

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUL 03 1989

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Multiple Resource Area of Sebring, Florida

and or common

2. Location

street & number Multiple not for publication

city, town Sebring vicinity of

state Florida code FL county Highlands code FL 055

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple: See Individual Nominations

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Highlands County Courthouse

street & number 430 South Commerce Avenue

city, town Sebring state Florida

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title His. Prop. of Sebring, FL has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date September, 1987 federal state county local

depository for survey records FL Dept. of State-Bureau of Historic Preservation

city, town Tallahassee state FL

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Please See Continuation Sheets

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Multiple Resources of Sebring, FL

SUMMARY

The City of Sebring is located in south central Florida, approximately 90 miles south of Orlando and 90 miles east of Sarasota. It is situated on the central ridge of Florida approximately 160 feet above sea level. The topography of the area consists of rolling hills mixed with numerous lakes. The southern limestone soil supports pines and oaks in some areas, but grasses, along with saw palmetto and sabal palms predominate. The city is situated near the northern edge of the tropical zone with an annual rainfall of 61 inches. The corporate limits of Sebring cover nine square miles and encircle Lake Jackson, an expansive body of water covering approximately 3,000 acres.

Sebring, with a population of slightly over 8,000, is the county seat of sparsely populated Highlands County. The economy of the area depends principally upon citrus, cattle, and tourism. The growing of tropical plants and fruits, introduced in the 1920s, remains a viable industry. The businesses within the city are mainly service oriented. The population of Highlands County and its three urban areas, none of which exceeds 10,000, has grown moderately in the past half-century.

ORIGINAL APPEARANCE

Relatively little is known about the prehistoric settlements of Sebring and surrounding Highlands County. Florida's pre-Columbian inhabitants established their permanent settlements within coastal areas or along riverine basins where they enjoyed access to shellfish. Recent work suggests, however, that the central highlands did lend itself to previously unrecognized occupation, including hunting camps, semi-sedentary villages, and ceremonial sites. Highlands County is within the sphere of settlement of the Calusa Indians, a coastal tribe known to have settled as close as Charlotte Harbor, about sixty miles southwest of Sebring. No evidence exists at this time that the Calusas inhabited land within the Sebring area, but the potential for archeological data remains.

This central ridge of Florida was largely undeveloped at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ground cover in the piney woods was cleared in areas to provide cattle range for the small, but growing numbers of settlers. Soon, the settlers planted winter vegetables and citrus. Even so, there was only scattered clearings in the piney ridge in 1910. The development of Sebring spanned the years from 1911, when the city was laid out, until approximately 1927, when the collapse of the Florida Land Boom greatly curtailed new growth and development. The principal land divisions of development within the Town of Sebring were the original town plan, platted in 1912; Lakeview Terrace Subdivision, platted in 1924; and Palmhurst

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Subdivision, platted in 1925. These areas include the downtown commercial sector, where masonry vernacular buildings predominate, and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The commercial district centered around "The Circle", a planned axial park with radiating streets and buildings with curvilinear facades.

The historic residential component of Sebring measures approximately 310 acres. During the period of growth, there was limited construction outside of the three above mentioned subdivisions. The original residential development centered on the area between the Circle and Lake Jackson. The finer historic residences, such as those owned by the Sebring family, were situated along the lakefront. Residential architecture was predominantly Frame Vernacular, Bungalow and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. Included under the style of Spanish Colonial Revival are the Spanish Eclectic, Mediterranean Revival, and Mission styles.

PRESENT APPEARANCE

The appearance of present day Sebring is very similar to the historic period. Sebring still serves as the seat of county government of Highlands County, created in 1921. The major economic activities are service industries such as law firms, title and abstract companies, and real estate businesses related to the local government function and retail shopping and other service businesses downtown. In addition, tourism and the citrus are significant industries. Buildings within the city, both historic and contemporary, embody these activities through their design and use. They include private residences, churches, a school, and governmental, commercial, and civic buildings.

The visual character of Sebring reflects the original town plan. The plan was laid out in 1911 and forms the framework for most of the subsequent historic development of the town. It consists of a central circle enclosed by a hexagon from which six streets radiate. The circular plan is unique among urban areas in Florida. It provides the city with a distinctive appearance. It forms the visual, ceremonial, and commercial core of Sebring and is surrounded by the historic commercial buildings of Sebring.

The circular plan, in contrast with the more common grid pattern, resulted in a curvilinear street pattern in the blocks surrounding the Circle. The blocks extending from the Circle are often asymmetrical and polygonal. Toward the outer edges of the original plat, the blocks assume a more regular pattern in the form of triangles, squares, and rectangles. Portions of the original brick streets also remain in certain places, in particular, Wall Street, the street encircling the central core.

