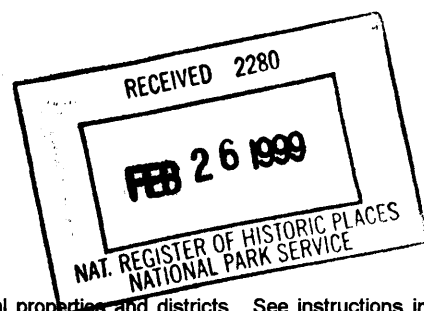


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



371

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 "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. 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 DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 300 Block of North Bridge Street N/A not for publication

city or town LaBelle N/A vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Hendry code 051 zip code 33935

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.)

[Signature] DSHPO 2-18-99
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State 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]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 3/25/99

Name of Property

County and State

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	
9	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
9	1	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)

- COMMERCIAL/Specialty Store
- COMMERCIAL/Bank
- COMMERCIAL/General Store
- DOMESTIC/Single Family Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCIAL/Specialty Store
- COMMERCIAL/Specialty Store
- COMMERCIAL/General Store
- DOMESTIC/Single Family Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

- NO STYLE/Frame Vernacular
- MEDITERRANEAN REVIVAL
- MODERNE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Concrete
- walls Wood
- Stucco
- roof Metal
- other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- Criteria A, B, C, D, E, F, G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, designated landmark, recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey, recorded by Historic American Engineering Record.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE
COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1911-1945

Significant Dates

1911
1928
1945

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown
Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of Repository

#

DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
Name of Property

Hendry Co., FL
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3 appx.

UTM References
(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	4 5 6 5 0 0	2 9 6 0 4 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, Historical & Architectural Research Services/Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date February 1999

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Downtown LaBelle Historic District comprises eight primary buildings and two outbuildings. Seven of the buildings were constructed between 1911 and 1945 and contribute to the historic character of the district. The boundaries of the approximately three acre district encompass all of the buildings facing the 300 block of North Bridge Street and one building located on the south side of Park Avenue in what was the original downtown commercial section of LaBelle, Florida. Six of the buildings have remained constantly in commercial use. There is one historic residence, the Mitchell House, which has remained in continuous use as a single-family residence throughout its existence. One building, the Original First Bank of LaBelle, was moved in 1929 from its original location on Bridge Street to the southwest corner of Park Avenue and Lee Street. That building was used at for a number of years as a single family dwelling but now serves a commercial purpose. Five of the primary buildings are wood frame vernacular structures. The three other primary buildings are masonry structures. There is one Mediterranean Revival Style building, and one building exhibits characteristics of the Moderne Style. Both of the two outbuildings are wood frame vernacular structures. Although some of the primary buildings have undergone limited non-historic modifications, they continue to display their historic character and association with the early development of the city of LaBelle.

SETTING

The City of LaBelle is a community of 2,800 residents located in the south central part of Florida, approximately 30 miles east of Ft. Myers and 60 miles west of West Palm Beach. It lies in the northwest section of Hendry County, immediately south of the county line. LaBelle is the county seat and one of only two incorporated cities in the county, the other being Clewiston, a city with approximately 6500 residents, which is located 32 miles to the east. LaBelle is situated on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River, which originates in Lake Okeechobee and terminates at the Gulf of Mexico on west coast of Florida at the city of Ft. Myers. The main commercial section of the community now lies in the vicinity of State Road 80 (Hickpochee Avenue), which runs east-west and intersects the north-south route of State Road 29 (Bridge Street) near the center of LaBelle.

Hendry County is situated on the northern edge of the Everglades and is bordered by Glades, Lee, Collier, Broward and Palm Beach counties. More than half of the county's population lives in unincorporated areas. The county is the state's leading producer and refiner of sugarcane, which is grown in the rich mucklands around Lake Okeechobee. Other leading crops are sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, potatoes, squash, and tomatoes. Hendry County is also a major producer of citrus and cattle.

