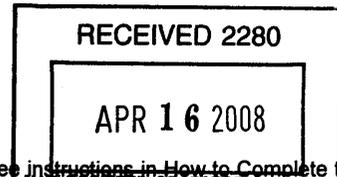


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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 the appropriate boxes by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For "not applicable" conditions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE

other names/site number Fink & Boyle Law Offices

2. Location

street & number 2050 McGregor Boulevard N/A not for publication

city or town Fort Myers N/A vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Lee code 071 zip code 33901-3420

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.)

Barbara C. Mattick / DSHPO 4/10/08
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Edson H. Beall 5-29-08
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	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE/Funeral Home

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL STYLES Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Wood

roof Metal

other Stuccoed Veranda Arches

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.)

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENTARCHITECTURE**Period of Significance**c. 1885-c. 1925**Significant Dates**c. 1885c. 1925**Significant Person**Towles, William H.**Cultural Affiliation**N/A**Architect/Builder**Arch: UnknownBlder: Unknown**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of Repository

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	4 1 3 0 2 0	2 9 4 6 6 8 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mikki Hartig, Historic Consultant/Carl Shiver, Historic Preservationist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date March 2008

street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Michael G. Fink, Fink & Boyle, P.A. Attorneys at Law

street & number 2050 McGregor Boulevard telephone (239) 337-1303

city or town Fort Myers state Florida zip code 33901

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

TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

Built in 1885, the William H. Towles House, located at 2050 McGregor Boulevard, is an example of a large, two-story, late nineteenth century residence exhibiting characteristics of the Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival styles. The building has a rectangular ground plan and rests on a continuous concrete foundation. The building is sheathed in weatherboard siding and features a veranda that embraces two elevations. The veranda and main roof are surfaced in standing seam metal roofing. Hipped roof dormers with paired multi-light wood windows and with standing seam metal roofs are found on the main facade and north elevation of the main roof. Wide overhangs, rafter tails and screened attic vents, extend beyond the walls of the main block of the house. A one-story veranda embraces the building on the main facade and southwest elevation. The hipped roof porch also has a standing seam metal roof. A one-story c.1956 addition, with a flat built-up roof, is found at the northeast corner of the former residence. The house was originally oriented to the northeast, facing the corner of McGregor Boulevard and Cleveland Avenue, but in 1930, it was moved farther south on its building lot and its facade turned to face McGregor Boulevard. To save the building from demolition, the building was moved in 2004 to its present location on the opposite side of McGregor Boulevard. The main facade was oriented toward McGregor Boulevard to preserve as much as possible its original ambience. The new owners undertook a major rehabilitation that included removal of vinyl siding, the restoration of original windows, and restoration of the interior. A handicapped access ramp was constructed at the southwest porch entrance, which is now the main entrance to the building. The original front steps were removed and the space between the piers filled with a wooden balustrade. All of that work was approved and completed as part of a Federal Rehabilitation Tax Project.

SETTING

Fort Myers is the county seat and commercial center of Lee County, Florida. As of July 1, 2006, the city had a population of 60,531, and the population estimate for the greater metropolitan area was 571,344. Known as a tourist center, Lee County is located in Southwest Florida where it is bordered by Charlotte Harbor and the Gulf of Mexico on the west, and by the counties of Charlotte, Hendry, and Collier on the north, east and south. Close to 10 million people (three-quarters of Florida's population) reside within a 150-mile radius of Fort Myers. The city is the historical and governmental hub of Lee County. It is the gateway to the Southwest Florida region, which is a major tourist destination in Florida, as well as being a popular place to live for retirees. The winter homes of Thomas Edison (Seminole Lodge) and Henry Ford (The Mangoes), which are both primary tourist attractions in the region, are located on McGregor Boulevard in Fort Myers. The Southwest Florida International Airport is located just outside of Fort Myers, and serves much of Lee County, as well as neighboring Charlotte and Collier counties.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 2

TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

DESCRIPTION

Previous Location

The William H. Towles House was originally an example of a large, two-story, late nineteenth century Colonial Revival residence that was constructed in 1885. At some time in first decades of the 20th century—possibly in the 1920s—its first story veranda was altered to give it a Mission Revival style appearance. Some indications of the development of the house over the decades after it was erected can be seen in the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Fort Myers. The residence first appears on the 1917 edition,¹ located on a triangular lot at the intersection of McGregor Boulevard and Cleveland Avenue, with its main facade oriented northwest toward the intersection (See Attachment A). A 1½-story residence is also located on the same lot just south of the main house. The Towles House exhibits much of its present footprint, except that the veranda occupies three elevations of the building, and there is also a one-story porch found on a rear one-story extension. The only change to the property that appears on the 1922 edition of the Sanborn Maps is the addition of two wood frame garages, indicating that the occupants of the two residences now own automobiles. By 1930, however, the Towles House had been moved to south end of the lot with its facade now oriented toward McGregor Boulevard (Attachment B). The smaller house had also been move to the southwest corner of the lot. The Towles House was probably moved to make way for the construction of the H.C. Sinclair Filling Station —later the Han-Dee Tire Company—which was constructed in 1931 (Photo 1). The 1948 Sanborn Maps (Attachment C) show the footprints of both buildings.² The other residence that had been behind the Towles House no longer appears on the map.

