

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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

For NCRS use only

received

date entered

**1. Name**

historic Safety Harbor Site

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number Philippe Park \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Safety Harbor  vicinity of congressional district

state Florida code county Pinellas code

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Pinnellas County Park Board Mr. Fred F. McLean, Director

street & number 407 South Garden Avenue

city, town Clearwater \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Florida 33516

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pinellas County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Clearwater state Florida

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Florida State Master Site File has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Florida Board of Archives and History

city, town Tallahassee state Florida

## 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

Located on the west side of Old Tampa Bay about a mile north of the town of Safety Harbor in Pinellas County, Florida, the Safety Harbor Site now consists of a large shell mound dating to the late prehistoric/early historic period and representing the culture of the Gulf Coast Timucua Indians at the time of European contact and somewhat before. The landmark is contained within the limits of Phillippe Park.

The most conspicuous feature of the site is the large, flat-topped shell mound which stands on a point of land protruding into Old Tampa Bay. This mound measures about 150 feet in diameter and about 20 feet in height. The summit plateau measures about 100 by 50 feet.

However, at one time the site consisted of a village site and numerous burial mounds. Construction and excavations has reduced to the site the one large mound. The way in which the mound was constructed and the manner of its use have been subjects of a great deal of discussion. Some archeologists have described it as a domiciliary mound (Walker, 1880), others as a temple mound (Willey, 1949), and recently it has been suggested that parts of the mound are natural rather than man-made (Williams personal communication). These aspects will be further discussed in the following section of the excavations.

### Excavations

In 1880, S. T. Walker published a brief note on the site but did not conduct any excavations there. Apparently, the first recorded investigation occurred in 1929 when Matthew W. Stirling visited the site and conducted test excavations. Stirling returned the following year and investigated the now defunct burial mound. Even at that early date, pot-hunters had apparently already disturbed some of the surface layers, but the mound was large enough so that it yielded a great deal of material despite the earlier vandalism. Almost the entire structure was excavated. Over 100 burials, mainly of a secondary nature, were recovered. The mound was apparently built up in successive layers of sand. Pottery was found mainly at the base of the mound near its edge. Many of the vessels contained intentional perforations, indicating that they had been ceremonially "killed." Several European artifacts (an iron ax and silver tubular beads) were recovered, but all of these historic trade items were found associated with burials in the upper portions of the mound. The bones from the excavation were carried off by farmers for fertilizer. Some small test trenches were also dug in the village area between the burial mound and the large platform mound.

In 1948, the site was purchased by Pinellas County, and excavations were begun using county labor under the direction of Ripley Bullen and John Griffin of the Florida Park Service. Bullen and Griffin basically investigated three areas: the large mound, a small hillock southwest of the large mound which was thought to be man-made but turned out to be composed mainly of naturally deposited sand, and a portion of the village area northwest of the large mound. On the basis of their excavations and tests in the large mound, Griffin and Bullen have written an account of the various stages of construction. The first stage which they discerned was a clay and sand mound capped by a clay mantle and possibly used for burial. The first enlargement, accomplished by the addition of sand, shell and other materials, did not increase the height of the mound substantially but did expand its area to the north. Two partially superimposed clay floors yielding signs of habitation capped this expanded structure. Subsequently, the mound was enlarged and its height was increased with a rather thick and extensive layer of mixed shell and debris which may mark an occupation level or may represent debris scraped from the village area and used to enlarge

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

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**Specific dates** Approximately 1500-1650 or 1700 A.D. **Builder/Architect**

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Safety Harbor Site, situated on the shores of Old Tampa Bay in Pinellas County, Florida, is a late prehistoric site which was occupied into the early part of the Spanish period (ca. 1500-1650 A.D.). With its large platform mound, it is the type site for the Safety Harbor phase, and a pottery type (Safety Harbor Incised) diagnostic of this period also bears its name. It is possible that the site is the location of the Western Timucua village of the Tocobago visited in 1567 by Pedro Mendenes who left a small detail of soldiers there for several months. In fact, because of its large size, it is generally thought that the Safety Harbor Site may be the Tocobago capitol.

### Discussion

Safety Harbor is basically a single component site of the phase which bears its name. As early as 1936, Stirling was writing of a Safety Harbor ceramics, thus making Safety Harbor a type site. The general artifact assemblage associated with the phase has been described in the preceding section of this form (#7 - Description). Characterized by platform mounds, burial mounds with secondary burials, and the diagnostic artifact types Safety Harbor sites are generally small coastal villages. The basic subsistence for the occupants of Safety Harbor phase sites was probably a combination of agriculture with hunting, gathering, and fishing. Although concrete evidence for agriculture and plant gathering is not available, fish and deer bones and much shell material which imply hunting, gathering and fishing activities have been found.

