

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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13 00

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

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Roebling, Donald, Estate

AND/OR COMMON

"Spotswood", "Spottis Woode", "Spottiswoode"

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

700 Orange Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5

STATE

Florida

VICINITY OF

CODE

12

COUNTY

Pinellas

CODE

103

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Todd, Mrs. Frances P.

STREET & NUMBER

700 Orange Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

VICINITY OF

STATE

Florida

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

Architectural Survey, Clearwater Inner City

DATE

1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

City of Clearwater Planning Dept., City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Clearwater

STATE

Florida

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Donald Roebing Estate, "Spotswood," consists of a large irregularly massed Tudor Revival style main residence with several outbuildings all designed in the same style - a boat house, a well house and a bath house; additional facilities include a swimming pool, a tennis court, terraced and landscaped gardens, a "pool pavilion", a green house and a large "service building" or machine shop.

The house, which is basically rectangular, is located near the center of the seven acre site which borders Clearwater Harbor. To the west or rear of the house, the terrain drops off toward the water; toward the east the terrain remains level. The recreational facilities (pool, bath house, pavilion, boat house and tennis court) are located on the western edge of the property along the water. The greenhouse and Roebing's machine shop where he developed his amphibious vehicle are located to the north-east of the residence while the tiny well house is located east of the house along the southern property line. The house is approached from Orange Avenue through an expanse of lawn and massive live oak trees by a curved drive which terminates in the forecourt at the east (entrance) facade.

The 2½-story house is constructed of red brick laid in Flemish bond. Gable ends are articulated with half-timbering and patterned brickwork (herringbone, basket weave). Bay windows on both the entrance and garden facades, the entrance pavilion and the arcaded bays of the garage and west porches are carried out in molded limestone. The two massive chimneys located near the extremes of the central hip roof are animated by clustered brick stacks. Subsidiary wings project to the east (a 3-bay garage), to the north (a 2-story guest wing)¹ and to the south (a 1-story study wing, date undetermined). A semi-octagonal elevator tower (1939) adjacent to the main entrance also projects from the east facade.

The linear plan of the house allowed the architect to take maximum advantage of the natural qualities of the elevated site. Living and sleeping spaces are ranged along the west or garden facade as is the paved terrace; circulation spaces (stairs, corridors, elevator tower) are all found along the west (entrance) facade. Thus vistas to the west over the water and the landscaped gardens could be viewed from all the principal rooms. The original interior remains virtually unaltered and is richly detailed with mahogany paneling and carved ceiling beams, molded plaster ceiling ornaments and carved limestone fireplace mantels. One of the most unusual features is the U-shaped oak staircase at the southeastern corner. Its newel post finials have carved likenesses of the designers and craftsmen who worked on the house: the architect (Roy W. Wakeling); the builder (John Phillipoff); the plasterer (Edison Lippincott); the head foreman (Fred Wyllie); the surveyor (Leo Butler); the carpenter (Ed Dalton);

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the electrician (Ralph Robinson); and the plumber (Ralph A. Gourieux) are each represented.

The original paved terrace running the length of the garden facade was covered and enclosed sometime between 1940 and 1948. The porches near the southwest corner have been similarly enclosed. These alterations along with the addition of the north and south wings and the elevator tower have been the only major exterior changes. However, the latter additions were all designed by R. W. Wakeling,² the original architect, and in a comparable style.

The boat house and the bath house adjacent to the swimming pool were part of the original design and are carefully detailed with half timbering, pattern brickwork, and Indiana limestone trim which complement the house. A small pool pavilion added about 1948⁵ along the seawall was also designed by Wakeling but is a simple flat roofed concrete structure.

Roebbling's machine shop ("service building") was added to the estate sometime after 1931 with subsequent additions around 1946.⁴ This large 1-story brick masonry building was also designed by Wakeling but bears no stylistic relationship to the estate's other buildings.

The property is bordered by a brick wall with brick coping and piers. Brick piers with wrought iron gates mark the Orange Avenue entrance on the east and the machine shop entrance on the north.

1

Roy W. Wakeling, "Addition to the Donald Roebbling Residence, Clearwater, Florida," February 11, 1946, drawing copy filed with the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee, Florida.

2

Roy W. Wakeling, "The Donald Roebbling Residence at Clearwater, Florida," comm. #837, (n.d.); "A Swimming Pool for Donald Roebbling, Clearwater, Florida," comm. #857, (n.d.); "Well House for Donald Roebbling," comm. #837 (n.d.); "Bath House for Mr. Donald Roebbling, Clearwater, Florida," comm. #837, (3 March 1930); "A Boat House for Donald Roebbling,

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Clearwater, Florida," comm. #837 (n.d.); copies of miscellaneous drawings filed with the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee, Florida.

3

Roy W. Wakeling, "Pavilion for Mr. Donald Roebing, Clearwater, Florida," (n.d.); masonry paving adjacent to pavilion has a November, 1948 plate date.

4

Roy W. Wakeling, "A Service Building, Donald Roebing," (n.d.); "Servcie Building and Gates & Drives, Donald Roebing, Clearwater, Florida," (n.d.); copies of drawings filed with the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee, Florida.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES +1929

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Wakeling, Roy W.
(Clearwater, Fl.)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Donald Roebbling Estate, "Spotswood/Spottis Woode," is significant as the residence and workshop of Donald Roebbling (1908-1959), inventor, local philanthropist and descendent of one of America's most important engineering families of the 19th century. "Spotswood" is also an imposing example of the Tudor Revival architectural style. The picturesque qualities of this style resulted from the combination of irregular massing and a rich variety of highly textural materials. Steeply pitched roofs animated with clustered chimney stacks and frequent gables with patterned brickwork and half timbering were reminiscent of English domestic architecture of the 15th and 16th centuries. The style was used to much advantage by many American architects for suburban estates during the early decades of the 20th century.

