

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECEIVED

JUL 06 1990

National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Commercial Sponging and Boat Building in Tarpon Springs, 1873-1946

Commercial Tourism Related to the Sponge Industry in Tarpon Springs,
ca. 1925-1990

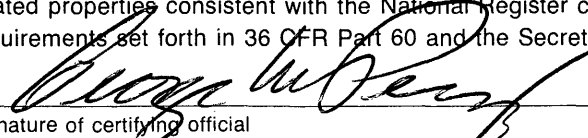
C. Geographical Data

The home port for the sponge boats is the Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks on the Anclote River, along Dodecanese Boulevard in Tarpon Springs, Florida.

N/A See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.



Signature of certifying official

6/29/90

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Bureau of Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.



Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

8/2/90 RRF
7/31/90

Date

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

UNRECORDED

UNRECORDED
UNRECORDED

See Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 1

Historic Contexts

Section E., Statement of Historic Contexts

Summary

The Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats are nationally significant under criteria A and C in the areas of industry, maritime history, naval architecture, and tourism. The properties include four sponge diving boats and one hooking boat which are the only known surviving sailing/motor craft remaining in Tarpon Springs that were constructed to serve as part of that city's large sponging fleet that operated in the Gulf of Mexico from approximately 1907 to 1946. These boats are physically and visually distinctive type of craft that were developed to suit the needs of the sponging industry, combining aspects of a centuries-old type of Mediterranean sailing craft with those of a vessel powered by a modern internal combustion engine. The tasks involved in gathering sponges made the combined use of sail and engine power a highly efficient method of operation.

Commercial Sponging and Boat Building in Tarpon Springs, 1873-1946

The first commercial sponge fishing in Florida took place in Key West and Apalachicola during the late 1840s. A wide variety of sailing craft traveled the waters of the Gulf of Mexico to work the various sponging grounds between the two cities lying at opposite ends of the state. The ships carried small dinghies and cat boats to use in shallow water where the sponges were gathered by the hooking method. Usually a two man crew worked the dinghy, one to work the oars, while the other gathered sponges from the sea bottom using a long pole fitted with a tri-pronged hook. Some sponging was also done by free diving, using a weight attached to a line to allow the diver to remain on the bottom and collect sponges before having to come to the surface for air. These techniques, however, allowed American sponge fishermen to take only those sponges lying at a depth of from two to five fathoms. Those found at a greater depth could be gathered only with diving equipment not then in use.

The sponge beds in the vicinity of Tarpon Springs were discovered accidentally in 1873 by Key West turtle fishermen whose nets were fouled with sponges off the mouth of the Anclote River. Informed of this discovery, spongers from Key West came to investigate and discovered large quantities of high quality sponges in the Anclote Key and Rock Island vicinity. Vessels began to arrive from Key West, Apalachicola, and even the Bahama

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 2

Historic Contexts

Islands to work the beds, and some spongers began to move their operations to the small fishing village at the mouth of the Anclote River. The sponge market at this time, however, lay at Key West, where buyers gathered at the warehouses to purchase sponges for shipment to American and European cities. The moving of the sponge industry to Tarpon Springs did not take place until 1890, almost a decade after the founding of the city as a winter resort by Hamilton Disston.

When Florida gained statehood in 1845, much of the land still belonged to the federal government. In 1850, the U.S. government gave the state some 10,000,000 acres of swamp and overflow land, and in 1851 the Florida legislature created a Board of Trustees to manage that and other lands the state had received upon entering the union. The trust set up to manage and improve this vast acreage proved insufficient and became bankrupt after the Civil War. The Board of Trustees wished to dispose of these lands, but state law required that all debts incurred by the trust fund be paid before any land could be sold.

The search for a purchaser willing to buy enough of the unimproved land to pay the fund's debt ended in 1881 when Hamilton Disston, a wealthy saw manufacturer from Philadelphia, worked a deal with the State Board of Trustees for the purchase of 4,000,000 acres of land at a cost of twenty-five cents per acre. The Disston Purchase enabled the state to clear its debt and then distribute large land subsidies to railroad companies wishing to construct transportation routes throughout Florida. Disston planned to recoup his investment by the widespread development of agricultural lands in Central Florida, access to which would be provided by the construction of railroads in which he expected to have a major financial interest.