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DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

PRESENT AND ORIGINAL APPEARANCE

LaBelle's historic business district extends along the 300 block of North Bridge Street (State Road 29) between Park Avenue, located one block south of the Caloosahatchee River to Ft. Thompson Avenue. A few early commercial buildings were constructed along Ft. Thompson Avenue between Bridge Street and Main Street, and others were erected along Main Street between Riverview and Ft. Thompson Avenues, but none of the structures survive. Bridge Street, north of Hickpochee Avenue, is LaBelle's historic main thoroughfare. At one time, both sides of Bridge Street south of the bridge over the Caloosahatchee River were lined for several blocks with stores, shops, offices, banks, and theaters. A few single family residences were mixed with these commercial establishments, and several two-part commercial blocks provided living accommodations on the second floor. Most of the early structures in the downtown core, including two large hotels, have been lost to fire and demolition.

Although there were commercial buildings and residences erected along Bridge Street as early as the 1890s, the surviving contributing resources in the historic district all date between c. 1911 to 1945. The three oldest structures are the Poole Store, the Royal Poinciana/Newcomb Bakery, and the Mitchel House, all erected in 1911. The last commercial building constructed within the period of significance was Davidson's Cleaners, completed in 1945. With the exception of this building and the Second First Bank of LaBelle, constructed c. 1925, LaBelle's commercial architecture is wood frame and masonry vernacular. Davison's Dry Cleaners is a Moderne style building, and the Second First Bank of LaBelle exhibits characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival style.

Poole Store

The Poole Store (Photos 1-3), located at 360 North Bridge Street, was constructed c.1911. William Poole came to LaBelle from Georgia in the late 1880s. He established a citrus grove, raised cattle, and opened a general trading post in the village. Poole may have had an earlier store on Bridge Street dating from some time in the late 1890s. Poole operated his store in this building until 1923, when Melville Forrey, Poole's son-in-law, took over the business. The Forrey family continued to own the building until 1941. Over the years, the building has served as a grocery, dry goods store, and a number of other commercial functions.

This two-story, frame vernacular style building is an essentially rectangular building constructed of heart pine. Defining features include a gable roof, vertical board and batten siding, wood double-hung sash

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Section number 7 Page 3 DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

windows, a masonry pier foundation, and a two-story veranda. The front-facing gable roof has minimal eaves and is surfaced with contemporary 5-V sheet metal. Simple, square wood vents are located on the gable end walls. Original 2/2-light double-hung sash windows are located along the outer walls of the building on both the first and second story levels. Replacement 1/1-light double-hung sash windows, both paired and single, are located on the first story of the main (east) facade. The replacement windows appear to be modifications that pre-date World War II. The current two-story veranda on the street facade is a c. 1985 reconstruction of the original which had to be removed because it was badly deteriorated. The full-width veranda is divided into three evenly spaced bays by square wood posts. The veranda has been modified to include a wheelchair access ramp and deck to meet current building codes.

The Royal Poinciana/Newcomb Bakery

The Royal Poinciana Bakery (Photos 4-6) at 381 North Bridge Street was built c. 1911 and reportedly acquired its fancy name from the nearby Royal Poinciana Hotel (no longer extant) for which the bakery supplied bread and pastries. The business was purchased after a few years by Mr. and Mrs. James Newcomb, who changed the name to the Newcomb Bakery. The second floor had a meeting hall used by the Royal Neighbor Lodge. Dances and other social functions were sometimes held there. The building was also used as a precinct voting place and the local chapter of the Brotherhood of Carpenters held their meetings on the second floor during the 1920s. In 1925, the first floor storefront was divided into two units for the establishment of a restaurant run by the Nemiths, relatives of the Newcombs. By 1929, the restaurant had been replaced by Hedges Drug Store. The bakery continued in operation in the building until 1938.

The two-part, wood frame commercial block has a simple, essentially rectangular plan and features parapet walls. It has a symmetrical facade, two-story verandas front and back, weatherboard siding, and 2/2-light double-hung sash windows. The verandas on the east and west elevations have sheet metal surfaced shed roofs and are supported by simple, square wood posts. The door and window bays on the rear elevation are irregularly placed. The building originally had a single storefront on the street facade, but the first floor was subdivided to include a second unit about 1925. Today, the interior of the first floor once again contains one large space.

