

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

SARASOTA POINT¹ (Siesta Point)

HALS NO. FL-26

Location: Sarasota County Parks, Recreation, and Natural Resources, Siesta Key Beach Access 2 and 3.

41 North Beach Road and 100 North Beach Road, a part of the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision Plat (Avenida Messina to the north, North Beach Road (789A) to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the west, and Columbus Boulevard to the south)

Sarasota County, Siesta Key, Florida 34242

27.276095°, -82.569043° (Central intersection of Avenida Messina and North Beach Road, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Sarasota Point is a vernacular coastal landscape on the western edge of a natural barrier island along Florida's southwest coast. The island, named Siesta Key, contains a rich, local history dating back to the 1800s when Billy Bowlegs, a seemingly docile Seminole Indian, had yet to sign a peace treaty with the government, and pirates patrolled the offshore waters. The dynamic coastal landscape integrates a complex system of natural and man-made features including a seaward juncture, known as Sarasota Big Pass, which is located between the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay, and a landward link between a subdivision and sovereign submerged land that initiates the beginning of the coastal park network on the island. The onshore and offshore landscapes bustle with flora and fauna including several endangered species.

Three public rights of way within the upland subdivision known as Mira Mar Beach create and connect county parks beach access 2 and 3 of Sarasota Point (Siesta Point). The subdivision embodies early twentieth century concepts of the modern urban planning movement. Planning concepts include, dedicated rights of way that dissolve into the Gulf of Mexico initiating the concept of public beach access, sixty to eighty foot roadways designed to accommodate the automobile, ample space for on-street parking, expansive sidewalks, lush vegetation, views of the Gulf of Mexico, and detailed deed contracts that outline land use and development standards.

In 1990, a Historical Resources Survey of the Coastal Zone of Sarasota County, Florida recommended that Sarasota Point (Siesta Point), including Mira Mar

¹ Sarasota Point is the recorded name on early maps; however, locally the site is known as Siesta Point, and has been for decades before it was official changed in 1952. For this reason, the report will use the name "Siesta Point" in all sections following the statement of significance to reduce confusion and maintain consistency with the recommendation previously recorded in footnote two.

Beach Subdivision, be further studied to determine eligibility and boundaries for a local historic district.² According to the Cultural Landscape Foundation, a vernacular landscape is one “that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped those landscapes. Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, family, or a community, the landscapes reflect the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives.” Sarasota Point (Siesta Point) is a palimpsest of culture and ecology that resulted from the Great Florida Land Boom of the 1920s. The untold story of it’s beauty, abundance, community, and exotic history plays out within a shifting coastal context and fits beautifully within this description.

Description: Siesta Point is located where the Gulf of Mexico intersects with Sarasota Big Pass along the southwest coast of Florida in Sarasota County. It resides on Siesta Key, an island comprised of 3.4 square miles of land and water combined. Today, the island is accessible by two bridges, the North Bridge originally built in 1917 and the Stickney Point Bridge originally constructed in 1926.³ The oldest maps refer to the island as Sarasota Key, but it has been locally known as Siesta Key since 1912.⁴ In 1952, the United States Board of Geographic Names, Department of the Interior, officially changed the name to Siesta Key.⁵

Siesta Key Public beach accesses 2 and 3 are integral to Siesta Point where North Beach Road⁶ intersects with Avenida Messina to the north and Columbus Boulevard to the south. The Mira Mar Beach Subdivision Plat of 1926 created the beach accesses through publicly dedicated rights of way.⁷ North Beach Road runs parallel to the Gulf of Mexico, connects access 2 and 3, and today, represents the only public right of way on Siesta Key with unobstructed waterfront views– a vital public resource.

The natural landscape in and around Siesta Point is a distinct coastal riparian habitat subject to mixed tides, shifting shoals, prevailing winds, wave activity, storm surge, human use, development, and dredging. Impacts include narrowed shorelines, structural erosion control, shoreline degradation, road damage, vegetation, habitat and species loss, and introduction of non-native species. Local public and private agencies developed rehabilitation programs to mitigate and/or prevent further deterioration of natural resources, which have successfully increased habitat and species diversity in and around Siesta Point. However,

² “Historical Resources Survey for the Coastal Zone of Sarasota County, Florida.” March 1990. Sarasota County Historical Center, 208.

³ “Bridges Played a Role in Siesta Key Development.” Bridges Played a Role in Siesta Key Development | Sarasota History Alive! Accessed July 24, 2017. <http://www.sarasotahistoryalive.com/history/articles/bridges-played-a-role-in-siesta-key-development/>.

⁴ “Siesta Key is Wiped Off the Map.” July 20, 1952. (Siesta Key Folder at Sarasota County Historical Center.)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Formerly known as Avenida Puesta del Sol.

⁷ “Mira Mar Beach Subdivision Plat.” Map. February 8, 1926. Sarasota County Assessor Office. Subdivisions and Plats. [Plat Book 2, Page 130-130a.]. Sarasota County Historical Archives.

cultural resources such as North Beach Road and access 2 and 3, which together make up Siesta Point are threatened due to development, erosion, deferred right of way maintenance, right of way abandonment and subsequent potential for privatization of beach accesses.