Disston picked the present site of Tarpon Springs as his base of operations, because it lay along the major sailing route of the west coast of Florida, approximately half way between Cedar Key and Tampa. Access to the interior was made possible by the Anclote River, which was navigable for several miles inland and features a large fresh water spring as the focal point of his intended settlement. To market the property in the new community and the other vast tract of land at his disposal, Disston formed the Lake Butler Villa Company, which was responsible for much of the early construction in Tarpon Springs.

Disston intended Tarpon Springs to be a winter resort for wealthy Northerners, and soon the town began to take form. The

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number E Page 3 Historic Contexts

town was laid out in a regular grid, except around Spring Bayou where the blocks and streets conformed to the shape of this most important natural feature. In 1884 a post office was established, and three years later the settlement, with a population of about 300, was incorporated as a town.

The year 1887 also marked the arrival to Tarpon Springs of the first railroad, the Orange Belt Railway, which was taken over by the Plant System in 1891. Following the arrival of the railroad, tourism and winter residency began to play an important role in the development of Tarpon Springs, and a number of the extant buildings near Spring Bayou remain as vestiges of this early era of tourism.

The major development that would change the character of Tarpon Springs forever was the founding of the commercial sponge industry in 1890, when a Tarpon Springs businessman named John K. Cheyney opened the Anclote and Rock Island Sponge Company, establishing the community as a processing and marketing center. Thus began the gradual transfer of the sponge industry from Key West to the Tarpon Springs area.

Cheyney had been attracted to Tarpon Springs because of a business relationship with Hamilton Disston. In 1889, Cheyney went to Key West to learn about sponge business. Upon his return to Tarpon Springs he formed a company for processing and selling sponges, building warehouses, and financing the construction of the first sponge hooking boat launched at Tarpon Springs. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, many sponge boats came to Tarpon Springs from Key West. A fleet of vessels from points as far distant as Apalachicola and Key West, came to sell their sponges there. By the early 1900s Tarpon Springs was considered the largest sponge port in the United States.

While the sponge industry had begun to thrive before their arrival, it was the Greek immigrants to Tarpon Springs who expanded and refined it. The person who spearheaded the Greek involvement in sponging was John Cocoris, a native of Greece, who arrived in Tarpon Springs in 1896 as a buyer for the Lembessi Company of New York. A year after his arrival he began working for John Cheyney, who financed Cocoris's early efforts to make the industry more efficient.

In 1905 Cocoris brought a crew of Greek divers to Tarpon Springs to begin harvesting sponges in deep waters. By year's end approximately 500 Greek divers had arrived from the various

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number E Page 4

Historic Contexts

islands of Greece. In 1907 two small boats of the type used by the divers were brought from Greece on the deck of a steamship, and the construction of diving boats in Tarpon Springs dates from that time. Other immigrants soon followed, and established businesses to serve the growing Greek community. In their wake came sponge merchants and brokers from Greece who established their own offices and warehouses in Tarpon Springs. The new settlers built their own boats, extended loans to other boat owners, established business houses, and supplied tools and food stuffs to the entire sponge fleet. As the sponge industry boomed, the Greek population extended its interest to yet other businesses, such as finance, insurance, transportation, fishing, lumber, citrus, and building construction.

Boats of the Greek design began to replace the variety of American craft that had been used for sponging. At first these were lateen rigged "double enders," a type of boat whose ancestors had been used in the Aegean since before the Christian era. Broad beamed, with little freeboard amidships, these boats had a decided shear fore and aft, rising sharply at the bow to the distinctive stem. Forward their lines were quite convex, differing from many native American type of "double ender" by having a hollow waterline entry.

With the advent of gasoline power, the shape of the stern was altered, and the boats using engines were built with a transom stern in order to provide room for the power plant and fuel tanks. Eventually, diesel engines began to replace gasoline ones in the large craft. About 1920, the distinctive Tarpon Springs type of sponge diving boat had come into being. Although built by rule of thumb rather than from plans, these boats were very similar in essential details. They averaged about forty feet in length, with a beam of thirteen to fourteen feet. The keel depth was from four to five feet, and the ships usually had a displacement of less than 20 gross tons. The rigging was changed from the slanted lateen common in some areas of the Mediterranean to a gaff-headed yawl, consisting of a main mast approximately 25 feet high set well forward and a jigger mast of about twelve feet in height rising out of the stern rail fitted with a spanker sail.

