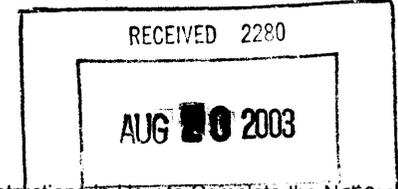


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name ROBERTS RANCH

other names/site number Old Allen Place, Baucom Place, FMSF # 8CR143, CR635-640

2. Location

street & number 1215 Roberts Avenue N/A  not for publication

city or town Immokalee N/A  vicinity

state Florida code FL county Collier code 021 zip code 34142

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Janet Snyder Matthews 8/06/2003  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Jan E Beal 10/4/03  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
9	4	buildings
0	0	sites
3	0	structures
0	0	objects
12	4	total

**Name of related multiple property listings**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

"NA"

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, secondary structures

AGRICULTURE: animal facility, outbuildings

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE: museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: frame vernacular

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls WOOD

roof METAL

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1915-1953

**Significant Dates**

1915

**Significant Person**

Roberts, Robert, Jr.

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Builder: Roberts, Robert, Jr.

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

# \_\_\_\_\_

Roberts Ranch  
Name of Property

Collier Co., FL  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 12.93

### UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	17	456720	2922280
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2	17	457120	2922280

3	17	457120	2922100
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4	17	456820	2922100

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Godwin, Diana/Robert O. Jones, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date July 2003

street & number 500 South Brounough Street telephone 850-245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state FL zip code 32399-0250

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Collier County

street & number 3301 Tamiami Trail, East telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Naples state FL zip code 34112-4996

**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 amend 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**ROBERTS RANCH, IMMOKALEE, COLLIER  
COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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**SUMMARY**

The 12.93-acre site of Roberts Ranch includes twelve contributing resources, all built between 1915 and 1950: nine Frame Vernacular buildings, and three structures, a well, a horse ramp, and a cane syrup cooker. The ranch contains four noncontributing buildings and structures. A group of buildings compose a cluster primarily associated with domestic life, and a second cluster of resources is associated with the cattle operations. U.S. Highway 29, the main thoroughfare through Immokalee, forms the western boundary of the property and Roberts Avenue runs along the northern boundary. Privately owned parcels adjoin the eastern and southern boundaries. The ranch, now owned by Collier County, and known as the "Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Roberts Ranch," is used to interpret the cattle-ranching heritage of the area.

**SETTING**

The terrain is flat and well drained, and a remnant of the historic Roberts orange grove (which is being restored) occupies a portion of the site to the southwest. Lake Trafford is three miles to the west of the ranch. An unpaved access road enters the property from Roberts Road on the north, and forms a loop by the main house. Mature pine trees grow on the grounds in front of the Roberts main house, which faces north. The Roberts Ranch site was cleared of much of its surrounding pinewoods by the hurricane of 1926. Hurricanes also damaged the original orange grove whose trees were described as forty feet high at one time. The current property is a small portion of a huge ranch located to the west of the crossroads settlement of Immokalee. The unincorporated community has a population of approximately 15,000. The current city now extends around the ranch to the northwest. U.S. Highway 29 runs due north from the ranch, but curves around the southern boundary as it runs east and then southeast at the eastern edge of Immokalee. County Road 846 runs due south from the center of the community. With an economic base in citrus, vegetables, and cattle, the city is one of the state's major produce centers. The population doubles each year with tourists and migratory produce laborers.

A community school and cemetery were historically located near the Roberts Ranch. The cemetery occupies land on the northern side of Roberts Avenue, and is the final resting place for the Roberts' close neighbors. The Roberts were buried in the original churchyard of the First Baptist Church.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

The fenced property contains two clusters of frame vernacular buildings. The first is associated with the house and its domestic functions, and the second is a cluster of utilitarian ranching buildings situated about 100 yards to the northwest, close to the northern border of the property (See ranch map). An orange grove is in the southwest portion of the property. A drainage ditch created by William Dius Roberts to control flooding after the hurricane of 1947 lies to the south of the orange grove.<sup>1</sup>

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COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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The ranch buildings retain remnants of dark blue-green paint or stain on the wood. Fences also have traces of rose-colored paint. Many of the buildings were constructed of, or repaired with, salvaged materials, including timbers from an earlier log house that was once located within the cluster of buildings.<sup>2</sup>

**Roberts Family Home/Main House**

The Roberts family home was built in 1926, and is a two-story, front-gabled, frame vernacular house with drop siding (covered with asbestos siding in the late 1940s), two-over-two double-hung, wooden sash windows, and brick pier foundation (Photo #1). The south/rear portion of the house is one story (Photo #2). Exterior brick chimneys are on the east, west, and south sides of the house (Photo #3). The house is of symmetrical design with four sets of paired windows on the east and west elevations, and two sets of paired windows on the north façade, and a louvered vent in the north gable. The moderate slope roof is constructed with exposed rafter ends. The one-story north, front porch, spans the elevation and has a gable roof. It is enclosed with a knee-wall and screened. The porch was a family gathering place, and business was transacted there without intruding on the family privacy (Photo #4). The Roberts House interior has a center hall with two rooms flanking either side. The walls are constructed of narrow beaded vertical siding (Photo #5). The floors were of painted heart pine boards. The central hall leads to a south entry room and two bathrooms in the southeast corner. A kitchen is in the southwest corner. A narrow, wooden staircase in the first floor bedroom leads to four small upstairs bedrooms. The lumber for the house was shipped by train from Lake Wales by the Townsend Lumber Company.<sup>3</sup>

The house withstood major hurricanes in 1926 and 1928 without substantial damage but lost its main roof in a 1947 hurricane.<sup>4</sup> V-crimp roofing replaced the previous corrugated metal roof. Two windows on the north façade, second story were installed in 1947. Electricity was installed in the 1940s. Non-historic alterations include the installation of louvered aluminum windows in place of screens on the sides of the main porch. The southeast corner room was a rear porch, enclosed to create a sitting room, and later bathrooms were added. The adjacent kitchen was modernized in the early 1960s. A half-bath was installed upstairs. Wall-to-wall carpeting was installed upstairs and on a narrow staircase leading to the upper floor.<sup>6</sup>

Currently used as a house-museum, it is furnished with original Roberts family furniture and memorabilia. Original pictures illustrate the history of the family and ranching activities. The desk, typewriter, and filing cabinets are in the front room used as the office for the Red Cattle Company, formed in 1950. The hallway contains a painting by Mary Louise Roberts Floyd of the original log house. Mrs. Roberts' treadle-powered Singer sewing machine is in her bedroom on the first floor. The dining room furniture includes a pie safe, buffet, Depression glass, and tableware.

