller and an officer of the Standard Oil Company. Flagler had ambitious plans for Florida's east coast, as he had demonstrated in St. Augustine where, after bringing in his railroad in 1887, he constructed three major hotels for northern tourists. He continued to lengthen his line along the Atlantic, reaching Daytona in the autumn of 1892 and New Symrna shortly thereafter. The railroad had been pushed to Miami by 1896 and was finally completed to Key West, Florida's southernmost city, in 1912.

The most densely settled area of New Smyrna in 1895 was concentrated on the mainland along the river, principally in the areas of Washington and Canal streets and Riverside Drive. The population of New Smyrna was approximately 200 in 1895 and had leaped to 750 by 1901. The period of phenomenal growth, however, was just beginning. From 1900 to 1920, New Smyrna grew by more than 400 percent, reaching 2,492 persons by the latter year.

The real estate boom attracted a number of entrepreneurs to the area, eager to develop the new subdivisions that were growing up as a result of New Smyrna's swelling population. Handley's "El Real Retiro" was itself located in one such area just north of the main commercial district. The house was completed in 1923 and was described by the New Smyrna Daily News as being "of Spanish architecture, 200 feet long constructed of heavy timbers with a stucco finish and imported Spanish tile roof." Handley had married Hester Merwin, a native of New Smyrna, whom he had met upon his first visit to the city, and she helped to decorate the house with art and antiques from all over the world. The Handleys also hired the American artists Robert Lochner and Lauren Ford to paint murals evocative of Florida history and landscape in the library and reception hall.

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Robert Lochner (1888-?) was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and was noted as a muralist and book illustrator. He painted scenes from the history of New Smyrna in the Library of El Real Retiro, including the landing of Ponce de Leon in in 1513 and the arrival of Andrew Turnbull in 1767. The works took Lochner nearly a year to complete, during which time he resided in New Smyrna Beach. Lochner is listed in the 1936-1953 editions of Who's Who in American Art.

Lauren Ford (1891-?), born in Bethlehem, Connecticut, was an illustrator and painter fashionable from the 1920s to the 1940s. She exhibited widely, concentrating on scenes from the life of Christ and the saints, often setting events such as the Nativity in a New England landscape. Her scenes in the "Jungle Hall" depict a palmetto forest populated by tropical birds and flora.

In addition to being exhibited in various galleries, Lauren Ford's works were reproduced in a number of popular magazines, including Life and Vogue. Robert Lochner, however, appears to have exhibited little, concentrating almost completely on book illustration and architectural decoration. Neither artist appears to have made a major or lasting contribution to the history of American art, as neither their biographies nor their works appear in any standard modern reference works on American artists.

The real estate market in Florida began to take a sharp downturn after a hurricane ravaged the east coast of Florida in October of 1926. Hundreds of buildings in the new subdivisions along the Atlantic Seaboard were destroyed and the land inundated. Much of the property already sold had been purchased largely on credit, the buyers hoping to resell the tracts as they increased in value, thereby paying off the original debt and making a profit. The inability of debtors to meet mortgage payments, plus the lack of confidence in the durability of the new developments, dried up new investment in Florida real estate and the boom came to an end.

Few of Robert Handley's plans for real estate investment in New Smyrna Beach were ultimately realized. Moreover, he began to suffer financial reverses in the stock and bond markets from which he was never able to recover. In 1928 he was forced to sell El Real Retiro to Ohio businessman, Frank D. Bristley, who made the house his residence until his death in 1941. Handley ultimately moved to California, where he died in 1961.

Frank Bristley was born on the family farm near Hamilton, Ohio, on August 15, 1867, the son of John H. and Elizabeth Bristley. As a child, Frank Bristley attended a nearby rural school, receiving comparatively little education in the primitive conditions that prevailed in that day. He was seventeen years old when, in 1884, he walked the fourteen miles from the farm to the town of Hamilton to find work. He was first employed as a stock boy in a retail grocery, two years later rising to the position of manager. After another year, Bristley induced his employer to start a wholesale grocery business of which he became the manager. Eventually, he came to own a one-fourth interest in the firm.