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In addition to the historic structures, Sebring contains significant landscape and streetscape features. The most significant of these is the circular town plan and central park. The Circle, at less than one acre, is the central and most prominent of several parks within the city limits. Others are Pocket Park and Park Street Park, both of which also measure less than one acre. Additional open spaces include Glenwood and Hawthorne Park, the Sebring Middle School grounds, the city tennis courts, and Firemen's Field. Natural features such as Lake Jackson and a proliferation of water oak trees, offering spacious canopies, lend the area distinction.

One of the most important preservation projects in Sebring has been the restoration of the city's historic street lamps. The lamps had a classical design consisting of an attic base and fluted columns. They are topped by a glass globe. Many of the original lamps have been restored as part of improvements to the Circle and the streets surrounding it.

The high percentage of historic buildings, particularly in the downtown redevelopment area, and the preservation of the circular plan provide striking evidence of the historic integrity that Sebring retains. The city conveys a sense of time and place through its historic buildings and distinctive plan. These features embody Sebring's formative years of development from 1910s and 1920s. The historic fabric of downtown and the surrounding residential neighborhoods provides a link between old and new Sebring.

The City of Sebring Multiple Resource Area includes commercial, governmental, transportation, and residential buildings that are associated with the city's settlement and subsequent development between 1911 and 1927.

COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

The historic commercial buildings within the city were constructed between 1916 and 1927. They are one and two story, attached masonry buildings. The first floors were originally designed for use as public spaces such as banking rooms, insurance offices, hotel lobbies, and retail storefronts. Offices, entertainment, and meeting spaces were located on the upper floors. Many of the structures have secondary facades at the "rear" elevation on the alley (Wall Street) providing another location for small businesses and specialty shops.

The typical storefront features large display windows and a formal entry while the upper stories contain the signage and the decorative elements of the building. Decoration is minimal and frequently limited to decorative brick or stonework at the main facade. Shop windows are flanked by pilasters providing a frame for the displaying of retail merchandise. The main entrance is frequently centered and recessed to avoid competition with the display area.

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"Kick" panels located at ground level below the display windows are constructed of a variety of materials, most commonly wood. Metal or wood canopies or canvas awnings are used above the storefronts and serve as shelter for shoppers and as an extension of the display surface of the building.

The extant historic commercial buildings in Sebring are rectangular in plan and constructed of red or buff brick or stucco with flat roofs and parapets. Structures on South and North Circle Drive have curvilinear facades to correspond with the curvature of the street. In some instances, the original brick finish has been obscured through painting or the application of stucco. Decorative features include corbelling, dentils, belt courses and name and date panels. Several good examples are 208 Circle Drive, 134-138 North Ridgewood Drive, and the Hotel Nan-ces-O-Wee at 133 North Ridgewood.

RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURAL

Residences are the most numerous type of historic buildings located within the city. The most prominent historic residences front on Lakeview Drive, which circles Lake Jackson. These, as well as the other historic residences in Sebring embody both vernacular and high styled architecture. Historic residences include the H. O. Sebring House, the Paul L. Vinson House, and the Edward Hainz House. Other historic buildings include the Presbyterian Church, the Seaboard Air Line Passenger Depot and Freight Station, the Central Station firehouse, and the Highlands County Courthouse.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Bungalow Style

The bungalow style is predominant in the historic residential architecture of Sebring. The bungalows generally contain a rectangular ground plan with the short side of the building facing the street. Other identifying features include a gable over gable roof line, exposed rafter tails, decorative beams or braces under gables, tapered chimneys, and battered porch columns.

Several bungalows in Sebring take a more elaborate form such as the Airplane/Belvedere and Japanese styles. These styles are characterized by a central second story mass, smaller in area than the first floor. A series of multiple roof planes with a peaked or flared roof line set apart the Japanese style, as denoted by the Edward Hainz House at 155 East Center Avenue.

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Mission Style

There are numerous examples of the Mission style in Sebring, represented in both residential and commercial buildings. The identifying features of the Mission style are the curvilinear dormer or roof parapet, smooth stucco wall surfaces, arched window and door openings, and tile roof surfaces. In commercial buildings designed in the style, roofs are usually flat while in residential buildings they are often hipped or gabled.

Spanish Colonial Revival Style

Architecture reflecting a Mediterranean or Spanish influence is also prevalent in Sebring. Spanish Colonial Revival styled structures are numerous in residential areas, and much rarer in the commercial structures of Sebring. They are distinguished by low pitched hipped or gable roofs; arches at the entrances, fenestration and porches; stucco exterior walls; clay barrel tile roofing; elaborate doors emphasized by adjacent spiral columns; pilasters; carved stonework, or patterned tiles; cast-iron grill work; balustrades, balconies, and balconettes; clay barrel or s-shaped tile chimney tops; canales; scuppers; round or square towers; and loggias.

There are numerous examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture in Sebring. Many of the large houses that line Lake Shore Drive embody the traditional style in the symmetry of the structure, ornamented with classical detailing. The style also lends itself to more eclectic architecture, and is used in conjunction with the Mission and Art Deco styles in Sebring to create unique, and rare forms of architecture.