Another feature of the map is the location of the Englehardt Funeral Home at 1521 McGregor Boulevard, not the Towles House itself. Oral history states that the funeral home moved into the Towles House at 1517 McGregor in 1933; however, although they moved from original location on Hendry Street to McGregor Boulevard in that year, they did not actually occupy the historic home until 1954, as indicated by an artwork image of the house that appeared in an advertisement for the business in the city directory for that year.³ The Sanborn Map for 1948 clearly shows the funeral home being located next to the Towles House which was still being used as a residence. By 1964, the Han-Dee Tire Company had moved to a location farther south on Cleveland Avenue. The building at the corner of McGregor and Cleveland was subsequently demolished and used for parking by the funeral home.

¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Fort Myers, Florida (New York: Sanborn Map Company, March 1917), p. 10.

² Ibid., (March 1948), p. 8.

³ Polk's Fort Myers City Directory (Richmond, VA: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954), p. 68.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 3

TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

Present Location and Appearance

Exterior

The William H. Towles House is located at 2050 McGregor Boulevard in downtown Fort Myers at the intersection of Bayside Parkway, about one block west of the Caloosahatchee River near the intersection of U.S. Highway 41 (Cleveland Avenue) and Martin Luther King, Junior Boulevard. A historic church, dating from the 1920s, is located next door. The Edison/Ford Estate, also located on McGregor Boulevard lies a half mile to the east. The building (Photos 2-4) has a rectangular ground plan and rests on a continuous concrete foundation wall. The building is two-stories in height and has an exterior sheathed in wood weatherboard siding. The veranda and main roof are surfaced in standing seam metal roofing. Hipped roof dormers with paired multi-light wood windows and with standing seam metal roofs are found on the main facade and north elevation of the main roof. Wide overhangs, with substantial rafter tails and screened attic vents, extend beyond the walls of the main block of the house. A one-story wrap-around porch embraces the building at street level. The porch has a separate hip roof, also surfaced in metal. A one-story c.1956 addition, with a flat built-up roof, is found at the northeast corner of the former residence.

The most notable feature of the main block is the wrap-around porch (Photos 5-6) which occupies two elevations of the building. The original main entrance to the porch (Photo 7) is centered in the main facade which faces McGregor Boulevard. The original side entrance (Photo 8) on the southwest elevation of the building is now the main entrance to the Fink & Boyle Law Offices. The main block of the building and its 1956 addition, are sheathed in weatherboard siding, but the massive hollow wooden arches and piers that support the veranda roof are surfaced with stucco, probably reflecting a 1920s modernization effort that attempted to imitate a "Spanish" influence. The hipped roof of the veranda has a more shallow pitch than the one covering the main block of the building. A wide soffit featuring rafter tails and screened attic vents (Photo 9) extend beyond the walls of the main block of the house. Openings at the base of the solid balustrade bordering the veranda (Photo 7) allow rainwater to drain from the porch deck. Stuccoed sills run along the bottom of each arched opening, and stucco banding is found at the top of each of the piers from which the arches spring. An arched bay of the northeast section of the veranda that had been enclosed to install a drive-in teller's station by the bank that occupied the house in 1988 was visually restored in the renovation of the Towles House by inserting an arched recess in the wall where the veranda arch was originally located (Photos 10-11). One veranda bay farther along the northeast elevation had already been enclosed around 1926⁴ when the Towles House was reoriented to face McGregor Boulevard for unknown reasons.

The original main entrance to the building is found in the center of the main facade (Photo 12). The single wood and glass panel door is flanked by multi-light sidelights and is surmounted by a 16-light transom. The

⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Fort Myers, Florida (New York: Sanborn Map Company, February 1926), p. 8.

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Section number 7 Page 4

TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

fenestration of the first story of the main facade consists of a grouping of three 9/1-light double-hung sash windows found on either side of the main entrance. Window placement at the second level of the main facade is also symmetrical. A pair of 12/1-light double-hung sash windows flanks a pair of 6 by 6-light casement windows (Photo 3). On the southwest elevation, is the original secondary entrance to the building, now used as the main entrance to the present law offices (Photo 6). A handicapped ramp was added in the renovation of the building. Further along the same elevation is a pair of 4 by 4 light casement windows and a single 12/1-light wood double hung sash window. On the second story are four asymmetrically placed 12/1-light double hung sash windows. On the roof is a hipped roof dormer similar to the one found on the main facade roof that features two fixed 8-light windows.

The c.1956 one-story wood frame addition found on the northeast elevation (Photos 10-11) has a flat roof and contemporary wood stairs with a simple wood railing that ascend to a secondary entrance to the building. A single wood and glass panel door provides access to one of the interior offices. Above the door is an 8-light transom. Two 4-light fixed wood windows are found to the left of the entrance, and a single matching window is on the opposite side. On the second story is a single 12/1-light wood double hung sash window.

The rear (northwest) elevation of the building (Photo 13) exhibits only plain wall surfaces, except for a small 4-light fixed window that illuminates one of the two first floor bathrooms and a rear entrance door.

Interior

The interior floor plan has been altered somewhat over its 122 years of existence that included at least two moves, the removal of a one-story kitchen addition and porch, and the construction of a one-story addition around 1956, two years after the building was occupied by the funeral home. None of the original rooms, therefore, retain their original use. The first floor presently comprises nine rooms, including a small kitchen and two bathrooms. It appears that originally the first floor plan included a living room, parlor, dining room, bathroom, kitchen, and downstairs bedroom. The present supply room was created in 1988 by the partial enclosure of the veranda on the northeast to create the drive-in teller office for the bank.