The chain of early land ownership on the bridgeless barrier island is difficult to trace. Fourteen years after the homestead act of 1862, J.P. Apthorp, an early surveyor of public lands, surveyed the tract of land at Siesta Point between February 11th and 15th, 1876.⁸ Written historical accounts indicate that the original homesteaders of the subject land might have been Harry Higel, Louis Roberts, and E.M. Arbogast of the Siesta Land Company (1907). Records indicate they owned the surrounding properties, and sought to plat Siesta Village. An old land sales map with handwritten notes indicate A.B. Edwards, as an owner of the land or real estate expert, potentially facilitated the transaction with the subdivision site to the Mira Mar Development Company.^{9 10} The section, including the lands that create Siesta Point, was platted as Waverly Beach in 1914, but ownership was not noted on the plat and cannot be confirmed.¹¹ Plat records from 1925 and 1926 reflect that a portion of Waverly Beach was replatted as Mira Mar Beach, which it remains today.¹²

The historic landscapes associated with Siesta Point are complex and include an upland boundary, marine environment, terrestrial landscape, historical man-made structures, and community.

Upland Boundary

The upland boundary exhibits a modern subdivision from the 1920s named Mira Mar Beach. It includes publicly dedicated roads. Avenida Messina and Columbus Boulevard terminate at the Gulf of Mexico and create public beach accesses 2 and 3 while the third, North Beach Road, connects the previous two roads and offers expansive views. Combined, they create the vernacular landscape of Siesta Point. Through the Mira Mar Development Company, Andrew McAnsh developed the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision a few years post completion of the first mixed-use development on the mainland in 1922.¹³ Fifty acres of island uplands comprised the subdivision, which included extra wide roads to accommodate the newly minted automobile, sidewalks, landscaping, on street parking, traffic circulation, and contracts for deeds. Development restrictions were regulated through deed contracts and designated allowable use

⁸Bureau of Survey and Mapping. Division of State Lands. Department of Environmental Protection. Original Survey Plat. http://ftp.labins.org/SalesPlats_by_Range/East/South/Rge_17E/T37S_R17E.pdf

⁹ Hook, Mary Rockwell. "This and that." Kansas City, Mo., 1970, 56.

¹⁰ Bureau of Survey and Mapping. Division of State Lands. Department of Environmental Protection. Original Land Sales Plats. http://ftp.labins.org/SalesPlats_by_Range/East/South/Rge_17E/T37S_R17E.pdf

¹¹ "Waverly Beach Subdivision Plat." Map. In Sarasota County Assessor Office. Subdivisions and Plats. January 13, 1914. [Book A, Page 47] (Sarasota Historical Society County Archives).

¹² "Mira Mar Beach Subdivision Plat."

¹³ Kearns, Sarah L. "DeMarcay Hotel." National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Florida Nomination Form. State of Florida Department of State Divisions of Archives, History, and Records Management.

to specific lots such as, single-family homes, apartments, hotels and commercial practice.¹⁴ Additional noted development restrictions narrated acceptable building materials, easement regulation, utilities, street lighting, public street improvements and parks. As a precursor to zoning codes, deed contracts were inextricably linked to the dawn of urban planning and characteristic of subdivision development during the 1920s. Many of the homes built within the subdivision represent architectural styles such as Mission Revival, Frame Vernacular and Masonry Vernacular and are visible from Siesta Point beach access 2 and 3 today.

Block 7 of Mira Mar Beach is located west of North Beach Road, and includes lots one through twenty-nine and a 20-foot easement. The developer, Andrew McAnsh, was not familiar with the migrating shoal associated with Sarasota Big Pass, because shortly after the subdivision was platted, the shoreline moved eastward and submerged most of the lots that comprised this block. Aerial photographs dating to 1948 illustrate this; however personal conversations with Mr. Thomas A. Hamilton, indicate the shoreline shifted earlier. As a result, Block 7 became sovereign submerged lands for public use and has remained for at least seven decades.¹⁵

North Beach Road is the most westward public thoroughfare on the island. It affords unobstructed coastline views and connects Avenida Messina to Columbus Boulevard, which are the two streets that establish county parks beach access 2 and 3. It is regularly subjected to erosion. Over decades, storm events caused the road impassable and it often needed repair. In 1993, Sarasota County closed the road to vehicular traffic due to storm damage and deferred maintenance indefinitely. Sixteen years later in 2009, county staff made repair recommendations and recognized the road as a valuable public resource, but the repairs never commenced.¹⁶ In 2012, Sarasota County hired an engineering firm to evaluate and recommend a permanent solution for North Beach Road. This plan was not implemented.¹⁷ In the midst of writing this report, a portion of North Beach Road was abandoned by the county at the request of adjacent private homeowners and created a finite block in the thoroughfare, permanent vehicular restrictions, sidewalk closures, and contention between private homeowners and the public. Since the 2016 abandonment, half of this section of North Beach Road functions as passable to private homeowners only, while the other half is closed off with bollards to pedestrian use only, contains no sidewalks, is impassable to wheeled mobility devices, and pools water several inches deep after a rain event.

¹⁴ Mira Mar Beach Incorporated. Contract for Deed. February 28, 1925. [Deed Book 36. Page 493-498].
Mira Mar Beach Incorporated. Contract for Deed. October 10, 1926. [Deed Book 36. Page 234-239].

¹⁵ Catala, Maria L. "Where the Sea Meets the Land." *St. Thomas Law Review* 27, no. 2 (2015), 243.

¹⁶ Status of North Beach Road, Siesta Key, June 22, 2009. Sarasota County Government, Interoffice Memorandum Board Assignment #09062 (Sarasota County, Florida).