Neo-Classical Revival

The Neo-Classical Revival style of architecture is apparent in the commercial structures of Sebring, most notably the Highlands County Courthouse. The style is dominated by a monumental portico on the facade of the structure. In addition, the structures contain full cornices, regular fenestration, corinthian or ionic columns, dentils, modillions, and pedimented gables. Most often, the main block contains a hip or flat roof with parapet. The style is best represented by the Highlands County Courthouse at 430 South Commerce Avenue and the Highlands Bank and Trust at 200 North Circle Drive.

Art Deco

There is a limited number of Art Deco styled structures in the Town of Sebring. They are found, however, in both commercial and residential areas. The outstanding details of the style include a smooth wall surface, vertical terra-cotta panels, towers, and vertical emphasis at the roof line. The Art

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Deco style was commonly used in public and commercial buildings in the 1920s and early 1930s. While there are some residential examples of the style, they are relatively rare. In Sebring, this scenario holds true, with such examples as the Central Station firehouse, and the eclectic Paul L. Vinson house displaying Art Deco through its unusual configuration of Mission style influences.

Wood and Masonry Vernacular Structures

Much of the early residential architecture in Sebring consisted of wood frame buildings probably custom built for their owner occupants. These buildings were the houses of the first settlers, whose concerns were utilitarian and whose dwellings are best described as Frame Vernacular. Most of the Frame Vernacular buildings in the survey area had a gable roof, although hip roofs were occasionally used. In general, the roof was covered with wood shingles which in many instances have been replaced with composition material. Buildings were one and two stories high and rest on low concrete block or brick piers. Exterior sheathing varied with drop siding, weatherboard, and wood shingles. Fenestration was regular but not always symmetrical, with wood, double hung sash and doors of panelled wood. Doorways were unadorned. The plan of these houses was rectangular, with two rooms (hall and parlor), two or four rooms divided by a central hall, or two rooms with a stairwell to the side. "L" or "T"-shaped plans were used to maximize cross-ventilation. The interior finish of these vernacular buildings was probably as utilitarian as the exterior.

The masonry vernacular structures of Sebring are most often two to three stories with flat roofs and parapets or false fronts. The main building material is brick, with examples of concrete block and hollow clay tile also in evidence. Fenestration is most often regular, double hung sash at the upper stories, and storefront display windows at the first story. Decorative detailing is limited to the cornice and dentils. There are several stuccoed structures, reflecting the desire to reflect the Spanish Colonial Revival style.

Of the 184 buildings and other properties surveyed, 130 were classified as residences. Another 33 had a commercial use. Other uses included, government, 9; apartments, 9; religion, 1; park, 1; and abandoned, 1.

The historic building stock appears to be in solid condition given its relatively recent date of construction and its frequent maintenance. Eleven buildings were classified as being in excellent condition, 108 in good condition, 56 were in fair condition, and only 5 in poor condition.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–1939	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) comm. development
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				

Specific dates 1912-1939 **Builder/Architect** Various, See Individual Nominations

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

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THE SEBRING FAMILY AND THE FOUNDING OF SEBRING, FLORIDA

Relatively little is known about the prehistoric settlements of Sebring and surrounding Highlands County. Florida's pre-Columbian inhabitants established their permanent settlements within coastal areas or along riverine basins where they enjoyed access to shellfish. Recent work suggests, however, that the central highlands did lend itself to previously unrecognized occupation, including hunting camps, semi-sedentary villages, and ceremonial sites. Highlands County is within the sphere of settlement of the Calusa Indians, a coastal tribe known to have settled as close as Charlotte Harbor, about sixty miles southwest of Sebring. No evidence exists at this time that the Calusas inhabited land within the Sebring area, but the potential for archeological data remains.

The highland region of Central Florida was open rangeland during most of the nineteenth century with a cattle population far exceeding that of humans. The towns of Arcadia and Avon Park were both established in 1886; located fifty miles southwest and ten miles north, respectively, of present day Sebring, the towns remained the only centers of civilization through the end of the century. By 1911, however, more than 42 families had established homesteads in the area surrounding Lake Jackson. The area was relatively isolated and difficult to reach as the railroad depot was forty miles northwest at Wauchula. The economy consisted mainly of citrus and winter vegetable production and cattle farming until 1912. At that time, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad extended its line to the Town of Sebring which George Sebring had platted the previous year. With the railroad came new settlers and more service related businesses.

The town prospered, and the founder was credited with a successful venture. Born in 1859, George Sebring was one of six sons of a hardware store owner in East Liverpool, Ohio. With his brothers, George established a highly successful pottery business during the 1890s. In 1898, the Sebrings began looking for a location to establish a new community in which their business might serve as a focal point. Sebring selected a tract in the southwest corner of Mahoning County, Ohio. A pottery was quickly built and in two years the town of Sebring, Ohio, was established. The brothers set up a holding company for their properties in the city and eventually constructed a water works, telephone system, electric plant and other utilities. George Sebring retired from the business for health reasons and moved to Florida in the first decade of the twentieth century.

