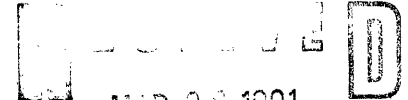


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form

MAR 06 1991

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

Commercial Fishing Industry of Charlotte Harbor, c. 1920-1941

**C. Geographical Data**

Charlotte Harbor, Florida. The area encompasses the waters of the confluence of the Myakka River and the Peace River, Matlacha Pass and Pine Island Sound in the Counties of Charlotte and Lee in southwest Florida.

See continuation sheet

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Suzanne P. Walker, deputy SHPO  
Signature of certifying official State Historic Preservation Officer  
Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

2/28/91  
Date

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Amy Federman  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

4/10/91  
Date

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number  E  Page  1  Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Charlotte Harbor, located in southwest Florida, has been a highly important fishery since prehistoric times. When Spanish explorers arrived in the 16th century, the Calusa Indians inhabiting the area were primarily dependent on its abundance of marine resources for subsistence. The Spanish established fishing operations in the harbor to supply dried and salted fish to Cuba. By the late 19th century, American settlers were fishing the harbor and selling their catches in Tampa, the terminus of the Florida Southern Railroad.

In 1886, the Florida Southern Railroad extended its line to Punta Gorda. Founded in the 1870s, Punta Gorda is located at the mouth of the Peace River, on the northeastern shore of Charlotte Harbor. Punta Gorda became the point for shipping fresh fish to Tampa, where it was then shipped to northern markets. Instead of a single line through town, the railroad track forked at King Street, with the depot centrally located in the triangle of the track. One line of track curved north along King Street to the ice plant, the first one south of Tampa. The other line of track ran west to the Long Dock, the deep water shipping connection for the railroad and the center of the harbor's commercial fishing industry.

Due to the lack of refrigeration, fish from the harbor had previously been preserved by sun-drying or salting. The railroad and the ice plant, however, allowed large quantities of fresh fish to be shipped to distant northern markets. As the demand for fresh fish increased, Punta Gorda became one of the major commercial fishing centers in Florida. In 1897, at least 230 people fished offshore and another 25 were employed full time onshore, with one hundred and forty vessels operating during season. Gill netting for mullet became the mainstay of the area's fishing industry. Spanish mackerel, oysters and channel bass were also major products.

The leading fish companies--Chadwick Brothers, West Coast Fish Company, and Punta Gorda Fish Company--were located in buildings on or near the Long Dock. The Crossland Fish Company and Gasparilla Fishery were located on Gasparilla Island. The fish companies received daily telegraph orders from their larger customers. Orders were shipped out by train in barrels packed in ice.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number   E   Page   2   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

Each company had its own fishing territory and operated an elaborate system to obtain fresh fish from as far south as Estero Bay. Ice houses and residential cabins were built throughout Charlotte Harbor, Bull Bay and Pine Island Sound. An 1897 study of the Florida fishing industry noted the commercial fish cabins located at the entrance to Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River, St. James City, and Punta Rassa. Most of the fish cabins were located on keys or along the mainland, but some were built on pilings out over the water. Freshly caught fish were taken to one of the ice houses where the icekeeper hauled the fish up into the building in a bucket, then separated and weighed them. The boat captain, who usually owned and operated his own boat, was then given a receipt for the catch that could be cashed in at the fish company's office. The money was divided among the crew, with the captain receiving one full share plus a third of each man's share. During long fishing trips, the fishermen slept in the residential cabins scattered throughout the bay. Sometimes house boats, or "lighters" as they were called, sheltered the fishermen.

The offshore houses were easily transportable and were moved to follow the catch. At low tide, barges were driven under each end of the building. When the tide rose, the building was lifted from its pilings and towed to the new location. A third barge equipped with pile driver and water pump was used to jet up the piles and reset them at the new location. Camps were moved as far away as Chokoloskee and Fakahatchee in pursuit of fish. A building could be moved twenty miles in twelve hours.

The fish companies operated delivery or "run" boats in the harbor. At about 4:00 a.m. every morning, the run boats were loaded with 300 pound blocks of ice, groceries, and personal items for the fishermen, who numbered about 400 in the 1920s and 1930s. Merchandise and mail were also carried for the islanders and businesses located throughout the harbor. After deliveries were made, the run boat crew stayed overnight somewhere in the harbor. On the way back to Punta Gorda the next morning, they collected the days catch at the ice houses. Thousands of pounds of fish were shoveled from the houses through floor chutes into the ice holds of the run boats. A pole was used to push the last of the fish through the chute into the boat.