The **Maid's House**, (1926) (Photo #6) is a small rectangular 120-square-foot, one-room, front-gabled building. Vertical board siding is over stud framing, and a low-pitched roof with corrugated galvanized steel sheets is

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**ROBERTS RANCH, IMMOKALEE, COLLIER  
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over wood decking, exposed common rafters and wooden flooring. The building is painted white and is in good condition, and small square screened windows are centered in each of three remaining elevations. A single door is on the main elevation. The doorway can be entered from a set of wooden steps. A small shed roof over the doorway deflects rain. The maid's house is interpreted with furnishings appropriate to the 1920s and 1930s.

The **Privy**, (1926) (Photo #7) is a 4'x4' building with vertical board siding and a shed roof sheathed with corrugated galvanized metal sheeting. The privy is an improved form built on a concrete foundation containing a waste unit much like a septic tank that was promoted by the government during the 1920s and 1930s to improve hygiene. The privy is painted white, and is in good condition. The unit was ventilated through the diagonal wood vent across the corner. This is the only surviving example of this type of modernized outhouse in Collier County.

The **Smokehouse**, (1950) (Photo #8) is located southeast of the main house. The gabled roof is of corrugated metal and the drop siding on stud walls is painted white. It has a poured concrete foundation that was installed later. Screened openings just under the eaves let out the smoke and kept flies away. The door is built of solid wooden boards with a diagonal brace. It replaced a 1932 log smokehouse. Though called a smokehouse, it contains a hide curing vat.

The **Garage**, (1926) (Photo #9) is a rectangular building with galvanized corrugated metal sheathing installed over wood stud walls. It has a low-pitched front gable roof with exposed rafters covered with corrugated galvanized metal sheets. The first mention of the garage at the ranch was in 1926.

The **Tractor Barn**, (1950) (Photo #10) is an open-sided, 24"x4" square pole building. Sixteen poles set into the ground in four rows are joined by 4"x 6" inch beams at the top of the poles, held in place with metal straps. A gable roof is above the central two rows of poles, and side shed roofs extend from these central poles to the outer rows. The beams extend continuously around the perimeter and at the center of the shed. The gable roof is formed from roof trusses bearing on the 4" x 6" beams. The trusses are made up of 2" x 6" chords and webs and are spaced at 36 inches on center. Rough-sawn 1' x 6" and 1' x 8" boards were used to create a solid wood roof decking. Corrugated galvanized sheet steel roofing covers the wooden decking. The gable end trusses are sheathed on the exterior with vertical 1' x 10" foot boards. The poles are connected with 2"x 6" rails at 18 inches above grade on the sides. Pairs of double 2" x 6" rail gates are hinged at each end of the structure. The tractor barn is in fair condition with limited termite and wood rot damage.

The **Kitchen**, (1915) (Photo #11) is a 12' x 18' foot building with two 8-foot sheds on each side. The central portion of the kitchen was built prior to 1914 to serve the log cabin home that stood to the east of it. The Roberts family added the side shed additions after they purchased the property in 1914. The kitchen is constructed entirely of rough-sawn lumber. Split-log piers of approximately 18 inches diameter are half-buried at each corner. Each end of the structure has 3"x6" wood beams bearing on the log piers that support 2"x 6"

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floor joists spaced at 24 inches on center. Spaced wood flooring is nailed to the joists. The walls are framed with vertical 2" x 3" studs located only at the openings. There is a door at each end and two doors or windows on each side. A 2" x 3" top plate is continuous over the studs on the sides and ends. The open sheds on each side are framed with wood poles, some of which were salvaged from the log cabin (Photo #12). Smaller logs bear on these with a 2" x 4" space at each 24 inches. The roof decking is 1' x 4" boards spaced at 12 inches on the center. Corrugated galvanized steel sheets cover the roof decking and the sidewalls of the sheds. The condition of the kitchen is fair, although the log piers and floor beams have deteriorated.<sup>6</sup>

The **Horse Barn**, (1943) (Photo #13) is a 30' x 40' foot, one-story building constructed in December 1943. The rough-sawn siding and roof decking of the transverse crib barn were salvaged from an earlier two-story pole barn. A continuous concrete grade beam supports the flat 4"x6" wood plate. A concrete slab serves as the finished floor in the storage area. Vertical 4" x 4" studs are spaced at 10 feet on center with a continuous 2" x 4" top plate to form the frame walls. A simple low pitch gable roof is formed by roof framing of 2" x 6" rafters spaced at 36 inches on center. The rafters are supported on two exterior sidewalls and two interior parallel walls. The roof decking is solid butt joint 1' x 6" boards with planed surfaced lumber board framing members covered with rough sawn wood sheathing and decking material. The roofing is a five V-crimp galvanized steel. The walls form three bays of approximately 10' x 40'. The East Bay contains six horse stalls accessed from the exterior. The exterior walls as well as the interior walls separating the horse stalls are sheathed in vertical siding. The other two bays form one open storage area. The feed storage room sheathed in corrugated galvanized steel sheets is located in the southwest corner of this open area. The entrances are a nine-foot sliding door and a three-foot hinged door on the north side, and there is also a three-foot hinged door on the south side. A wood fence attached to the building forms a corral for horses on the east side of the building<sup>7</sup>

The **Hide House**, (c1928) (Photo #14) is a gable-roofed building. It is the only historic tannery related building known to survive in Collier County. It contains a vat that was used to cure hides. Its foundation is a single course of concrete block laid on grade with mortared joints. The walls are vertical 2"x4" studs spaced at 42 inches on center with exterior 1"x10" and 1"x12" vertical board siding. There is a single hinged door constructed of 1"x10" vertical boards in the center of the east elevation. The corners are framed with salvaged white-painted 4"x4"s with chamfered edges, which may have once been porch columns from another building. The gable roof is constructed of 2"x4" rafters spaced at 24 inches on center with 1"x4" board decking spaced at 24 inches on center. The roof is covered with corrugated galvanized steel sheets. The 8-foot square vat takes up most of the interior. The bottom of the vat is formed by a on grade concrete slab. The sides are 2"x4" studs driven into the ground at 24 inches on center and sheathed with 1"x8" horizontal boards. The sides extend 22 inches above the slab. The exterior siding and roofing are in fair condition.