George Sebring was acquainted with Florida prior to his retirement, having visited the state on hunting trips in the 1890s. Sebring often commented on the warm climate and natural beauty, a marked contrast from the cold, industrialized area of Ohio where he grew up. In 1909 he built a large

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residence on the east coast in Daytona Beach and in 1910 purchased a tract of land at Auburndale, Florida, where he planned to establish a community. He soon sold it, however, feeling it did not suit his needs. In 1911, an acquaintance from Wauchula, Florida, A.G. Smith, introduced Sebring to the Lake Jackson area. Sebring purchased approximately 9,000 acres with the majority of it on the east side of the lake.

Sebring's three sons joined him in the property development and management of Sebring, Florida. They were H. Orvel Sebring, who was born in 1881 to Sebring's first wife; and George E. Sebring, Jr. and Payne Sebring, the progeny of a second marriage. Sebring also had two daughters, one from each marriage. His brother, Frank Sebring, also enlisted in the Florida enterprise.

After purchasing the land, George Sebring wasted little time in platting the town. He selected as his surveyor, A. C. Nydegger, who was working in Polk County north of the Sebring tract. Nydegger recounted in 1951 that he drew the preliminary map for the town of Sebring on October 28, 1911. He and Sebring took a train to Wauchula, where Sebring rented a car and employed several helpers. They drove and pushed the car through the sand past Avon Park and down to Lake Jackson. Sebring and the surveyor selected the site for the town and Nydegger drew the plans before returning to Winter Haven. The actual platting of the town was performed by an engineer from Lakeland, J.W. Turner.

The most prominent feature of the town which George Sebring created on the shore of Lake Jackson was its radial plan. The central feature was a circular park situated on a low hill, the crest of which was located approximately four blocks east of the lake shore. The park, in turn, is encircled by a street from which six avenues radiate. Two peripheral streets ran in an outer semicircle, tying the three eastern spokes of the radius together. An outer alley called Wall Street encompasses the entire circumference of Circle Drive. Circle Drive and Circle Park are symbols of the city and have served as the centerpiece of community activities and festivals.

Sebring marketed the majority of the Florida land through the Sebring Real Estate Company, one of numerous companies he and his sons established through the years in managing their various enterprises. Those enterprises included land development, construction and operation of hotels, provision of power and telephone service to the city, and property management. By early 1912, the Sebring Real Estate Company had prepared an extensive list of properties for sale in the community, with varying prices for urban lots and rural land. Lots situated around the Circle were either retained by Sebring or immediately conveyed to co-developers.

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The first major advertisement for lots, issued in April, 1912, offered lots adjacent to those around the Circle for prices ranging from \$400 to \$650 per lot. Lakefront property was advertised at approximately \$1000 per lot, although the lakeshore lots were considerably larger than the commercial lots near the Circle. The blocks along Ridgewood Avenue north of Pine Street were divided into three lots per block and offered for sale at \$1,500 per lot. That price included a concrete sidewalk along the street, an "improved road", a fence on the back and front portions of the lot, shade trees in front of the walk, and a cleared lot planted with grapefruit and orange trees. Buildings constructed on many lots were required to cost at least \$3,000. Like his Ohio land conveyances, the Florida deeds which Sebring transferred to buyers contained a restriction against the sale of alcoholic beverages.

The first businesses established in the town were George Sebring's real estate and development companies. Sebring's involvement in every facet of the town's development were so widespread that his interests were universally referred to in the community as "the Company." Electric service in the town's first year was provided by a wood-fired, steam-driven generator, owned by Sebring. Service was available only during five evening hours. In 1912, a telephone line was strung on trees through the forest from Arcadia and eleven phone outlets made available for residents.

Streets consisted of sand trails and automobiles proceeded along ruts worn in the sand. H.O. Sebring made the first attempt to pave a street with a mixture of sand and tar. It proved ineffective. Next, a twenty foot wide test section of concrete was poured at the corner of Ridgewood and Mango with little success. Finally, the first useful hard surfacing, consisting of "Bartow clay," or tailings of phosphate mining, was applied to the street surrounding the Circle and for a short distance to radiating streets.

H. Orvel Sebring helped organize and served as a director of the Board of Trade, predecessor to the Chamber of Commerce, which was organized in 1914. The Board of Trade played an active role in the physical development of the town as well as in promotional efforts. So important did George Sebring regard its activities that, in 1916, he gave the Board a choice lot on the Circle for an office. The Board erected a building that served additionally as chambers of the City Council, a Town Hall, and a city auditorium. The building became a center of town social activity, serving surely to link the idea of promotion, the major work of the Board of Trade, with town life. The Board of Trade room served as headquarters for the Red Cross during World War I and remained for forty years the repository of the Women's Club library.