Donald Roebbling was the youngest son of John A. Roebbling, II, and Margaret McIlvaine Roebbling. He did not follow the family engineering tradition established by his great grandfather John Augustus Roebbling and his grandfather Washington Augustus Roebbling, who pioneered in the design and construction of wire-cable suspension bridges. Instead, Donald attended Bliss Electrical School, Washington, D.C. and devoted most of his life to private research, inventions and philanthropy.

Between 1929 and 1931,¹ Donald Roebbling and his wife Florence Spotswood Roebbling moved to Clearwater, Florida, and built a large house on "the Bluff," a natural prominence overlooking Clearwater Harbor. The seven-acre estate was designed by Roy W. Wakeling, a local architect, and the firm of A. D. Taylor, landscape architects of Orlando, Florida and Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to the large, irregularly massed Tudor Revival style house built of varying patterns of red brick, the estate included similarly detailed outbuildings: boat house, bath house and well house. Terraced lawns and formal gardens descend from "the Bluff" to the water's edge while broad lawns to the front (east) and side (south) are landscaped with ornamental shrubs and citrus trees.

The engineering genius of the Roebbling family was continued by Donald at his Clearwater estate where he developed his amphibious vehicle, "the Alligator," sometime between 1933 and 1940. Tradition² assigns the suggestion for such a craft to John Augustus Roebbling, II, Donald's father, who thought that such a vehicle would be useful in assisting

(See Continuation Sheet)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 7
 UTM REFERENCES

A 17 322460 3093650
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 C

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING
 D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All of that part and parcel of land comprised of lots 2,3,5,6,7 and 8 of Shore Oaks Subdivision, Lot A of Harbor Oaks Subdivision and Lot 2, Block 6 of Starr and Savery's Addition.

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
 Dan G. Deibler (Historic Sites Specialist)
 ORGANIZATION
 Florida Division of Archives, History & Records Management
 STREET & NUMBER
 The Capitol
 CITY OR TOWN
 Tallahassee
 DATE
 7-13-1979
 TELEPHONE
 (904) 487-2333
 STATE
 Florida

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL XXX

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 *[Signature]* DATE 9/26/79
 TITLE Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

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

Sally L. Old DATE 12/19/75
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 ATTEST: *W. H. Baker* DATE 12/12/79
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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victims of the devastating hurricanes which periodically struck Florida. Whatever the motivation, Roebling added a machine shop to his estate some-time after 1931, hired a number of workmen and began experimenting with designs for an amphibious tractor. He was able to get additional parts from the Food Machinery Corporation (FMC) plant which was near Clearwater.³ Roebling's "Alligator" became known to the Department of the Navy, more specifically the Marine Corps, by 1937 when Major John Kaluf, USMC, was sent to Florida to investigate Roebling's device.⁴ In 1939, the Marine equipment Board purchased 3 experimental vehicles and the following year, ". . . the Navy Department set aside funds for further development and let the first Navy contract to Roebling to produce his tractor in large quantities. This was the origin of the first tracked landing vehicle (LVT)."⁵ The LVT Mk I's were used for the first time in landing operations in the Solomon Islands in August, 1942 by the Naval and Marine forces.⁶ By the end of World War II, FMC plants in Florida and California had produced some 11,251 tracked landing vehicles (LVT) for Allied naval operations. Other manufacturers⁸ included Borg-Warner, Graham-Paige Motors and the St. Louis Car Company, which brought the total wartime production to more than 18,000 vehicles.

Roebling's generosity in releasing the patent rights to the "Alligator" to the United States Government led to an "Award of Merit" being conferred in 1946 by President Harry S. Truman.⁹ This patriotic contribution to a national cause was matched by Roebling's equally strong community concerns. His philanthropy facilitated the addition of several wings to Clearwater's Morton F. Plant Hospital (1930, 1941, 1954), a hall and gymnasium to the Peace Memorial Presbyterian Church in Clearwater, and the construction of a local boy scout building.¹⁰

Roebling retained the estate until 1956¹¹ when he sold it to Augustin J. and Frances Packette Todd, who have used it as a residence since then.

¹ Polk's Clearwater City Directory for 1931 lists Donald and Florence Roebling as residing at 700 Orange Avenue. Site plans dated 22 May 1929 and revised 7 January 1931 were done by the A. D. Taylor landscape architectural firm.

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2 Michael L. Sanders, "Mr. Roebling," Beach Life, September 1974, p. 27.

3 "Alligators by Roebling," Time, January 11, 1943, p. 76.

4 Jeter A. Isley, The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 69.

5 Ibid.

6 J. D. Ladd, Assault from the Sea 1939-1945, New York: Nippocrene Books, Inc., 1976, p. 151.

7 Ibid.

8 "Alligators by Roebling," op. cit.

9 Copy of Award, on file with the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management.

10 Michael L. Sanders, "Mr. Roebling," p. 39.

11 Frances Packette Todd, personal communication to L. Ross Morrell, August 14, 1979.

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"Alligators by Roebling," Time, January 11, 1943.

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The American Historical Society, Inc., 1938.

Isley, Jeter A. and Philip A. Crowl, The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

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Nippocrene Books, Inc., 1976.

Polk, R. L. Clearwater City Directory, Jacksonville, Florida:
R. L. Polk and Co., 1924, 1925, 1926, 1931, 1952, 1955, 1956.

Sanders, Michael L. "Mr. Roebling," Beach Life, September, 1974.

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August 14, 1979.

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Donald Roebling residence, Clearwater, Florida, 1929-1946.
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