Mitchell House

The Mitchell House (Photos 7-9) at 388 North Bridge Street, was constructed c. 1911 by Dr. John Mitchell, LaBelle's first elected mayor, who opened a drug store on Bridge Street around 1916. The store was purchased a year later by J.M. Magill and Mitchell seems to have left LaBelle shortly thereafter. The residence was inhabited by the family of Raleigh Dyess from c. 1923-1934, and in 1935 it was purchased by

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Section number 7 Page 4 DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

Robert M. Harris, who was a native of Sulligent, Alabama, who lived there until 1960. The house has had a number of residents since that time. The two-story, frame vernacular style residence, occupies a large portion of the building lot and is largely obscured from view by the Second First Bank of LaBelle building immediately to the north and by the mature vegetation that surrounds much of the house.

The core building is rectangular, with a hip roof surfaced by corrugated sheet metal. It is sided with wood weatherboard and rests on a brick pier foundation. Windows appear to be regularly spaced along the south and east walls. Some of the original wood double-hung sash windows were replaced with metal awning windows c. 1975. A one-story shed roof porch supported by wood posts is located on the main (east) facade. The residence was modified by the addition of a shed roof room and porch on the rear (west) elevation c. 1934. A historic, detached, one-bay, wood frame garage located at the rear of the house was connected at an unknown date to the main structure by the construction of a small breezeway.

Earl Powell Furniture Store

The Earl Powell Furniture Store (Photos 10-11) building at 353 North Bridge Street is a one-story, frame vernacular structure built c. 1915. Originally, it housed a feed and grain store, and in the 1930s served as the Earl Powell Furniture Store. In the 1940s, it became a pool hall. Today, it is the Iglesia El Faro, a missionary Protestant church for a Spanish-speaking congregation. The one-story, front-gable roofed building features vertical board-and-batten siding on its side and rear elevations. Brick veneer was applied to the main (west) facade of the building around 1985, as was the one-bay, gable-roofed entrance porch. The fenestration of the building includes historic 2-light pivot windows and non-historic fixed glass and metal awning windows. Despite the alterations to the main facade, the building remains a contributing resource in the historic district because of the remaining historic fabric visible on the other three elevations and because of its association with the early development of the downtown commercial center of the city of LaBelle.

Original First Bank of LaBelle

The Original First Bank of LaBelle building (Photos 12-13), constructed c. 1921, is presently located at 97 Park Avenue. It was moved there in 1929 from its original location at the southeast corner of North Bridge Street and Park Avenue. The frame vernacular structure has a rectangular ground plan and a front-facing gable roof surfaced with sheet metal. The exterior walls are covered with wood drop siding and features regularly spaced, double-hung wood sash windows. The building is supported by a wood pier foundation. A full-width, shed roofed room was added to the south (rear) elevation of the building around 1945. The shed roofed entrance porch was added to the main (north) facade about 1965. A non-historic, one-story, wood frame outbuilding is located southwest of the former bank. It has a gable roof surfaced

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Section number 7 Page 5 DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

with sheet metal and drop siding exterior walls. After the bank building was moved to Park Avenue, it was used for a number of years as a single family dwelling, but now serves a commercial purpose.

Second First Bank of LaBelle

The Second First Bank of LaBelle (Photos 14-15), at 390 North Bridge Street, is located at the southwest corner of North Bridge Street and Park Avenue. The Mediterranean Revival style, stuccoed masonry building was constructed c. 1925. The two-story structure has a simple rectangular ground plan and features two storefronts at the street level. These still retain their original configurations and design elements. They flank a central entryway that provides access to the second floor via interior stairs. An original, six-bay arched loggia that extended the width of the main (east) facade of the building was removed when Bridge Street was widened several years ago. The fenestration of the second story of the main facade consists of metal awning windows set in blind arches. The original wood sash windows were removed at an unknown date; however, some of the building's original 1/1-light double hung wood sash windows are found on the side elevations. Surviving decorative elements of the building include a shaped/tiled parapet wall and a full-height, projecting center bay with an arched niche.