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The Sebrings vigorously promoted the new community. H. Orvel, George Sebring's eldest son, was principally responsible for recruiting buyers from Ohio and the northeastern states. George remained in charge of development activities in Florida. The company produced a number of brochures touting the locality. An early example, entitled "The Consummation of a Great Idea," emphasized the opportunities for "better living" in a land "of sunshine, fruit and flowers." The brochure described the geography of the region "on the sunny slopes of Florida's high, rolling pine lands", the community's lakefront location, the advantages of soil and climate, and the possibilities for production of cash earning citrus. Implicit in the advertising was the appeal of Sebring as a resort location and retirement site offering an opportunity for economic improvement. Sebring's Eden in Florida was a place where "preachers, evangelists, college professors and Christian workers who are spending their lives in the work of the church, will find a place to rest and recuperation in the days of their activity and a pleasant climate in which to spend the evening of their lives. Where the businessman, the farmer, the mechanic and all who are looking for a better living will find their ideal home."

George Sebring's desire to establish a new community in a veritable wilderness was apparently influenced by a mixture of social, religious, and economic motives. His efforts to establish planned communities in both Ohio and Florida involved attempts to provide modern services and amenities for inhabitants and for the people who were in his employ. He encouraged the propagation of religious communities by offering inducements to religious leaders. The list of original settlers and land purchasers in Sebring included a large number of members of the Salvation Army. Sebring extended an offer of free land to any denomination that would construct a church building. The lots included choice property in the center of town. At fund raising efforts for churches, Sebring often made an offer of "the first and last one hundred dollars."

In the years between the town's founding, its incorporation in 1913 and its period of hectic expansion in the mid-1920s, Sebring grew at a respectable pace, transforming itself from a raw frontier settlement to a small resort and retirement community, offering services to support the nascent citrus and cattle industries around it and the real estate development activity in its midst. The town's early growth was immeasurably aided by the almost simultaneous introduction of rail service. The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad had pushed its line into Avon Park by 1912 and, upon news of Sebring's development, promptly extended its service to the new community. Serviceable highways came much later. The earliest highways, like the streets of Sebring themselves, remained little more than sand trails well into the 1920s. A principal duty of one county commissioner was the "strawing" of roads, insuring that well worn ruts were filled with pine needles.

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An application for municipal incorporation was filed March 15, 1912. It provided for an administration vested in a mayor, town clerk, treasurer, assessor, tax collector and five-member town council. Following approval from the state, the first meeting of the administration was held July 2, 1913. Its first resolution urged the railroad company to remove a derailed car from a street. Reflecting the religious purpose that George Sebring sought to introduce into his community, a second resolution two weeks later offered a five dollar reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone selling intoxicants. At that second meeting, Sebring offered to sell the town his light and water plants. His requested price of \$10,000 could not be met by the small community.

Early town meetings wrestled with establishing a code of ordinances, a system for licensing businesses, laying sidewalks, and installing clay streets. Initial municipal revenue came from license fees. Not until April 1914 was the first tax assessment roll published. In its first two years of existence, the town had little money for substantial municipal improvement. In 1916, the property valuation was assessed at \$600,000. The seven mill levy upon that assessment promised to yield only \$3,600 for the municipal budget, of which only \$250 was allocated to street repair.

Although his son, H. Orvel, served on the town council for ten years, George Sebring never held any office in the administration of the town. But in the community's formative years a number of "Company" employees did. Their presence on the council and in other posts resulted as much from the fact that Sebring's employees constituted a large proportion of the town's population as it did from Sebring's desire to control affairs. Their number dwindled markedly after 1917 as the population increased and more citizens became available for administrative service.

The Board of Trade initiated or encouraged numerous efforts during the early years to promote the growth of Sebring. Those activities included leadership in the fight to obtain the county seat (1921), lobbying the municipal administration for physical improvements, luring industry to the town, boat regattas, beauty pageants, development of a civic park, purchase of right-of-way in 1924 to insure passage through Sebring of a second rail line, and an unsuccessful attempt to encourage construction of a major college in the vicinity. The most enduring legacy of the Board's early efforts was probably its leadership in the bitter and successful contest with Avon Park to secure the seat of newly created Highlands County in 1921. Until that time, Sebring was included in DeSoto County, a sprawling jurisdiction of 3,750 square miles that covered much of southwest Florida. The DeSoto County seat was located in Arcadia, some forty miles southwest of Sebring. After several years of complaint, the state legislature approved the subdivision of DeSoto

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County into five separate jurisdictions. The resulting location of county offices and courthouse in Sebring heightened its regional and state importance and provided additional employment for the community.