The **Well**, (1926) (Photo #15) was a primary source of water for the ranch from 1926 until it went dry in 1962. It is 16 feet deep and its sides are supported by 24-inch diameter terra cotta pipe of unknown date extending two feet above grade. Two wood poles are set into the ground on either side of the pipe and support a horizontal

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pole above the well. A pulley and chain for raising and lowering buckets into the well were mounted to the horizontal pole over the pipe.<sup>8</sup>

The **Cane Syrup Furnace/Vat**, (1944 rebuilt) (Photo #16) is located east of the tractor shed. Used primarily to render sugar cane juice into syrup, it was also used to dip hogs during butchering. The brick furnace was rebuilt in 1944 using materials from the original furnace. A cast iron vat rests on an opening above a firebox. The entire structure is eight feet long. The brickwork is in poor condition.<sup>9</sup> A cane-grinding mill is no longer present.

The **Horse Ramp**, (ca1926) (Photo #17) located east of the horse barn was used to load working horses onto trailers or trucks. The structure is built of two rows of vertical poles set into the ground. Each row consists of four poles spaced apart at 4'11", 3'11", and 2'11" foot intervals. The rows are set 4'11" apart, allowing about 4' clearance for the horse. Each row is joined by boards creating parallel fences. An angled loading platform constructed of boards and cleats is set between the fences. The horse ramp was an important feature related to the use of motorized vehicles in ranching. Prior to vehicles, the cowboys rode horseback long hours, moving from one part of the huge Roberts Ranch to another. After the introduction of mechanized vehicles in the 1920s, the family and ranch hands were based at the ranch homestead, and they and their horses could be transported to any grazing acreage in Hendry or Collier County as needed.<sup>9</sup> The ramp had decayed and was substantially rebuilt recently, with as many of the older boards retained as possible. Because the structure's placement and configuration exactly matches the historic structure, and because it is an integral part of the ranch complex, it is considered contributing to the Robert Ranch nomination.

#### Noncontributing Resources

An original **bunkhouse** existed on another property that had been within the Roberts Ranch, and was used to house the cowboys who worked on the ranch. The bunkhouse burned in 1998, and was reconstructed on the current site in 2001, to assist in the public's interpretation of the ranch (Photo #18). It is a frame construction with horizontal exterior walls over a stud frame attached to two rows of eight poles set into the ground.

The **pump house** was built in 1962 to shelter a pump, diesel engine, and a tank for grove irrigation (Photo #16). It is constructed partially of salvaged materials, and is of pole construction with open sides. It was the last building constructed on the ranch before the death of Robert Roberts, Jr.

The 1926 **First Baptist Church of Immokalee**, (Photo #19) is now located in the southwest quadrant of the property, was moved in 2002 to the property to prevent its demolition. The Roberts family was among the founders of the church and was its greatest supporters. The 1760 square foot vernacular building is intended for use as a visitor center for the ranch museum.

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**ROBERTS RANCH, IMMOKALEE, COLLIER  
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A Seminole Indian-style **Chickee** was built on the property in 2001 (Photo #20). It is open-sided, pole-built, and without flooring. It is a temporary structure used to provide shade during interpretive events. It is located half way between the two groups of buildings.

NOTES

1. Maria Stone. The End of the Oxcart Trail, pp.25,47.
2. Chalmers Yielding. Existing Conditions Assessment, p.3-10.
3. Stone, p.15.
4. Stone, pp.13-15,70.
5. Stone, p.70.
6. Mildred Roberts Sherrod, interview, 20 January 2001.
7. Yielding, p.3-10.
8. *ibid.*
9. Sherrod, 2001.

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**LIST OF BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES**

RESOURCE	YEAR	STATUS
Roberts Family Home	1926	contributing
Maid's House	1926	contributing
Privy	1926	contributing
Smokehouse	1950	contributing
Garage	1926	contributing
Tractor Barn	1950	contributing
Old Kitchen	1915	contributing
Horse Barn	1943	contributing
Hide House	1928	contributing

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Well	1926	contributing
Cane Syrup Vat	1944	contributing
Horse Ramp	ca.1926, repaired	contributing
Bunkhouse	2001, reconstructed	noncontributing
Pump House	1962	noncontributing
First Baptist Church	1926, moved, 2002	noncontributing
Chickee	2001	noncontributing

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**SUMMARY**

The Roberts Ranch is nominated to the National Register under Criterion A for its significance on the local level in the area of Agriculture. The Roberts family developed one of South Florida's largest 20<sup>th</sup> century cattle raising operations. Their property holdings were immense and extended across Collier and Hendry counties. The base and headquarters of their operations, and home for the family is the property nominated. The period of significance is 1915-1953.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

**Immokalee and Collier County**

Immokalee is Collier County's largest inland community. It is about twenty-five miles from the Gulf of Mexico and has a long tradition of cattle ranching and fruit and vegetable production. These inland prairie lands were located on the highest elevation in the county and were originally settled by the Calusa Indians who also had established large villages on the Gulf coast. The Seminole Indians, displaced from north and central Florida after the Seminole Wars of the 1830s and 1840s, also used the land as a seasonal hunting ground. The Indians called the area "Gopher Ridge" because of the abundance of the land tortoise (gopher turtles), a valued source of meat. Although white trappers and hunters passed through the area earlier in the nineteenth century, the first permanent white settlement was not established until the 1870s. Cowmen, missionaries, and Indian traders were drawn to the frontier hamlet. In 1897, the name of the settlement of Gopher Ridge was changed to Immokalee, a Seminole word meaning "my home."<sup>i</sup>

