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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

AUG 20 1988

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Henry Ford Estate

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2400 McGregor Boulevard not for publication

city, town Fort Myers vicinity

state Florida code FL county Lee code _____ zip code 33901

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

George W. Perry, SHPO _____ Date 8/5/88

Signature of certifying official _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:) _____

Alvina Byer Entered in the National Register 9/8/88

fu Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/English Arts and Crafts

foundation concrete piers
walls wood shingle

roof metal shingle
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY

The Henry Ford Estate at 2400 McGregor Boulevard, Fort Myers, Florida is a one and one-half story wood frame vernacular structure with English Arts and Crafts influence. The main block of the house is rectangular in plan with one story flanking wings attached at the northwest and southwest corners. The roofs of all three sections are gabled and oriented north-south. Massive twin dormers dominate the front and rear of the main roof. Recessed porches on the west and east elevations were screened in 1916. Outstanding interior features include fourteen closets and a fire extinguishing system complete with copper water tank in the attic.

ORIGINAL SETTING

The Henry Ford Estate was built along the Caloosahatchee River on a parcel of land cleared for its construction in 1895. During that same year, a house was built by Thomas Alva Edison across the dirt road that is today called McGregor Boulevard. There were scattered houses in the immediate vicinity of these two structures, and the newly incorporated town of Fort Myers was less than 1/2 a mile to the northeast.

PRESENT SETTING

Today, the estate sits adjacent to the river-side portion of the Thomas Edison Estate in Downtown Fort Myers. The property is surrounded by a white picket fence, constructed in 1916 by Henry Ford, and restored in the 1940s. There has been little change to the surrounding area since the early 1900s. The estate is in the older residential area of Fort Myers that is best known for its avenue of Royal Palms along McGregor Boulevard. While there has been little change to the immediate area, the downtown area of the city northeast of the estate has undergone major changes in the past seventy years.

PRESENT APPEARANCE

The Henry Ford Estate a one and one-half story wood frame vernacular structure with English Arts and Crafts influence. The main block of the house is rectangular in plan with flanking north, south wings attached at the

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Invention

Period of Significance

1895-1931

1916-1931

Significant Dates

1895

1931

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Henry Ford, Sr.

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SUMMARY

The Henry Ford Estate is significant on a state level under Criteria B as the winter residence of Henry Ford in Fort Myers, Florida, from 1916-1931. It is also significant under Criteria C as a good example of vernacular architecture with English Arts and Crafts influence in the southern portion of the Florida West Coast.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

In the 1870's the greater part of the tourist travel was by way of the St. John's River to middle Florida. After railroad and hotel developments were initiated in the 1880's by Henry M. Flagler and H. B. Plant, pioneer Florida financiers, the volume of travel was turned to the east and west coasts. But this diversion of tourists trade did not retard the development of the interior of the State in the period between the Spanish-American War and the World War. Drainage of the Everglades was begun in 1906 as a State project under the State board of drainage commissioners; rapid progress was made after 1910. Medical research made possible preventive measures for the control of yellow fever and malaria. North Florida developed a large turpentine and naval-stores industry, after the center of citrus culture was moved from the St. Johns River valley to middle and south Florida following the destructive winters of 1895-96. Pebble phosphate was discovered in 1884 and hard rock phosphate in 1889; the former is still a source of wealth for the State. In some sections phosphate offered a substitute industry for timber, depleted by sawmills. Sixteen new counties were formed between 1909 and 1921, the greatest number since before the War between the States.