¹⁷ "Resources – Taylor Report." Reopen Beach Road. Accessed July 24, 2016.
<https://www.reopenbeachroad.org/resources/>.

Community

Siesta Point marks the epicenter of island camaraderie and has many names such as Sarasota Point, Sunset, and The Pier. Presently and historically it is a popular location for sunbathing, swimming, fishing, water recreation (motorized and sail), stand-up paddle boarding, surfing, shelling, biking, walking and sunset viewing. Siesta Key, is known for harboring bohemian artists, writers, architects and craftsmen undoubtedly inspired by the exotic landscape, white sands, and emerald waters. Renowned American writer, John D. McDonald lived on the key and it's people and culture inspired many of his stories – some questionably fiction. Today, the population remains eclectic and as an island, casual attire negates any visible appearance of social status.

Multiple generations harbor memories of Siesta Point when ferries shuttled guests to the shoreline, artesian wells projected from the sand, bonfires burned, the pier resisted wind and waters, Australian Pines canopied the road, Hobie Cats sailed, and Naval Hero Captain Ralph Styles conducted evening flag ceremonies at sunset.¹⁸ In conversation, Mr. Thomas A. Hamilton recalled the days when his family, who owned the Bay Island Hotel in the early 1920s (located further north along the island), would bring their guests to Siesta Point. His grandmother purchased two lots in Block 7 of Mira Mar Beach, where she built a beach cottage for guest use. The cottage was relocated to the Bay Island Hotel property when the shoreline shifted too close to keep it open on the lot.¹⁹

Use of the public access 2 and 3 at Siesta Point is mixed like the tides. During the day, the beach is populated with locals, families, and tourists enjoying the sun, surf, and sea breeze. It is the only beach where dogs are unofficially permitted – at sunset only. A county sheriff's officer monitors the beach and knows locals by their chosen name. Nicknames on the island are rampant, and it is not unusual to know someone only by their island handle. As sunset approaches, residents and tourists re-emerge from their homes or the urban center of the island, known as The Village, located within a walkable/bikeable distance eastward of North Beach Road. About fifteen minutes before sunset, the beach populates with children, teenagers, adults, grandparents, disabled individuals, and dogs all eager to observe the sun gracefully drop into the Gulf of Mexico.

Historic photographs show a range of scenarios between access 2 and 3. Some depict the Gulf waters at the edge of North Beach Road with cars and people lined up alongside watching the sunset, while others reveal a wide span of white sand reaching seaward drawing people into the water, onto the sand, or out on the pier. The constant among the historical images of the migrating coastal

¹⁸ Zaloudek, Mark. "Taps for Siesta Key's Capt. Styles." Sarasota Herald. October 09, 2008. Accessed July 24, 2017. <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20081009/BREAKING/810090247>.

¹⁹ "Conversations with Thomas A. Hamilton." Telephone interview by author. June 14, 2017.

landscape is the community presence active within a long loved beach park. Currently, two non-profit Florida corporations, Reopen Beach Road, Inc.²⁰ and Siesta Key Beach Community Trust, Inc.²¹ founded by local residents with island histories spanning generations emerged as a result of the county's abandonment of a section of North Beach Road. Through volunteer efforts, they educate and advocate for the preservation of beach access as a beneficial, public, and cultural resource.

Terrestrial Environs

Public beach access at Siesta Point was established through the development of the Mira Mar Beach subdivision and dedicated streets. The north and south street circulation parallel the coastline, while east and west streets intersect and terminate at the Gulf of Mexico. All streets that terminated at the Gulf became public beach access. This pattern continued south along the coastline (outside of the subject area) as development continued. It resulted in twelve beach accesses from Siesta Point to the southern terminal, Point of Rocks. Access 1, located further northeast along the coast was created similarly, but disconnected due to shoreline hardening efforts and privatization of access. In the early 1970s under the direction of County Parks Director, Walt Rothenbach, the county officially surveyed the public beach accesses at the terminal, platted, and designated roads and added them to the local parks network.²²

The most visible natural resources at Siesta Point are the sand and expansive Gulf waters. The sand at this locale is 99% pure quartz, fine textured, cool to the touch, and native to only 3.5 miles of coastline in the region.²³ It provides nesting habitat to several endangered species, most notably the snowy plover, green sea turtle, loggerhead turtle and leatherback turtle. Mote Marine Laboratory, a local independent marine research institution, monitors, tracks, and stakes sea turtle nests during season from May 1 through October 31. It is not unusual to see marked nests within the landscape along Siesta Point during these months. By week twelve of the 2017 season, there were over 1,000 sea turtle crawls along the entirety of Siesta Key including actual nests and false crawls.

The coastal landscape is devoid of most vegetation due to the migrating shoreline, with the exception of one patch of native sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*) and sprawling bitter panicum (*Panicum amarum*). Beach access 3 and along the east boundary of North Beach Road seagrape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), silver buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*: var *sericeus*), beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) reside. Railroad vine

²⁰ Reopen Beach Road, Inc. Accessed July 24, 2017. <https://www.reopenbeachroad.org>.

²¹ Drouin, Roger. "New Beach Road Champion." Siesta Sand (Sarasota). August 2017.

²² "Siesta Key Public Beach and Beach Access Map." Map. In Transportation Department, Engineering Department. September 13, 1982. Sarasota County, Florida.

²³ Siesta Beach History. Accessed July 24, 2017. <https://www.scgov.net/SiestaBeach/Pages/SiestaBeachHistory>.