The combination of engine and sail power made the Tarpon Springs boats adaptable to a wide variety of weather conditions in the Gulf of Mexico, and allowed the craft to stay away from port up to weeks at a time. Sponge hooking boats, used to gather sponges in shallow water, were built on a pattern similar to the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number E Page 5 Historic Contexts

diving boats, but usually had only one large mast and were sloop rigged. These boats worked in conjunction with the diving craft but did not operate in the same grounds, preferring to harvest sponges in water only two or three fathoms deep, whereas the diving boats could seek sponges in waters up to twenty fathoms deep.

The sponge industry changed the character of Tarpon Springs forever. Prior to 1890 it had been a winter health resort and fishing village, which catered to a small group of wealthy Northerners. There were few streets and fewer stores. Less than two decades later it was the center of the sponge industry in the United States. The industry grew steadily through the 1910 and 1920s. While many Florida communities suffered a virtual halt of development after the collapse of the land boom in 1926, Tarpon Springs continued to grow. The local economy was buoyed by the continued success of the sponge industry even during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Even with the onset of World War II and the closure of European markets, the domestic demand for sponges continued to support the Tarpon Springs industry. The prosperity of Tarpon Springs during this period is symbolized by St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, one of the largest and most distinctive buildings in Tarpon Springs, which was constructed in 1943.

The supply of sponges, however, began to dwindle seriously as the Gulf beds became depleted. The prosperity of the Tarpon Springs sponge industry ended virtually with the cessation of hostilities in Europe. From a record high production of over \$4,000,000 worth of sponges in 1946, the total fell by more than \$1,000,000 the following year. There were two reasons for this dramatic decline. The renewal of sponging in the Mediterranean brought about a market glut that badly depressed the prices of American sponges. Also the domestic beds were struck by a "blight" that destroyed millions of sponges and damaged much of what remained, leaving little of commercial quality. In the course of the decade from 1947 to 1957 commercial sponging in Tarpon Springs all but disappeared.

Commercial Tourism Related to the Sponge Industry in Tarpon Springs, ca. 1925-Present

Although Hamilton Disston had founded Tarpon Springs as a winter resort for wealthy Northerners, the character of the town began to change with the arrival of the railroad in 1887. Direct rail links with northern communities made Tarpon Springs

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 6

Historic Contexts

accessible to tourists of very modest means, and in the 1890s boarding houses and small hotels began to take their place alongside the magnificent winter homes constructed overlooking Spring Bayou. The commercial area along Tarpon Avenue--lying strategically between the railroad station and the spring--provided the modest needs of these middle class travelers. During the winter months hundreds of such tourists arrived to view the spring and engage one another in a variety of social activities such as picnics, dances, and religious revival meetings. The more hardy and action-minded tourists also spent time hunting and fishing, or taking steamboat excursions up the surrounding bayous to view alligators and exotic bird life.

The arrival of the sponge industry brought no diminution of tourist activity but provided an added incentive for visiting Tarpon Springs. The Greek fishermen seemed colorful and romantic, and their restaurants and bakeries provided culinary delights often not found in the tourists' home towns. The nature of tourism in Tarpon Springs remained largely unchanged in the 1890s and the first two decades of the twentieth century, but by 1925 both Florida and the type of visitor attracted to the state were altered dramatically.

The 1920s were a period of increasing prosperity and mobility for many Americans, and Florida was viewed as a tropical paradise and land of opportunity by a people liberated from the cares of the World War I years. The 1920s were also a progressive era for the state of Florida. Numerous new highways were constructed, so that cities once only accessible by railroad or ship travel could now be reached by the family automobile. The tourists of the 1920s were mainly drawn were mainly middle class Americans who came as members of tourist clubs or individual families that drove their own cars. They lived as cheaply as possible, bringing their own supplies and cooking their own food. Often they lived in tents and homemade campers, frequently gathering in communal campgrounds near scenic attractions or on the beaches. Their vagabond lifestyle earned them the name "tin can tourists."

This new wave of tourists were as enthralled by the colorful and exotic character of the Greek community at Tarpon Springs as had been their predecessors and hungered for souvenirs of their trip to the sponge fishing capital of Florida. The naturally purchased sponges, both to use and to show to members of their family or friends back home. Often they would purchase sponges as gifts for relatives. The Greek community began to provide for

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number E Page 7 Historic Contexts

sale other items associated with their culture, some made domestically and other imported from Greece. The sale of such novelty items still forms an important part of the economy of Tarpon Springs.