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Bristley later became a travelling sales representative for the Royal Baking Powder Company, subsequently advancing to sales manager and vice president. He held both of these positions upon his retirement. He also exerted a notable influence in marketing methods in the retail grocery trade, first in the creation of the chain store and "super market" concepts, and then in the development of the comprehensive food products processing and marketing companies. As a result of his ideas, Bristley was elected president of the American Grocery Specialty Manufacturers' Association, an office which he held from 1924 to 1926.

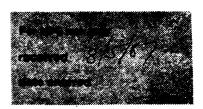
Bristley retired from business in 1927. During his years of association with the Royal Baking Powder Company he had lived in New York City. In 1896 he had married Harriet Shell, a native of New York and the daughter of a local banker, Henry C. Shell. In 1928, he purchased El Real Retiro in New Smyrna Beach as his retirement home and at once began interesting himself in the civic and social life of his adopted community. Beginning in 1930, Bristley served six years as president of the New Smyrna Chamber of Commerce, and from 1937 to 1940 was commodore of the New Smyrna Yacht Club and manager of Region Five of the American Power Boat Association. He also served as president of the Volusia County Tuberculosis and Health Association and was a member of the Elks, Masons, and Scottish Rite clubs, all of which were engaged in various public service activities in New Smyrna Beach. Frank Bristley died on October 1, 1941, and his widow sold the house and returned to New York City.

Architecture

El Real Retiro is a rather large example of that type of Mediterranean Revival architecture known as the "Spanish Eclectic Style." The type is characterized by both symmetrical and asymmetrical planning, smooth and textured stucco on the walls and chimneys, tile roofs with little or no overhang, and casement windows. The house belongs to that principal subtype that combines hip and gable roofs, found particularly on those houses that have rambling compound plans, in which the different units have separate roof forms of varying heights arranged in an irregular and informal pattern.

The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Gothic, or Renaissance inspiration, or any combination of the above. The typical roof tiles are of two basic types: Mission tiles (found on El Real Retiro), which are shaped like half-cylinders, and Spanish tiles, which which have a shallower S-curve profile. Entrances are often emphasized on the exterior by adjacent spiral columns, pilasters, carved stonework, or patterned tiles. Such decorative features, however, may be absent, as in the case of El Retiro Real. The house, however, does have the typical paired, doors with multiple panes leading to the gardens and patios. The major decorative features of El Real Retiro are found in the interior, particularly, the bedroom and library of the north wing, the "Jungle Hall," and the former ballroom and dining room in the south wing, all of which to some extent are based on "Spanish" precedent.

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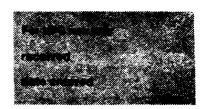
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Houses drawing their stylistic inspiration from Spain were built in the United States as early as the 1890s, but gained considerably in popularity, particularly in California and the southwestern states, after the Panama-California Exposition held in San Diego in 1915. Although isolated examples were constructed in Florida at about this time, it was the work of Addison Mizner (1872-1933), a California-born architect, that propelled "Spanish Picturesque" architecture into the forefront of building activity in state during the 1920s. He made his reputation designing large houses for wealthy patrons, primarily in the city of Palm Beach. Architects in the new resort areas of Florida began to follow his lead, and soon even inexpensive houses in the new subdivision were constructed with stucco walls and clay tile roofs.

All attempts to identify the architect of El Real Retiro have remained unsuccessful, despite the fact that the house was among the largest and most costly residences built in New Smyrna Beach during the 1920s. Although far from the largest or most elaborately decorated Mediterranean Revival style house in Florida, or even the east coast of the state, El Real Retiro was the most ambitious residential project in New Smyrna Beach during the 1920s. Moreover, New Smyrna Beach failed to receive the benefits of the real estate boom to the same extent as some other Florida communities and no large concentrations of Mediterranean Revival architecture are found in the area. It was, in part, the abortive attempt to promote real estate sales in the area that cost Robert Handley his fortune and forced him to sell El Real Retiro.