(*Ipomoea pes-caprae*) thrives at access 2 and within the right of way along the southern boundary of North Beach Road. Historically, Australian Pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia* L.), a non-native species was regionally introduced and historical photographs depict several specimens at Siesta Point that created a drive through canopy across North Beach Road. Today, a remnant tree trunk extends upward out of the sand and is adorned with a palm frond in the shape of a cross. According to the Florida Native Plant Society, Virginia Creeper is native; however, it abnormally encompassed several native species onsite.

A contiguous beach exists between accesses 2 and 3 and measures approximately 1000 linear feet. The width fluctuates with tidal patterns, wind, waves, and storm frequency. Due to the shifting nature of shoreline patterns some historic photographs show the site completely devoid of usable beach; however today, the width reaches approximately 100 feet seaward of North Beach Road. Four visible footpaths dissect the landscape from the road to the water. Two are located near access 3 and two lead from properties. Non-natural dune activity is currently present; however, historically, Siesta Point has been devoid of dunes due to the shifting nature of the shoreline. The artificial dune activity creates drainage issues noted after rain events around access 3.

Rip-rap exists westward of North Beach Road to ameliorate the impact of storm damage, which proved ineffective. Extensive damage to the road continued over time with squalls that produced higher tides, stronger winds, and larger waves. A 1989 study on the Historical Shoreline Changes in Southwest Florida, discussed the 150 foot active shoreline in the area and indicated that development prior to 1948 was built too close to accommodate the slow random changes characteristic to the area.²⁴ The road is currently covered in sand at the midpoint, but is visible on the north and south ends near access 2 and 3. Sidewalks east of the road at access 3 are completely covered in sand and form an artificial dune. The dune is planted with native plants and the walkway is currently impassable to foot traffic. Historically, the road was passable to vehicular traffic and the sidewalk provided a safe thoroughfare for pedestrians and mobility-impaired individuals.

Posted signs deter the community from utilizing the public road. A daily traffic jam occurs at the site of access 2 due to the number of people who visit for sunset by car and ingress/egress to the homes along North Beach Road. Most traffic is by foot, bike, skateboard, golf cart, or wheelchair. There is one handicap parking space. Trash and recycling receptacles reside at both access points. Access 3 also includes a bike rack and interpretive signs that educate the public on the sensitive nature of sea turtles in the area, as well as the potential for rip tides and procedure for escape. Newspaper articles indicate that the county vacated part of North Beach Road in 2016 at the request of three adjacent

²⁴ Foster, Emmet R. P.E. and Rebecca J. Savage. "Historic Shoreline Changes in Southwest Florida." Published by the American Society of Civil Engineers, N.Y., USA 1989.

property owners.²⁵ Today, the vacated part of the road visually and physically fragments the landscape and the subdivision.

Marine Environs

Siesta Point marks the beginning of a complicated system known as the Siesta Key Closed Littoral Cell, which originates at the entrance of Big Pass and terminates at Point of Rocks.²⁶ The geology of the maritime landscape is unique and even today, coastal geologists still cannot fully understand the complexities of the system except that continuously circulates sand from the offshore shoal onto Siesta Key, which nourishes the beach while protecting it from wave activity.²⁷ Since the 1800s, the wandering, self-maintained channel provided navigation access to Sarasota Bay. Personal communication and one old map indicate a lighthouse resided at the mouth of Big Pass for navigation purposes.²⁸ Today, there is a channel marker in the approximate location of the lighthouse and is visible from Siesta Point. The name is likely a result of the geographical westward projection of the barrier island into the marine intersection in the shape of a distinct point. Sarasota Big Pass has never been dredged or part of a beach renourishment project to date.

The marine ecosystem at this intersection is a thoroughfare for endangered manatees and sea turtle species, dolphin, tarpon, spotted eagle ray, Snook, and numerous other underwater marine flora and fauna. The mixing of the Sarasota Bay with the Gulf of Mexico provides a smorgasbord of dining options as the tides pull crab, seagrass and other edibles from the Sarasota Bay, through Big Pass, and into the Gulf of Mexico. Historically, in the mid 1950s, Sarasota Bay was dredged to facilitate infill islands, such as Lido Key and Bird Key, for high-end development, which impacted species population and food sources within the bay. In the 1980s, Midnight Pass, a natural, but shifting inlet to the south was permanently filled by the county at the request of private homeowners nearby, which further impacted the health and vitality of the bay.²⁹ Today, Sarasota Bay has regained health through preservation and restoration efforts, which positively impacted the entire local ecosystem including in and around Siesta Point.

The Gulf waters surrounding Siesta Point are warm, glow emerald green and maintain crystal clarity. The temperature difference from the mixing of the two bodies of water and currents can be felt while swimming around access 2 and 3, which differentiates this section of the beach from others. It is not unusual to observe a family of manatees or dolphin swimming a few feet away, a school of fish skirting the water's edge, or even a rare sea turtle sighting. Shore birds such

²⁵ "Siesta Key's last public access road to be privatized, residents fight back." Sarasota News | Mysuncoast.com and ABC 7. June 14, 2016. Accessed July 24, 2017. http://www.mysuncoast.com/news/local/siesta-key-s-last-public-access-road-to-be-privatized/article_23052f74-327e-11e6-830f-bff89ee51403.html.

²⁶ "Big Sarasota Pass. Accessed July 24, 2017. <https://www.soss2.com/big-sarasota-pass>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bureau of Survey and Mapping. Original Land Sales Plat.