Upon entering the house from the original front entrance, one finds what was probably once the living room, now a conference room (Photos 14-15). The parlor (Photos 16-18), which now serves as the lobby of the law offices, is accessed from the southwest porch entrance. Double leaf pocket doors occupy the doorways between the former parlor and living room and the parlor and former dining room, now an office. The other major spaces on the first floor are offices. The stairs to the second floor (Photo 19) are found in the present vestibule which was the original hall that provided access to the other rooms on the first floor even when the building was used as a private residence. The vestibule also connects with a hallway leading to the secondary entrance (Photo 20) at the northeast elevation of the building. A small kitchen (Photo 21) is located just to the north of

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TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

the vestibule, as is a handicapped accessible bathroom. A second bathroom is accessed via a doorway found next to the staircase (Photo 20).

The second floor originally consisted of a central hall, three bedrooms and a single bathroom. The floor plan has been modified with the installation of some wall partitions to give the area its present configuration. The stairs to the second floor lead to a small landing or vestibule that provides access to a hallway leading to the receptionist's area and the second floor offices. Another restroom is found at the head of the stairs (Photo 22). Other major spaces are used for offices and the storage of files (Photos 23-25).

ALTERATIONS

Alterations to the house include its c. 1930 relocation and the enclosure of one bay of the veranda on what is now the northeast elevation of the building around 1948. A one-story kitchen addition and rear porch may have been removed at the time of the construction of the one-story addition around 1956 (Photo 10), two years after the building was occupied by the funeral home.⁵ Other changes were made after the move of the building to the opposite side of McGregor Boulevard. The setback of the building was reduced, requiring changing the main entrance from the front of the building to the original side entrance. The vinyl siding installed by the bank was removed and the new owners undertook the restoration of original windows and of the interior. A handicapped access ramp was constructed at the southwest porch entrance which is now the main entrance to the building. The front steps were removed and the space between the piers filled with a wooden balustrade. An arched bay of the northeast section of the veranda that had been enclosed to install a drive-in teller's station by the bank that occupied the house in 1988 was visually restored in the renovation of the Towles House by inserting an arched recess in the wall where the veranda arch was originally located.

⁵ This is represented by the "mechanical deck" and the accompanying floor plans of the building.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section number 8 Page 1 TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The William H. Towles House is significant at the local level under Criteria B, and C in the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Architecture for its association with pioneer settler William H. Towles, who built the house in 1885 and was one of Fort Myers's prominent early residents. He was a cattleman and merchant, and served as a town councilman in the years between 1892 and 1909. He also served as a city councilman in 1911 and 1915 after the town was incorporated as a city. Towles is best known for playing a leading role in the founding of Lee County. He was elected to serve as one of the first county commissioners and served as chairman of the board twice. He was also instrumental in achieving the construction in 1915 of the historic Lee County Courthouse in Fort Myers, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. The building is also significant as an excellent example of a large 19th century wood frame residence erected in Fort Myers that also exhibits some features of the Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival styles. The building was declared eligible for listing in the National Register by the National Park Service on March 28, 1985, but the relocation of the building in 2004 made it necessary to prepare a National Register Nomination for the property.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Ponce de Leon explored areas along Florida's Gulf coast in 1513 and 1521. The barrier islands of Lee County are believed to be one of his many stops. Spanish and Cuban settlers created temporary fishing and farming camps along the coast, but for years Southwest Florida was a rugged and isolated area. Spanish and Cuban settlers created temporary fishing and farming camps along the coast, but for years Southwest Florida was a rugged and isolated area. In the early 1700s the Lee Island coastline first appeared with some accuracy in British maps.⁶

Florida became a United States Territory in 1821, and the ensuing wave of settlers asked for protection from the native Seminoles. Built on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, Fort Myers is located in the same strategic location twice chosen by the United States Army for a military fort.⁷ Fort Myers was named in honor of Colonel Abraham C. Myers, the son-in-law of the commander of Fort Brooke in Tampa. The fort was abandoned in 1858 and reoccupied by Federal troops from 1863-1865. The southernmost battle of the Civil War, a skirmish between Northern and Southern troops occurred across the river in 1865.⁸

After the war the abandoned fort buildings were disassembled, and some of the wood was used in construction of some of the first buildings in what would become downtown Fort Myers. No more than ten families lived in

⁶ "The History of Fort Myers," The Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.fortmyers.org/fort-myers-history.htm>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 2 TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
SIGNIFICANCE

the original town when it was platted in 1876. During the late 1860's, and in the 1870's a number of settlers began to drift into the area, and by 1876 there were enough people living on properly surveyed land to justify officially creating the community. In that year, the plat for Fort Myers was recorded in Key West, the county seat of Monroe County, which then included all of what is now Lee County.⁹

Also during the years after the war, cattle baron Jacob Summerlin often drove his herds past the old fort grounds on the way to Punta Rassa (Spanish for "Flat Point") the port where the Caloosahatchee River meets the Gulf of Mexico. There they were lifted onto schooners and steamers using block and tackle, and shipped to Cuba to be paid for in gold.¹⁰ Cattle, farming, and logging were early mainstays in the Fort Myers area. In 1881, the wealthy industrialist Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia came to the Caloosahatchee Valley. Disston's goal, he made it known, was "to drain this worthless swamp you people call Everglades." By dredging through shallows where the Indians had once traveled on canoe trails, Disston connected Lake Okeechobee with the Caloosahatchee River. Steamboats churned the waters from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee and up the Kissimmee River. By 1885, Fort Myers was bursting with pride and a bulging population of 349, the second largest town on Florida's Gulf Coast south of Cedar Key.¹¹

The next year, the town's school house burned to the ground. When school officials journeyed to the distant Monroe County seat at Key West to request funds to rebuild, they were told there was no money for a new school, and they "ought to learn to take better care of county property." Incensed, the citizens of Fort Myers petitioned Tallahassee to secede from Monroe County. On May 9, 1887, town fathers received word that their request had been granted. Lee County had been born. Fort Myers, named as the original county seat, was soon to gain its long-standing title as "Gateway to the Tropics."¹²

Most of the growth during the remainder of the nineteenth century was in the vicinity of the old fort grounds—presently Downtown Ft. Myers. Virtually all of the early construction was wood frame and very few of these structures remain. During the 1870s, two general stores, a school and a number of private homes were built. In 1876, when Fort Myers was platted, the United States Post Office officially changed the town's name to Myers, supposedly to avoid any confusion with Fort Myer, Virginia. Although local people continued to call their home "Ft." Myers, the name was not legally restored until 1901.¹³

⁹ "Downtown Fort Myers, <http://www.downtownfortmyers.com/History>.