During the Great Depression, the demand for fresh fish declined dramatically. In 1939, a fire destroyed the Long Dock, a devastating blow to the harbor's commercial fishing industry. Many of the fish companies in Punta Gorda went out of business

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   E   Page   3  

Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

and the remote fish cabins were bought by the Punta Gorda Fish Company and the Gasparilla Fish Company, which had fish houses in Boca Grande and Placida.

Following World War II, the building of roads and bridges made the use of land based fish houses more practical. Catches were brought in daily to one of the ice houses on land and refrigerated trucks hauled the fish back to company warehouses. In the mid-1950s, the stilt cabins, no longer vital to the commercial fishing industry, were sold to private individuals for sport fishing.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 1 Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

I. FISH CABINS OF CHARLOTTE HARBOR, c. 1920 - 1941

II. DESCRIPTION

The Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor Multiple Property Group consists of frame vernacular cabins built on wood pilings in Charlotte Harbor by commercial fish companies between c. 1920 and 1941. Two types of cabins were built based on function. One type was the icing station, which was used to store freshly caught fish and ice. The second type was the residential cabin, used by fishermen on long fishing expeditions in the harbor.

The cabins were designed for mobility so that they could be moved to different fishing grounds. Because of this, only the buildings and supporting platforms are being nominated to the National Register. The pilings which support the structures are considered temporary and are not being nominated.

The submerged lands where the cabins are located are leased from the State of Florida by the cabins' owners and are not being nominated.

a. Icing Stations

Icing stations are frame vernacular buildings set on wood pilings that served to facilitate the loading and unloading of large quantities of ice and freshly caught fish. Icing stations date approximately from c. 1920 to 1941 and are located in what were once the fishing territories of the large fish companies of Punta Gorda. They are rectangular in form with a metal roof, wood plank or board and batten siding, and a wood deck. The boards and battens were double thick to allow for insulation. The ice bins were cypress lined and the main structure was of cypress with pilings of lighter pine. A covered open deck allowed the loading of fish and ice through a chute into the hold of the boat. Windows were framed openings with wood shutters that could be propped open when necessary. The icing stations required adequate deep water surrounding them to allow for the mooring of the larger "run boats." Some icing stations had small living quarters for the ice keeper.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number F Page 2 Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

b. Residential Cabins

The residential cabins, constructed between 1920 and 1941, were built for commercial fishermen to use on long fishing expeditions. Frame vernacular buildings, they were constructed on pilings over the water. A deck and dock surrounded each building to provide for the mooring of boats. Windows were screened openings with large shutters that could be propped open for ventilation and light. The cabins were very simple with metal gable roofs and board and batten siding. Bunk beds, dining tables, and chairs were the only furnishings. Rain barrels provided fresh water.

Archaeological Resources

The submerged lands surrounding the fish cabins may contain data of potential historic archaeological significance. These submerged lands, leased by the cabins' owners from the State of Florida, have not been investigated for archaeological resources and are not being nominated to the National Register.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor are significant under Criterion A in the area of maritime history as an example of the buildings used by the commercial fishing industry that developed in Charlotte Harbor around 1886 and continued through the period of significance, c. 1920-1941. They are significant under Criterion C because their architecture, materials, and workmanship reflect the functions of the buildings in relation to the commercial fishing industry in southwest Florida during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Icing stations and residential cabins were significant in the development of the commercial fishing industry in southwest Florida because they facilitated the process of long term fishing expeditions. An 1897 study of the Florida fishing industry noted the commercial fish cabins around the entrance to Charlotte Harbor and the Caloosahatchee River, St. James City, and Punta Rassa. Some of the cabins were built over the water on stilts, but most were built on the mainland or keys. Without leaving their fishing grounds, crews could drop off their catches for icing and storage at the ice houses and then continue to fish. At night or during storms, they could stay in the residential

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   E   Page   3   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

cabins without having to travel back to Punta Gorda. Run boats brought food, ice, and other supplies and hauled the catches back to the Long Dock.

The fish cabins were the mainstay of the commercial fishing industry in Charlotte Harbor from the late 19th century up until World War II because they allowed fishermen to work longer shifts without having to return to Punta Gorda for food, shelter, and storage facilities. After World War II, the building of roads and bridges along the coast made it easier to truck fish catches over land. Fishing crews brought their catches to warehouses on the mainland so that the stilt ice houses and residential cabins located throughout the harbor were no longer necessary.