It is not clear just when some sponge boat owners began to hire their boats to passengers wishing to see how sponging was done, but it probably began as a regular commercial tourist activity sometime during the late 1920s or early 1930s. For a carriage fee from twenty to forty tourists could be transported to a point near the mouth of the Anclote River where a diver in full regalia would descend to retrieve unprocessed sponges placed there earlier, assuring that the tourists would not be disappointed in their desire to see sponges successfully collected. The entire trip usually takes no more than an hour. Today, the sponge diving boat St. Nicholas III is the only one providing this demonstration. The collapse of the sponging industry after 1947 saw all but the five boats covered by this nomination either scrapped or converted to purposes not related to the sponge industry. Only these five boats apparently remain in Tarpon Springs.

F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type See Continuation Sheet

II. Description

See Continuation Sheet

III. Significance

See Continuation Sheet

IV. Registration Requirements

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

See continuation sheet for additional property types

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency

- Local government
 University
 Other

Specify repository: _____

I. Form Prepared By

name/title Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 27, 1990
street & number 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333
city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 1

Associated Property Types

Section F, Associated Property TypesI. Name of Property Type: Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats,
1927-1947II. Description:

Tarpon Springs sponge boats are wooden craft, usually built of heart pine and cypress. They share a number of general characteristics and features. Both the diving and hooking boats were originally sailing craft with auxiliary gasoline or diesel engines. Two of the diving craft covered by this nomination were modified ca. 1947 to be powered by engine only and have had wooden canopies constructed to protect passengers from the elements.

Sponge Diving Boats

Although only four of the nearly 100 such boats constructed in Tarpon Springs are known to survive, this type of craft followed a standard pattern that is exemplified by the remaining craft. The diving boats were normally rigged as a gaff-headed yawl. The foremast carried a large triangular sail, while the stern mast had a small spanker sail. Their deck length is approximately 40 feet and the beam between 13 and 14 feet. The main sail mast may be from 25 to 30 feet in height. The boats share a number of general characteristics and features. At the stern are the stern sail mast, the rudder and tiller, the helmsman's cockpit, and the stern samson posts. Amidships are the rear and forward companionways, the bridge pipe and center boom for hanging sponges and the propeller cage. The mainmast stands in front of the forward companionway, and the bow area features the round hatch in which the line and hose tender stands, the sponge storage hatch, the anchor hoist, diver's ladder and bow samson posts.

Sponge Hooking Boats

Since only one hooking boat survives, it is not possible, with the evidence available, to draw any general conclusions about their physical character as a class. The hooking boat Duchess has many characteristics of the larger diving craft but is somewhat smaller and has not been fitted to carry diving equipment. It has a single mast and appears to be sloop rigged.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 2

Associated Property Types

Like the sponge diving boats, the hooking boat has auxiliary engine power. There are also a bridge pipe and center boom for hanging sponges and sleeping quarters for the crew.

III. Significance

The Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats are nationally significant under criteria A and C in the areas Architecture (naval), Maritime History, Industry (sponge fishing), and Recreation/Entertainment (tourism). They are last known remaining examples of such craft constructed in Tarpon Springs for use in the sponge industry, and four of the boats remain working vessels. The fifth boat is moored in the water but at present is not sea worthy.

IV. Registration Requirements

The Tarpon Springs Sponge Boats fulfill the criteria for qualifying for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by being floating vessels that retain their integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. All five vessels meet National Register criteria A and C.

The four sponge diving boats named in this nomination (St. Nicholas III, St. Nicholas VI, N.K. Symi, and George N. Cretekos) are the best and only known remaining examples of a type of craft constructed in Tarpon Springs for use in the sponge fishing industry. These meet the minimum requirement for being classified as large vessels, being greater than 40 feet in length and weighing more than 20 tons. These boats are maintained in the water, and three of the four are still working vessels. The St. Nicholas VI is not, at present, a working vessel. The sponge hooking boat Duchess is a small craft of only 27 feet in length. It is maintained in the water, possesses a high degree of physical integrity, and is the only known example of its type of craft remaining in the Tarpon Springs vicinity.

All five craft display distinct design characteristics associated with a specific historical maritime activity and were, or still are, involved in activities related to their historical function. These watercraft have been associated with events that played an important role in the development of the city of Tarpon

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number F Page 3

Associated Property Types

Springs and contributed significantly to the national and international development of the trade in natural sponges. The areas in which these craft meet criterion A are: industry (sponge fishing) and recreation/entertainment (the demonstration of sponge diving techniques to tourists). Under criterion C the vessels are good representatives of a specific type of naval architecture and embody numerous features associated with their historic function.

The sponge diving boats St. Nicholas III and St. Nicholas VI also require special justification for listing in the National Register because of changes made to their superstructure ca. 1947 when they were converted from commercial sponging craft to tour boats. Although this conversion did not involve any major physical modification of the craft other than the removal of the sail rigging, these changes did significantly alter the visual profile of both vessels. Also the conversion involved an additional area of significance which for each of these vessels was less than fifty years old. The category of recreation/entertainment, however, was directly related to the historic function of sponge fishing and could not be ignored.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number G Page 1

Identification and Evaluation Methods

Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The historic watercraft covered by this multiple property nomination were identified during a comprehensive survey of the historic properties of Tarpon Springs, Florida conducted in 1988. This survey also identified a historic district and other individual resources of architectural or historical significance. The "Historic Properties Survey of Tarpon Springs" was a comprehensive area survey focusing on resources related to the historical development of the community from ca. 1873 to 1950. The personnel conducting the survey were drawn from the disciplines of history and architectural history. Its boundaries were the city limits of Tarpon Springs.

The method of conducting the survey involved a series of progressive steps. Historical documents were researched to determine the periods, activities, and personalities significant to the development of the city and to provide a preliminary identification of archaeological sites, historic buildings, and structures. At first, watercraft were not specifically included under the resources to be identified but were added to the survey when it was realized that some such historic resources might still exist and the importance of the role these ships and boats played in the development of Tarpon Springs. The survey, however, limited itself to identifying those craft related to sponge fishing activity, since that industry played the paramount role in the physical, economic, and cultural development of the city of Tarpon Springs. The purpose of this multiple property nomination is, therefore, limited and does not preclude the possibility of the existence of other historic watercraft in the vicinity of Tarpon Springs. Such resources as might exist, however, did not fall within the criteria or context of the survey.

The intermediate level of the survey included a field survey to locate and confirm the existence of extant properties, the evaluation of preliminary research materials, the recording of resource data on site inventory forms. The inventory was then categorized according to theme, historical period, and level of significance in order to determine which properties should be recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places or be considered solely as locally recognized landmarks.

The 338 buildings and other resources recorded during the project were inspected and photographed, and their location was

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number G Page 2

Identificantion and Evaluation Methods

marked on a base map of Tarpon Springs. The inventory form for each resource provided a physical description and summary statement of significance for the property, also indicating its structural integrity and any threats to it.

The format for recording survey data was the Florida Master Site File form for standing structures. Forms were set up on a dBase III data processing program. The forms were updated as additional information was accumulated and the final product was printed in hard copy. Analysis of the data, particularly the results of the field survey was facilitated by the computer program. Information about historic properties was copied on a floppy disk for transfer to the hard disk of the computer system maintained by the Florida Master Site File of the Bureau of Archaeological Research. A survey report of the findings of the Tarpon Springs survey was also published, and copies were provided to the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, the Florida Master Site File, and the City of Tarpon Springs.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number H Page 1 Bibliography

Major Bibliographical References

- Frantzis, George. Strangers at Ithaca. St. Petersburg, 1962.
- Lovejoy, Gordon. The Greeks of Tarpon Springs. Masters Thesis, University of Florida, 1938.
- Olausen, Steve. Interview with George Brillis, June 21, 1988, Tarpon Springs.
- Pent, R.F. A History of Tarpon Springs. St. Petersburg, 1964.
- Rozees, Eileen and Lou. Sponge Docks Tarpon Springs, Florida: America's Sponge Diving Birthplace. Tarpon Springs, 1973.
- Stoughton, Gertrude. Tarpon Springs, Florida, The Early Years. 1975.
- Work Projects Administration. Florida Merchant Marine Survey. (typescript). Tallahassee: Florida State Library Board, 1938.