For lack of roads, Immokalee grew slowly until the Atlantic Coast Line Railway was extended to the isolated inland location in 1921. The vast open lands of this southern frontier, once part of Lee County, became Collier County in 1922, spearheaded by the efforts of an ambitious developer named Barron G. Collier. Collier pushed for the construction of a paved highway, called the Tamiami Trail, and for a further southern extension of the railroad from Immokalee to Everglades City, the county seat. These improvements increased the potential for growth and development in Immokalee. Ranchers and farmers prospered and lumbering and oil production added to the growth of the local economy once the transportation systems were improved.<sup>ii</sup>

When the Roberts family moved to Immokalee in 1914, it was a frontier town with a few small family homesteads and a limited commercial center near the crossing of two roads where State Road 826 meets US Highway 29 today. "Cowhunters," driving cattle south for shipment to the Cuban market, patronized Immokalee's two-story hotels, saloons, and store. Panthers, wild hogs, bears and turkeys inhabited the pine and oak scrub flatlands that surrounded the town, which was routinely buffeted by hurricane winds, flooding and periodic scrub fires.<sup>iii</sup>

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**Cattle Ranching in Florida**

Cattle ranching originated in the Spanish colonial era when Spaniards brought Andalusian cattle to Florida to provision the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine. Their hides were a valuable commodity. When the Spanish left Florida, their cattle, already adapted to the Florida climate, were left behind to run wild and forage for themselves. By 1600, there were 20,000 head of cattle in Florida and 34 established ranches.<sup>iv</sup> Native American groups from Georgia and the Carolinas moved into Florida and claimed the livestock abandoned by the Spanish for their own herds. Quaker botanist John Bartram was impressed in 1774 with the “innumerable droves of cattle” owned by Chief Cowkeeper, a Seminole who grazed his herds on the lush grass of Payne’s Prairie.<sup>v</sup> There were large ranches in Alachua County, in Volusia County, and in the hills of Northwestern Florida. When Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, settlers with a herding background moved into the state. Families from the Carolinas and Georgia, many of them descendants of Scotch-Irish immigrants, brought their expertise and traditions to cattle ranching in Florida. As they moved from the north of Florida to the South, they rounded up the wild cattle, using cow dogs trained for the job, and small tough ponies that could withstand the heat, insects, and rough forage.<sup>vi</sup> They used a method of herding derived from the Scottish tradition of penning the cattle in split-rail fenced pens, easily constructed from available materials. Each evening the cattle were herded into these “cowpens” (a common place name in Florida’s cattle ranching regions). On the long cattle drives, long leather “Cracker” whips, effectively snapped or “cracked,” kept the cows moving and provided protection from snakes and other predators.<sup>vii</sup>

In the mid-1800s, Florida cattlemen drove their herds to Punta Rassa, near Port Charlotte, and shipped them to Cuba.<sup>viii</sup> Florida beef was known for its toughness, limiting its marketability in this country. During the Civil War, vast herds of Florida cattle were driven north through the center of the state to supply the Confederate Army. Jake Summerlin, a well-known pioneer rancher in the state, sent as many as 25,000 head of cattle from his own herds and those of other ranchers on these drives. After the war, many cattle dynasties were founded as Confederate war veterans took up ranching. A hard working, enterprising man could round up a herd of wild cattle, fatten them on the open range, then drive the herds to market to trade them for profit that came in the form of Cuban gold coins.<sup>23</sup> There were 19<sup>th</sup> century “cattle wars” with widespread cattle rustling and vigilante violence, the result of constant and bitter disputes over cattle ownership. Into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the South Florida cattle plains were still subject to the occasional band of armed outlaws.<sup>ix</sup> A typical cow hunt in 1877, as described by a veteran rancher, might take up to four months, with mounted parties ranging through the palmetto scrub and woods, rounding up stray cattle, separating the herds according to marks and brands, and penning them in temporary makeshift pens. Breeding season began in December, and winter was the calving season. After the calves matured in the spring, they were branded and, unless the herds were to be driven to market, the herds were turned out again to graze.<sup>24</sup>

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Cattlemen were successful in crossbreeding the Florida scrub cattle with Brahma bulls imported from India. Paired with this other hardy variety easily acclimated to hot, humid climate, Florida cattle improved in quality. Two hardy Florida breeds, "Brangus" and "Braford," are the result of these efforts. However, problems with tick-borne diseases and screwworms diminished the health and value of Florida herds. A federally-mandated dipping program in the 1930s finally brought the tick problem under control using arsenic dips. Flies responsible for the screwworm, were eventually eradicated by introducing sterile male flies onto the affected regions. A 1949 Florida law mandated that cattle be fenced-in. Ranchers, used to grazing their herds on public lands and driving them over miles of unfenced land, were dismayed by the new restrictions. However, fencing, the eradication of the two insect threats, successful breeding programs, and the introduction of improved forage, created an improved image of Florida cattle as promoted by the Florida Cattlemen's Association.

**The Roberts Family**

Robert Roberts, Jr., who established the ranch in Immokalee, was born in 1884, into an agricultural family that was well established in the growing Florida cattle industry.<sup>1</sup> His ancestors came to America from England before the American Revolutionary War. His father, Robert Roberts, Sr., moved to Florida from Georgia before 1860, and enlisted in a Florida unit of the Confederate Army when the Civil War began.<sup>x</sup> After the war he became a successful rancher at Wachula, in Manatee County (later part of Hardee County). When Robert Roberts, Jr. married Sara Jane Henri Cordell, his father gave him eight cows and eight heifers, and her father gave her five cows. Her uncle was a major Florida cattleman, "Boss" Hendry. He gave her a small herd when she was born and named her "Henri", a feminized version of his own name. When Roberts, Sr. died in 1912, Robert Roberts, Jr. inherited and bought additional cattle to add to his growing herd.