¹⁰ Punta Rassa was an important cattle town in the 1800's, being the point where Florida's "crackers" would drive their cattle to ship to Cuba. The spot figured prominently in the historical novel "A Land Remembered." It also held the telegraph office that first learned of the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Cuba.

¹¹ "The History of Fort Myers," Fort Myers Online, <http://www.fortmyers-online.com/history.htm>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 3

TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
SIGNIFICANCE

A few hotels began to appear during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the first being Keystone, at the foot of Park Street. By 1885, the population was up to 349, the Ft. Myers Press newspaper was in operation, people were beginning to settle along the river away from the immediate fort area, and Fort Myers was about to gain its most famous resident. In 1885, Thomas A. Edison visited the town, fell in love with it, and within two years, he had built his home and laboratory on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River. A colorful addition to the area during this period was the appearance of a number of pineapple plantations along the river. The year 1887 was critical for Fort Myers. Lee County was created (out of Monroe), a new courthouse was built, a second newspaper, the Tropic News, opened, and a severe freeze in the state resulted in much of the citrus industry moving farther south - some of it to this area.¹⁴

The twentieth century dawned with 943 residents in Fort Myers. The growth of the community was greatly facilitated in 1904 with the arrival of the Coast Railroad, with its terminus at a dock on Monroe Street. During the same year, construction began on the Bradford Hotel which still stands on First Street. A power plant, several banks, commercial ice plants and new hotels reflected the increased pace and growth during the first decade of the century. Another notable sign of growth during the first two decades of the 20th Century was the beginning of several residential developments such as Edgewood, Wardwood Grove, and what came to be called Dean Park. Streets were paved Downtown, and the famous palms were planted along McGregor Boulevard.¹⁵

The 1920's brought the "Boom Time" to all of Florida, and Fort Myers shared in the riches. Most of the Mediterranean Revival buildings seen throughout the City were built during this period. In fact, the Mediterranean Revival style, which combines several other prominent architectural styles, typifies Florida during the 1920's. Growth radiating out in all directions from the old fort grounds was to be seen during the 1920s. Still-prominent developments such as Seminole Park, Riverside Park, Edison Park, Valencia Terrace, Allen Park, Alabama Groves and others had their beginnings in the Boom Time. It was also during this exciting period that the Seaboard Railroad came to town, offering competition to Henry Plant's older Coast Line. Today three terminals from this period can still be seen in the city. The opening of the Tamiami Trail (U.S. 41) linked Fort Myers to Tampa and Miami, adding more to the growth of the Big Boom in the 1920s. Growth radiated in all directions until the 1930s. Two devastating hurricanes in 1921 and 1926, combined with poor publicity and inadequate planning, brought a collapse in Florida's boom time. Fort Myers suffered along with the rest of the nation during the Great Depression. Still, there was moderate progress as some of the more elegant buildings in Fort Myers were built during the 1930s.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 4 TOWLES, WILLIAM H. HOUSE
FORT MYERS, LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA
SIGNIFICANCE

The big story of the 1940s in Ft. Myers, as everywhere else in the world, was World War II. Every county in Florida had air bases to take advantage of Florida's fine flying weather. Lee County's bases brought servicemen, and sometimes their families to Fort Myers. Many of these people, and their visitors, came back in later years to become permanent residents.¹⁷

In the early 1940s, every county in Florida had air bases due to the advantageous flying weather. The Fort Myers area had Buckingham and Page Fields, and the city was home to thousands of servicemen, many of whom returned and became permanent residents. In the years since World War II, the city has grown along with Lee County and the rest of Southwest Florida. Commercial and residential growth has pushed development in all directions to create Cape Coral, North Fort Myers and Lehigh, as well as adding to the coastal settlements of Fort Myers Beach, Pine Island, Sanibel and Captiva Islands, and Bonita Springs. Fortunately, the older downtown area and the City of Fort Myers historic districts have retained much of their charm, and proper preservation measures are in place to ensure that charm will be treasured for many generations to come.¹⁸

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, CRITERION B—William H. Towles

William H. Towles was the son of John M. Towles (b. 1820) and Sarah Ann Towles (b. 1829). John Towles was born in Georgia and had moved to Perry, Florida, around 1844 where he met and married his wife, Sarah. "Bill" Towles was born in Perry, Florida on February 28, 1852.¹⁹ The 1860 census for Taylor County, in which Perry is located, noted that his father was a farmer and that there were seven children in the family.²⁰ Around 1874, Towles entered the cattle business and later opened a general store in Bartow. He moved to Fort Myers in 1883, a widower who had a young daughter. Upon his arrival in the village, Towles entered the mercantile business with James E. Hendry, a member of one of Fort Myers' and Lee County's most prominent families. When the schooner Idell of Pensacola anchored at the Fort Myers wharf in mid-December 1884, all hands busied themselves unloading lumber for the dwelling to be erected for Towles. A new resident and a new residence were both uncommon events in Fort Myers, a small unincorporated village of only a few hundred people. Work commenced almost immediately on the home located at the intersection of present-day Cleveland Avenue and McGregor Boulevard, which then lay on the southwesterly edge of development of the village, with only a few widely scattered settlers beyond. In February 1885, after nine weeks of work and an expenditure of about \$2,300, the completed residence was ready for occupancy. The editor of the brand new newspaper, the Fort Myers Press, described the dwelling as "a good comfortable structure" and said that it presented a good appearance.²¹ Shortly after the home was completed Towles' daughter and mother arrived. His mother helped