The fish cabins represent a lifestyle associated with an industry that has flourished in Florida for centuries. With changing technologies and transportation opportunities, it dominated the economy of Charlotte Harbor during the first half of the 20th century. The fishing industry continues to be a major economic factor in the area, although this lifestyle for commercial fishermen no longer exists.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The fish cabins, frame vernacular buildings built on wood pilings, embody the distinctive characteristics of a functional type of architecture. They provide interpretive information on the methods of commercial fishing in Charlotte Harbor, reflective of the industry throughout Florida. The structures have maintained their distinctive design characteristics.

**IV. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

The registration requirements for the listing of icing stations and residential cabins shall focus primarily on association with the commercial fishing industry as it was practiced in Charlotte Harbor from 1920 to 1941. Structures in Charlotte Harbor that served the function of storing ice and fish for transshipment to northern markets shall qualify as icing stations under these requirements. Structures in the harbor that served the function of residential cabins for commercial fishermen shall qualify as residential cabins under these requirements.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   E   Page   4   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

Physical alterations are considered appropriate because of the demands of extreme weather conditions. The replacement of roofs, siding, decks, docks, and pilings has been a necessity over the years to maintain the existence of the structures in their waterborne environment. Replacement materials have been largely of similar materials. The interiors of the buildings have remained essentially intact.



---

**G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

---

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

---

**H. Major Bibliographical References**

---

See continuation sheet.

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency

- Local government  
 University  
 Other

Specify repository: Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation

---

**I. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title Tulie W. Taylor-Historic Sites Specialist Gladys Cook-Consultant  
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date 12-10-1990  
street & number 500 South Bronough St. telephone (904) 487-2333  
city or town Tallahassee state FL zip code 32399-0250

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   G   Page   1   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

## IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

The Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor were identified and recorded on the Florida Master Site File as a result of historic resource surveys conducted in Charlotte County and Lee County. Extensive field work combined with personal interviews and historical research led to the identification of these structures as historic resources. The criteria for listing on the surveys was modeled from the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Historic Properties Survey of Charlotte County, Florida, identified the fish cabins located in Bull Bay. The study recommended that the buildings be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and stated:

The most historically significant buildings found in Charlotte County are probably the "stilt houses" or "fish houses" located in Bull Bay at the entrance to Charlotte Harbor.

The historic context of commercial fishing was determined based on a major industrial activity type that occurred and continues to occur in the coastal areas of Florida. This activity has been of such importance as to shape the development of many coastal towns and cities and is therefore considered to be broad enough to share in representing the overall development of Florida's history.

The Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor are identified as a property type according to their original construction purpose and use for many years, that of serving the needs of commercial fishing. The main activities were ice and fish storage and residential.

The physical condition and integrity of the buildings is in a constant state of change due to the extreme weather conditions that they must endure. Therefore, it is the association of the buildings with the fishing industry that is of greater importance, even though alterations made can be considered to maintain the historic integrity of the buildings.

The Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor are evaluated for significance at the state level. Although the buildings included in this nomination served the local fishing economy, they are representative of a system of commercial fishing that was common

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

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number   G   Page   2   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

along the southwest coast of Florida and formed a significant segment of a major statewide industry.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number   H   Page   1   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Survey Reports

Adams, William R. and Robert Steinbach. "Historic Properties Survey of Charlotte County, Florida," Manuscript on file, Florida Division of Historical Resources, Tallahassee. 1989.

Florida Preservation Services. "Lee County Historic Sites Survey," Manuscript on file, Florida Division of Historical Resources, Tallahassee. 1986.

Books

Covington, James W. The Story of Southwest Florida. New York, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc. 1957.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee. A Field Guide to American Houses. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York. 1984.

Pettengill, George W. The Story of the Florida Railroads, 1834-1903. Boston, 1952.

Tebeau, Charlton W. A History of Florida. Updated Version. University of Miami Press, Coral Gables, Florida. 1971, 1980.

Articles

Covington, James W. "Trade Relations Between Southwest Florida and Cuba, 1600-1840," Florida Historical Quarterly; 38: 114.

Peeples, Vernon. "Charlotte Harbor Division of the Florida Southern Railroad," Florida Historical Quarterly; 58: 1980. 291.

Maps

Cram. Railroad and County Map of Florida. 1895.

Florida Southern Railway Co. New Sectional Map of Florida. 1888.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Punta Gorda. 1909.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Punta Gorda. 1914.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   H   Page   2   Fish Cabins of Charlotte Harbor

---

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Punta Gorda. 1925.