²⁹ "Midnight Pass: A 10-year Retrospective." The Midnight Pass Society, Inc. (Sarasota, Florida).

as Terns, Sanderlings, Ibis, and the Brown Pelican are plentiful within the coastal landscape and eagerly compete for their next meal. Subterranean coquina clams are abundant at the shoreline and visible as waves pull the top layer of sand out to sea.

For the past several years, the entire coastline north, south and including Siesta Point is monitored seasonally for protected wildlife by various government agencies and Mote Marine Laboratory to ensure the safety of endangered flora and fauna. Strict rules are implemented during mating seasons and lighting ordinances were codified on the island to assist species success.

Historical Man-Made Elements

The prominent character defining man-made element within the coastal landscape is an open lattice erosion control groin without a deck and adjacent to access 2. A newspaper article described the emergency erosion control groin for the north end of the island as, “a 100-foot, \$15,000 erosion control groin designed by Makepeace Wood, Inc. to be constructed at the end of Avenida Messina on Siesta Key.”³⁰ Historically and presently, it is known as “The Pier” and is used for fishing or gathering for the sunset.

The pier has a complex history some of which remains unexplained due to minimal and conflicting documentation surrounding the structure. Articles indicate contention between the county commissioners and the public regarding the groin citing claims that it would be useless when the Big Pass Shoal shifted.³¹ It was permitted and built on a private submerged lot instead of within the county beach access 2 (right of way) immediately north. The private lot belonged to the Hamilton Family who ran the historic Bay Island Hotel on Siesta Key from 1928-1952. The hotel ferried their guests by boat to the beach property. Geological history dictates that the controversial erosion control groin likely functioned better as a fishing pier, its most common use even today, than a beach anchor. It’s almost unfathomable, that a 100-foot public structure, unintentionally built on private property has remained uncontroversial, with the exception of construction approval, since 1967. Ironically, this fact affords a tiny glimpse into the blasé yesteryears of life on Siesta Key and the general demeanor of the population.

Newspaper articles and photography from the 1920’s and later advertise built structures on and around Siesta Point, and oral accounts by locals recall a series of cypress cottages on the beach. Aerial photos from 1948 depict a reasonable width of beach, but no structural remains. Furthermore, a 1952 survey of public right of ways for Sarasota County depicts the mean high water line reaching approximately 100 feet seaward of North Beach Road exhibiting many

³⁰ “Commission Gives Ok to Groin.” 1967. (Siesta Key Folder at Sarasota County Historical Archives.)

³¹ Ibid.

submerged lots.³² Remnant structures of any kind within the landscape do not appear on aerial photographs until 1969. The 1969 image shows old seawalls, the pier, and older erosion control groins visible just above the sand. Another survey conducted in 2000, depicts several records of the mean high water line. In 1981 and 1983 it reached the edge of North Beach Road right of way, and by 2000 retreated approximately fifty feet seaward of North Beach Road. Additionally, a remnant seawall visible in the 1969 aerial is drawn on lots four through eight of Block 7. Another seawall with stairs to the Gulf waters and two unnamed trees, twenty-four feet and fourteen feet tall, is drawn within access 3. Rip-rap is illustrated along North Beach Road at Avenida Messina and access 2 and the pier is noted on Lot 1 of Block 7.³³ Today, the pier, road, rip-rap and remnant seawalls along lots four through eight are visible and integrate into the coastal landscape. The seawall and stairs within access 3 are no longer present.

History: Historically, Siesta Point, resided within a tropical wilderness - dense with vegetation and beastly fauna. Mosquitos, venomous serpents, wild swine, rodents, and wildcats lived among the red cedar, cypress, live oak, cabbage palm and mangrove forests. Hidden within the landscape, remnant artifacts and shell middens provided clues that an early human population inhabited the island possibly dating to 1000 B.C.³⁴ Roving fishermen subsisted in elevated cypress structures with thatched roofs along the water's edge, which was rich with varietal species of edible fish and shellfish.

During the late 1800s, pirates monitored the Gulf waters smuggling slaves and running rum while Billy Bowlegs, a "hospitable" Seminole Indian patrolled the mainland and Siesta Key.³⁵ William Whitaker and his family homesteaded much of mainland Sarasota, and by 1846, his half brother H.V. Snell from Cuba landed on Siesta Key and set up camp.³⁶ Billy Bowlegs befriended the Whitaker families and frequently attended their gatherings. Despite the relationship, Bowlegs, kept a close eye on *his* banana fields and defended them fiercely from the local white man.³⁷

The last half of the 1800s, brought the homestead act of 1862, but the rugged quality of the Siesta Key landscape delayed formal homesteading until 1876, fourteen years later.³⁸ During this year the government contracted a surveyor named J.P. Apthrop to survey government owned sections in and around Siesta

³² "Plat of Right of Way Mira Mar Beach Subdivision." Map. January 29, 1952. Sarasota County Commission. Sarasota County, Florida.

³³ "Boundary Survey Mira Mar Beach (Beach Road)." Map. July 3, 2000. Sarasota County Public Works. Avenida Messina to Columbus Boulevard. Sarasota County, Florida.

³⁴ "Tourists in Contrast to Early Settlers". November 2, 1958. (Sarasota Historical Society County Archives).

³⁵ Dreffin, V.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Grismer, Karl H. The story of Sarasota: the history of the City and County of Sarasota, Florida. Sarasota, FL: M.E. Russell, 1977, 37.