By 1917 the town had grown to a population of 700, but its development was diffuse. A Chautauqua Assembly Hall building stood at the northwest corner of Ridgewood Drive and Pine Avenue, helping to fulfill George Sebring's promise of a culturally enriched community. Few other businesses appear on the Sanborn map of that year; Kenilworth Lodge, a large hotel located south of the Circle on Lake View Drive, was in place, however. Its Spanish Revival style revealed the determination of George Sebring to create a Florida city that architecturally reflected the state's Spanish origins. Sebring pursued that stylistic objective throughout his developments and encouraged its adoption by other builders and developers who came to Sebring.

The City of Sebring was thus well poised for the Florida Land Boom in the early and mid-1920s. The city offered an attractive urban plan, laid out on the shores of a pristine, scenic lake. It was the county seat of a large rural jurisdiction that encompassed potentially productive agricultural and grazing land. Railroads linked it to nearby urban centers. Within the town itself were sufficient services to insure the comfortable supply of modern amenities. Above all, the promotional machinery was in place. George Sebring and the Board of Trade were already well practiced in the business of promoting and selling Florida real estate.

THE LAND BOOM PERIOD OF THE 1920S

Sebring established his new community at an opportune time. Within the next decade, in the aftermath of World War I, Florida entered a period of frenzied real estate speculation and population expansion known as the Florida Land Boom.

It is difficult to exaggerate the speculative proportions of the Florida Land Boom that erupted in the early 1920s. Miami and Palm Beach are generally regarded as the scenes of most frenzied activity, but few communities in the state failed to experience a fever for land and property. Twenty thousand people were thought to be arriving daily in the state in December, 1924. That fall, the Florida Legislature issued an open invitation to wealthy investors with approval of a constitutional amendment prohibiting either an income or inheritance tax. The resulting capital influx accelerated an already developed industry of land purchasing and land speculation.

Sebring is a small scale example of the experience. Property valuations increased a modest ten percent in 1922-1923, but by early 1924 real estate agents were becoming aware of American public's desire for Florida land. A

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paved highway from Jacksonville to Sebring was scheduled for completion in November, the same month that Sebring played host to a national governor's conference. Forty-three state executives met that month at Kenilworth Lodge, an event that could hardly help but fuel speculation about the city's significance as a resort and tourist center. Added rail service was provided by the arrival of a second line, the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, which linked the city to major metropolitan cities of the nation's northeast. In January, 1925, a cross-state train, dubbed the "Orange Blossom Special," made its initial journey through Sebring, which immediately began proclaiming itself the "Orange Blossom City." Travelers arrived at new station facilities, designed in the popular Spanish Revival style of architecture.

The Sebring Realty Board advertised the city's three-hour proximity to both coasts of Florida, its good climate ("soft gulf winds" and "strong Atlantic breezes"), productive soil, "pure drinking water", and recreational opportunities, which included hunting, boating, bathing, golf, and fishing. In February, 1925, fifty developers, meeting at the Nan-Ces-O-Wee Hotel, raised \$10,000 in "60 seconds" to "advertise the city of Orange Blossoms."

Throughout 1925, the front pages of the Sebring newspapers were dominated by reports of real estate activity. Building plans, land purchases, rumors of influential buyers arriving in town, progress of construction, and, invariably, testimonials to growth, provided grist for the press mills. A 150 foot-wide lot on Lake View Drive near George Sebring's home sold for \$30,000 in May. Sebring's newest development, northwest of the urban center, charted opening day sales of \$750,000. Three Pullman cars were required that day to bring in new buyers. Tent cities were erected to house people who could not find hotel or apartment rooms. The sixty-three brokers who maintained an active business in the small city that summer could not keep pace with the demand. Visions expanded. A local real estate promoter said there was not a "shadow of a doubt" that Sebring would soon rival Miami as an object of real estate activity. The town's population had quadrupled in three years, growing to 4,500 by 1925. The newspapers began carrying a daily masthead prediction that Sebring would reach a population of 30,000 by 1930. "When will it all stop?" one editorialist asked rhetorically in June. "When no more room is left for development," was his own reply. There were no contemporary standards by which to measure the phenomenon, he thought. One had to look to the colonial experience for an analogy, for these modern speculators were "trail blazers, axemen." Florida, like America in the 1700s, was "opening up."

The Florida East Coast railway curtailed some of the rampant land speculation in August, 1925, with the announcement of an embargo on freight shipments to south Florida. Rail lines and ports in the Miami and West Palm Beach area had become clogged with incoming shipments and speculators using the lines as temporary storage areas. Bankers and businessmen throughout the

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nation had begun to complain about the transfer of money to Florida. Newspapers suggested fraud in land sales. Florida's governor and a score of representatives from the state's press held a "Truth About Florida" meeting in New York. The response in Sebring, like that elsewhere in Florida, was additional publicity. "Cold facts" about the Ridge (a local name for the Sebring area) and Florida, said a real estate promoter for the Harder Hall interests, provided "the best answers to the attacks of the knockers." He compared Florida to California, which he said had continued to prosper and grow despite similar criticism.