After working on a cattle drive to La Belle, and visiting nearby Immokalee, Roberts, Jr. traded sixty acres of land near Ona, in present day Hardee County, for sixty acres on a high ridge in Immokalee. In December 1914, Bob Roberts, Jr., his wife "Henri" and their seven young children, including their first son, William Dius Roberts, age 12, set out in wagons from Ona, to the frontier settlement of Immokalee, 100 miles to the south. They sent ahead ox teams pulling carts loaded with their furniture and possessions, some Durock Jersey hogs and 300 scrub cattle. Robert Roberts, Jr. and his family contributed to the growth of Immokalee between 1914 and 1950 by providing room and board to visitors and teachers, supporting the local school, organizing the Baptist Church and the Masonic Lodge.

Robert "Bob" Roberts, Jr., was prominent in local and state political spheres, Roberts was elected to the first Collier County commission in 1922 when the county was formed and served as commissioner for six years. He helped organize some of the earliest cattlemen's associations in the region in the 1930s and 1940s.

In 1932, William Dius Roberts, the oldest son, established a general store in Immokalee, which became a trading post for the Seminole and Miccosukee people in the Big Cypress area as well as the local families. He ran the store for fourteen years before he sold it to spend more time on his ranching activities.<sup>xi</sup> The Roberts

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had close contacts with the Big Cypress Seminoles and helped establish a Baptist Mission on the Brighton Reservation.<sup>xii</sup> Two more children were born to Bob and Henri Roberts after moving to Immokalee, increasing the number of their offspring to nine. The oldest and youngest were sons, who continued with some of their sisters to engage in the family cattle business. William Dicus Roberts, served two terms as president of the Florida Cattlemen's Association and his youngest son, Robert "Bobby" Roberts, served as the organization's director. The women of the family were also prominent in cattle-ranching circles. Mildred Roberts Sherrod, the youngest Roberts daughter, always took an active part in the Red Cattle Company business and was honored in 1981 as an outstanding Florida Cattlewoman.<sup>xiii</sup>

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Roberts new 1914 property (of which the current ranch is a part), included thirteen acres of well-established orange groves, the first planted in Immokalee. The site had already been occupied for over forty years, and was associated with cattle driving since the 1870s as the site of a set of cow pens.<sup>xiv</sup> The Roberts family lived initially in an existing log cabin built by George Hendry in 1882 (See figure 5). Less than two dozen families lived in Immokalee, and the site was known by several names. Some knew it as the "Allen Place," after William Allen, a trapper and Confederate veteran from Arcadia who had settled nearby in the 1870s, but who never lived on the property. It was also sometimes called the "Old Baucom Place," after an earlier owner who lived nearby. Hendry, who had owned the property beginning in the 1870s, built the cabin and lived there. The cabin was the earliest house built by non-Indians in Immokalee.<sup>xv</sup>

The original log cabin had a side-gable roof with a front porch under a shed roof. It had no fireplace or chimney and was in dilapidated condition when the Roberts arrived. Roberts moved the log cabin a short distance west, closer to the current horse barn, and built a lean-to addition onto the rear elevation to accommodate the children's bedrooms. He constructed a fireplace to replace a cook stove, and added a breezeway passage to a new, but separate, kitchen building. The core of the current 1915 kitchen is the oldest building on the ranch. The Roberts family lived in the cabin with all seven children from 1914 until they constructed the new wood-frame residence in 1926 to replace it. The log cabin no longer exists, having been dismantled in the 1940s. Saddle-notch log timbers from the cabin were used to repair several outbuildings that are still standing on the site.<sup>xvi</sup> The sites of the log cabin have not had archaeological investigations.

The family maintained a self-sufficient life style, raising vegetables, citrus, and hogs in addition to beef cattle. Bob Roberts purchased an additional 200 head of cattle from his father's herd and by the end of World War I had increased his herd to 2,000. He leased land from the Collier Company, a corporation headed by Barron Collier, for whom the county is named, and purchased land specifically for grazing at a time when many ranchers simply let their herds roam wild. The Roberts family acquired additional land when it could be bought for as low as \$1.50 an acre and by paying back taxes due on other parcels until the Roberts Ranch encompassed

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more than 100,000 acres, including 13,000 acres under lease.<sup>xvii</sup> Their lands once extended across Collier, and into the Hendry County town of Felda, directly north of Immokalee.

Robert Roberts, Jr. (1884-1963) and William Dius Roberts, (1902-1989), worked on the family ranch all their lives, consistently encouraged the introduction of progressive techniques, and were recognized as statewide leaders in the Florida cattle industry. They pioneered the crossbreeding of the sturdy Florida range cattle with the imported Red Devon and Brahma bulls, developing a superior strain of cattle with reddish coats and large black-tipped horns.<sup>xviii</sup> The Roberts family named their business the "Red Cattle Company" after these crossbreeds, and retained the name when they incorporated their cattle ranching business in the early 1950s. Robert Roberts, Jr. also introduced St. Gertrudis, and King Ranch bulls from Texas as breeding stock.

The family endured difficult years during the 1920s and 1930s when the price of beef was very low, and a Texas cattle tick infested cattle and wild deer. During the tick infestation the cattle had to be dipped in a chemical solution every two weeks for about 14 months. The process was costly and time consuming for ranchers who bore most of the cost of the eradication program. Many Florida cattlemen were forced out of the ranching business because of the increased costs.<sup>xix</sup> Bob Roberts encouraged compliance with the eradication program despite the hardships it imposed upon ranchers.

The Roberts Ranch complex exemplifies the cultural, economic, and historic growth of ranching in Collier County. The Roberts Ranch is the oldest cattle ranch remaining in Immokalee. The ranch complex is a significant agricultural resource associated with the management of an extensive cattle enterprise, and retains its historic integrity and character to a high degree. The ranch demonstrates the importance and functions of the ranching industry in Immokalee. The many surviving outbuildings each illustrate important aspects of ranch agriculture in southern Florida, including the introduction of mechanized vehicles to make ranching more efficient. The Roberts adopted new mechanization and hybrid breeding techniques before their introduction by farm extension programs and the Florida Cattlemen's Association.