³⁸ Dreffin, Desi. "History of Siesta Key Ch. V." Pelican Press (Sarasota, Florida), June 2, 1977. (Siesta Key Folder at Sarasota County Historical Center.)

Point.³⁹ In addition to H.V. Snell, other noted settlers included Captain Louis Roberts, the Edmondsons, and the Hansens, who all contributed significantly to early island development projects.⁴⁰ By the turn of the century, economic opportunity through recreational and commercial fishing and early tourism simmered among the mosquitos and mangroves.⁴¹

The inlet at Siesta Point was a thriving transportation corridor. The deep navigable waters provided access from gulf to bay for steamships and ferries, which along with the railroad was the primary means of regional transport. Siesta Key was a bridgeless barrier island and only accessible by boat until 1917 when the first bridge opened.⁴² Despite easier access to the island, only a few perceived it a paradise, and the residential population remained low.

The island landscape shifted between 1900 and 1917, as additional pioneering families arrived including Harry Higel and E.M. Arbogast of West Virginia. Roberts, Higel and Arbogast established the Siesta Land Company, platted Siesta Village, built The Roberts Hotel and the Higelhurst Hotel, and launched an advertising campaign that referred to the island as Siesta Key for the first time.⁴³ In 1912, the Bay Island Hotel was built on the barrier island, marking the third establishment on the key for guest accommodations.⁴⁴ Economic tourism commenced, and it wasn't long before northern visitors descended and realized the value and beauty of the emerald coastline.

Concurrently, the mainland, was bustling with land speculators. The Ringling's purchased mainland property around 1911 and later turned Sarasota into the winter home of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum Bailey Circus.⁴⁵ Small mangrove islands in Sarasota Bay were enlarged through bay dredging and served as holding grounds for circus animals. A man of pomp and circumstance, John Ringling and his family left a legacy of fine art, architecture, city planning, entrepreneurial land development, and European culture complemented by an eccentric circus society to the verdant Gulf coast.

Even greater than the greatest show on earth was Bertha Palmer. At sixty years old, the wealthy Chicago socialite, adorned in jewels and Parisian couture, descended on the Gulf Coast mainland, and invested heavily in land. She was determined to appeal to the wealthiest northerners tempting them south to the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dreffin, Desi. "History of Siesta Key Ch. VI." Pelican Press (Sarasota, Florida), June 9, 1977. (Siesta Key Folder at Sarasota County Historical Center).

⁴¹ In 1938, that the government signed a peace treaty with the Seminole Indians.

⁴² "Bridges Played a Role in Siesta Key Development." Bridges Played a Role in Siesta Key Development | Sarasota History Alive! Accessed July 24, 2017. <http://www.sarasotahistoryalive.com/history/articles/bridges-played-a-role-in-siesta-key-development/>.

⁴³ Dreffin, VI.

⁴⁴ Sarasota Times, November 2, 1911. (Sarasota County Historical Center).

⁴⁵ "Biography of John Ringling." The Ringling. Accessed July 22, 2017. <https://www.ringling.org/biography-john-ringling>.

breezy seaside paradise. Investors blew in like a hurricane, paused momentarily in 1913 for the recession, and then crushed the roaring twenties. Historical accounts indicate, Bertha Palmer added Sarasota County, Florida to the modern urban development map, thus attracting Andrew McAnsh, a Chicago developer, and John Nolen, the father of urban planning, to Sarasota and the island of Venice a few miles south.⁴⁶

McAnsh was a Scottish immigrant who arrived in Chicago at the age of seven. He attended public schools followed by college where he studied business. His subsequent career path included government work at the Cook County Treasurer's office, investment opportunities buying and selling businesses, founded a furniture manufacturing plant with operations in Wisconsin, Michigan, and North Carolina, incorporated the Railway Terminal Warehouse Company in Chicago, and finally entered building development by constructing apartment complexes in Wichita, Kansas and Chicago before embarking south to Sarasota, Florida.⁴⁷

McAnsh demonstrated his agility in development when the City of Sarasota contracted him to build a mixed-use complex that included apartments, a luxury hotel, and auditorium on the Bay front. In 1922, he immediately organized the Mira Mar Development Company and happily complied. With the cooperation from the Carman Contracting Company of Tampa, Florida, on design and construction, McAnsh completed the first project of its kind in Sarasota in sixty-six days, which included a request to the commission for larger sidewalks and a ten-year tax deferment.⁴⁸ His Mira Mar Hotel and Apartments supplied the first high-end hotel to the mainland area and attracted countless wealthy investors to the region eager to profit off the land. McAnsh proved through his swift and innovative development that Sarasota was ripe for expansion, and ignited the region's contribution to the Great Florida Land Boom.

Immediately following his mainland success, McAnsh embarked on Siesta Key where he replatted a portion of the Waverly Beach subdivision into a sophisticated urban district called Mira Mar Beach and simultaneously designed and built the adjacent Mira Mar Casino.⁴⁹ On July 14, 1925, Donald W. Caven a Civil Engineer from Cincinnati, Ohio and Sarasota, Florida surveyed Mira Mar Beach Subdivision. It was successively recorded on February 9, 1926.⁵⁰ The Mira Mar Casino functioned as a marketing tool for the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision and served as a social and recreational hub for potential homebuyers complete with entertainment, fine dining, beach amenities and views of the Gulf

⁴⁶ "Bertha Palmer." Bertha Palmer | Sarasota History Alive! Accessed July 24, 2017. <http://www.sarasotahistoryalive.com/history/people/bertha-palmer/>.