Fewer advertisements for property appeared in the Sebring newspapers as the year progressed. Frequent assurances were issued about economic conditions, often in the form of annual comparisons to show that activity remained robust. By the summer of 1926, the front pages of the newspapers had returned to reporting national and international news instead of local real estate developments. Rental units, impossible to secure in mid-1925, were readily available by the end of 1926. In November, work continued on Harder Hall, although the newspapers reported that it had to be refinanced. In September, 1926, a terrible hurricane wreaked havoc on south Florida and further curtailed real estate investments. As 1927 progressed, the papers sought occasional consolation in new rumors, including reports of alleged oil strikes, and urged Floridians to "pull together." Three years later, the country entered in to an economic depression that had already been felt in Florida.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY DURING THE 1930S

The financial woes caused by the crash were visited not only upon real estate investors and developers, but upon the City of Sebring as well. The abandonment of mortgages and defaulted tax payments forced the City eventually to seek refunding assistance for bonds issued during the early years of the decade for physical improvements. Like many banks, the City feared taking foreclosure action for nonpayment of taxes, since mortgage holders were unable or unwilling to make payments. Sebring fortunately owned its public utilities, which provided revenue to continue many services. Professional management of city financing and operations, introduced for the first time in the 1930s, helped to overcome some problems. Federal relief projects and private assistance provided the greatest boost to the local economy. Highlands Hammock, an extensive forested area west of Lake Jackson, long regarded for its scenic beauty, was purchased in the early 1930s by a group headed by financier John A. Roebing. The land was donated to the State of Florida for use as a state park. One of Florida's first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) projects was installed there under the direction of Allan Altwater, an active member of city government. Numerous buildings were

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constructed, providing work for local young men and feeding some revenue into the city. On November 21, 1935 Highlands Hammock became Florida's first state park.

With the rest of the nation, Sebring emerged from economic depression on the back of a growing defense industry. The flat terrain of the area was an excellent location for airfields. Arcadia, among other cities in southeast Florida, served as a military air training center during World War I. In keeping with that, Sebring became host to construction of a major military facility, Hendricks Field, in 1941. Recognizing the effect that a similar facility might have upon the economy of their area, Sebring officials had begun to lobby the U.S. Army Air Force actively in 1940 to establish a base near the city. Along with the air field came numerous infrastructure developments, including construction of numerous homes for base employees and military personnel. After the United States entry into the war, Hendricks Field served as a training site for thousands of B-17 pilots and crews. Sebring became a bustling supply center, providing support services for the base. Activity at the base reached its zenith in the summer and fall of 1942, when the need for trained pilots and crews was most crucial. After this critical demand was met, the air field maintained a program solely for training pilots. The field was deactivated on December 31, 1945 and declared surplus by the Pentagon on January 26, 1946, despite desperate lobbying by city officials. The field was turned over to a reluctant city council on February 26, 1946. Since then, the air field has served as the site of several successful business ventures including the Eight Air Depot, Inc., an airplane overhaul concern.

The vacated air field became the scene in the 1950s of an annual sports car race that has stamped the name of the city upon international automobile racing. The roads throughout the expansive air field in the midst of a relatively isolated area fit the requirements of a group of American sports car enthusiasts who had been hunting a suitable site for a planned event. Now known as "The 12 hours of Sebring", the annual race, held in late March, brings tens of thousands of spectators to the city.

By the mid-1980s the city's population for the first time exceeded 10,000. Like all cities and towns throughout the United States, large or small, Sebring has been suffered the experience of urban sprawl. Shopping centers and "malls", an essentially post 1950 phenomenon, have appeared in all directions, creating economic pressure on the traditional downtown area. The city moved in 1983 to strengthen the economy of the businesses located in the vicinity of the Circle by adopting a redevelopment plan. A part of that plan is an emphasis on preserving the historical characteristics of the inner city.

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CIRCULAR CITY PLAN

The circular plan is the most significant historical and design feature of Sebring. Its similarity to the L'Enfant plan for the capital city of Washington, D.C. is obvious. Leila Sebring, the daughter of H. Orvel, believes the Sebrings simply adopted the concept from Washington, D.C. The circular city plan, as found in Washington, D.C. and Sebring, Florida, has been a persistent theme in urban history from ancient to contemporary times. The most common form of the circular town plan contains five or more axis radiating from a central point. It has been considered a work of art and the formal expression of an ancient and enduring ideal. Some of the symbolic meanings associated with the circular form have been perfection, wholeness, and harmony. The form has also had strong religious associations with eternity, the divine, and heaven. It was often used to define a sacred place. St. Augustine, for example, used a circular plan to describe the City of God. Conversely, the plan was often associated with authoritarianism and centralization of power.

While they have been a persistent theme of urban history, relatively few circular plans have actually been implemented, in part due to its impracticability. Negative aspects of the plan are the accessibility it provides an attacker, its inflexibility, the congestion which results from the concentration of institutions and activities, its inefficient use of space, and the awkward lot and building shapes which result. As a result, the plan is generally more theoretical than applied. The plan does have some practical features, offering direct access to the ceremonial core of the city. When military defense is of primary importance, it provides accessibility to defense positions and encloses a larger area than square or rectangular defense positions.

In the United States, the rareness of the circular plan has contributed to its significance. In contrast to the Spanish who used a rigid, formal system for establishing new towns, Anglo-American urban design was based on organic growth and the pragmatics of rectangular geometry. Aside from the orthogonal grid, a simple means of dividing land, there were seldom regulations which might in any way limit property rights or diminish land sales. There were other reasons for the infrequency of the circular plan. They included lack of interest or awareness of the ritualism and symbolism associated with the circle, the pragmatism of the American pioneer, a disinclination to subordinate private property rights to community standards, and the rapid pace of 19th century territorial expansion in the United States.

George Sebring had a number of concrete examples of circular plans available to him. There is no greater concentration of circular planned communities in the United States than those platted in Ohio and western

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Pennsylvania, where George Sebring and members of his family spent much of their lives. Probably the first of the circular towns in North America was Circleville, Ohio, laid out in 1810. In subsequent decades the plan of Circleville was "squared," taking the form of a standard gridiron. But it was, in all likelihood, sufficiently well-known for Sebring to be aware of it. Another circular town in the region was Perryopolis, Pennsylvania in the southwestern part of the state. Founded in 1814, it still survives today. Other 19th century circular planned towns or institutions in the region were Lancaster, Ohio, Marienville, Pennsylvania, and the campus of the University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio.

Besides Ohio and Pennsylvania, California was the other state with the greatest concentration of circular planned towns. One was Corona also known as Circle City, California. Another was Almondale, organized with the support of the magazine, Farm, Field, and Fireside. A third, Cotati, still survives. It shares a number of characteristics with Sebring. Like Sebring it was developed by a single family, Dr. Thomas Page and his sons. The Pages, like the Sebrings, formed a real estate corporation to promote and sell lots in the town. The reason for implementing the plan appears to have been family sentiment and the marketability resulting from its uniqueness rather than lofty ideals. Like that of Sebring, the plan was hexagonal, a side for each of Dr. Page's sons. Similarly, Cotati never developed substantially, consisting of only small frame houses and commercial buildings. The plan is the only exceptionally significant feature of the town. It has been recognized as such through its designation as a National Historic Landmark. Florida, in contrast, had few if any, circular city plans in 1911.

The plan of Sebring, while certainly associated with speculative real estate promotion, nonetheless, reflects certain idealistic and utopian beliefs held by the founder, George Sebring as reflected in his close association with the Salvation Army. A second was Sebring's involvement with the temperance movement and the restrictive covenants he placed in deeds prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages. A final one was the hope implicit in the settlement of a previously undeveloped and unspoiled area, that Sebring, with the "utopian" city plan, would be a city with a strong moral and religious character.

ARCHITECTURE

The architecture of Sebring is varied and quite diverse. While the commercial and governmental structures are more traditional in nature, the residential structures reflect several different styles, and some eclectic buildings that incorporate several styles at once. This diversity reflects the extensive period of growth and development experienced by Sebring during the 1910s and 1920s. Various architects from the area such as M. Leo Elliot,

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Fred Bishop, William J. Heim, and William Manley King came to Sebring and designed structures in representative examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival, Art Deco, Neo-Classical Revival, Mission, and Japanese Bungalow styles. In doing so, they provided the basics for the numerous eclectic structures in the town such as the Buckeye Building in the Circle, and the Paul L. Vinson House on Lake View Drive.

In addition, the use of the circular plan in the creation of the Circle and Circle Drive had a significant effect on the architecture of the downtown district. To accommodate the restrictive triangular lots, the builders of the commercial area created curvilinear facades to the buildings, allowing for a more symmetrical composition. The buildings were also designed to take advantage of the six streets radiating from the Circle. This gave them the ability to use the canted store front entrance or a second entrance on the "street" elevation. Finally, the circular plan provided for a rear "alley" that ran the circumference of the lots. Here, in the majority of structures, were located secondary shops and trade stores.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Please See Continuation Sheets

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property various-see individual nominations

Quadrangle name Sebring, Florida

Quadrangle scale 1:2400

UTM References various-please see individual nominations

A

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B

Zone	Easting			Northing					

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Verbal boundary description and justification

N/A-See Individual Nominations

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Vicki L. Welcher-Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation

date June 12, 1989

street & number 500 South Bronough Street

telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee

state FL 32399-0250

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national 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

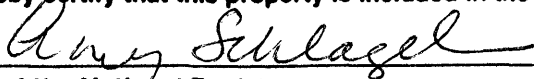


title State Historic Preservation Officer

date June 21, 1989

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register



date 8/14/89

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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