The Roberts family once held extensive acreage for grazing cattle throughout Collier County and in adjacent Hendry County, which were later divided by inheritance. The family sold portions of the original sixty-acre parcel at various times but left the central core of the ranch intact. These core parcels were sold to Collier County in 1996, and 1999, with the intention that they would be used for historic interpretation and public education. In keeping with the public education role several non-contributing resources have been introduced to the ranch in an area generally central, and between the two historic clusters of buildings.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Various approaches to Frame Vernacular construction are buildings that compose the Roberts Ranch are an excellent ensemble of wooden construction. They employ various engineering methods for buildings with

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various functions. Construction on wooden stud frames predominates in the domestic, southern cluster of buildings. These buildings include the main house, the maid's house, the smoke house, and out-house. Construction on poles set into the ground is a common a technique within the ensemble. Pole construction is commonly used for utilitarian buildings, such as the garage, the tractor barn, and the early kitchen. The horse barn is built with stud frame techniques, yet the vertical elements are of 4"x4" material. The development of two separate areas of buildings indicates a clear separation of domestic and managerial activities, and the ranch work activities. The driveway off of Roberts Avenue with a loop to the north of the main house, and the remaining orange grove in the southwest portion of the property are the two most prominent elements of the historical landscape.

1. W. Theodore Meador and Merle C. Prunty, "Open Range Ranching in Southern Florida," 1976: 364-5.
2. Joe Akerman, Florida Cowmen: A History of Florida Cattle Raising, 1976: 1-3, 13, 18-20
3. Terry G. Jordan. North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers: Original, Diffusion and Differentiation, 1993: 18-19.
4. Jordan: 178-180; Akerman : 35
5. Akerman: 54-56
6. Meador and Prunty: 366.
7. Akerman: 85, 101, 127
8. Akerman: 160
9. Meador and Prunty: 368-371, 373.
10. Akerman: 232-234, 243, 253; Meador and Prunty: 371-372.
11. Doris Moody Lewis. Immokalee, Formerly "Gopher Ridge." n.d.: 1-4; Charlton Tebeau. The Last Frontier, : 192-202
12. Tebeau 202-206, 252
13. Lewis: 49.
14. Adams and Gramling. A Florida Cattle Ranch, 1998: 60. Maria Stone. The End of the Oxcart Trail, 1989: 5
15. Tebeau 193, 197; Stone 6-12

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16. Stone, p. 22.

17. William Dius Roberts, interviewed by Harry Kersey, August 3, 1972 , University of Florida Oral History Collection; Stone: 20, 79-84.

18. Stone: 40.

19. Mildred Roberts Sherrod, interviewed by Murray Laurie, January 16, 2002, ; Lewis: 52-56; Stone 49-50.

20. Akerman: 72.

21. Stone: 90-91, 104-105. Kral: 7

22. Kral: Preface, 5; Akerman: 253; Burnett, Gene, "Topsy-Turvy Over a Tick": 77-79.

23. The Murphy Act of 1937, which provided that anyone who could pay the amount owed in taxes could gain title to the land, made it possible for many ranchers to increase their holdings. Akerman: 251-253.

24. Stone: 100.

25. Akerman: 275.

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Interviews:

William Dius Roberts, by Harry Kersey, April, 1973, Oral History Archives, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Millicent Roberts Sherrod, by Murray D. Laurie, January 15, 2002, Immokalee, FL.

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Tracts D and E, of Roberts Ridge, a subdivision (see site map).

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary encompasses a portion of the property that was historically known as the Roberts Ranch. This property retains the best concentration of historic resources associated with the ranch.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC LIST**

1. Roberts Ranch, Roberts Avenue, Immokalee, Florida
2. Collier County, Florida
3. Diana J. Godwin
4. February 16, 2002
5. Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Roberts Ranch
6. Roberts House, main, north façade, facing south
7. Photo #1 of 21

Numbers 1-5 are the same for each following photograph.