The Safety Harbor phase is an outgrowth of the preceding Weeden Island phase of development in the Southeast. Weeden Island sites are small coastal villages with burial mounds. The addition of the platform mound to the list of features in the succeeding Safety Harbor phase probably stems from contact with and influence by the contemporary Fort Walton culture to the northwest. The Fort Walton was also preceded by Weeden Island, which exhibited geographical variation, but in the more northern Fort Walton area, Mississippian influence was more strongly felt. It makes sense that Safety Harbor, further from the source of influence, would show fewer effects of the Mississippian contacts than Fort Walton at the same time levels. It is clear that the occupants of Safety Harbor sites were local inhabitants whose culture became modified by influences from the Mississippi Valley (via Fort Walton) but who did not lose their cultural identity to the same extent as their more northern neighbors. Some archeologists (Willey, 1949) have gone so far as to infer that the Fort Walton culture actually resulted from an influx of people with Mississippian cultural traits rather than a diffusion of ideas (see Fort Walton landmark file).

Other traits found at the Safety Harbor site reemphasize the contemporaneity between the Safety Harbor and Fort Walton cultures and indicate the extent of the intercultural contact. For example, Fort Walton Incised pottery sherds have been found at the Safety Harbor site. There are also a few examples of Leon-Jefferson sherds at Safety Harbor. The Leon-Jefferson phase followed the Fort Walton phase in the Gulf Coast area northwest of the Safety Harbor culture area. Leon-Jefferson is an early historic period characterized by Spanish-mission influence on the native inhabitants of the area. Apparently this Spanish influence did not extend as far south as the Safety Harbor area during

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Bullen, Ripley P., 1966a, "The Importance of the Safety Harbor Site, " Paper read at National Historic Landmark dedication ceremony, December 10, 1966.

1966, "The Southern Limit of the Timucua Territory, " Paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society in Clearwater, May 6-7, 1966.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2

Quadrangle name Oldsmar, Florida

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 1 7 3 3 5 1 4 0 3 0 9 8 4 8 0  
 Zone Easting Northing

B              
 Zone Easting Northing

C                  

D                  

E                  

F                  

G                  

H                  

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Beginning at the cement mounted NHL plaque, proceed south-southeast to the shoreline, thence north-east along the shoreline to the point where the shorelines curves to a northwest direction; thence northwest along the shoreline to the second stoned recessed area; thence southwesterly to the NHL plaque, the point of origin.

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

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

Original Form Prepared by Francine Weiss, Archeologist  
 name/title Revised by Cecil McKithan

organization National Park Service - Southeast Region date June 1981

street & number 75 Spring Street telephone 404-221-2651

city or town Atlanta, state Georgia

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

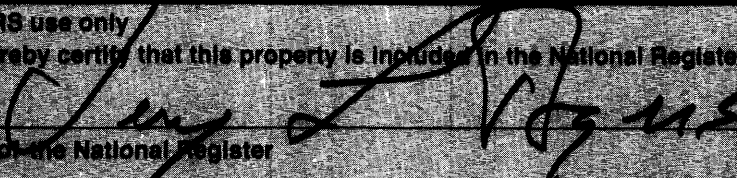
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

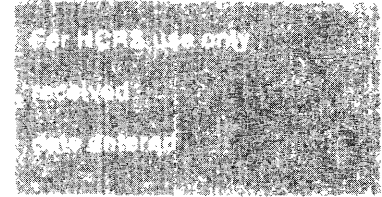
State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

For HCRS use only  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
  
 Keeper of the National Register date 5/16/81  
 Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

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the mound. Post holes have been found extending down from near the top of this level. Later, additional debris was added, and another occupation occurred, as indicated by the presence of pits, post holes, and numerous sherds. Accretion, which may have been natural while other portions are man-made. If the shell layer was not a secondary deposit on the mound top, it is possible that the mound was actually a dwelling place. The possibility also exists that the mound served as the base for a temple as its platform shape suggests. Perhaps additional excavations could clarify these points.

The excavations to the southwest of the large mound served to indicate that the hillock was a natural sand deposit. The investigation in the village to the northwest of the large mound yielded post holes and pits, but no patterns were discerned. A deposit of shells free from cultural debris was found near the water. The lack of cultural material in this deposit may perhaps be explained by the fact that the shell debris was removed from the living area or that the shells were shucked and even perhaps cooked there.

Subsequent excavations at the site were conducted by Gustav Nelson (2660 McMullen Booth Road, Clearwater, Florida 33519), a local amateur. Refer to the accompanying Map B for the indications of the location of Nelson's work. Artifacts from the site are housed at the Florida State Museum, at the Smithsonian Institution and in private collections.