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Grismer, Karl H., The Story of Fort Myers, a facsimile reproduction of the 1949 edition with a foreword by Ernest W. Hall, A Southwest Florida Historical Society Book, The Island Press Publishers, Fort Myers Beach, Florida 1982, p. 286.

²⁰ 1860 Taylor County, Florida Census Transcription, <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/fl/taylor/census/1860.txt>.

²¹ Mary Hanson, "Towles Englehardt Home," Preservation News (Fort Myers: Lee Trust for Historic Preservation, Spring 2003), p. 3.

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put the finishing touches on the house before she returned to Bartow. William Towles daughter remained with him in Fort Myers.²²

William Towles and his partner James Hendry, opened a general store at the southwest corner of First and Jackson Streets. Together, they proceeded to commission the construction of a wharf at the end of Jackson Street in 1885. It was the second largest dock on the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers at that time.²³ Around 1887, Towles dissolved his partnership with Hendry and began focusing on the cattle business, becoming one of the leading cattlemen in the state.²⁴ He established a lucrative trade shipping cattle to Key West and to markets in northern states. He bought a schooner to facilitate the operation and by 1887 owned a line of steamer ships and a warehouse on Jackson Street.²⁵ The cattle business had been in the doldrums since the end of the Cuban insurrection in 1878. It had been kept alive by shipping livestock to the Key West market and some northern locations, but the demand had not been strong enough to keep the price up, and quality steers were bringing only \$8.00 a head. When the U.S. occupation forces took over Cuba after the Spanish-American War in 1898, the demand for cattle soared and so did the price. Within three months after the end of hostilities, steers were bringing in \$15.00 a head, and shortly thereafter jumped to \$18.00.²⁶ On a single day in 1900, Towles and his business associates shipped 2,747 head to Cuba out of the nearby port at Punta Rassa. Towles established his own steamship line with docks in Fort Myers and Tampa. In 1901, Towles purchased the schooner Lilly White to ship cattle and other cargo to various markets. The ship operated in Gulf waters until 1910 when the vessel caught fire while docked at Towles' wharf in Tampa and burned to the waterline.²⁷ Towles' increase in wealth spurred him to build another dwelling for his family in 1900 at 158 Fowler Street. Towles continued to own the original family home until his death in 1921, renting it out to several Fort Myers families.²⁸ The house on Fowler Street was demolished in c.1968 and the site is now occupied by a modern commercial building.²⁹

Towles is best known for the leading role he played in the founding of Lee County.³⁰ He served as a town councilman in 1892, 1903, 1904, 1907 and 1909. He went on to serve as a city councilman in 1911 and 1915 after the city was incorporated.³¹ He was elected to serve as one of the first county commissioners and served as chairman of the board twice.³² He zealously worked to secure civic improvements to the town. Beginning

²² Towles' first wife, Lydia, had died while he resided in Bartow, Florida; U.S. Federal Census for Florida, 1880.

²³ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, September 1914, p. 1.

²⁴ Grismer, pp. 286-287.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 196.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 160

²⁸ Board, Prudy Taylor, and Colcord, Esther B., Historic Fort Myers, Donning Company Publishers, 1992, p. 17.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ He is credited with selecting the county name in honor of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Grismer, p. 199.

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in 1897, Towles led a movement to obtain a courthouse building for the newly established Lee County.³³ For the first years the county's governmental business was conducted on the second floor of the general store that Towles and Hendry had established at First and Jackson Streets. A small wood frame structure was constructed a few years later to serve as a courthouse, but Towles did not consider it adequate or substantially impressive enough for the growing county. He spent several years in an attempt to get the courthouse built and was said to be in large part responsible for finally successfully accomplishing the task in 1914 by seeing that the old courthouse was burned to the ground, thus necessitating the construction of a new structure, the courthouse that continues in use by Lee County.³⁴

Towles was active in community affairs. He was vice president of the local Board of Trade. He helped organize the First National Bank of Fort Myers.³⁵ Towles was married twice. He was widowed by his first wife, the mother of his oldest daughter, Corrine. He married Wilhelmina "Willie" Boyd in Fort Myers in 1899.³⁶ He fathered another daughter, Mildred and one son, Wallace (1902-1978). Wallace married Ester Cooper. Corrine married into the Summerlin family another prominent early large landholder in Fort Myers. William H. Towles died in Fort Myers on June 25, 1921.³⁷ His wife followed him in death in 1945. They are both buried in the Fort Myers Cemetery. Their son, Wallace, rests nearby.³⁸

After William Towles death in 1921, his family retained ownership of the property until around 1930 when the house was relocated for the first time. It remained a private residence until 1954 when the building became the headquarters of the Louis Englehardt Funeral Home.³⁹ The firm, under the name the Leo Englehardt Funeral Home (Photo 26) remained in the Towles house until 1988. The business was merged into the Harvey-Englehardt-Metz Funeral Home and moved to 1600 Colonial Boulevard.