The World War broke commercial ties valuable to Florida, but tourist trade prospered and many persons who traveled to foreign resorts spent their vacations in the State. After the United States entered the War, an important army training camp was established at Jacksonville, a naval training school at Pensacola, and student flying fields at Arcadia and Miami. An army post was maintained at Key West and coastal defenses strengthened.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 # _____

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property approximately one acre

UTM References

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Parcel between McGregor Boulevard and Caloosahatchee River in West 1/2 of Section 23, Township 44, Range 24 OC or 1555/1477 as described in the Lee County Tax Rolls.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

These boundaries follow the historic boundaries established in 1895 when the property was cleared for construction. There have been no boundary changes, therefore the National Register boundaries conform to the original lines.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Vicki L. Welcher Historic Sites Specialist
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date August 5, 1988
street & number 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333
city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

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northwest and southwest corners. The roofs of all three sections are gabled and oriented north-south. The roofing is pressed metal shingles and is painted silver to retard corrosion. All elevations are covered in wood shingle and painted gray. The frame work and flooring are of South Florida heartwood pine and rest on concrete pier foundations. The unusually heavy framing has undoubtedly contributed to the preservation of the structure during five major hurricanes that hit Fort Myers in 1910, 1921, 1926, 1928, and 1960.

The main (east) facade is dominated by the extended slope-front gable roof with two gabled roof dormers. Both the main roof and the dormers have overhanging gables with triangular kneebrace supports. Dormers have curved exposed rafter tails. Paired 9/1 double hung wood sash in each dormer are screened. The lower portion of the facade is a recessed porch, originally open, and screened in 1916 by Henry Ford. The original balustrade with squared posts is intact and visible from the interior of the porch. A one story gable roofed wing at the northwest corner of the main block houses the original kitchen, while an identical one story wing at the southwest corner is a small "guest" room.

The north elevation contains two 4/1 double hung wood sash on the second story and a shed roofed bay window with triple 4/1 double hung wood sash on the lower level. The kitchen wing is connected to the main block at a level that breaks the roofline of the rear slope line. 9/1 double hung wood sash is flush with the eaves line with no kneewall.

The south elevation contains an oversized rubblework chimney that allows room for the "walk-in" interior fireplace; the stack perforates the overhanging eaves. Four 9/1 vertical double hung wood sash flank the chimney on two stories. The one story gabled wing is slope-front with single and paired 9/1 double hung wood sash.

The rear (west) elevation contains twin gables with connecting infill which form the second story. Gables repeat the pattern of overhanging eaves and triangular kneebrace supports of the main facade. The kitchen wing on the north side has a screened, recessed porch that extends to the main block. The guest wing on the south side has paired 9/1 double hung wood sash and is accessed from the screened, recessed porch of the main block. A small storage room separates the two porches. Fenestration on the upper story is irregular, with the north gable containing paired 9/1 double hung wood sash, while the south gable has a bank of six replacement aluminum windows. At the center of the two gables is a pair of smaller 4/1 double hung wood sash.

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The first floor rooms of the house are accessed by six sets of doors on both the east and west elevation. Only the main entrance is a single door; all others are paired multi-light french doors. All door lintels are returned and finished. The ceiling is wood with exposed double beaded beams. The fireplace and mantle are intact although partially blocked to reduce drafts during the summer months. A window seat in the dining area is retained and serves as a storage area.

Additional points of interest in the interior include the fourteen original closets, a rarity in 1895. Also of interest is the fire extinguishing system installed by Henry Ford in 1916. An upstairs and downstairs closet were each equipped with a water valve, fire hose and nozzle which was connected by copper plumbing to the copper holding tank installed in the attic. The system is intact with the exception of the hoses lost to dry rot.

A wood paneled stairwell leads to the second floor landing and the extra wide hallway. At the southwest corner of the house is the sleeping porch connected to two upstairs bedrooms and a bathroom by a series of doorways.

ALTERATIONS

The house itself has seen few changes since its construction in 1895. The front porch was screened in 1916 by Henry Ford, leaving all sections of the porch intact. The same year, Ford had installed the fire system described above. The only other alteration was made in the 1980s to modernize the kitchen. One interior wall was removed between the kitchen and pantry to make a larger eating area for the family.

The grounds were restored in 1947 by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Biggar, the third owners. Old, dead citrus trees were removed, the land regraded, and the native foliage allowed to take over. Several Royal Palms are still evident, with one being recognized as a Champion Royal Poinciana in 1982. In addition, Royal Palms were planted to the rear of the main house in a double row and lead to the restored dock and seawall on the Caloosahatchee River.