Therefore, El Real Retiro is significant as a large Mediterranean Revival style house of which no examples of a similar scale exist in New Smyrna Beach. Even though the building is relatively plain on the exterior, its size, large rambling plan, and visual setting make it visibly impressive. Moreover, its interior contains a number of distinctive and unusual decorative features that make it unique in the community. The residence is also associated with its builder and first occupant, Robert Handley, who constructed the building as an elaborate showplace and as a base from which to develop his real estate interests in the city of New Smyrna Beach. Its second occupant, Frank Bristley, had already made a significant contribution to the world of commerce before arriving in New Smyrna Beach by helping develop the chain store and supermarket concepts of grocery marketing nation—wide. During his residence in the house from 1928 until his death in 1941, he contributed to the social and civic life of his adopted community.

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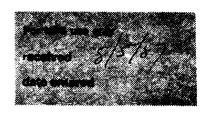
Association with significant events and individuals

El Real Retiro was built at the height of the Florida Land Boom, a major historical phenomenon of the 1920s, by Robert Handley, a successful and prominent financier who had chosen New Smyrna Beach as the locus of his own participation in the land boom development. Well connected in elite social circles, Handley used the property for the lavish entertainment of business associates and prospects until he sold it in 1928, his fortunes having been adversely affected by the collapse of the boom two years earlier.

Despite the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent economic depression, the new owner, John H. Bristley, appears to have retained his financial well-being. Retired from his business successes, he was free to pursue a busy civic and social life. As president of the local Chamber of Commerce, he led the local business community through the early years of the Great Depression of the 1930s. He was, according to the Encyclopedia of American Biography, "a first citizen" of the community, whose "beautiful mansion itself became the center of a delightful hospitality" which he frequently used as a means of promoting his civic and social projects.

Thus, the primary significance of El Real Retiro as an outstanding example of Florida Boom period architecture is supplemented by its role in the commercial and social development of the community as well.

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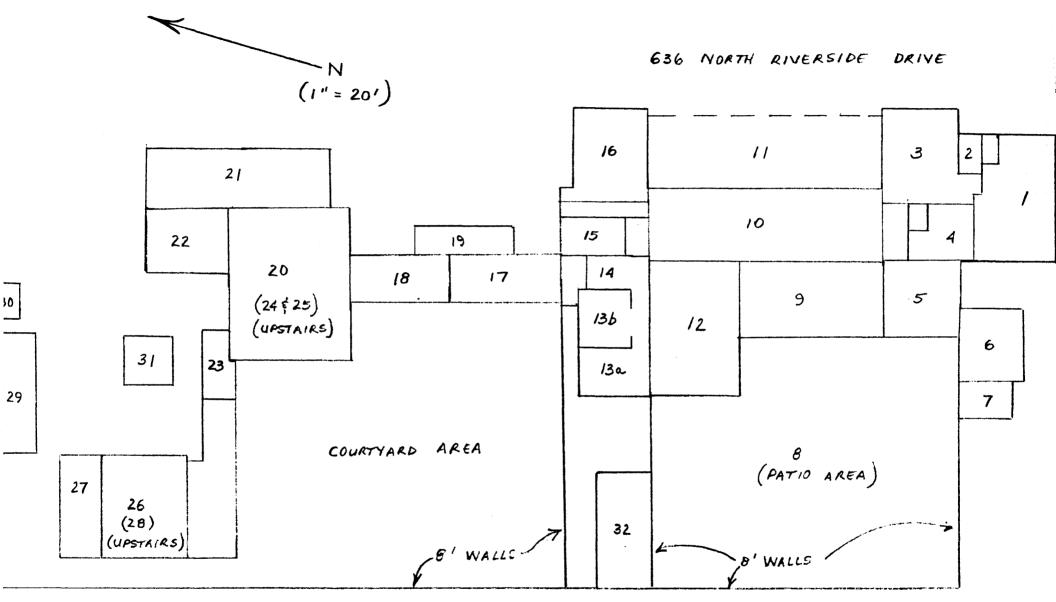
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647 FAULKNER STREET