6. Roberts House, rear façade, facing northeast
7. Photo #2 of 21

6. Roberts House, east facade, facing west
7. Photo #3 of 21

6. Roberts House, front porch, facing west
7. Photo #4 of 21

6. Roberts House, central hall, facing east
7. Photo #5 of 21

6. Maid's house, facing east
7. Photo #6 of 21

6. Privy, facing east
7. Photo #7 of 21

6. Smokehouse, facing northwest
7. Photo #8 of 21

6. Garage, facing south
7. Photo #9 of 21

6. Tractor barn, facing south
7. Photo #10 of 21

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6. Old Kitchen, facing west

7. Photo #11 of 21

6. Wood salvaged from log cabin used in repair, facing south

7. Photo #12 of 21

6. Horse barn and corral, facing west

7. Photo #13 of 21

6. Old kitchen, on left, and hide house, on right, facing south

7. Photo #14 of 21

6. Old well head, photographer facing east

7. Photo #15 of 21

6. Cane syrup furnace and vat, far right, facing west

7. Photo #16 of 21

6. Horse ramp, facing north

7. Photo #17 of 21

6. Non-contributing bunkhouse, reconstructed, facing east

7. Photo #18 of 21

6. Non-contributing pump house on right, facing west

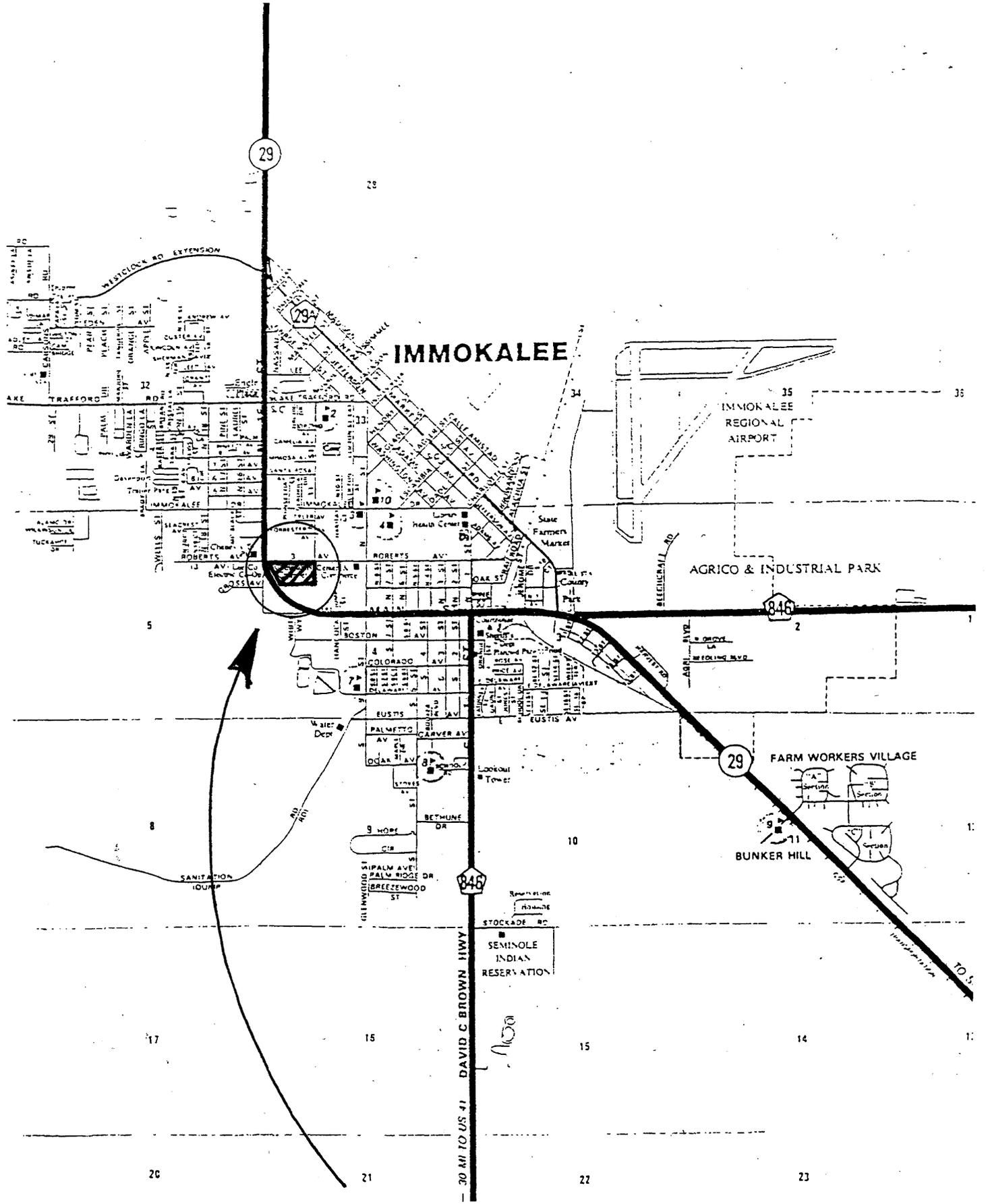
7. Photo #16 of 21

6. Non-contributing First Baptist Church, moved, facing northeast

7. Photo #19 of 21

6. Non-contributing Seminole style chickee, facing south

7. Photo #20 of 21



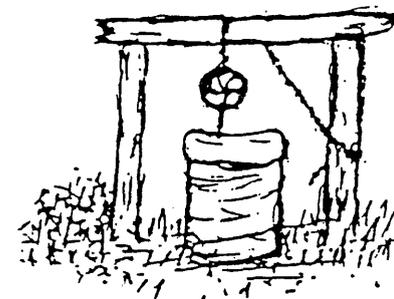
**ROBERTS RANCH, IMMOKALEE,  
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Locator Map