The only addition to the property has been the three bay car port in the late 1940s. It is interesting to note that the house of the automobile

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magnate had no garage or paved driveway during his tenure as owner of the property.

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After the World War reports of large profits in real estate brought speculators by the hundreds of thousands to Florida. The hysterical buying and selling of land so inflated prices that it was profitable in many cities to dredge sand from the bottom of bays and build artificial islands. People rushed in by train, auto, and boat, intent upon making a fortune in a few days. As a result, between 1920 and 1925, population increased four times as fast as in any other State. One and a half million visitors came annually in the early 1920's, and seven new counties were formed in 1921. At the peak of the real-estate craze in 1925, 2,500,000 people entered the State. The bubble burst in the spring of 1926. Banks failed, and individuals who had made millions became penniless overnight. Thus Florida experienced a depression in advance of the rest of the country.

The WPA Guide to Florida

Between 1880 and 1926, Florida had experienced two periods of enormous growth. The boom to Florida's economy began with the construction of railroads on the coasts by two wealthy entrepreneurs, Henry Flagler and Henry Plant. Their interest in Florida sparked others to look to the State as a land suited to winter living and year-round business opportunities. On the East Coast, Flagler's business partner, John D. Rockefeller moved to the Daytona Beach area, while Flagler built an enormous mansion in Palm Beach and John Deering built Viscaya. On the West Coast, the Ringling Brothers built a large estate in Sarasota, while Thomas Edison located to Fort Myers, where he was joined in the winters by Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone.

FORT MYERS

In the 1880s the first attempt to drain and reclaim lands from the Everglades was begun by Hamilton Disston. Although Disston met with little success, and eventual failure, his venture sparked interest in the southwest area of Florida. Settlers came to the area lured by stories in the national press of lands reclaimed from the swamps with fertile "muck soil" which would grow anything twice as fast and twice as well as back home.

In addition, the Big Freeze of 1895 drove investors and settlers from north and central Florida to the southern regions looking for better protected lands. The Caloosahatchee Valley was a good target. Citrus groves were established on lands surrounding Fort Myers. The warm climate of the area, combined with a protected inland waterway, made the town prosper.

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In 1909, Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward began large scale dredging of the Everglades, sparking a period of growth in Fort Myers. Much of the dredging and draining was directed at lands adjacent to Lake Okeechobee, to the west of Fort Myers. In 1910, the Caloosahatchee River was straightened to make the river more navigable for steam ships carrying prospective settlers, merchants, farmers, and speculators.

During the winter of 1913-14, the Everglades boom ended almost as soon as it began. Few of those who purchased "farm plots" could endure the loneliness or the mosquitoes. Also, much of the land sold was actually still underwater. Hundreds of persons who had bought Everglades lands resettled permanently in Fort Myers.

The federal census of 1910 showed the population of Fort Myers leaped from 943 in 1900 to 2,463 in 1910, a gain of 161.2%. The town continued to grow, and when the Florida Land Boom began in 1921, Fort Myers was already established as a prosperous small town with a healthy economy based on fisheries, citrus industries, cattle and tourism.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
CRITERIA B

The Henry Ford Estate was the winter residence of Henry Ford from 1916-1931. Ford bought the property after visiting his friend Thomas Edison at his winter home, adjacent to this property.

Henry Ford, born July 30, 1863 in Dearborn, Michigan produced the first mass-marketed automobile, and changed the way of life for many in the world. Ford showed early on an interest in mechanics and upon completing grade school, went to work in Detroit as a machinist's apprentice. He returned to Dearborn where he repaired and operated steam engines. In 1888, he married Clara Jane Bryant and moved again to the city where he worked at the Edison Illuminating Company. It was here that he first met Edison, and the aging, hard-of-hearing inventor applauded the young inventor's idea of a gasoline driven automobile.