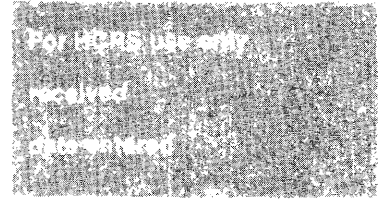
Numerous artifacts were unearthed and collected from the site. The most common pottery types are Pinellas Plain, Pinellas Incised, and Safety Harbor Incised. Safety Harbor Incised are diagnostic of the Safety Harbor period. Pinellas Plain vessels are either large open bowls with slightly incurbate rims, casuela bowls, collared ollas, or pot forms. The bases are generally rounded and the rims are sometimes folded on the exterior. Nodes or pinched punctations sometimes occur on or below the rim. Decorations on Pinellas Incised include: a single line arcade encircling the vessel below the rim with a row of heavy, often rectangular punctations. The Safety Harbor Incised vessels usually bowls, jars, or bottles, are decorated with incised lines and dot punctations which form rectilinear and curvilinear geometric designs. Other pottery types from the site include: Lake Jackson Plain, St. John's Plain, St. John's Check Stamped, Belle Glade Plain Jefferson, Leon Check Stamped, Fort Walton Incised, Glades Plain, Wakulla Check Stamped, Sarasota Incised, Biscayne Plain, Biscayne Check Stamped, Pasco Plain, and Pensacola Plain. (Refer to Willey, 1949, for type descriptions). There were also 38 Spanish olive jar sherds recovered. Stone artifacts from the site include: numerous points; some drills, scrapers, knives, hammerstones, grinding stones, and plummets; and one limestone bead; one discoidal; and one pottery hone. In general triangular points appear to stratigraphically overlie stemmed types. Shell tools found at the site include Busycon picks, hammers, and dippers perforated Venus and Arca shells, celts, gouges, and Columella chisels. Bone artifacts include: pins, possible sockets, awls, and a gorge. As mentioned previously, a few European artifacts were also recovered.

Condition

The mound is generally in good condition. Lush hammock vegetation and a tropical garden area cover the large mound. Nevertheless, erosion is a continuing problem, especially on the seaward side of the site. At the time of the 1975 National Park Service visit, workmen were surveying the area and indicated that a seawall would be built to help control the problem. Such a wall has been built.

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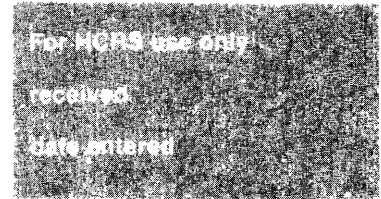
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Throughout the years, pot-hunters have vandalized the site. As early as the 1930's Stirling commented upon the destruction of portions of the burial mound, and Griffin and Bullen in 1950 noted disturbances in the large mound. Today with public ownership of the property, pot-hunting is probably less of a problem although the county has unfortunately allowed amateurs to conduct some of their own excavations at the site.

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early historic times, for the Leon-Jefferson phase finds are rare at the Safety Harbor Site. Safety Harbor excavations have also yielded evidence for trade with other nearby cultures. For example, Glades pottery from the south is common at the site, and St. Johns sherds indicating contacts to the east have also been recovered.

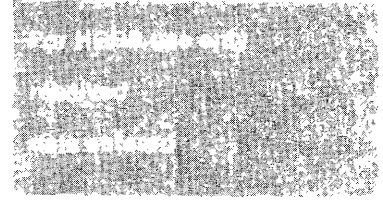
There is some evidence of stratigraphic changes at the Safety Harbor Site, for Leon Jefferson sherds, Spanish olive jars sherds, and triangular points are found in the upper levels. The date of the earliest occupation at Safety Harbor is unknown but probably did not occur before 1500 A.D. The site may have been the village of the Tocobago visited by Pedro Mendez in 1567. Some of the Spanish jar sherds have been dated to this time period and thus add credence to this idea. Although not much is known about the Tocobago, a branch of the Western Timucua, there are some ethnographic references to practices of secondary burial. The Timucua and Safety Harbor people probably occupied an area from Charlotte Harbor on the south to the Aucilla River in the north, and Pinellas County was probably the focal point for the phase (Bullen 1966a, 1966b). The few Leon-Jefferson finds date the end of occupation of the Safety Harbor Site to 1633 or 1650 A.D. or even to as late as 1700 A.D.

In conclusion, the Safety Harbor Site appears to represent a late prehistoric/early historic village, the type site for the Safety Harbor phase, occupied from perhaps as early as 1500 A.D. to perhaps as late as 1700 A.D. The Safety Harbor phase illustrates the southward extension of some Mississippian ideas but is basically a development out of the preceding local weeden Island culture. The phase is contemporary with the Fort Walton culture on the northwest Gulf Coast which showed more Mississippian influence - with the Leon-Jefferson phase, which followed the Fort Walton period. However, the Safety Harbor phase does not exhibit the marked break which is evident between Fort Walton and Leon-Jefferson for the Spanish influence was obviously not nearly as great in the Safety Harbor culture area.

Numerous questions remain concerning the Safety Harbor culture. Excavations at the site have implied that cultural changes occurred during the period of occupation. However, the various stratigraphic levels have not been clearly isolated nor have there been any dates from the site. Additional excavation might reveal more information on these subjects as well as date concerning the nature and construction of the large mound.

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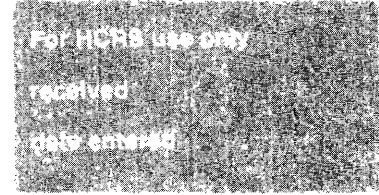
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Griffin, John W. and Ripley P. Bullen, 1950, "The Safety Harbor Site, Pinellas County, Florida," Florida Anthropological Society Publications, No. 2.



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The boundary was drawn in this manner because there was no apparent indication of national historic significance with the exception of the one large mound. The village area and other mounds have been excavated to extinction and developed upon. The mound is the only thing left with integrity.