In 1988, the South Florida Bank purchased the property for use as their downtown headquarters (Photo 27). The conversion of the property for use as a bank resulted in modifications to both the exterior of the building as well as the modernization and upgrading of the interior and its mechanical systems. In 1989, the newly renamed Fifth Third Bank of Fort Myers converted the building into a branch office. In 2002, the bank declared the building no longer adequate for their needs and announced their intention to demolish it. In 2003, they applied for a demolition permit to raze the building.⁴⁰ Public outcry and sentiment for the historic significance of the structure and fear of its loss led to a dedicated effort on behalf of the banking institution to find an alternative.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 287.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 172.

³⁶ Fort Myers Press, June 26, 1921

³⁷ Ibid. p. 287.

³⁸ Fort Myers Cemetery Records, http://www.interment.net/data/us/fl/lee/ftmyers/ftmyer_tv.htm.

³⁹ Polk's Fort Myers City Directory (Richmond, VA: R.L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954), p. 68.

⁴⁰ Ft. Myers News Press, March 20, 2003.

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The bank attempted to locate an individual or organization willing to relocate the structure from its original site. They were successful in their efforts. In early 2004, Fink and Boyle, P.A. and Michael W. Leonard, P.A., attorneys at law, stepped forward with a plan to save and relocate the structure. As a gesture to the community and of cooperation, Fifth Third Bank contributed significantly towards the cost of the relocation and the building was moved to its present site that year. The new site is directly opposite of the original site on McGregor Boulevard but with its primary facade oriented in the opposite direction (See Attachment D). The new owners, not only detached the non-historic one-story addition prior to the move but undertook major rehabilitation which included removal of vinyl siding, restoration of some original window openings and interior restoration and some upgrades, primarily plumbing and mechanical in nature. All of that work was approved and completed as part of a Federal Rehabilitation Tax Project. (Project 14604).

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Colonial Revival was a nationalistic architectural style and interior design movement in the United States that became popular after the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 reawakened Americans to their colonial past. Colonial Revival sought to follow the Colonial style of the period around the Revolutionary War, usually having a simple rectangular ground plan, being two stories in height with the ridge pole running parallel to the street, a symmetrical front facade with an accented doorway and evenly spaced windows on either side of it. Front doors, often with decorative crown pediments and overhead fanlights, or transoms and sidelights are typical elements. Window openings, while symmetrically located on either side of the front entrance, were usually hung in adjacent pairs or in triple combinations rather than as single windows. Double-hung wood sash windows with multi-light upper sashes—9/1-light and 12/-1 light—are common in late 19th century examples. Verandas, side porches or sunrooms were common additions to these homes, introducing modern comforts. Both side-gabled and hipped main roofs were widely used and dormer windows were also popular. Floor plans followed late 19th century tastes for comfort, often continuing Queen Anne traditions, rather than adopting central halls for access to all parts of the house. Wood examples were often sheathed in weatherboard.

The Towles House exhibits many of these Colonial Revival features, with the exception of the massive Mediterranean Revival style arches, piers, and balustrade wall that became popular in Florida during the real estate boom of the 1920s which used variations of the Mediterranean Revival as its signature style. Its adoption by the Towles House is certainly unusual if not unique, producing a hybrid, even mutant, style that is very distinctive. Changes of style to houses constructed in the 19th century was fairly common in Florida by the first two decades of the 20th century. This was sometimes a matter of taste—the elaborate Queen Anne houses had fallen out of favor—but also one of practicality. The hot, moist climate of Florida caused the wooden columns and delicate millwork found on porches to deteriorate rapidly, and their replacement could be expensive. Chinsegut Hill Manor House (N.R. 11/28/03) built near Brooksville, Florida, around 1847, had its veranda fitted with bungalow style columns c. 1925. California was the birthplace of the Mission Revival style beginning in the 1890s, but spread eastward rapidly, quickly taking root in Florida even before the beginning of the 1920s

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real estate boom era when Spanish and Mediterranean Revival architecture became the signature style for the state's rapidly growing cities and residential neighborhoods. Mission style houses were much simpler than the sometimes elaborately decorated Spanish Colonial style houses. Typical features of Mission style houses were rounded and stepped roof parapets, smooth stucco walls, and porch roof supported by thick arches resting on large, square piers. The wide eaves and hipped roof of the Towles House—also found on some variations of the Mission Revival style—may have led the owner of the house c. 1925 to consider an arcaded porch to be an appropriate modernization.

Criterion Consideration B—A Property Removed from its Original Location

In early 2004, Fink and Boyle, P.A. and Michael W. Leonard, P.A., attorneys at law, stepped forward with a plan to save and relocate the structure. The bank agreed to sell the Towles House to the law firm for \$1. The attorneys declared their intention to use the historic home as their new law offices. The bank contributed \$40,000 to defray part of the \$120,000 cost of moving the house and building a new continuous concrete block foundation to replace the original piers. Preparation for the move took several weeks, but the move itself only took about two hours. On Saturday, February 14, 2004, workers moved the home right across the street from 2017 McGregor Boulevard to 2050 McGregor Boulevard (Attachment D). In 1985, the National Park Service and State of Florida had certified that the Towles Englehardt Home was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and the Fort Myers Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the home receive local designation as well.⁴¹ The building was renovated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The former site of the property remains vacant except for an abandoned one-story wood frame building (Photo 28).

⁴¹ "Towles Home Update," Preservation News (Ft. Myers, FL: Lee Trust For Historic Preservation, Spring 2004). p. 6.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

BAYSIDE PARK, PB 8 PG 72, LOT 2 PARCEL 23-44-24-P2-00300.0020

Boundary Justification

The above parcel includes all resources, plus the present parking lot, associated with the historic former residential structure known as the William H. Towles House.