In June, 1896, Ford had a successful run of a light, four-wheeled vehicle driven by a two-cylinder, four cycle gasoline motor. The machine held little distinction at that time, as at least five other crude automobiles of superior quality had already been produced.

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Ford followed this car with others and from 1899-1902 was associated with the Detroit Automobile Company and the Henry Ford Company. By 1903, Ford had achieved some recognition in the race care field, and promptly founded the Ford Motor Company. As the company prospered, Ford and his partner, Alex Y. Malcomson, began to differ on the direction the company should take. Ford favored a low priced, light car that the general public could afford; Malcomson felt there was more profits to be made in a high quality, costly car that would appeal to an elite clientele. In 1907, unable to reconcile their differences, Ford bought out Malcomson and attained control of the company.

In 1908, the Model T was introduced, and the name "Ford" became a household word. It became the first car produced by a moving assembly line in 1913. That year, Ford Motor Company produced 250,000 units with a price tag of \$500 and paid \$11,200,000 in dividends. In 1914, Ford decided to share the profits with the workers, and introduced the astonishing \$5-a-day minimum wage.

By 1915, Ford had become an internationally known industrialist and a multi-millionaire. At this time, he began to investigate ways to process not only the Model T, but to control costs by processing all the raw materials for his product. One of the products was rubber, and for this Ford turned to his friend, Thomas Edison.

Edison had begun to work on ways to produce natural rubber in 1886, in a laboratory in Fort Myers, Florida. Ford and Harvey Firestone visited Edison there in 1913. They enjoyed in so much that Ford purchased the adjacent property on June 6, 1916 for \$20,000 and began to spend his winters residing at 2400 McGregor Boulevard. Firestone rented the house on the other side of Ford. That first winter Ford had three Model Ts transported to the Ford Agency in Fort Myers. Upon their arrival, Ford presented one to Thomas Edison, one to John Burroughs (his friend and later prominent citizen of Fort Myers), and kept the last for himself. In the years to follow, Ford could be seen driving around town in his Model T. Although he presented Edison with a new model each year, Ford never exchanged his, stating that it was all he needed.

Not only did Ford reside next to Edison, he financed Edison's experiments in rubber. As always, Edison was in need of financing for his projects, and two of America's most well-known industrialists came to his aid. Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone both contributed funds for the initial experiments. Later, as rubber became important to the War Effort, Ford and Firestone added still more financial assistance in conjunction with the

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Federal Government. Over 500,000 experiments were conducted on the Edison Estate from 1886 until Edison's death in 1931. The exotic plants that Edison used in his experiments are still on the estate, many of them on the riverside of the estate, as this is where the original factory was located. During Hurricane Donna in 1960, the debris from these plants all but engulfed the Ford estate.

Ford took an active interest in the activities of Fort Myers. After being humiliated in a liable suit in 1919, (of which he won a six cents damages), Ford began to collect items in the early 1920s for Greenfield Village, an exhibit at Dearborn he designed and which emphasized his conception of history as the progress of man from handicrafts to modern technology. Two of the articles he had dismantled and reconstructed at Dearborn were the original electrical laboratory of Edison's, built in 1887 and now in disrepair, and the steam ship that had plied a Caloosahatchee for many years, but had also fallen into disuse.

When Thomas Edison died in 1931, Ford closed up the estate in Fort Myers, saying it was too painful to visit without his good friend. The estate was rented until 1945, when it was purchased from Mrs. Edison by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Biggar. It has been preserved intact since then with particular attention being given to protect the property from modern intrusions. In 1988, the City of Fort Myers purchased the property with intentions of converting it into a house museum to honor Henry Ford.