When the bank building was completed in c. 1925, one of the first floor storefronts housed the bank's operations, and the other was occupied by Clark and Royer's Drug Store. The second floor contained office spaces. In 1935, the bank ceased operation. In recent years, the first floor space has been occupied by variety, antique, and gift shops. For a number of years, the second floor had residential rental rooms, but the floor is now vacant.

Sam Luckey Building

The Sam Luckey Building at 355 North Bridge Street, built c. 1928 (Photos 16-17), is a two-story masonry vernacular building constructed of stuccoed hollow clay tile. When the building was completed, the B & B Food Store was located in the first floor. Within a few years, the food store became the C.A. Davis' Grocery. A drug store and rooms for rent were located on the second floor. The building has a rectangular ground plan and features a stepped parapet with accented coping surrounding the flat roof. The two sets of paired 3/1-light double hung sash windows found on the second story of the main (west) facade are set in blind arches. The windows on the side elevations include paired and single 1/1-light double hung wood sash windows.

The nearly symmetrical facade is interrupted on the street level by an arched doorway found near the northwest corner of the building. This entranceway opens onto stairs leading to the second floor. The few

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DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

decorative elements of the building include clay tile canales found just below the parapet on the side elevations of the building, the arched windows and doorway found on the main facade, and the stepped parapet. All of these elements reflect the stylistic influence of the Mediterranean Revival style which was popular in Florida during the 1920s, but the building remains essentially a vernacular structure. A full-width metal canopy, suspended by chains, shelters the street level of the building.

Davidson's Dry Cleaners

Davidson's Dry Cleaners (Photos 18-20), located at 325 North Bridge Street, was constructed c. 1945. The one-story, Moderne style masonry building was the last commercial building constructed in the historic district. The building replaced an earlier structure that had been constructed around 1929. The essentially rectangular building has a flat roof, a stuccoed exterior finish, and a concrete slab foundation. The rounded corners of the main (west) facade are sheathed in glass brick that also surrounds the central doorway and the two secondary entrances at the northwest and southwest corners of the building. The front of the building features a four-bay porch/canopy, also rounded at the outer corners, that is supported both by thin metal posts and by chains attached to the roof parapet. A one-story, masonry addition was constructed at the rear of the building about 1975.

The contributing wood frame outbuilding (Photo) located immediately south of the primary structure remains from the period of the original dry cleaning building that was constructed c. 1929.

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DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
BUILDING LIST

CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

<u>Address</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Style</u>	<u>Use</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Site #</u>
<u>North Bridge Street</u>					
325	Davidson's Dry Cleaners	Moderne	Commercial	c. 1945	8HN217
325 A	_____	Frame Vernacular	Outbuilding	c. 1929	8HN217
353	Earl Powell Furniture Store	Frame Vernacular	Commercial	c. 1915	8HN250
355	Sam Luckey Building	Masonry Vernacular	Commercial	c. 1928	8HN260
359 (381)	Royal Poinciana Bakery	Frame Vernacular	Commercial	c. 1911	8HN209
360	Poole Store	Frame Vernacular	Commercial	c. 1911	8HN261
388	Mitchel House	Frame Vernacular	Residencial	c. 1911	8HN200
390	First Bank of LaBelle	Mediterranean Revival	Commercial	c. 1925	8HN257

Park Avenue

97	Original Bank of LaBelle	Frame Vernacular	Commercial	c. 1921	8HN262
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NONCONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS

97A	_____	Frame Vernacular	Outbuilding	c. 1996	8HN262
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Section number 8 Page 1

DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The LaBelle Downtown Historic District is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Commerce as the historic commercial section of the city of LaBelle. The architectural resources reflect the development of the small rural community between the years c. 1911 to c. 1945. The buildings in the district served a variety of commercial, social, and residential purposes. As the seat of Hendry County, LaBelle served as the business, social, and religious center for much of surrounding region. The downtown housed important early businesses such as a bank, professional offices, stores, hotels, and apartments. The main physical character of the buildings in the historic district is vernacular, but the visual character of the district is enhanced by two buildings that reflect the Mediterranean Revival and Moderne architectural styles popular in Florida during the period from the 1920s to the 1940s.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Seminole and Creek Indians migrated to north Florida from Georgia and Alabama c.1750, replacing the last remnants of the indigenous Indian tribes that had disappeared from the peninsula during the centuries since European contact in the sixteenth century. Following the acquisition of Florida from Spain in 1821, they established themselves in the Okeechobee, Big Cypress and Everglades regions, being driven ever farther south by the constant armed conflicts with white settlers and the U.S. Army historically known as the Seminole Wars. Only a few white hunters and trappers had begun to make use of the area of what is now known as Hendry County by 1830, often trading with the Indians. When the Second Seminole War broke out in 1835, two frontier forts were built by the United States Army within in the vicinity of the future site of LaBelle. These were Fort Denaud (c.1835), located approximately six miles to the west, and Fort Thompson (1837), found about two miles east. The forts were abandoned around 1855, after the conclusion of the Seminole Wars.

By 1858, most of the Indians in Florida had been removed to western "Indian Territories" of the United States, and the area around present-day LaBelle was opened to settlement by white civilians. Population growth, however, was slow, prospective homesteaders being deterred by the subtropical heat, swampy land, abundant snakes, and pestering insects. Cattlemen came to the area in the late 1860s, not as settlers but as cowboys, to take part in drives of semi-wild cattle herds that had grown up in the Florida wilderness over the decades prior to and after the Civil War. The few settlers who did come to the area set up homesteads on tracts of land north and south of the Calooshatchee River, where they raised sugar cane and established citrus groves. Only about five families resided in the LaBelle area by 1870, but by the early 1880s, there were about 50 people living at the former Fort Denaud and Fort Thompson sites, prompting the

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DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

the establishment of a U.S. post office at Ft. Thompson in 1884. These settlements did not survive, but in the late 1880s some families began to occupy property in the area of present-day LaBelle.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The town of LaBelle was founded about 1890 by Francis A. Hendry, a cattle rancher who was one of the major landowners in the area. By 1895, the community had a population of about 75, occupying several parcels of unplatted land along the south side of the Caloosahatchee River. Within a short time, LaBelle boasted a post office, a general store, livery stable, blacksmith's shop, a one-room schoolhouse, a community church, cattle pens, and a scattering of dwellings. The town was formally platted on November 1, 1909, by Edgar Goodno, who, by that time, had acquired most of the land within the town limits. The community consisted of 44 blocks, oriented in a north-south grid, located south of the Caloosahatchee River. No streets conformed to the meandering course of the river itself. The only crossing over the waterway was a wooden bridge, constructed in 1908 at the north end of the aptly named "Bridge Street". The bridge provided access to a sandy road leading to the outlying areas of farmland and swamp north of town. A replat of LaBelle in 1911 more than doubled the size of the original town; and in the same year, the 700 acre tract was officially designated the unincorporated Town of LaBelle.

In the early years of the twentieth century, LaBelle remained largely isolated from the outside world, lacking roads or a railroad connection to link it with the rest of Florida. The residents of the community depended on a paddlewheel steamboat that arrived once or twice weekly from Ft. Myers to bring them many of the necessities of life. A smaller daily motor boat brought mail and sometimes passengers. By 1912, the town had several stores that provided a wide range of goods to the community. There were also two hotels and an ice plant. To promote growth of the town, various real estate companies brought prospective settlers and investors to LaBelle aboard the steamer Edison, which operated out of Fort Myers. Many of these visitors decided to remain permanently, building homes and establishing new businesses to meet the population's growing needs.

The Florida Boom Years, 1920-1926

By 1920, the downtown business area of LaBelle along Bridge Street had changed considerably from its early days when there were only a few general stores, dry goods establishments, and providers of farming implements. It was now a vital and varied business center, typical of many small towns in America. The first building on Bridge Street, south of the bridge over the Caloosahatchee River, was Porter Dean's cobbler shop. There was also a small house reportedly built by Edgar Goodno, across the street from which was the Everett Hotel, which served not only as a hostelry but also as a social center for the townspeople. There was

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DOWNTOWN LABELLE HISTORIC DISTRICT
HENDRY COUNTY, FLORIDA
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

the W.T. Hull Market, and F. Watts Hall had a large general store in the building that also housed the post office. The First Bank of LaBelle was located across the street from Hall's store, next to which was the two-story frame dwelling occupied by Dr. John Mitchell. Poole's Store was located next door, and the block featured an arcade building that contained a number of small businesses, including Staples Barber shop and C.J. Kirk's real estate office. Set back from the street was the movie theater owned by J.G. Attanasio. The city's telephone office occupied a wood frame building in the same block, and the Caloosahatchee Current newspaper, a restaurant, and the J.R. Crews' house were also located in this area. The Royal Palm Hotel and restaurant occupied the corner at North Bridge Street and Ft. Thompson Avenue. These were just a few of the businesses and residences that lined both sides of Bridge Street for the first three blocks south of the river.

Hendry County was created from a portion of Lee County in 1923, and LaBelle was chosen as the county seat over Clewiston, at that time the only incorporated town in the new county. The first county commission meetings were held in the Everett Hotel building, which was used as a temporary courthouse until 1927 when the Hendry County Courthouse, located near the intersection of Bridge Street and Hickpochee Avenue, was completed. In 1924, the town passed a \$25,000 bond issue for making improvements to the city's infrastructure. A plan was made to expend \$15,000 for laying water mains and sewers along the city's major streets and for the paving of roadways. In April of 1925, the residents of LaBelle received the welcome news that the Seaboard Air Line Railroad would run its line to LaBelle. Townspeople saw this as a much needed and well-deserved improvement and another indication of LaBelle's great progress and promising future. On December 10, 1925, LaBelle became an incorporated town, two years after it had become the county seat. Disagreement among the town's leaders and railroad company officers about the most desirable location of the Seaboard Air Line rail bed and depot delayed construction of the new facilities until May of 1926, and rail service to the community did not start until mid-1927.

Although its impact on population growth and new construction was small compared to other locations in Florida, LaBelle experienced a period of unparalleled growth during the 1920s, an era that became known as the Florida Land Boom. Between 1925 and 1926, the city's population doubled, reaching more than 1100 residents. In October of 1925, real estate transfers reached their highest point in the town's history. Like elsewhere in the state, the city and its citizens were caught up in a spiral of rapid development and rising expectations of economic progress. New ventures and construction projects took place at a frantic pace to match the growing needs of newcomers arriving in the city. The completion of the Ft. Myers to Palm Beach Highway through LaBelle in mid-1926 was welcomed by city residents as an additional transportation resource to supplement rail service.

With "every residence and shack occupied," a need for new housing and hotels arose. In response, new subdivisions were platted, residences built, and for the first time development began to take place north

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of the Caloosahatchee River. New businesses sprang up along Bridge and Main Street to supply the needs and wants of the growing population. Every few weeks, a freight boat arrived at the landing on the Caloosahatchee River, bringing building materials for use in the town's expansion. The city's chamber of commerce began to receive numerous inquiries from all over the country regarding the prospects for relocation and available land in LaBelle. The local newspaper, the Caloosahatchee Current, reported that the city was taking on new subdivisions at the rate of several a week.

The Real Estate Bust and the Great Depression

By the summer of 1925, the beginnings of the collapse of the Florida real estate boom in Miami Beach and other parts of Florida began to affect LaBelle's growth. Banks became unwilling to extend credit for real estate development, and some financial institutions began to demand payment of existing loans. Capital for paying existing debts dried up, and builders could not obtain construction materials to complete projects already under way. Many of the subdivisions platted between 1920 and 1925 remained undeveloped. The boom was dealt a fatal blow when a hurricane struck Miami Beach in September of 1926. LaBelle faced its own disaster when, on April 1, 1928, a fire that started in the Royal Palm Hotel swept through the commercial area, destroying seven buildings and severely damaging others. The devastating blaze prompted the eventual relocation of many of the city's businesses to the vicinity of the new Hendry County Courthouse at the intersection State Roads 29 and 80. The fire and the nationwide economic depression that followed the New York stock market crash in 1929 began to adversely affect the economy of LaBelle. The first indication of financial problems facing the municipal government arose when there were insufficient funds to pay the town marshal, and the office was declared vacant. Other city financial obligations also remained unpaid. The town suffered a major flood in 1930, adding to the misery of the economic fortunes of the community.

During the depths of the Depression in 1932-1933, the city council called upon voters to decide if the city government should be abolished. The vote to retain the municipal charter passed by a wide majority. Unable to pay the rent on the building used as city hall, the city council was forced to vacate the building and move to a store on Bridge Street that was offered at no cost for use as an official meeting place. The Hendry County treasury was so depleted that the county administrative staff had to pay for their own office supplies and postage.

Despite the difficulties presented by the economic hard times, the population of LaBelle slowly continued to grow. By 1930, the number of residents had risen to nearly 3,500, and five years later the count stood at just over 3,700. During the 1930s, most of the residents continued to support themselves in areas related to farming and cattle ranching. In September 1935, the First Bank of LaBelle was liquidated, but all

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depositors were paid in full. Economic conditions began to improve during the 1940s, with the increased demand for timber and other agricultural products needed to support the war effort during World War II. The period following the war saw a marked increase in the development of land for sugar cane and timber production, and the growing of vegetables and cattle raising continued to play an important role in the local economy. These changes, however, were a mixed blessing for the community. The expansion of employment opportunities in the rapidly growing major cities of the state in the 1960s and 1970s caused hundreds of LaBelle residents to move where better jobs were available. The population declined to less than 3,000, the point at which it stood in the mid-1920s. The loss of residents put an even greater strain on the historic commercial areas of Bridge and Main Streets, so that today all that remains in the area are the buildings found in the Downtown LaBelle Historic District.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the proposed LaBelle Downtown Historic District are those shown on the map of the historic district that accompanies this National Register Nomination Proposal.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries drawn reflect the most intact concentration of historic resources within the historic commercial center of LaBelle. No other resources are located in sufficient proximity to those encompassed by the district boundaries to be considered for inclusion in the historic district.

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LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Poole Store, 360 N. Bridge Street, Downtown LaBelle Historic District
2. Labelle (Hendry County), Florida
3. Mikki Hartig
4. February 1997
5. Historical and Architectural Research Services
6. East (Main) Facade and North Elevation
7. Photo 1 of 20

Items 2-5 are the same for the remaining photographs

1. Poole Store, 360 N. Bridge Street
6. South Elevation and East (Main) Facade, Looking Northwest
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1. Poole Store, 360 N. Bridge Street
6. North Elevation and East (Main) Facade, Looking Southwest
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1. Royal Poinciana Bakery, 381 N. Bridge Street
6. West (Main) Facade and South Elevation, Looking Northeast
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1. Royal Poinciana Bakery, 381 N. Bridge Street
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6. East (Rear) Elevation, Looking West
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1. Mitchell House, 388 N. Bridge Street
6. Main (East) Facade, Looking Southwest
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6. Main (East) Facade and South Elevation, Looking Northwest
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1. Mitchell House, 388, N. Bridge Street
6. Detail, Breezeway Connecting Main House and Garage, Looking North
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1. Earl Powell Furniture Store, 353 N. Bridge Street
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1. Earl Powell Furniture Store, 353 N. Bridge Street
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1. Original First Bank of LaBelle, 97 Park Avenue
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1. Original First Bank of LaBelle, 97 Park Avenue
6. Outbuilding, North and West Elevations, Looking Southeast
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1. Second First Bank of LaBelle, 390 N. Bridge Street
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1. Sam Luckey Building, 355 N. Bridge Street
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1. Davidson's Dry Cleaners, 325 N. Bridge Street
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1. Davidson's Dry Cleaners, 325 N. Bridge Street
6. Main (west) Facade and South Elevation, Looking North
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1. Davidson's Dry Cleaners, 325 N. Bridge Street
6. Outbuilding, South Elevation, Looking North
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