

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JUN 7 1977  
DATE ENTERED DEC 2 1977

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Fort DeSoto Batteries

AND/OR COMMON

Battery Laidley & Battery Bigelow

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

*Y. corner of St. Petersburg on Mullet Key*

Fort DeSoto Park

CITY, TOWN

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

*Mullet Key St. Petersburg vic.* VICINITY OF

*8th 6th*

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Florida

12

Pinellas

103

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Pinellas County Parks Department

STREET & NUMBER

407 South Garden Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

VICINITY OF

STATE

Florida 33516

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Pinellas County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

STATE

Florida

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

DATE

1960

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS

Pinellas County Parks Department

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

STATE

Florida

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Battery Laidley and Battery Bigelow were located in an area of approximately ten acres of the original site of the Fort DeSoto Military reservation, on the west shore of Mullet Key. Today, they are the only structures remaining of the Fort DeSoto installation, which, with Fort Dade on Egmont Key, comprised a major coast artillery fortification for the defense of Tampa Bay in the early 20th century.

The major feature of the site is the massive earth covered concrete structure of Battery Laidley. This structure consists of two mortar emplacement pits separated and flanked by magazines, machinery spaces, and fire control rooms, in linear arrangement on a roughly north-south axis. A paved walkway along the rear or east side gives access to the various spaces. Beyond this, in back of each of the mortar pits, is a small brick booth from which fire control data boards were displayed.

The mortar pits are entirely open above and in the rear (see photograph). The magazines, machinery spaces, and fire control plotting rooms are windowless. The original steel doors have been removed, and only the rooms now currently being used for storage have been supplied with doors. All equipment, accessories, and fixtures for ammunition handling and fire control have been removed. However, new lighting fixtures and wiring similar to the original have recently been installed, and a general clean-up and repair program has put the basic structure in good condition.

Four of the original eight twelve-inch mortars are still in place in the pits. The breech mechanisms, parts of the aiming mechanisms, and other accessories have been removed. In each pit, one gun is displayed in the elevated or firing position, and one in the depressed or loading position. The guns and carriages are painted and well maintained.

The earth fill above the magazines and working spaces, and covering the seaward or west face of Battery Laidley, is covered with dense vegetation. For visitor access, concrete stairways at each end of the earth fill lead to a paved walkway and observation area at the top. From this vantage point the visitor can view the entrance channel to Tampa Bay, and Egmont Key, site of the main coast defense installation of which Fort DeSoto was an adjunct.

The ruins of Battery Bigelow are located approximately seven hundred feet in front, and just to the south of Battery Laidley. They consist of the tumbled remnants of concrete emplacements for two three-inch guns protecting the inshore approaches to Mullet Key and Egmont Key. Originally, the shoreline was some two hundred feet from Battery Bigelow. Beach erosion has resulted in the undermining and collapse of the structure, and the ruins are now awash at high tide.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES +1898-1945

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Fort DeSoto Batteries are significant as examples of military coast defense construction of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Battery Laidley is of unusual significance as it is one of very few such installations in which a portion of the original armament has been retained in place.

Mullet Key is the largest and southernmost of a chain of offshore islands extending southward from the Pinellas peninsula. It is a low, narrow, vee-shaped sand spit, one arm of which extends northward approximately two miles from the apex, and the other a slightly greater distance toward the east-northeast. It forms the northern limit of the entrance to Tampa Bay. The main channel from the Gulf of Mexico enters Tampa Bay between Mullet Key and Egmont Key, two miles to the southwest. A secondary channel lies between Egmont and Passage Key further south.

The potential military value of Mullet and Egmont Keys for the defense of Tampa Bay was recognized by Army Engineers in a survey of the Florida coast in 1849. As a result of their recommendations, these and several other islands in Tampa Bay were reserved for military use. The interest of the War Department in the Mullet and Egmont sites was reaffirmed in the post-Civil War period (Sarles pp. 9-11).

No immediate efforts were made to establish defensive fortifications, probably because the limited commerce of the Tampa Bay area did not warrant the expenditures required. By the 1890s, however, after rail-road connections with the interior had been established, Tampa became a major outlet for the booming phosphate industry. Products of the surrounding forest and agricultural areas, and of its own growing industries added to Tampa's commerce (Long, passim). This general economic development, and the events of the Spanish-American War in 1898, resulted in the decision to establish a major coast defense facility to protect the Tampa Bay area.

The plan adopted was to utilize both Mullet and Egmont Keys in the development of a complete coast defense artillery complex, with the main battery of long range heavy coastal guns on Egmont Key, supported by the battery of mortars on Mullet Key. In addition, a battery of light artillery at each location would cover the entrance channels between the islands (Lewis pp. 75-79 for coast defense technology and tactics).

Continued

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Lewis, Emanuel Raymond. Seacoast Fortifications of the United States: An Introductory History. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970).

Continued

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 10 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>1</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>2</u>   <u>8</u>   <u>70</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>6</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>0</u>	B	<u>1</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>2</u>   <u>8</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>15</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>0</u>		
ZONE	EASTING <sup>680</sup> <u>460</u>	NORTHING	ZONE	EASTING <sup>720</sup> <u>540</u>	NORTHING
C	<u>1</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>2</u>   <u>8</u>   <u>4</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>4</u>   <u>4</u>   <u>0</u>	D	<u>1</u>   <u>7</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>2</u>   <u>8</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>6</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>3</u>   <u>0</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>6</u>   <u>5</u>   <u>0</u>		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at point A, proceed approximately 180 meters in a SSE direction to point B, thence approximately 280 meters in a WSW direction to point C, thence approximately 240 meters in a NNE direction to point D, thence approximately 160 meters in an ENE direction to beginning.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

William N. Thurston, Chief Preservation Planner

ORGANIZATION

Division of Archives, History & Records Management

DATE

1/10/77

STREET & NUMBER

Department of State, The Capitol

TELEPHONE

(904) 487-2333

CITY OR TOWN

Tallahassee

STATE

Florida

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Director, Division of Archives, History and Records Management

DATE

5-26-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

12/2/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

11-30-77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Fort DeSoto Batteries

CONTINUATION SHEET

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Construction of the mortar battery at Mullet Key began in November, 1898, with the clearing of the site and the establishment of a construction plant. This included a 275 foot wharf, a narrow gauge railway and an overhead cableway for landing and handling materials, a concrete mixing plant, quarters and messhall for the workmen, stables, storage spaces, and a construction office. Stone and cement were brought from New York and New Jersey by sailing vessels. Sand and shell were available on the site. Construction proceeded rapidly, and the basic structure was completed by the end of 1899. Installation of the electrical equipment, gun carriages, and miscellaneous hardware, and completion of the earth fill required another five months. In May of 1900, the battery was reported complete and ready for installation of the armament (Sarles pp. 13-15).

Construction of the secondary battery was carried out during 1901 and completed early in 1902. Installation of the armament, eight twelve-inch mortars in the primary battery and two fifteen pounder rapid fire guns in the secondary battery, was completed in 1903, and firing tests were conducted in November of that year. By General Order No. 78 of May 25, 1903, the main battery was named in honor of Colonel Theodore T.S. Laidley for his "conspicuous service in the war with Mexico and the Civil War," and the secondary battery for First Lieutenant Aaron Bigelow, killed at the battle of Lundy's Lane, Ontario, on July 25, 1814 (Sarles pp. 16-17).

In the meantime, construction of the post buildings had begun. By 1906, when this work was complete, a total of 29 buildings had been erected. These included officers' and noncommissioned officers' quarters, barracks, kitchen, bakehouse, messhall, hospital, and administration buildings, workshops, stables, and storage sheds. Water and sewerage systems, brick roads, and outlying fire control installations completed the facilities of the base, which occupied an area of 613 acres (Sarles pp. 17-20).

Fort DeSoto was garrisoned by a company of regular Army artillerymen from 1904-1910. Isolation, lack of recreational facilities, and the incessant assaults of swarms of mosquitos made the post all but unendurable. The monotony of garrison duty was broken on three occasions when joint maneuvers were held with the militia units designated to man the post in event of mobilization. In June, 1910, the garrison company was withdrawn. A caretaker detachment was left in charge, but it was never large enough to cope with the maintenance requirements. With the outbreak of World War I, the detachment was increased--not to activate the fort, but to dismount four of the mortars and prepare them for

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Fort DeSoto Batteries  
CONTINUATION SHEET

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shipment to France. Despite subsequent efforts to maintain the facility after the war, deterioration continued. Beach erosion was a serious problem, threatening to undermine several buildings, and approaching the foundations of Battery Bigelow. Finally, in October, 1921, a major hurricane swept the area, causing extensive damage (Sarles pp. 20-28).