The Henry Ford Estate still reflects the presence of Ford. His alterations to the property, the white picket fence, the revamping of the sleeping porch into his office, the installation of a fire extinguishing system, and the screening of the porches had been preserved and restored as needed. The presence of the three great industrialists/inventors in Fort Myers was further enhanced by the location of their estates. The tourist trade to Fort Myers was strong as visitors hoped to catch a glimpse of the three magnates.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
CRITERIA C

The one and one half story wood frame vernacular house of the Henry Ford Estate is significant for its uncommon construction in the Fort Myers area of the Florida West Coast. It shows influence of the English Arts and Crafts

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Movement, begun in the 1850s, and picked up in the Columbian Exposition of 1893. It is a forerunner of the Bungalow style architecture used in America and referred to as Craftsman style after 1903.

The Arts and Crafts movement was first noticed at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Here, young British architects rejected classic, historic architecture and machine-produced building materials. They designed houses using the vernacular structures of rural England as models. The intent was to return to the craftsmanship of the medieval period, prior to the industrial revolution.

As the movement progressed, certain characteristics of the style developed. The roofs were usually steep pitch gables with extended slopes and overhanging eaves. They used rubblestone for fireplaces, chimneys and other detailing instead of machine-cut stone. Triangular kneebraces were used at the eaves lines and exterior walls were often shanks or shingles.

The Henry Ford house reflects this movement in that it is vernacular, and yet shows special attention to detail. The rooflines of the main block and wings do not intersect on a normal axis. Framing could only be done by a craftsman skilled in construction techniques. In addition, the builder incorporated porches on both the east and west elevations. These served the purpose of providing shade as well as cross-ventilation, to catch the river breezes. A sleeping porch on the second story is situated to catch southwesterly breezes, the most common direction during the summer months.

The framing for the house is unusually heavy, showing a concern for the hurricanes and high winds that had struck Fort Myers consistently since its early settlement as a fort in the 1830s. Along with a heavy frame, the house was constructed on piers, to prevent damage from termites and flood waters.

It is believed the house was one of the first built out of wood from a lumber mill that was constructed nearby. It is known that all wood is heartwood pine that had to have been milled nearby for transportation reasons, heartwood pine being exceptionally heavy to transport overland. In addition, it was not until the early 1900s, during the good roads movement, that Lee County could boast of even shell roads.

Because of the extreme heat, humidity and precipitation in the Fort Myers area, there are extremely few pre-1900 structures remaining in the city. The Ford Estate and the Edison Estate across the street are two of only a handful in the city as well as the county. Of those remaining, the Ford

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Estate is the exceptional for its very heavy framing and remarkable integrity. There has been no visible sagging in any areas of the framing or detailing. The wood shingled exterior walls have never been resingled, the roof retinned, nor the interior replastered.

The house is constructed with particular attention to detail, all door and window lintels are returned, all rooms finished with wide baseboards, the wall plastering of such high quality that it is still intact with almost no visible cracks. The final attention to detail is the fourteen closets built into the structure. Local legend has it that its original owner, Mr. Smith, had the house built for his wife and four daughters, knowing they could only fit if they had plenty of closet space.

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Henry Ford Estate

1. Henry Ford Estate
2. Fort Myers, Florida
3. Unknown.
4. 1987
5. Mrs. Gladys Biggar, Fort Myers
6. Aerial View of Estate facing northwest
7. Photo 1 of 12

The information listed in items 1-5 are identical for each photograph.

6. Rear Elevation facing southeast
7. Photo 2 of 12

6. Main Facade facing north
7. Photo 3 of 12

6. Rear elevation facing north
7. Photo 4 of 12

6. Front screened recessed porch facing south
7. Photo 5 of 12

6. Front screened recessed porch facing north
7. Photo 6 of 12

6. Interior detail of main room facing east
7. Photo 7 of 12

6. Interior detail showing upstairs hallway facing south
7. Photo 8 of 12

6. Main facade and north elevation, facing southwest
7. Photo 9 of 12

6. Rear elevation facing east
7. Photo 10 of 12

6. Interior detail of dining room, facing north
7. Photo 11 of 12

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6. Interior detail upstairs bedroom, facing northwest
7. Photo 12 of 12

CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER



20



Thomas Edison Estate

McGregor Boulevard

Henry Ford Estate

Thomas Edison Estate

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE