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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

X New Submission \_\_\_\_\_ Amended

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF LABELLE

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

(Name each associated historic context identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

- I. Early Development of Labelle, 1870-1921
- II. Florida Real Estate Boom, 1922-1928
- III. Great Depression, 1929-1940
- IV. Post World War II, 1945-1950

**C. Form Prepared by**

**name/title** Mikki Hartig/ Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

**organization** Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation **date** January 2003

**street & number** R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street **telephone** (850) 245-6333

**city or town** Tallahassee **state** Florida **zip code** 32399-0250

**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 and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation**.  See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Barbara C. Mattick, DSHPO for S&R  
Signature and title of certifying official

1/16/03  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
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.

for Daniel J. Vivian  
Signature of the Keeper

3/6/03  
Date of Action

**Table of Contents for Written Narrative**

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below

	<b>Page Numbers</b>
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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**E. STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXT**

**SUMMARY**

The Multiple Property Submission, Historic and Architectural Resources of LaBelle, Hendry County, Florida applies to Criteria A, B, and C for listing properties in the National Register of Historic Places. The historic properties in LaBelle have significance for their association with events and persons locally significant in the areas of Community Planning and Development, Education, and Commerce. The properties are also significant in the area of Architecture as they reflect the architectural styles most popular for rural residential architecture in Florida during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century, and both residential and school architecture during the Florida real estate boom. Most, if not all, of the residential buildings were built by local builders utilizing simple materials readily available locally, without the use of an architect. This was based upon LaBelle's rural and relatively isolated location, sparse population, and the simple and low cost housing needs of its earliest residents. Construction materials not easily obtained locally were shipped by boat up the Caloosahatchee River. Rail transportation directly into LaBelle was not available until 1927, when the Seaboard Railroad began service to and from the town. The relatively unaltered condition of the historic residences within the city limits of LaBelle, enhanced by their simply executed plans, designs, and relative lack of elaborate detailing, serves to convey a sense of time and place.

**I. Early Development of LaBelle, 1870-1922**

By 1870, a Manatee County census indicated that there were five men and their families residing in the future LaBelle area, all listed as either farm laborers or herdsmen. A visitor's letter written in the mid 1870s indicated that there was an Indian camp on the north side of the Caloosahatchee River in a hammock of large live oaks about 600 feet from the banks of the river. By about 1886, there were 50 people living at the nearby former Fort Denaud and Fort Thompson sites, and a U.S. Post Office had been established at Fort Thompson in 1884.<sup>1</sup>

LaBelle was established by 1889 or 1890. The town had its own mail delivery by a boat that traveled the Caloosahatchee River to a mail drop at Frierson's General Store. When Lee County was created in 1887 from part of the much larger Monroe County, LaBelle gained closer proximity to a governmental center but continued to remain fairly disconnected from any populated areas. By 1896, steamship service and a saw mill were established, and a United States post office was established in March of 1898.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bradbury, Alford G., and Hallock, E. Story, "A Chronology of Florida Post Offices, Handbook No. 2," published by the Florida Federation of Stamp Clubs, 1962, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Bradbury, p. 44, and Fort Myers Press, May 14, 1896.

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In about 1895, LaBelle, with a population of about 75<sup>3</sup> and consisting of several blocks of land along the river, was platted by Captain Francis A. Hendry, the largest landowner in the area and a major cattle rancher. Hendry is considered the father of LaBelle. Regrettably, long and diligent search has not uncovered any surviving copy of Hendry's early plat and no copy exists in Hendry County or Lee County public records that indicate it as having been filed. (The first documented plats are dated November 1, 1909 and were filed by E.E. Goodno<sup>4</sup>). Within a short time after Hendry laid out the town, LaBelle began to develop and boasted of a post office, Fraser's General Store, Curry's Livery Stables, Porter Dean's Blacksmith Shop, a one-room thatched schoolhouse, a rough community church, cattle pens, and the rather "crude" homes of the settlers.<sup>5</sup>

At the turn of the century, a road system to LaBelle had yet to be established. The only way the city was accessible was by way of horseback over Indian trails or by boat on the Caloosahatchee. A trip by way of the winding river from Fort Myers took 5-6 hours<sup>6</sup> making transportation difficult, even by water. Many early residents and visitors came to LaBelle by train to Fort Myers and continued the balance of the journey by boat up the river. The river was narrow, crooked and shallow and was subject to flooding during the rainy season, causing damage to businesses, destroying crops and endangering lives. The floods usually lasted several weeks and residents had to resort to using boats to ferry across the business section of town.<sup>7</sup> No provisions for improved drainage would take place until about 1910 when the Federal Rivers and Harbors Act was passed and some minimal early dredging of the river was undertaken.

Although the town was granted its own voting precinct in 1902, it was not until 1911 that the Town of LaBelle was incorporated on a 700 acre tract by Edgar E. Goodno, the successor to all of Captain F.A. Hendry's Fort Thompson property and the majority of his expansive LaBelle holdings. As Hendry had before him, Goodno, for a period of time, owned virtually the entire town.<sup>8</sup> The town's first council consisted of E.E. Goodno, Captain F.A. Hendry, J.H. Magill, J.W. Fraser and J.J. Slattery. Dr. John Mitchell, formerly of Wisconsin, was elected the town's first mayor. Mitchell appears to have disappeared from LaBelle within a short time and Forrey became mayor or acted as mayor shortly thereafter, maintaining an active local and state political career for the rest of his life.<sup>9</sup> Other

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<sup>3</sup>Florida Railroad Gazetteer, 1895, and Revised Second Edition of "John and Williams, sons of Robert Hendry," Compiled by Spessard Stone, 1988, Published by Genie Plus, Bradenton, Florida, 1989, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup>Plat of Goodno's Subdivision dated November 1, 1909, recorded in Plat Book One, Page 47 of the records of Lee County, Florida.

<sup>5</sup>"LaBelle, County Seat of Hendry County", p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Burke, Alvah, interview taken from "LaBelle, our home", a special historical publication of the LaBelle Leader, December 1985, compiled and edited by Katrina Elsen, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Burke, Alvah, LaBelle pioneer and river traveler, in a presentation before the Calusa Valley Historical Society in 1985, taken from Hendry County Supplement, May 12, 1993, 4B, and copy of historic photograph, courtesy of Edith Magill, LaBelle pioneer resident.

<sup>8</sup>Lee County Election Rolls, taken from local historical research done by Rider, Lynda Small on 4/23/90, and Weekly Fort Myers Press, November 23, 1911, and Hendry County News, September 18, 1925.

<sup>9</sup>Weekly Fort Myers Press, November 23, 1911, and Kirby, Ida Forrey, daughter of Melville Forrey and lifetime LaBelle resident, in an interview with Kari Rice on June 8, 1996 in LaBelle, Florida.

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records of the town's early government have been lost,<sup>10</sup> and it appears that early local governmental jurisdiction was allowed to lapse until around 1917 when records again give an account of the early history of LaBelle and its growth and management. The oldest surviving copy of LaBelle City Minutes is dated August 2, 1917. Those minutes document a meeting held to gather election votes. The elected officials were R.V. Hedges, Mayor; M.F. Yeomans, Treasurer; A.J. McLeod, Marshall; and E.A.W. Koester, Clerk and Tax Collector. The next day a special meeting was held to adopt a budget to be financed with property taxes, fines, and licenses. The Town of LaBelle took shape and the local Board of Commissioners established a sense of order.

Many residents who came to the area took up farming, cattle ranching and citrus growing. Some grew strawberries and others raised chickens for their families and for sale. Early businesses sprouted up to serve the community. By 1912, the town had two hotels and an ice plant. Supplies for the town arrived once or twice weekly by paddlewheel boat from Fort Myers. A smaller motor boat brought mail and sometimes passengers daily. Several businesses were in operation. The LaBelle Garage and Jennings Hardware opened in 1912.<sup>11</sup> The town also had several stores, including the Poole and Forrey stores which provided a wide range of goods to the community. In 1913, telephone service was provided when a thirty year exclusive contract for telephone service for the community was granted to the Magill Telephone Company.<sup>12</sup> Within a few years, the town also got its first movie picture theater (non-extant).

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, various land companies brought prospective investors in by boat and the on Steamer *Edison* from Fort Myers, the nearest large settlement. Settlers arrived, mostly from the Midwest. They built homes and various industries were established. Most of the early buildings were of frame construction in the Frame Vernacular style. Ceilings were high for ventilation. At least six known sawmills operated in LaBelle or nearby to meet the need for lumber.<sup>13</sup>

## **II. Florida Real Estate Boom, 1922-1928**

More than anywhere else in the United States, there was a runaway economy in Florida during the 1920s. A series of events created a real estate boom during that time and intense building began all over the state. Speculators

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<sup>10</sup>These records may have been in possession of Melville Forrey who operated a general store in LaBelle on the site of the 1928 Forrey Building. The earlier building on the site that housed his store as well as the Forrey family home was destroyed by fire in 1928. This could account for the loss of early LaBelle city records although it can only be speculated.

<sup>11</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 3, 1922.

<sup>12</sup>LaBelle Ordinance, copy in LaBelle Minutes Book, Page 118, March 1, 1924, and Yeomans, Laura, early telephone company operator, in an interview published in LaBelle our home, A special historical publication of the LaBelle Leader, compiled and edited by Katrina Elskan, December 6, 1985, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup>Hall, Ernest, pioneer Labelle resident and then president of the Lee County Historical Society, in an interview in the Fort Myers News Press, July 6, 1973.

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began to quickly buy and sell land for profits. Residential subdivisions were platted throughout Florida, including LaBelle, although not nearly to the extent that occurred in more urban areas of the state.

One of the first signs of the upcoming growth of the LaBelle community during the 1920s was the organization of the LaBelle Board of Trade by business leaders within the city. The group, formed in the early spring of 1922, was a large representation of the business community. J.R. Doty was elected chairman.<sup>14</sup> By 1922, LaBelle obtained a source of electricity from an electric generator at Goodno's ice plant and a number of flourishing businesses clustered near the bridge crossing the Caloosahatchee.

The local newspaper carried numerous advertisements for area businesses such as: the LaBelle Bank; J.M. Magill's Drug Store, founded in 1916 by LaBelle's first mayor Dr. John Mitchell and sold to Magill in 1917,<sup>15</sup> Blount's Knife Works,<sup>16</sup> J.R. Moon Meats,<sup>17</sup> R.V. Hedge's Dry Goods,<sup>18</sup> Newcomb's Royal Poinciana Bakery,<sup>19</sup> George Fischer's "modern" LaBelle Dairy,<sup>20</sup> the LaBelle Radio Shop,<sup>21</sup> Hill's Service Garage,<sup>22</sup> Weaver's Drug Store, opened in 1926,<sup>23</sup> regular bus service provided by the Burke Bus Line,<sup>24</sup> George Aiken's blacksmith and wagon shop,<sup>25</sup> Watts Hall's Store,<sup>26</sup> LaBelle Cash Grocery,<sup>27</sup> Charles Bever's B & B Store,<sup>28</sup> Leo Blaire's LaBelle Nursery,<sup>29</sup> LaBelle Plumbing and Tinning Co.,<sup>30</sup> the short lived Mazzeri & Guzman LaBelle Cigar Co.,<sup>31</sup> the Everglades Insurance Agency,<sup>32</sup> Turner's Feed Store,<sup>33</sup> Madame Graves New York Shop for women's fashions,<sup>34</sup> the LaBelle Theater,<sup>35</sup> Hendry County Engineering Co.,<sup>36</sup> several restaurants, including the Vesuvius Cafe,<sup>37</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 3, 1922.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1929.

<sup>16</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 3, 1922.

<sup>17</sup>LaBelle Current, June 5, 1925.

<sup>18</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, May 18, 1922.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., February 27, 1925.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1925.

<sup>21</sup>Hendry County News, December 24, 1926.

<sup>22</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, June 8, 1923.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Hendry County News, May 21, 1926.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., September 27, 1928.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, May 18, 1922, and June 19, 1925.

<sup>30</sup>LaBelle Current, June 19, 1925.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., June 10, 1925, June 19, 1925, and May 7, 1926.

<sup>32</sup>Hendry County News, August 7, 1925.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1925.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., October 23, 1925.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., November 13, 1925, and August 6, 1926.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., November 27, 1925.

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Blount's Rooming House;<sup>38</sup> an apartment house;<sup>39</sup> a Ford and Dodge dealership; several service stations;<sup>40</sup> the Magill Brother's LaBelle Tile and Brick Company; and R.B. Pope and Iver Jepson's Saw Mill (3 miles outside the city);<sup>41</sup> and A.E. Hansen, a watchmaker.<sup>42</sup> The city had several real estate firms and realtors including: Lee Cochran,<sup>43</sup> J. G. Attanasio's South Florida Homeseeker's Service, founded in 1920,<sup>44</sup> J.R. Doty's real estate office, A.L. Henricksen's office, Edwards and Cornette,<sup>45</sup> and Charles Hale's LaBelle Investment Co.<sup>46</sup> The town could boast of having several lawyers, including Frank Spain,<sup>47</sup> E.M. Magaha,<sup>48</sup> H.A. Rider,<sup>49</sup> Mack Paggett,<sup>50</sup> and Louis Gravely.<sup>51</sup> Dental care was provided by Dr. P.H. Jones and Dr. Seebold had his medical office in the city, although the closest hospital was located in Fort Myers.<sup>52</sup> C.C. Cook, who maintained his residence and Palm Apiaries bee keeping operation in LaBelle, gained wide acclaim as the largest individual producer of honey in the state with, 400 hives producing more than 190,000 pounds of honey in 1926.<sup>53</sup>

The formation of Hendry County in 1923 from a part of the much larger Lee County was a time of great celebration for LaBelle residents. With nearby Clewiston development underway for only a relatively short time, LaBelle, as the only other incorporated town in the new county, was chosen as the county seat. A big celebration with a barbecue and speeches was held in the LaBelle park (Goodno Park) on July 11, 1923. A large number of residents from all of the surrounding communities attended.

At the first Hendry County Commission meeting on July 10 1923, E.E. Goodno was selected to chair the meeting and M.E. Forrey, who represented the LaBelle district, was elected the first Chairman of the Hendry County Commission.<sup>54</sup> E.E. Goodno made an offer of court rooms and office space in his Everett Hotel building for use as a temporary courthouse. The site continued to serve as such until 1927 when the Hendry County Courthouse was

<sup>37</sup>LaBelle Current, June 19, 1925.

<sup>38</sup>Hendry County News, November 13, 1925.

<sup>39</sup>LaBelle Current, May 21, 1925.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., May 7, 1925, May 21, 1926, and June 4, 1926.

<sup>41</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, July 13, 1923.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1925.

<sup>43</sup>LaBelle Current, June 5, 1925.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 6, 1925.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., May 18, 1923.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1923.

<sup>49</sup>LaBelle Current, May 15, 1925.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, April 27, 1925.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., February 27, 1925.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1925, and Hendry County News, February 12, 1926.

<sup>54</sup>Magill, Inez, From Ticks to Politics, The Cowboy Clerk, Volume I, 1969, p. 7, and Hendry County Supplement, 50th Anniversary Issue, May 12, 1993.

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completed. The first elected Hendry County Commissioners were: M.E. Forrey, LaBelle; M.F. Boisclair, Denaud; Thomas O'Brien, Clewiston; R.H. Magill, LaBelle; and L.N. Thomas, Felda. In the corner of the city's park, a temporary jail was constructed.

National prominence was brought to LaBelle in 1924 when the area gained an international celebrity; auto tycoon Henry Ford acquired ownership of E.E. Goodno's 8500 acres.<sup>55</sup> Goodno remained at Fort Thompson as Ford's property manager until late 1934 when he moved to Fort Myers.<sup>56</sup> The Fort Thompson property was put to use by Ford as an experimental rubber plantation. In March 1925, Ford set out 600 rubber plants and by June his rubber nursery was thriving with "thousands" of young plants and small trees.<sup>57</sup> Ford's investment in LaBelle provided a big boost for LaBelle residents. Nevertheless, Ford's hopes for successfully harvesting extensive rubber plants on his Fort Thompson property for use in manufacturing and other uses were dashed with the invention of synthetic rubber. By 1925, Barron Collier had become the largest landowner in Hendry County. His acreage exceeded even Ford's holdings. Collier also owned the local telephone company.<sup>58</sup>

Following the transfer of Goodno's land holdings to Ford in 1924, the town passed a \$25,000 bond issue for improvements. A plan was made to expend \$15,000 for laying water mains and sewers along Main, Bridge, and Lee streets, DeSoto, Park, Fort Thompson, Washington, and Hickpochee avenues and some paving of other streets.

LaBelle adopted a town charter in 1925. It passed the Florida legislature in a special session and was signed by the governor on the 10th day of December, 1925, although the city had already achieved the status of the county seat two and one-half years before.

In the spring of 1925, plans to construct a Hendry County Courthouse began. A building site measuring 440 x 250 feet was acquired, and Lakeland architect E.C. Hosford was chosen to design the building.<sup>59</sup> It was reported that the design of the new courthouse would be of "modified Spanish architecture," with an imposing 70 foot tower.<sup>60</sup> A cornerstone committee was appointed in August, and when the cornerstone was laid under the auspices of the local Masonic Lodge on March 25, 1926, a time capsule containing documents, newspaper, photos, and other items was placed in the ground. Over 3,000 area citizens attended the event and celebrated with a "gala" affair that included a picnic, barbecue, and a parade almost two miles long. Special speakers addressed the crowd.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup>Hendry County News, August 7, 1925 and LaBelle Tax Roll, November, 1924, copy on file at LaBelle Heritage Museum.

<sup>56</sup>Hendry County News, November 9, 1934.

<sup>57</sup>LaBelle Current, June 5, 1925, and Hendry County News, November 6, 1925.

<sup>58</sup>Hendry County News, September 4, 1925.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., July 3, 1925.

<sup>60</sup>LaBelle Current, June 5, 1925.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., March 26, 1926.



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In late April 1925 the town received the welcome news that the Seaboard Airline (railroad) would run its line to LaBelle. Townspeople saw this as a much needed and well deserved improvement and another indication of LaBelle's great progress and promising future.<sup>62</sup> Seaboard President S. Davis Warfield and other railroad officials visited the city to discuss the company's desired location for the depot and rail bed. A site at the northeast corner of Main and Seminole near the courthouse was selected,<sup>63</sup> but Warfield wanted the right-of-way to be one-half mile south of Hickpochee and the depot to be close to the river so it could easily serve the citrus groves in shipping fruit.<sup>64</sup> The depot was built on Main near Lincoln.<sup>65</sup> By May of 1926, Seaboard had acquired the right-of-way to begin construction of the depot and terminal yards. Hansen and Sons architects were chosen to design the depot building and by the end of October the site was cleared for construction.<sup>66</sup> In January, the railroad had reached the city and rail service started in mid 1927.<sup>67</sup>

LaBelle experienced a period of unparalleled growth during the 1920s along with Florida and the rest of the nation. Between 1925 and 1926, the city's population doubled, reaching over 1100 residents. In October of 1925, real estate transfers reached their highest point in local history.<sup>68</sup> The city and its citizens were caught up in a spiral of development and aspiration. New ventures and construction projects took place at a frantic pace to match the growing needs of newcomers.

The completion of the Fort Myers to Palm Beach Highway through LaBelle in mid 1926 was a welcome addition to the city.<sup>69</sup> A new boat service began running from LaBelle to Fort Myers and back when the *City of Palms* commenced transporting passengers and freight in June of 1926.<sup>70</sup> Bus service was provided by Gulf Atlantic Transportation, from Fort Myers to West Palm Beach with LaBelle as its headquarters.<sup>71</sup> With "every residence and shack occupied", a need for new housing and hotels arose.<sup>72</sup> In response, subdivisions were platted, residences built, and new businesses opened to support the growing population. Every few weeks, a freight boat arrived bringing building materials for use in the town's expansion.<sup>73</sup> Long distance telephone service between LaBelle and Fort Myers was established.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>LaBelle Current, May 1, 1925.

<sup>63</sup>Hendry County News, March 12 and March 19, 1926.

<sup>64</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, May 15, 1925.

<sup>65</sup>Many years later, it was moved to the southwest corner of Main and Seminole just adjacent to its original intended site.

<sup>66</sup>Hendry County News, April 23, October 22, and October 29, 1926.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., December 24, 1926, and January 14, 1927.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., October 30, 1925.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., March 12, 1926, and May 7, 1926.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., June 18, 1926.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., January 16, 1926.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., September 18, 1925.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., January 29, 1926.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1925.

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The Chamber of Commerce began to receive numerous personal requests and letters from all over the country regarding the prospects for relocation and available land in "LaBelle Among the Palms."<sup>75</sup> The local newspaper reported that the city was taking on new subdivisions at the rate of several a week.<sup>76</sup> Considering the size of the city and its relatively rural location, the total number of subdivisions planned and laid out was remarkable. Some of the new subdivisions platted during this period, several of which are not so identified today, are: Belmont Subdivision, developed by H.G. Morrow of Jacksonville; LaBelle Terrace, developed by Beekman & Beekman of New York; Evelyn Terrace, developed by C.P. Smith of Tampa;<sup>77</sup> LaBelle Heights, developed by local resident Lou Jacobs; Par Place Subdivision developed by Carl Royer;<sup>78</sup> LaBelle Plaza developed by Penn-Florida Corporation;<sup>79</sup> Teneva Lane Subdivision;<sup>80</sup> Fordson (Park) Subdivision, developed by M.J. Meckler of Tampa;<sup>81</sup> LaBelle Development Company's Belle La Casa Subdivision;<sup>82</sup> Englewood Terrace; and Sunset Park, a MidFlorida Development Company of Tampa project,<sup>83</sup> Washington Garden, and Lincoln Square. At least two development companies, Penn-Florida Corporation and LaBelle Land Co. were formed and drawn to LaBelle by Henry Ford's interest and holdings in the area.<sup>84</sup> Penn-Florida's purchase of approximately \$300,000 worth of lots in June 1925 was the largest individual transaction since Henry Ford's acquisition of Goodno's former holdings.<sup>85</sup>

All throughout 1925 and 1926, area newspapers heralded the improvements being hastily made to each of the new subdivisions. Landscaping and tree planting were underway and streets and sidewalks were being laid and poured. One subdivision, N. LaBelle Heights, had an entrance arch, Australian pines and hibiscus were planted throughout the subdivision, and 5 palm trees were planted on each lot. A crew of Italian laborers from Providence, Rhode Island, were sent to construct homes.<sup>86</sup> This was at a time when the city's most developed business street, Bridge Street, remained unpaved and would remain so until 1934.<sup>87</sup> County roads, some leading to LaBelle, were also in poor condition. In 1925, a \$430,000 road improvement campaign began that included the installation of sewers on Bridge Street.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., October 30, 1925, and Caloosahatchee Current, March 27, 1925.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1925.

<sup>77</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, February, 27, 1925, and Hendry County News, July 3, 1925, & August 7, 1925.

<sup>78</sup>Hendry County News, September 24, 1925, and plat of Park Place dated October 22, 1925.

<sup>79</sup>Hendry County News, July 24, 1925.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1925.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., August 27, 1926.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1926.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1925.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1924 and June 19, 1925.

<sup>85</sup>Hendry County News, June 19, 1925.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., September 24, 1925.

<sup>87</sup>LaBelle Current, May 29, 1925, and Hendry County News Supplement, Anniversary Edition, May 12, 1993.

<sup>88</sup>Labelle Current, April 23, and June 12, 1925.

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The citizens of the growing community were active promoters in the development of the town. LaBelle resident, developer, and active town promoter, Lou Jacobs, formerly of Jacksonville, Florida, attended the Florida State Fair representing LaBelle in the Hendry County booth.<sup>89</sup> Other local residents vigorously supported public events and activities. School plays, held in the cafeteria of the new elementary school, completed in 1926, filled to capacity and the LaBelle Motor Club held regular dances there.<sup>90</sup> The town had a ball club and a ball park north of the river.<sup>91</sup> A bridge club was formed that regularly met in various homes. Well attended band concerts were given on Sundays at the Royal Palm Hotel under the direction of local resident and bandmaster Professor Mazzerri.<sup>92</sup> Many residents traveled to Crescent Beach, near Fort Myers, for sun, swimming, and relaxation.<sup>93</sup> Carnivals were held at the school and traveling ones visited the town.<sup>94</sup> A Boys 4-H Club was also established in 1924.<sup>95</sup> In the spring of 1926, a new dance pavilion was completed and opened in North LaBelle by Lou Jacobs. Hundreds of cars from LaBelle and neighboring towns arrived to enjoy open air dancing at the first dance held at the open air structure.<sup>96</sup> After its completion and grand opening, it was the site of many celebrations and dances. Another property used by the community for many years for major events was established as a municipal park when four acres of land was donated. The property, located on the river between Bridge Street and Main Street, was covered with palms and Spanish oaks.<sup>97</sup> A trench was dug for a barbecue pit and various residents would donate meat for the enjoyment of all. The women of the town would bring other foodstuffs for the events. Another municipal park and a playground was established on a 150 x 150 parcel of land donated by a Judge Haynes on the southwest corner of block 27 downtown.<sup>98</sup>

### Sears, Florida

As part of the tremendous push for growth and construction throughout the country during the 1920s, Richard Warren Sears, Vice President of the Chicago based Sears & Roebuck became interested in Florida's vast forests of southern yellow pine and formed the Standard Lumber Company in the early 1910s. After Richard Sears' death in 1914, his wife and sons expanded the company's operation across north Florida, and in late 1925 established the community of Sears a few miles south of LaBelle, off today's SR29 on 160 acres of land. They held big aspirations and promised the creation of three hundred jobs.

<sup>89</sup>Hendry County News, February 27, 1925.

<sup>90</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, February 27, 1925, and March 27, 1925.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1923.

<sup>92</sup>LaBelle Current, June 5, 1925.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Hendry County News, April 16, 1926, and November 5, 1926..

<sup>95</sup>"LaBelle County Seat of Hendry County" "Other Organizations," published by the LaBelle Woman's Club, 1950, pp. 33 & 34.

<sup>96</sup>Hendry County News, March 5, 1926.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1925.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

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The main occupation of the town was the production of cut lumber for Sears & Roebuck precut houses that were listed for mail order in their catalogues.<sup>99</sup> A sawmill was erected, roads and a light plant were built; a voting precinct was established; and there was a post office, church, school, store, and commissary.<sup>100</sup> Within three years, the population reached 500 and plans were made to have as many as 1,000 residents. The community was established at the site to take advantage of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad which was established from the north to nearby Goodno station east of Fort Thompson. The railroad transported lumber from north Florida to Sears for processing.

A September 1926 hurricane dashed hopes for future growth when the sawmill and much of the town's housing were destroyed. Trees that were to provide the lumber for the mill were toppled. Workers began to rebuild. A new \$450,000 sawmill was built, and new housing was constructed, but other difficulties arose. A major lawsuit was filed against the company and the company's double-cut band saws were not found to be suitable for milling the dense south Florida yellow pine. Operations continued until 1928 but at a loss, and later that year the company faced bankruptcy. A number of residents stayed on and the Sears school remained open until c.1933. In 1936, the company's assets were sold, after which a number of the town's former buildings were sold and moved to LaBelle. In 1937, the north wing of the Sears school was brought to LaBelle and became the Daniels School. The remaining section was given to the moving contractor C.F. Denton of South Bay. Several Sears residential buildings were also moved and continue to survive within the LaBelle city limits. Other buildings were moved to nearby Clewiston. Today, nothing remains of the former Sears town site.<sup>101</sup>

### III. Great Depression, 1929-1940

In early 1929, railroad freight leaving LaBelle increased. Outgoing products included rail ties made from local wood, vegetables, honey, and animal hides.<sup>102</sup> But, with the total collapse of the Florida Land Boom and the October 1929 great stock market crash that affected the entire country, dire economics began to affect LaBelle and its city government. There were insufficient funds to pay the marshal and the position was declared vacant. Other city financial obligations remained unpaid.

The town saw a major flood in 1930. During the depths of the Depression in 1932 and 1933, small loans were provided for farmers, and unemployed residents were registered for federal work programs.<sup>103</sup> One program involved working to improve city streets.<sup>104</sup> Road conditions within the city were in such a deplorable state by the

<sup>99</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 10, 1925.

<sup>100</sup>Hendry County News, September 11, 1925, and April 2, 1926.

<sup>101</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, February 27, 1925, and March 10, 1925, and Hendry County News Supplement, Anniversary Addition, May 12, 1993.

<sup>102</sup>Hendry County News, January 17, 1929.

<sup>103</sup>Waldron, R.B., interview taken from "LaBelle our home", The Leader, p. 32.

<sup>104</sup>Bowden notes, on file LaBelle Heritage Museum, notes taken from LaBelle City Minutes, 1932.

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end of 1928 that the city found it necessary to levy taxes for street improvements. The work was completed by February of 1930.<sup>105</sup>

With unemployment and tax burdens at a record high, the City Council called upon voters to decide if the city should be abolished, but the referendum failed by a vote of 67 against to 13 in favor. To help cut city tax payer's individual property tax debts, the city began offering delinquent tax payers \$2 a day for cleaning gutters and cutting weeds. The state adopted the Murphy Act to allow for the acceptance of bids on tax certificates, and another bill allowed the county commissioners to adjust boom time valuations for a reduced rate. The Works Progress Administration provided food commodities.<sup>106</sup> Economics downtown required city hall quarters to be vacated and turned over to the owner in September 1934. Thankfully, a store was offered for no cost for use as an official meeting place. The Hendry County treasury was so low that county administrative staff bought their own ice for the coolers and also paid for heating the office and postage from their own funds.<sup>107</sup>

Although faced with oppressive times, the city's population continued to increase. In 1925, the numbers had stood at 1111. By 1930, the population had swelled to 3492, but growth from that point on was considerably slower. The citizens elected Carl Royer the new mayor in August 1930. Members of his city commission included E.M. Cornette and Grover Hill.<sup>108</sup> The 1935 population count was 3711.

During the 1930s, most residents continued to support themselves in areas related to cattle and farming. A number of businesses endured the tough times to continue to serve the community's needs. The city had two barbershops, Ed Staple's and Frank Turner's, and several grocery stores including: Ralph Hendry's (Captain Hendry's grandson), Grace Bekemeyer's, C.A. Davis's, Forrey's, and the B & B Grocery. LaBelle's first circulating library was started by the Woman's Club in 1931, with 50 books on loan from the State Library.<sup>109</sup>

Recreational and social activities within the community during the 1930s consisted of theater productions put on at the LaBelle Playhouse and movies shown at the LaBelle Theater.<sup>110</sup> P.T.A. programs were given and members of the Civic Club continued to meet regularly.<sup>111</sup> Many celebrations were held in the city park.

Inspired by a woman's group in Fort Myers, Mrs. B.L. Dulaney and a group of LaBelle women formed the LaBelle Woman's Community Club on February 3, 1930. The first meeting was held in the movie theater building and was

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., January 9, 1929, and February 13, 1930.

<sup>106</sup>Magill, pp. 11 and 28.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Hendry County News, August 7, 1930.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., May 21, 1931.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., February 20, 1930, December 7, 1933, and September 5, 1935.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., February 20, 1930, May 12, 1931, and December 7, 1933.

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attended by 62 enthusiastic women who pledged their active support and cooperation in the future of the club.<sup>112</sup> Mrs. Dulaney was elected the club's first president.<sup>113</sup> Subsequent meetings were held at the group's club room at the Everett Hotel. In March of 1930, Mrs. Thomas Edison addressed the group at their meeting. She encouraged them to take up the beautification of the town and the protection of native bird life.<sup>114</sup> Shortly thereafter, the club systematically planted palm and Australian pine trees on all the town's principal streets, leaving spaces to be later filled with oleander and hibiscus. The city council demonstrated support of their work when it passed two ordinances; one made it unlawful in the town to destroy, injure or molest any tree, shrub or plant along or near the streets of the city, and the other required all owners of property within the city limits to keep their property free from weeds, rubbish and trash.<sup>115</sup> The members of the Woman's Club held benefit card parties and sponsored motion picture shows to raise funds. They also oversaw the presentation of regular musical programs for entertainment and community parties for the town's residents.<sup>116</sup>

Although the major economic base of Hendry County remained cattle and ranching throughout the 1930s, a reprieve from the difficulties of the Depression years faced elsewhere was given to LaBelle when the Army Corps of Engineers began the task of deepening and widening the Caloosahatchee River. Preliminary surveys were undertaken in 1930 and 1931. As a result of the undertaking, the town again began to experience some population growth. Most of the Corps of Engineers people were from or settled in LaBelle, although some engineers were brought in from other areas and eventually settled in LaBelle permanently. The project provided many additional jobs in the local community. The project involved the dredging of the river to assist in drainage improvements to prevent the recurring floods that had plagued the area for many years.<sup>117</sup> Dredging occurred on the river from east of Fort Myers to Fort Thompson, and included the widening of the former Disston Canal from Fort Thompson to Lake Okeechobee. The river was dredged into a straight path with locks installed to control the level of the water.<sup>118</sup> Hydraulic dredges were used in the work but drag lines were used from LaBelle up. The project was completed in 1936.<sup>119</sup> The impact to LaBelle's building stock was minimal as not many homes were built along the river because of earlier floods and no commercial structures within the downtown area were affected. Those residences that did exist along the new path of the canal were either moved back or demolished.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1931.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1930, and February 6, 1930.

<sup>114</sup>Hendry County News, March 27, 1930.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1931.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., and January 22, 1931, February 20, 1930, March 6, 1930, and May 22, 1930.

<sup>117</sup>"LaBelle our home", "LaBelle was a friendly place" an interview with Frank Cothorn, Corps of Engineers employee who came to LaBelle in 1930, The Leader, 1985, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., and "Changing the Caloosahatchee, an interview with Glen Dyess, a worker on the Caloosahatchee River survey, dredging and widening project, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup>Inventory of the County Archives of Florida, "History of LaBelle" Prepared by the Historical Records Survey, The State Archives Survey, Division of Women's and Professional Projects Works Progress Administration, No. 25, Hendry County (LaBelle), Florida State Library, Jacksonville, Florida, The Historical Records Survey, The State Archives Survey, June, 1938, p. 36.

<sup>120</sup>"LaBelle our home", "Changing the Caloosahatchee", an interview with Glen Dyess, a 1914 native of LaBelle and a worker on the

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In 1933, in an attempt to spur new construction and provide needed housing, the city offered free one-acre lots in Ford Park to any one who would build a home.<sup>121</sup> About three years later, LaBelle resident R.B. Waldron moved 15-20 frame homes in the southeast section of town that were occupied by black families to Sunset Park and an adjacent 40 acres he owned. Waldron then sold the lots on time for \$25 or \$30 a piece.<sup>122</sup> This area, referred to for many years as the “quarters,” was renamed Fordson/Sunset Park when the City Commission was petitioned to give it a formal name in the 1980s.<sup>123</sup>

Some new construction took place in the business district, during the 1930s. When LaBelle was visited in 1934 by a government worker from the Home Loan Department in July, 1934, he noted that there was more building underway in LaBelle than average in comparison to other areas of the state.<sup>124</sup>

In September 1935, the Bank of Labelle went into voluntary liquidation, but all depositors were paid in full.<sup>125</sup> The town was further plagued by big floods in 1935 and June 1936. In 1938, a fire destroyed three buildings on Palm Beach Highway (SR 80): J.O. Davidson’s building; Blitz Wegman, Culley Fletcher, Sam Heath’s building containing the Town Tavern; and Kenneth Daniel’s building containing a grocery and lunchroom. In 1938, fire also destroyed the historic Goodno home at Fort Thompson.<sup>126</sup>

The local high school formed its first football team in 1936 under the management of Coach Howard Quick. Within a few years, the town acquired the McCormick Skating Rink and the Methodist Church created a recreation hall for community gatherings. The responsibility of housing and maintaining the town’s library was abandoned during the 1940s when providing adequate space for books and public reading began to be a problem for the LaBelle Woman’s Club, historically providing the community with a source of reading materials in their clubhouse. The school library served the entire community and provided materials and space for library functions for many years afterward.<sup>127</sup> It was not until 1972 that LaBelle acquired a separate library facility, The Barron Library, to serve its residents.

Henry Ford maintained his land holdings until 1941. From 1935 until that time, he leased the property to J.B. Hendry, Sr. In 1938, Hendry had already acquired all the land south of SR80 from Devil’s Garden Road east to Goodno and south for 5 to 5 1/2 miles.<sup>128</sup> Hendry then began to acquire all of Ford’s remaining substantial LaBelle

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Caloosahatchee River survey, dredging and widening project, The Leader, December 6, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>121</sup>Hendry County News, January 19, 1933.

<sup>122</sup>“LaBelle our home,” The Leader, December 6, 1989, Waldron, R.B., longtime LaBelle resident and two term Hendry County Commissioner, p. 32.

<sup>123</sup>Hendry County News Supplement 50th Anniversary Edition, May 12, 1993, p. 17A.

<sup>124</sup>Hendry County News, July 26, 1934.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., September 5, 1935.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., May 15, 1938.

<sup>127</sup>Edwards, Theresa, “1946-1950 History of LaBelle (Addendum),” produced by the LaBelle Woman’s Club, pp. 41-42.

<sup>128</sup>Hendry County News, May 15, 1938.

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and Fort Thompson area land holdings through his J.B. Hendry Cattle Company and his Consolidated Land Company.<sup>129</sup>

In 1939, the Woman's Club bought the old Dowling and Camp Lumber Co. commissary building from R.N. Miller for \$250 for remodeling into a clubhouse. A few years later, a gift of building lots from Mr. and Mrs. A.L. Taylor was received and generous contributions were made by R.N. Miller, Sears Roebuck and Co., Mrs. B.B. Bever, Mrs. W.B. Barron and many others. A permanent clubhouse (extant) was provided for on SR 80.<sup>130</sup>

A new State Livestock and Produce Market was opened in LaBelle on August 3, 1939 on SR 164, one block south of the courthouse. The market extended over 3 acres and there was free barbecue and dancing at its opening. The event was attended by 7,000, the largest crowd in the history of the county.<sup>131</sup> In May 1939, construction of a new Inter-County Telephone and Telegraph Company Building began, adjacent to the Hendry County News building.<sup>132</sup>

In March 1939, Florida Governor David Sholtz visited the city and gave a speech.<sup>133</sup> A 1939 account of LaBelle provides information as to life in LaBelle at the time. Sawmilling, cattle shipping, and the hewing of (railroad) ties were the principal occupations. The town had no police force; county officials maintained law and order. Cowboys rode into town from the surrounding ranches, wearing cowboy hats, high boots and other western apparel. The biggest event of the year was the Fourth of July rodeo at which local range hands competed in riding Florida broncos and "bulldogging" steers. Roping and whip cracking contests followed horse races, on which wagering was heavy. A barbecue dinner ended the day, and square dances were held in the evening in "jooks" and homes to the music of guitars and fiddles.<sup>134</sup>

During this same period, many men in the area earned their living by trapping. They stayed in the woods for months at a time, arriving with full provisions in early November. At the end of the season, the trappers returned home to bargain with local buyers, agents, or northern furriers who traveled from town to town in the Everglades district. Many Seminoles also brought in furs. Business was transacted along sidewalks, and payments were always in cash.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Hawkins, Betty, Twice Upon A Time, Stories of Southwest Florida's Early Settlers, Bollinger's Business Service, Fort Myers, Florida 33901, 1988, p. 42.

<sup>130</sup>"LaBelle, County Seat of Hendry County", p. 29, and Hendry County News, January 9, 1941.

<sup>131</sup>"Discover LaBelle", prepared and produced by the LaBelle Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>132</sup>Caloosa Belle, "Fifty Years Ago, May 16, 1939", May 16, 1989.

<sup>133</sup>Hendry County News, March 31, 1939.

<sup>134</sup>The Federal Writers Project Guide, a WPA Guide to Florida, 1939, p. 480.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 481.



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**IV. Post World War II, 1945-1950**

Following World War II, the community began to again see many new homes constructed, a few of which replaced earlier structures. Schneider J. Ridgdill built several homes in the southeastern section of the city. Ridgdill operated a sawmill and lumber yard as part of his operation.<sup>136</sup> The old Everett Hotel (non-extant) was rehabilitated, re-furnished and renamed the Riverside by Goodno's successor owner, J.B. Hendry, Sr. It continued in operation until 1952. The (Ralph) Hendry Hotel (non-extant), moved from Sears in 1940 to Hickpochee and later known as the Village Hotel,<sup>137</sup> was in operation. Mrs. Lewis's small hotel, The Oaks, on Fraser Street, also moved to LaBelle from Sears in 1940, but now non-extant,<sup>138</sup> also provided accommodations for visitors. The Forrey Building on Bridge Street continued to be a center for the community, housing the post office, a popular restaurant, and serving as the Western Union Office and bus station. The town had a "Ten Cent Store" and three groceries, a beauty parlor, numerous filling stations, two dry goods stores and three ladies clothing stores, a barber, physician and dentist.<sup>139</sup> The Davidson's Cleaners Building was the first new building to be built on the town's main street (Bridge Street) for many years when it was completed in 1945. Many older commercial buildings were improved by paint and modernization, and a few former barracks buildings were moved to LaBelle from the Buckingham Air Field, between Fort Myers and LaBelle, when the former military buildings became surplus governmental property.

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<sup>136</sup>Ridgdill, Della, widow and longtime LaBelle resident, in an interview with Mikki Hartig of Historical and Architectural Research Services in LaBelle, Florida, 1996.

<sup>137</sup>Caloosa Belle, February 8, 1978, "Looking Back, 1949."

<sup>138</sup>Baron Library vertical file, updated October 15, 1989, and Caloosa Belle, "Looking Back, 1949," February 8, 1978.

<sup>139</sup>"LaBelle, County Seat of Hendry County", p. 11, May 23, 1946.

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F. ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

Property Type: F.1

1. Name of Property Type: Residential Buildings

2. **Description:** Single family Frame Vernacular private residences comprise the majority of buildings found in LaBelle. Most are one-story in height, but occasionally are one-and-a-half or two-stories, with pine balloon frame structural systems resting on foundations of wood or masonry piers. Styles are very limited but reflect modest and simple national trends in architecture during the period in which they were constructed.

The most elemental design feature of LaBelle's historic housing stock is the prevalent simplicity of plan and volume. Unaltered examples have regular plans, basically rectangular. Most have gable or hip roofs pitched steep enough to incorporate attics. Both roof types allowed for exposed rafter tails, providing for at least one decorative detail. Horizontal weatherboard or drop siding are the mostly common exterior wall surface materials. Wood shingles, corrugated sheet metal, or metal composition shingles were most widely used for roof surfacing, but the majority of homes are now covered with 5v crimp sheet metal or composition shingles, the latter in a variety of shapes and colors.

Porches are a common feature, including one- and two-story end porches attached to the main building block to provide visual variety, flexibility of use, and to enhance ventilation and provide protection from sun and rain. Fenestration is regular but not always symmetrical. Original windows are wood double hung sash varying within the limits of readily available types supplied locally or shipped from vendors. Decoration is sparse and generally limited to ornamental woodwork, simple porch columns and balustrades, and eaves and porch brackets.

Beginning in the late 1910s, at least four local sawmills were operating in or near LaBelle. With plentiful and convenient local sources for lumber and for the milling of lumber, the construction of frame dwellings was easily accomplished without the need for transporting the bulk of the required building materials from outside areas. Additional building materials used in the construction of LaBelle's early buildings that were not readily available locally arrived by boat prior to the establishment a rail transport to the town.

In 1927, when the Seaboard Air Line Railroad was extended to LaBelle, goods also began to arrive by rail. Once shipped, needed materials could be obtained through local hardware and lumber suppliers such as the LaBelle Lumber Company which supplied doors, windows, brick, lime, cement, and building hardware to the area's building trade.<sup>140</sup> Other architectural elements were also supplied by local firms or, when necessary, shipped from remote distributors by boat or rail. For the most part, however, architectural elements and details were minimally

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<sup>140</sup>Caloosahatchee Current, March 6, 1925.

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used and were fabricated by local crafts persons, or were procured through catalogs which were widely available to the construction trade, lumber yards, and hardware stores. Because of the common sources of supply of these architectural elements, and because local building techniques were simple and the number of local builders was limited (only one local builder, Everett Burchard, is known to have had any formal architectural or engineering training), the housing stock in LaBelle is widely characterized by a number of common features and typically simple decorative elements.