The post was officially abandoned in 1923. Within ten years, destruction of the facility by the elements was nearly complete. Only three of the original 29 buildings were still standing, and Battery Bigelow had collapsed, a victim of beach erosion. Battery Laidley was still structurally sound, but its mortar carriages and other metalwork were badly deteriorated, and its further usefulness was considered "extremely doubtful" (Sarles pp. 29-39).

Attempts by the War Department to dispose of the property were not successful, and with the mobilization planning begun in 1940 it was decided to utilize the area as a bombing range (Sarles p. 34). Fortunately, this use throughout the World War II period did not result in further damage to either Battery Laidley or the ruins of Battery Bigelow.

In 1948, Mullet Key was sold to Pinellas County as surplus government property, for subsequent development as a recreation area. By 1964, partial restoration of Battery Laidley and its remaining mortar armament was completed, and action had been taken to arrest the beach erosion threatening the ruins of Battery Bigelow. A system of bridges and causeways provides easy access to the site, and Fort DeSoto Park has become a major recreational attraction in the Pinellas County area.

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Fort DeSoto Batteries

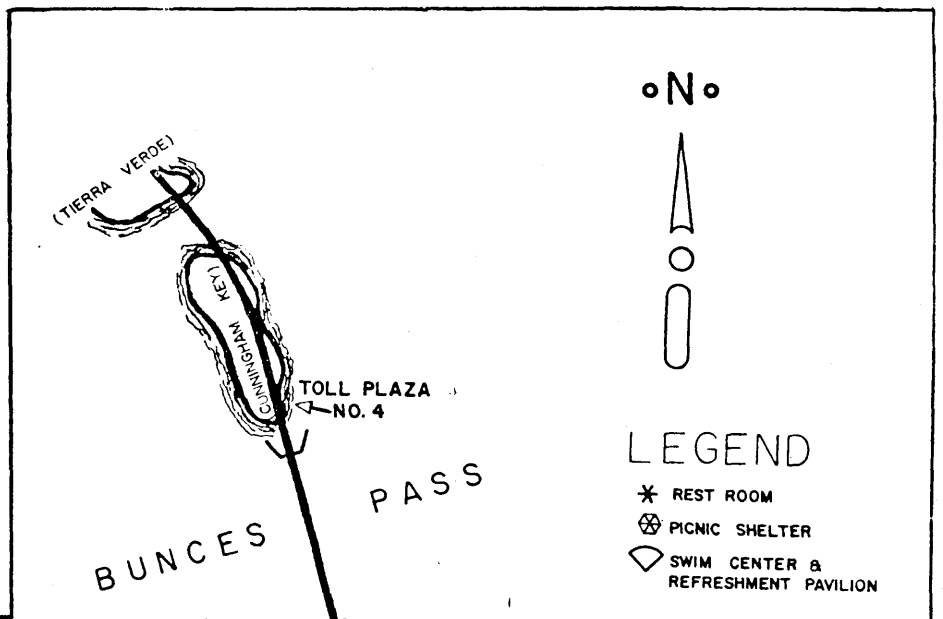
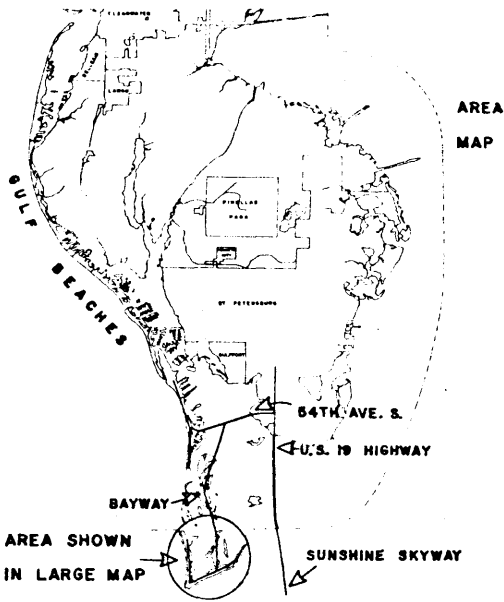
CONTINUATION SHEET

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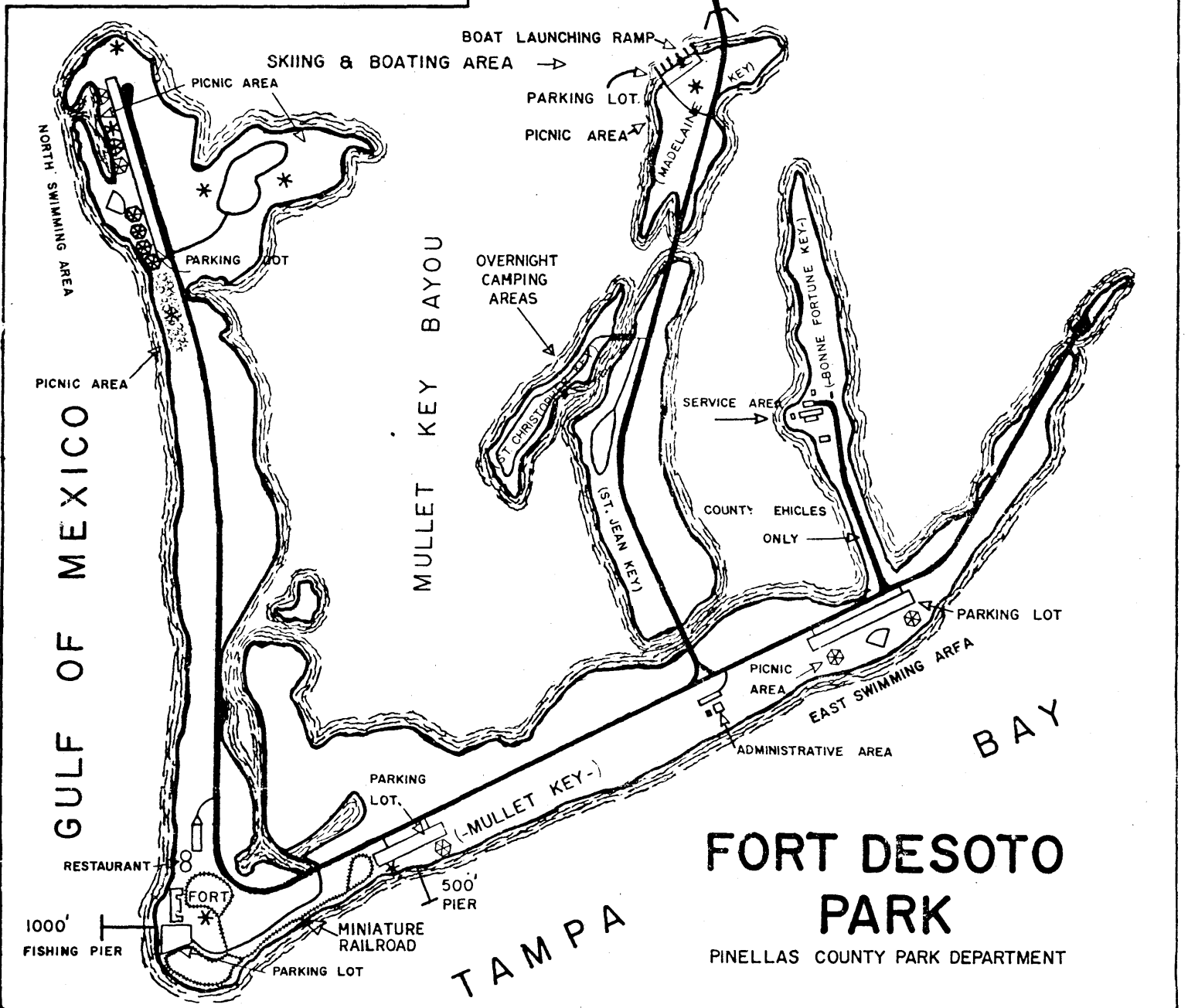
Long, Durward. "Making of Modern Tampa: A City of the New South, 1851-1911," Florida Historical Quarterly XLIX (April, 1971), pp. 333-345.

Sarles, Frank B., Jr. "Fort DeSoto, Florida." Historic Site Report prepared in 1960 for U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Copy on file in Pinellas County Parks Department, Clearwater, Florida.



**LEGEND**

- \* REST ROOM
- ⊗ PICNIC SHELTER
- ◇ SWIM CENTER & REFRESHMENT PAVILION



**FORT DESOTO  
PARK**

PINELLAS COUNTY PARK DEPARTMENT