Figure 1, sketch of original log cabin

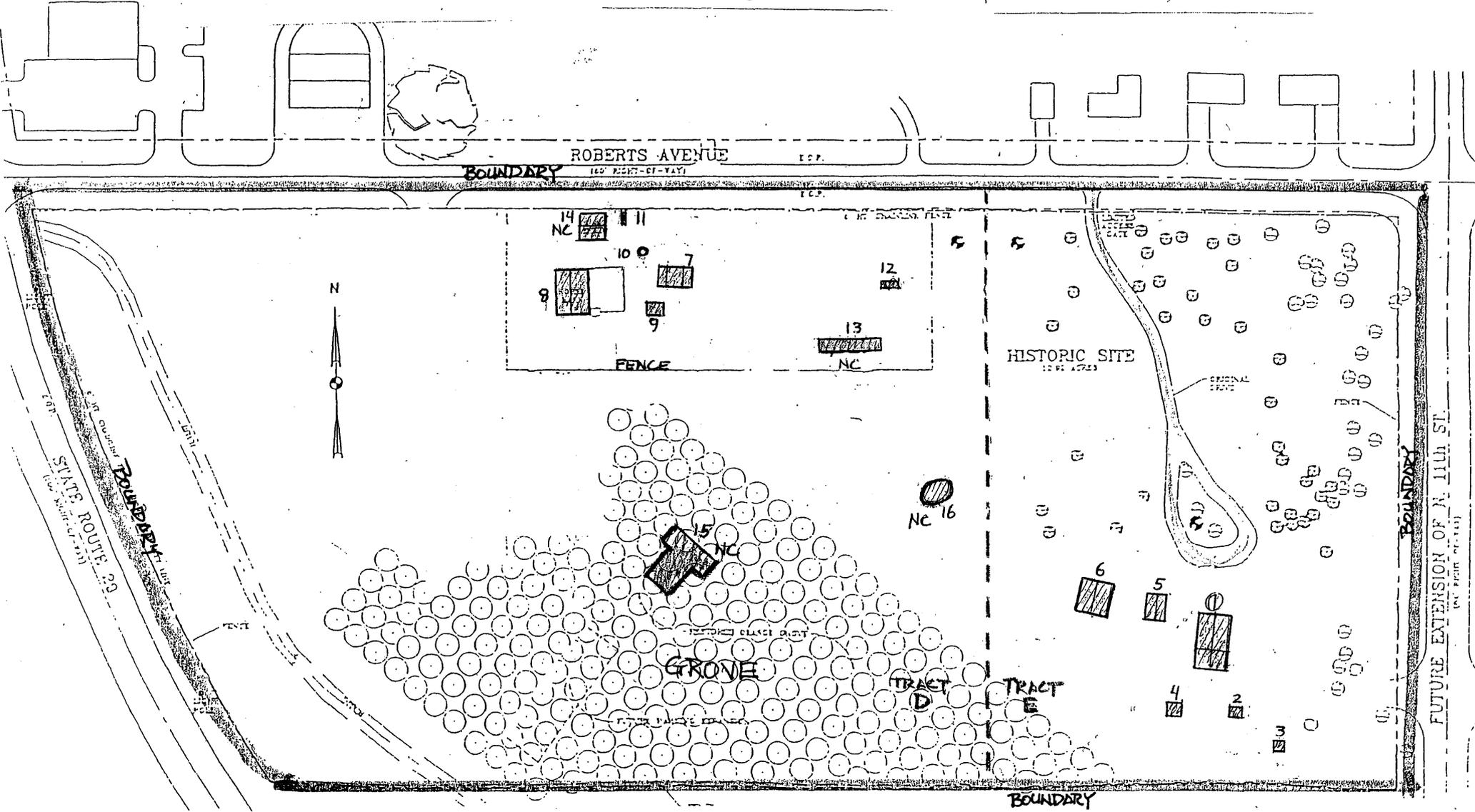
From Stone. The end of the Oxcart Trail



1. Roberts Home
2. Maid's House
3. Privy
4. Smokehouse
5. Garage
6. Tractor Barn

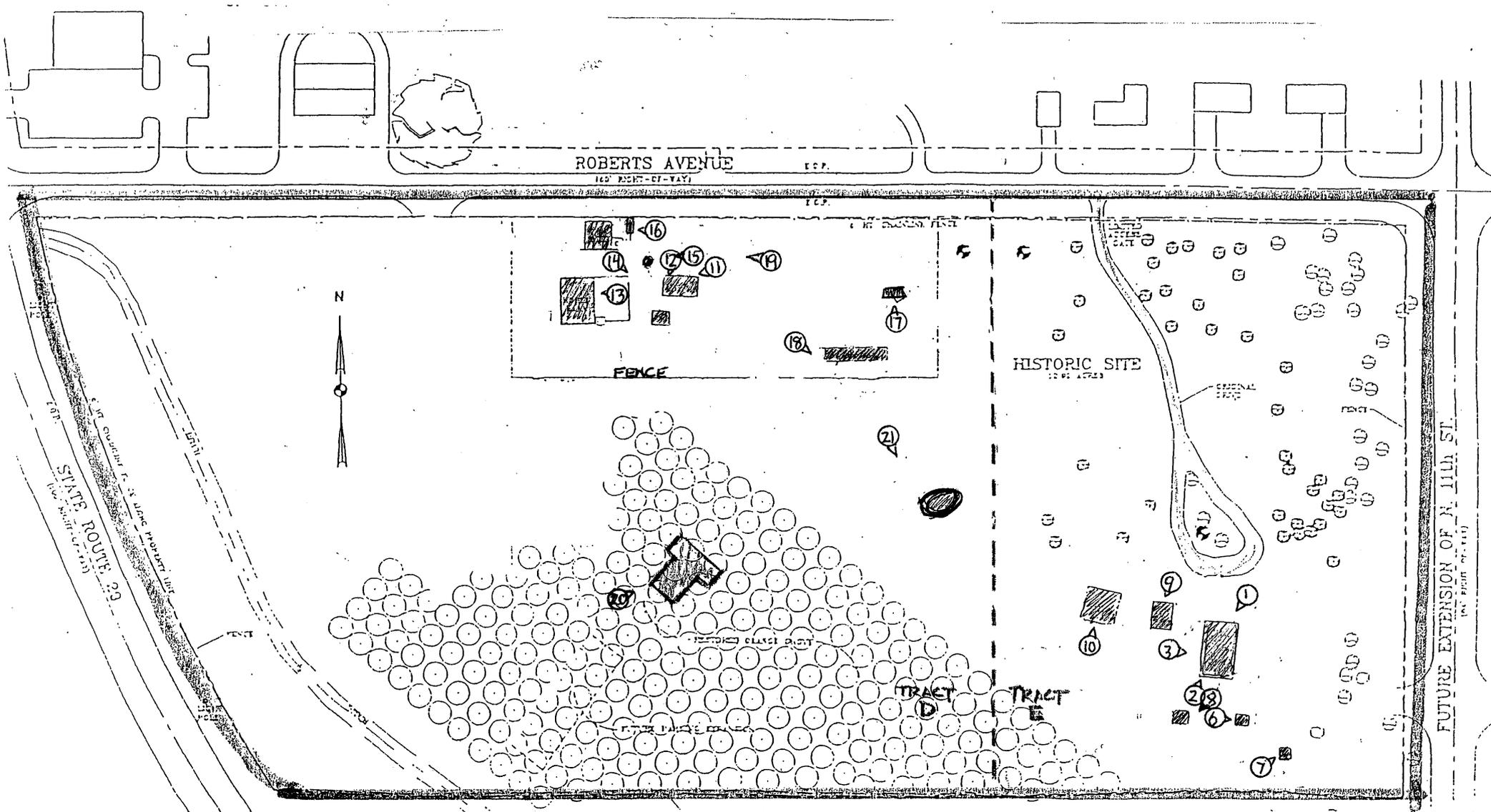
7. Old Kitchen
8. Horse Barn
9. Hide House
10. Well
11. Cane Syrup Vat
12. Horse Ramp

13. Bunkhouse, NC
14. Pump House, NC
15. First Baptist Church, NC
16. Chickee, NC



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Site and NR Boundary Map



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Site Photographic Diagram = 