**Frame Vernacular Architecture**

As is typical of small communities throughout the country, many of the residential structures in LaBelle were Frame Vernacular dwellings constructed by anonymous builders familiar with relatively simple construction. Their execution and method of construction was linked to the builder's experience, available resources, and responses to the local environment.<sup>141</sup> For the most part, these buildings were designed for utility and to bring construction costs down; beauty was a secondary concern.

Vernacular architecture embraces a diversity of folk and mass-produced building forms that were transmitted by memory or by pattern book. These vernacular structures can be amalgams of building traditions and style, or may reflect the personality of the builder. Frequently, vernacular buildings reflect a local adaptation to landscape, climate, and cultural patterns.

**Bungalow/Craftsman**

A very few more refined LaBelle historic residential buildings can be classified as Bungalows or Craftsman Style homes. New trends in architecture followed World War I. The United States began to experience a period of intense growth and Florida reached an unparalleled period of development known as the Florida Boom. One of the most notable changes in architecture during this time was the Bungalow's gain in popularity.

Although the bungalow appeared in America in the 1880s, spread here and there, mostly in New England, it was its development in Southern California that established its future popularity. One of the earliest mentions of the bungalow, establishing a transition in American building from the prevalent frame vernacular to the "vernacular bungalow" and subsequently to the California Bungalow, was made as early as 1904. The July 1904 issue of Carpentry and Building described the new California Bungalow as,

a low-house, generally with a spacious interior ... set snug and close to the ground with overhanging eaves, and great surfaces of roof. They are only one story high, or at most one

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<sup>141</sup>Fleming, John, Hug, Honour, Pevsner, Nikolaus, The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, Fourth Edition, Penguin Books, the Penguin Group, London, England, 1991, p. 465.

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story and an attic, and are stained dark ... porches are designed to be well-shaded. Rough stones are used for the chimney and visible foundations.

Following its success in California, the bungalow became one of the most successful vernacular houses ever built.<sup>142</sup> As opposed to Frame Vernacular, the Bungalow, and more specifically the Craftsman Style Bungalow, are much more self-conscious or intentional in their expression of such sensibilities as grace, ease, naturalness, permanence, stability, complexity, massiveness, volume and other characteristics associated with and symbolic of the home as a place of respite, quiet and comfort. It is symbolized by the design of the roof which is usually low pitched and extends to the deep eaves. The usual porch and posts, walls, doors, and windows take their places quietly in the scheme or style receding under the dominant roof. In most cases, the bungalow is set low to the ground, nestling into and becoming a part of the environment. Its casualness promotes the informal life of its occupants.<sup>143</sup>

The bungalow enjoyed an equal degree of success during the first twenty or thirty years of the twentieth century as the cottage had before it. It was tirelessly promoted and enthusiastically constructed. It constituted virtually all of the detached houses built during this time period. Due to an urgent need for housing and rapid expansion across the continent, more bungalows may have been constructed during this short time than the cottage which was previously popular for a period of 125 years. The bungalow's quick rise to prominence, its expansion throughout the country, its significant numbers, broad appeal, types and facets, and originality would make it worthy as an art form reflecting the life of its era. Consisting of a house of moderate size, adequate for a small family, constructed on a modest size lot, it afforded an overall effect of homey-ness. Most of all, its reasonable cost made it affordable to the average citizen and a good value.<sup>144</sup>

A few modest examples of the bungalow appear in LaBelle. Variations in exterior fabric over wood framing include; horizontal novelty siding, simple drop siding, wood and asphalt shingle, or some combination thereof. In some instances, original horizontal wood siding has been obscured by the application of horizontal vinyl or aluminum siding and a few houses have been covered in asbestos shingle siding. Common original windows are wood double hung sash in varying configurations, including 1/1, 3/1, 4/1 and 6/1 glazing. The most common modification to Labelle housing stock has been porch enclosures and window replacement, often with metal single hung sash or aluminum awning units.

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<sup>142</sup>Grottfried, Herbert and Jennings, Jan, American Vernacular Design 1870-1940, Iowa State University Press/Ames, 1985, p. 342.

<sup>143</sup>Lancaster, Clay, American Bungalow, 1880-1930, General Publishing Company, Ltd, Toronto, Canada, 1985, pp. 11 & 13, and Massey, James C. and Maxwell, Shirley, House Styles in America, The Old House Journal Guide to The Architecture of American Homes, Dovetale Publishers, 1996, p. 190.

<sup>144</sup>Lancaster, p. 13.

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**Colonial Revival Style**

Following World War I, the fashion for adaptations of the American colonial house began and it continues to the present time. With variations, Colonial Revival has been the dominant style of houses in the twentieth century. In Florida, it provided a strong influence on vernacular architecture. Colonial Revival style buildings, generally residences, rose to two-and-one-half- stories in height. Forms and elements are used and adapted with greater or lesser success. They displayed symmetrical massing, exhibited a tall hip roof and hip dormers, and usually contained a one-story full facade entrance porch or small stoop. The door is usually centered in the front facade and flanked by symmetrically placed double hung windows. Exterior fabrics included brick, weatherboard, drop siding, and shingles. Foundations were usually brick piers or continuous brick.<sup>145</sup>

These were low cost homes, wood was cheap, pattern books had standardized architectural details, and ornamentation was limited. The clean style was a reaction against the foppiness of Victorian styles, particularly that seen in some Queen Anne extravagances. The style was lauded for achieving thoroughness of workmanship characteristic of old New England houses.

**3. Significance:** The historic residential buildings of LaBelle may be significant under criteria A, B, and C. The areas of significance may include exploration and settlement, community planning and development, architecture, or any other area that may be sufficiently explained in the nomination proposal. Architectural significance should reflect local stylistic trends in architecture consistent with those found in Florida during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or be tied to special circumstances of design or use of materials found in Hendry County. Properties may gain significance through association with persons of historical importance, either as the only remaining resource to be associated with the person or through a significant activity (e.g., the writing of literature), other than residential use, exercised by the person on the property.

**4. Registration Requirements:** For buildings to be eligible for listing under the above property type they must be located within the city limits of LaBelle, Florida. They should be significant examples of a style or type of architecture and/or be associated with important local historical events. Districts nominated under this property type should possess a concentration of relatively well-preserved historical resources.

Buildings proposed under Criterion C must retain their original architectural integrity to a high degree. A residence, educational, religious, or commercial building that has been altered by intrusive additions, the extensive application of materials inconsistent with the historic period in which the building achieved significance, the removal of significant architectural details or removal from their original location within the last fifty years are

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<sup>145</sup>“Model Guidelines for Design Review, a guide for developing standards for historic rehabilitation in Florida communities,” Funded by Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, Sandra B. Mortham, Secretary of State, Assisted by Florida Historic Preservation Advisory Council, Consultants: Paul L. Weaver, III, Historic Property Associates, Inc., Pappas Associates, Inc., undated, p. 56.

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excluded from nomination under this criterion. The replacement of windows and the enclosure of porches is a fairly common occurrence. Generally, if the original window openings remain and if the original configuration of the porch is still visible, these changes will not in and of themselves be considered as reason for excluding the building from listing. Enlargement of residences is also fairly common. If the enlargements are at the rear of the building, are unobtrusive, and not larger than the building itself, they are not considered reason for excluding the building from listing. Integrity requirements for buildings that derive their primary significance for their historical associations may be somewhat less stringent than those nominated for their architectural significance alone.

**Property Type F.2**

**1. Name of Property Type: Religious, Educational, or Commercial Buildings of LaBelle**

**2. Description:** Poorly maintained dirt roads and a lack of railroad service into LaBelle until 1927, made the trip to the closest large city, Fort Myers, long for wealthy and poor alike in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Travel was primarily by horse and buggy or by boat along the Calooshattee River. LaBelle residents probably made this trip to town infrequently. Even in the early days of the automobile, the journey was arduous. Residents relied on churches, schools, and stores in LaBelle to meet their needs. Not only did those resources serve their obvious religious, educational or commercial functions, but they also often served as social centers for the rural population. As with rural residences, most of these buildings are vernacular, sometimes with references to architectural styles outlined above.

A single historic school building exists in LaBelle, the 1926 LaBelle High School. The Masonry Vernacular building is unusual to LaBelle because, along with the 1927 Hendry County Courthouse, it is the only other historic brick structure believed to have been built in LaBelle, or at least to have survived. The lack of brick residential or non-residential structures within the city dating from the first part of the century is a result of the high cost of brick, LaBelle's relative rural location, a lack of good roads to bring brick to LaBelle, and the non-existence of any railroad link until 1927. Other architectural elements and materials that were not available locally were delivered by boats along the Caloosahatchee River from Fort Myers and points beyond prior to the coming of the railroads and the construction of better roads. Atlantic Coast Line rail service came to Fort Thompson, a few miles outside of LaBelle in 1921, and the Seaboard Air Line Railroad came to LaBelle in 1927. The construction of solid road beds leading to LaBelle took place several years later.

**Masonry Vernacular Architecture**

Prior to the Civil War, brick was uncommon in Southwest Florida. In the region clay was scarce, and there were no industrial plants in the region to produce such building materials. Contractors for federal structures imported brick from other areas for their works. Following the Civil War, brick became more readily available in some areas of Florida, especially in the more metropolitan and densely populated towns and cities. Brick was most often used in

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the construction of new commercial buildings, or used to replace buildings destroyed by fire. Ornamentation usually consisted of simple detailing, such as cast concrete embellishments or decorative brick work. Roofs were usually flat and built-up with parapets. After 1900, new colors and textures of brick were introduced. In addition to commercial buildings, brick was increasingly used on a variety of types of buildings, such as private residences, apartments, schools, and governmental buildings.<sup>146</sup> Construction in rural communities, however, continued to be dominated by Frame Vernacular construction.

### **Educational/School Architecture**

The 1926 LaBelle High School is typical of numerous school buildings erected in Florida to accommodate a tremendous growth in the state's population during the boom years of the 1920s. This followed state legislation in 1919 that established compulsory schooling of children between the ages of eight and fourteen. Today, more than 1,500 publicly owned school sites in the state are over forty years old. These buildings were soundly constructed and built to provide a productive environment for learning and to resist hurricanes.<sup>147</sup> Many schools built in Florida during the first quarter of the century were designed by prominent architects and constructed with enduring materials.<sup>148</sup>

School buildings erected in the 1920s usually had masonry exterior finishes, particularly brick and stucco. They also normally had a central block with wings formed around a regular plan. The primary or main entrance was most often centrally placed. Such structures were built two or three stories in height with a variety of roof forms, including gable, hip, and flat. Large regularly placed operable windows provided maximum interior lighting. The interiors of these structures had generous floor-to-ceiling heights and usually incorporated an auditorium, in addition to classrooms, the principal's office and a library.<sup>149</sup>

3. Significance: The historic Religious, Educational, or Commercial Buildings of LaBelle must be significant under criteria A and/or C in the areas of commerce, community planning and development, architecture, or some area of significance related to their historic use. The architecturally significant buildings reflect

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<sup>146</sup>“Model Guidelines for Design Review, a guide for developing standards for historic rehabilitation in Florida communities,” p. 38.

<sup>147</sup>Florida Division of Historic Resources, Tampa Preservation, Inc., Historic Schools Reuse, Prepared by: Jan Abell, FAIA, Lee Braun, undated, p. 4.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>149</sup>“Model Guidelines for Design Review, a guide for developing standards for historic rehabilitation in Florida communities,” p. 101.

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architectural trends throughout Florida during the period of significance and retain a high degree of architectural integrity.

**3. Registration Requirements:** For buildings to be eligible for listing under the above property type they must be located within the city limits of LaBelle, Florida. They should be significant examples of a style or type of architecture and/or be associated with important local historical events. Districts nominated under this property type should possess a concentration of relatively well-preserved historical resources.

Buildings proposed under Criterion C must retain their original architectural integrity to a high degree. An educational, religious, or commercial building that has been altered by intrusive additions, the application of materials inconsistent with the historic period in which the buildings achieved significance, the removal of significant architectural details, removal from their original location within the last fifty years are excluded from nomination under this criterion. The replacement of windows and the enclosure of porches is a fairly common occurrence. Generally, if the original window openings remain and if the original configuration of the porch is still visible, these changes will not in and of themselves be considered as reason for excluding the building from listing. Enlargement of buildings is also fairly common. If the enlargements are at the rear portion of the building, are unobtrusive, and are not larger than the building itself, they are not considered reason for excluding the building from listing. Integrity requirements for buildings that derive their primary significance for their historical associations may be somewhat less stringent than those nominated for their architectural significance alone.



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**G.GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Boundaries of the City of LaBelle in Hendry County, Florida.

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IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

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**H. SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS**

A comprehensive survey of architectural resources in LaBelle was begun in 1995 and completed 1996, provided the core information used to develop the cover. The Historic Properties Survey of LaBelle, Florida, was prepared for the Calusa Valley Historical Society by Historical and Architectural Research Services of Sarasota, Florida, and was financed in part with historic preservation grant assistance provided by the Bureau of Historic Preservation, Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, assisted by the Historic Preservation Advisory Council. In addition, another study of archaeological and historical resources was undertaken in accordance with the procedures contained in 36 C.F.R., Part 800 ("Protection of Historical Properties"). That study was a result of a plan by the Florida Department of Transportation to widen SR80 through the center of LaBelle. Both studies involved extensive historical research using both primary and secondary documents, and oral histories. Since and as a result of the completion of the LaBelle Historic Properties Survey, two individual historic properties and one small downtown commercial historic district have been identified, nominated, and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The criteria for the survey included the identification and recording on Florida Master Site File Forms of all buildings, structures, and objects pre-dating 1946. Historic buildings, as they relate to the survey, were all 50 years of age or older at the time of the beginning of the survey. A total of 149 buildings and one site were identified and recorded. Survey work involved field work in which all pre-1946 buildings, structures, and objects were photographed and an architectural description prepared. The location of resources was recorded on a base map. Architectural style and details, plan, condition, use, and setting were noted. Legal descriptions and addresses were recorded. An attempt was made to document the construction date and history of each building and their original use(s) and owner(s). This was accomplished by using information compiled from LaBelle Heritage Museum files and a comprehensive review of old copies of the local newspapers Caloosahatchee Current, Caloosa Belle, and Hendry County News dating from 1922 until 1946. Available tax rolls dating from 1930 were cross-checked with existing Florida Master Site File Forms. Miscellaneous materials were made available by the LaBelle Heritage Museum.

The 1995-1996 historic properties survey also suggested that eleven properties appeared to meet the criterion necessary for listing in the National Register. Since that time, two historically associated buildings included in the list of potential properties, the Aiken/Rider House and Rider Law Office, have been determined to be ineligible based upon improper orientation and reversal in siting when the threat of demolition made it necessary to relocate the structures from their original site to a nearby site in 1993. It was the intent of the City of LaBelle to provide partial funding, combined with another Florida Department of State historic preservation grant approved in 1998, to not only sponsor this Multiple Resource Nomination but also to act as a facilitator in the nomination of all other potentially eligible National Register properties built through 1950 within the city limits of LaBelle. This will be

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done by providing the funding for consultant services to prepare nominations on behalf of owners of all properties within the city that appear to be eligible and who are willing to consent to the listing of their property.

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