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LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. William H. Towles House
2. 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Lee, Ft. Myers, Florida
3. Unknown
4. c. 1931
5. Michael Fink, 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL 33901
6. Han-Dee Tire Company, Looking South at Intersection of McGregor Blvd. and Cleveland Ave.
7. Photo 1 of 28

1. William H. Towles House
2. 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Lee, Ft. Myers, Florida
3. Michael Fink
4. March 2007
5. Michael Fink, 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL 33901
6. Southeast Facade and Northeast Elevation, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 2 of 28

Items 1-5 are the same to the remaining photographs unless otherwise noted.

6. Southeast Facade, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 3 of 28

6. Southeast Facade and Southwest Elevation, Looking Northeast
7. Photo 4 of 28

6. Southeast Facade, Looking Northwest
7. Photo 5 of 28

6. Southwest Elevation, Looking Northeast
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6. Southeast Facade (Detail), Looking Northwest
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6. Southwest Elevation (Detail), Looking Northeast
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- 6. Northeast Elevation (Detail), Looking South
- 7. Photo 9 of 28

- 6. Northeast Elevation, Looking South
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- 6. Northeast Elevation (Arch Detail), Looking South
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- 6. Southeast Facade, View of Veranda, Looking Northeast
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- 6. Northeast and Northwest Elevations, Looking South
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- 6. Interior, First Floor, Conference Room, Looking East from Lobby
- 7. Photo 14

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Conference Room, Looking Northeast
- 7. Photo 15 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Lobby, Looking Southwest
- 7. Photo 16 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Lobby, Looking Southeast
- 7. Photo 17 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Lobby, Looking North
- 7. Photo 18 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Hall, Looking Northeast from Office
- 7. Photo 19 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Vestibule, Looking Northeast toward Exit.
- 7. Photo 20 of 28

- 6. Interior, First Floor, Vestibule, Looking Northwest toward Kitchen
- 7. Photo 21 of 28

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6. Interior, Second Floor, Stairs, Looking Southwest toward Landing

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6. Interior, Second Floor, Looking East toward Southeast Office

7. Photo 23 of 28

6. Interior, Second Floor, Looking Southwest toward Southwest Office

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6. Interior, Second Floor, Northwest Hall, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 25 of 28

1. William H. Towles House (Englehardt Funeral Home)

2. 2017 McGregor Boulevard, Lee, Ft. Myers, Florida

3. Unknown

4. c. 1960

5. Michael Fink, 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL 33901

6. Northwest Facade, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 26 of 28

1. William H. Towles House (South Florida Bank)

2. 2017 McGregor Boulevard, Lee, Ft. Myers, Florida

3. Unknown

4. c. 1988

5. Michael Fink, 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL 33901

6. Northwest Facade, Looking Southeast

7. Photo 27 of 28

1. William H. Towles House (Englehardt Funeral Home)

2. 2017 McGregor Boulevard, Lee, Ft. Myers, Florida

3. Unknown

4. c. 2007

5. Michael Fink, 2050 McGregor Boulevard, Ft. Myers, FL 33901

6. View of Former Towles House Location, Looking South

7. Photo 28 of 28

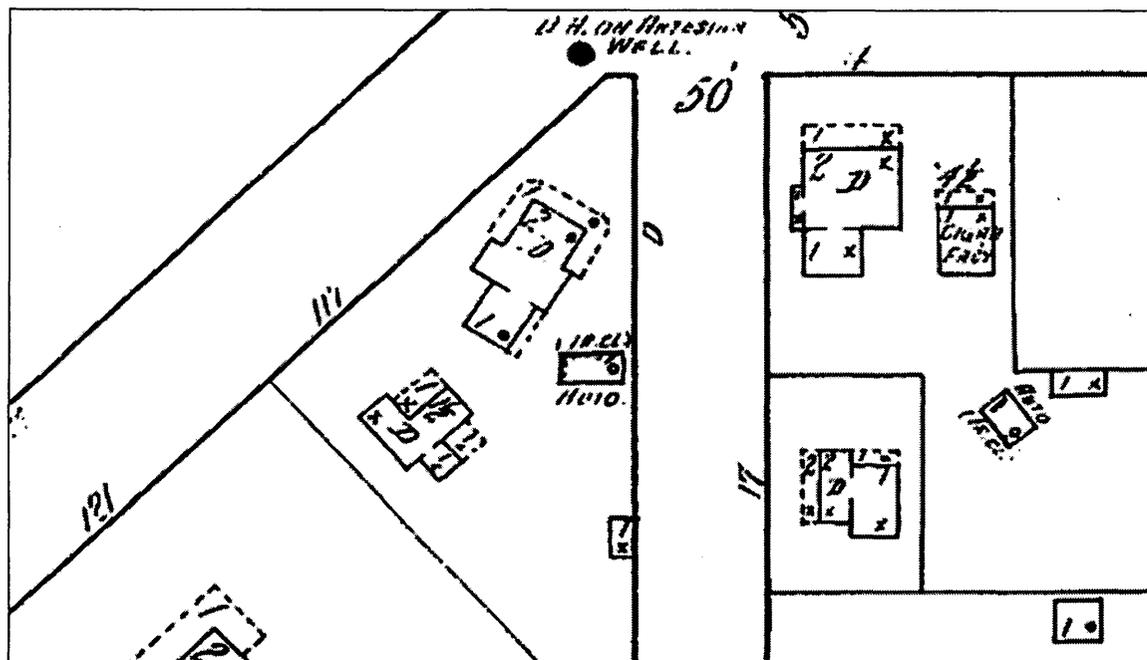
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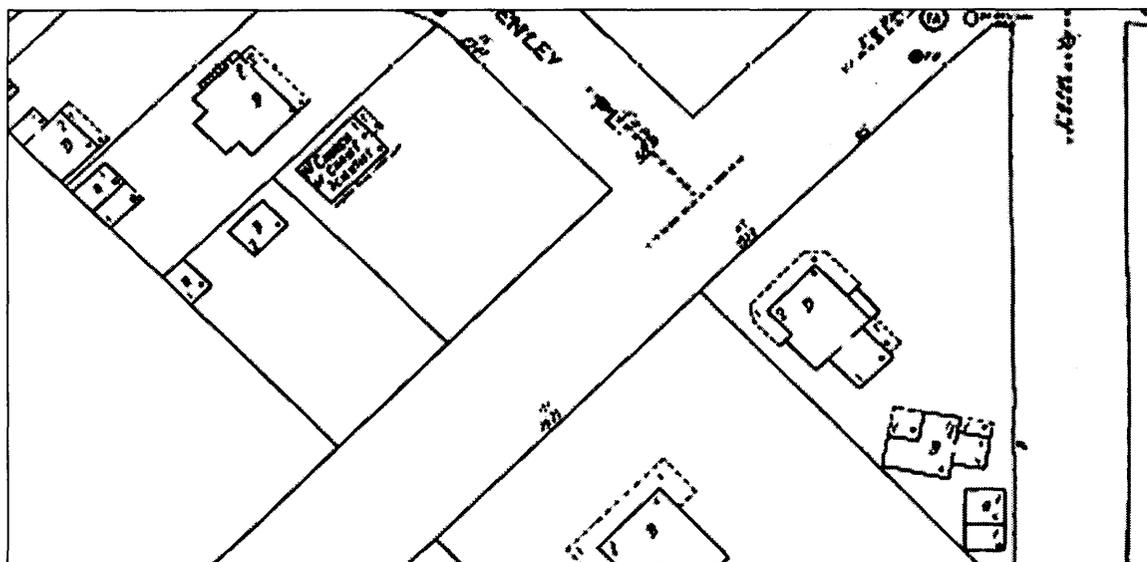
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ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENTS



ATTACHMENT A: WILLIAM H. TOWLES HOUSE, 1917 SANBORN MAP



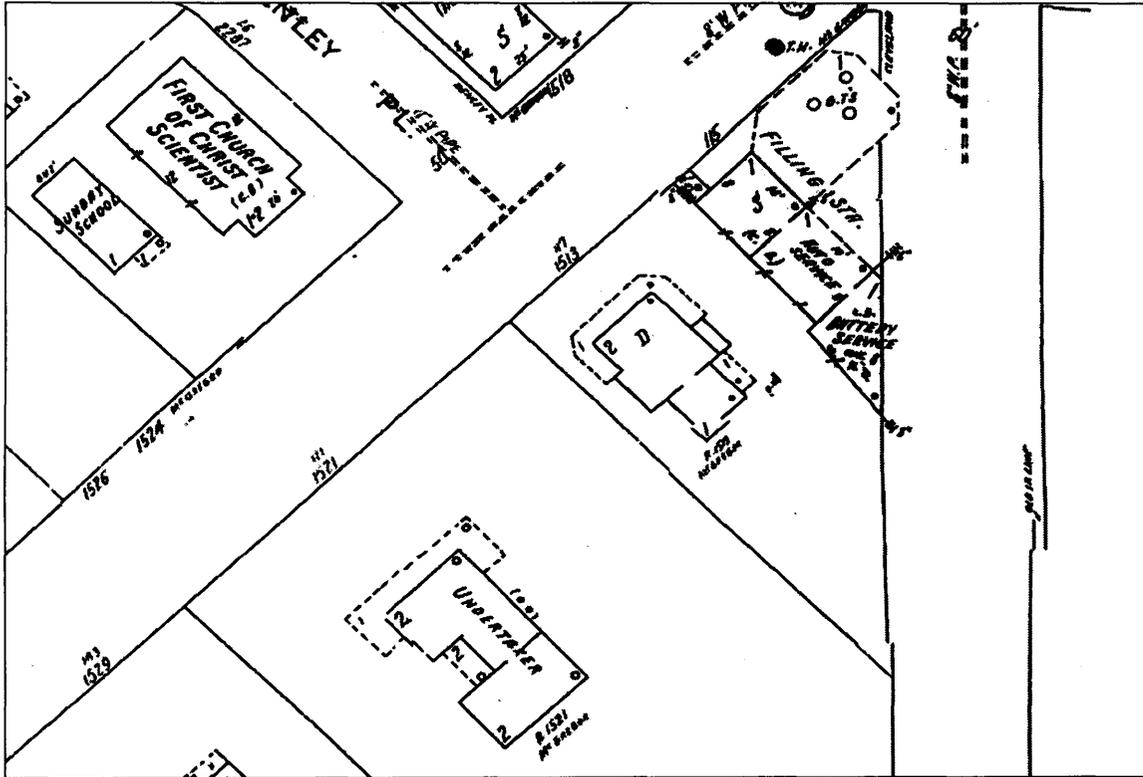
ATTACHMENT B: WILLIAM TOWLES HOUSE, 1930 SANBORN MAP

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ATTACHMENT C: WILLIAM H. TOWLES HOUSE, 1948 SANBORN MAP

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ATTACHMENT D: WILLIAM H. TOWLES HOUSE, GOOGLE AERIAL MAP SHOWING ORIGINAL AND PRESENT LOCATIONS