⁴⁷ Grismer, Karl H. The story of Sarasota: the history of the City and County of Sarasota, Florida. Sarasota, FL: M.E. Russell, 1977, 329-330.

⁴⁸ Sarasota City Council. Minutes of the City Council. v. V, p. 98. January 16, 1923 and January 18, 1923.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Mira Mar Beach Subdivision Plat." Map.

of Mexico. A 1925 article in the Sarasota Times described the Casino as follows, "The exterior casino will be a beautiful example of modern Spanish architecture with a cement stucco exterior, wide eaves, red tile roof, and coquina shell stairs. Surrounding it will be a scenic arrangement of palms and tropical shrubbery. The new amusement center will be located just off the shoreline overlooking the Gulf and Sarasota Bay. It will be connected with the new county highway."⁵¹ According to deed records it resided on the excluded Block 12 of the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision plat. The Mira Mar Casino opened on November 1, 1925, and by 1934 it sold and became the Beach Club of Sarasota.⁵²

In the early 1920's, without the assistance of her husband, Marjorie Hamilton of Anniston, Alabama purchased the Bay Island Hotel on the north end of Siesta Key. According to personal communication with her grandson, Thomas A. Hamilton, she was a strong and powerful woman ahead of her times. Mr. Hamilton said that his grandfather only found out about the purchase when the bank called him and alerted an overdraft of \$10,000 dollars. Subsequently, and consistent with the Great Florida Land Boom, the family immediately purchased ten acres of commercially zoned property surrounding the hotel. Contrary to the norm, Mrs. Hamilton swiftly converted the acquired land from commercial to residential zoning. The county thought she was crazy to surrender the value of commercially zoned land on the island, but Mrs. Hamilton was concerned one of her sons would put up a gas station in the midst of the beautiful landscape.⁵³ The local newspaper ran a story in 1925 and indicated the exclusive hotel would be run by Mrs. Hamilton's sister and offered updated rooms, fine dining, transportation by motor boat or bus, and afternoon tea.⁵⁴ Mr. Hamilton said that rainwater cisterns were installed throughout the property and guests rinsed after the beach in the freezing cold water.

Assessor records indicated that several members of the Hamilton Family owned beachfront properties in the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision. Mr. Hamilton revealed that his grandmother purchased two beachfront lots, Lot 1, immediately adjacent to beach access 2 and Lot 29 of Block 7. The hotel ferried guests to the lots at Siesta Point citing it as the most beautiful stretch of beach they had ever seen. The property housed a beach cottage and served as beach access for guests of the Bay Island Hotel from the mid 1920s until it closed in the mid 1950s.⁵⁵ In 1967, the previously discussed erosion control groin known as The Pier was constructed on Lot 1 instead of within the county right of way at beach access 2. Today, the groin remains a legal conundrum, recreational landmark, and integral landscape feature. Until recently, Mr. Hamilton maintained ownership of Lot 1 and Lot 29 of Block 7.

⁵¹ Sarasota Herald Tribune. October 4, 1925. (Sarasota County Historical Center)

⁵² Sarasota County Public Records Archives. Warranty Deed. June 6, 1934. [Deed Book 127, Page 189].

⁵³ "Conversations with Thomas A. Hamilton." Telephone interview by author. June 14, 2017.

⁵⁴ Sarasota Herald Tribune. October 21, 1925. (Sarasota County Historical Center)

⁵⁵ "Conversations with Thomas A. Hamilton."

The Great Florida Land Boom crashed immediately after the Mira Mar Subdivision was platted. By the 1930s, platted lands remained stagnant and undeveloped until the mid 1940s. Hotels, such as the Bay Island Hotel, remained empty except for nurses who used it for housing during the war, according to Mr. Hamilton.⁵⁶ In 1935, Mary Rockwell Hook of Kansas, another powerful woman ahead of her time, purchased fifty-five acres of island property along the north boundary of the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision. Rockwell studied architecture in the Beaux-Arts style in Paris, began her practice in architecture, and was denied acceptance into the American Institute of Architects due to her gender.⁵⁷ That didn't stop her from establishing her place in the profession. By the time she reached 100 years of age, she was granted honorary membership for her architectural contributions,⁵⁸ and rightfully so since she was responsible for a development, which was somewhat of an incubator for an entire architectural movement. Her developments were geographically connected to the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision by beach coastline and land tracts.

Hook developed three distinct projects within the fifty-five acres she owned which included, an inn, a subdivision, and a condominium development. The inn named Whispering Sands and the Sandy Hook subdivision link to Siesta Point. The Inn was her first endeavor within the fifty-five acre purchase and bordered the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision at the northern edge. It was an artist community and attracted artists, writers and other creative craftsmen and women including Eleanor Roosevelt and the Viennese designer, Helga Voght. The Inn grounds were lushly vegetated, offered views of the Gulf, attracted over 100 species of water fowl to the onsite bayou, had expansive sidewalks and roads, and solar powered hot water.⁵⁹

In 1945, Hook sold twenty-five of the fifty-five acres owned including the Whispering Sands Inn and developed the subdivision, Sandy Hook, on a section of the remaining acreage.⁶⁰ Sandy Hook was significant within the architectural world and offered a comprehensive survey of the Sarasota School of Architecture. Around 1950, Hook designed the first two homes in the community while Paul Rudolph designed the third home. Rudolph's design in Sandy Hook featured the first proposed example of his signature roof structure that used flexed plywood to form three thin vaults that span architectural space.⁶¹ Members of the Sarasota School of Architecture in addition to Rudolph include, Ralph Twitchell, Victor Lundy, Tim Seibert, Jim Holliday, Mark Hampton, Bill Rupp, Frank Folsom Smith, and Phillip Hiss. Their work, characteristic of the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Hook, Mary Rockwell. "This and that." Kansas City, Mo., 1970.

⁵⁸ IAWA Newsletter No. 3. Accessed July 22, 2017. <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/IAWA/news/news3.html#spotlight>.

⁵⁹ Corrigan, Agnes, Charlotte A. Gang, Thelma T. Childs, Stan Hausman, Marie Langer, and Lillian Neff. A History of Whispering Sands Village Siesta Key, Sarasota, Florida. (Siesta Key Folder. Sarasota County Historical Center).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Schwarz, Becky S. "Sanderling Beach Club." National Register of Historic Places. June 29, 1994. NRIS Reference Number: 94000618. Sarasota, Florida, 8.

movement, exemplified the use of native materials, blurred lines between the built and natural environment, and considered the exotic and natural context of place. Hook's final project on the key was Sandy Cove Condominiums, which are adjacent to Sandy Hook Subdivision northward, but are not connected geographically to Siesta Point.

Siesta Village borders the Mira Mar Beach Subdivision to the east and south and was platted in 1907 by the Siesta Land Company to serve as the economic center on the key. Landscape Architect, Lane Marshall, former president of the American Society of Landscape Architects and graduate of the University of Florida practiced in Sarasota for over twenty years.⁶² Marshall was responsible for numerous projects throughout Sarasota County as exemplified in County Commission minutes throughout the 1960's that included proposed roadway and median improvements on the mainland. In 1964, he developed a designed concept for Siesta Village, which included "trees, shrubbery, lighting, benches, water fountains, and trash receptacles creating a unified and natural look for the Village." His plan was not immediately implemented. In 1978, the Village Improvement Committee contacted him to review and re-evaluate the 1964 concept.⁶³

Today Siesta Village remains the epicenter of commerce on the island complete with maintained roads, native landscape plants, and many amenities proposed in Marshall's plan. New development in the Village is contentious as commercial property owners design "Key West" style facades along the main thoroughfare and fight building height restrictions, which retract from the established island context of a relaxed, residential community nestled within an exotic coastal landscape.⁶⁴ Overlay zones and restrictions attempt to maintain contextually appropriate design, but often variances and exceptions are granted, and newer structures stray faraway from the vernacular. Parking accommodations remain a hot topic. Alternate modes of transport are popular and include walking, biking, trolley, golf cart, free ride, and rideshare. A resolution to the parking debacle is slim considering the entire island is only 3.4 square miles in area with over one mile of that being water. A reflection on island history offers one solution to the everlasting problem when boats provided transportation to the verdant tropical paradise.

The Story of Sarasota, by Karl Grismer (1948) states, "*Extremely little is known about those early settlers of Florida. The reasons for this lack of knowledge are simple. The Indians left behind them no written records or architectural remains*

⁶² Shank, Bruce F. "Practitioner Turned Educator: Lane Marshall is Bullish on LAs." Weeds, Trees, and Turf, April 1983, 44.

⁶³ "Village Improvement Group Hears Landscape Architect." Pelican Press (Sarasota, Florida), December 7, 1978. (Bound office of the Observer Group).

⁶⁴ Conway, David. "Siesta Key Village property owners balance new and old | Siesta Key." Your Observer. June 08, 2017. Accessed July 24, 2017. <http://www.yourobserver.com/article/siesta-key-village-property-owners-balance-new-and-old>.

from which clues regarding their history can be obtained.”⁶⁵ Similarly, Siesta Point harbors a vibrant history, and despite exhaustive research, questions regarding its evolution remain. Historical documentation regarding the intricacies of this special spot are slim, which is surprising considering the developer, his connection with John Nolen (famed landscape architect and city planner) and other significant, local, historical figures. Thirty years ago, local historians recommended the subdivision eligible for further review as a local historic district. Perhaps the knowledge resides, untold in the archival memories of its oldest living inhabitants, such as Mr. Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton recalled the landscape at Siesta Point as “the most beautiful beach he had ever seen.” He retrieved this memory from a time when he was young and frequented the beach by boat with his grandmother. He laughed when he mentioned that the county constructed the pier on his property. There was no animosity in his tone.

Today, Siesta Point, at access 2 and 3 of the Sarasota County Parks network combined with the North Beach Road thoroughfare represents a concentration of community - physically, ecologically, biologically, socially, and culturally woven into a vernacular landscape seemingly disconnected from histories past despite the richness of the history that surrounds. It exhibits daily theatrics at the intersection of Gulf and Bay waters and features an ephemeral cast of wind, waves, tides, storms, snow white sand, spectacular sunsets, a shifting coastline, and an enthusiastic audience. Effortlessly, it represents the greatest show in town, if not on earth.

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⁶⁵ Grismer, 13.

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North View: Gulf of Mexico, Sarasota Big Pass, Beach Access 2, North Beach Road, The Pier, and migrating offshore shoal. (Source: Darbi Davis, July 12, 2017)



South View: Access 3, footpaths, man-made dunes, Restricted Sidewalk, trash receptacles, Bike Rack, Bollards, Hobie Cats, Sea Turtle Nests, Grasses, North Beach Road intersection at Columbus Boulevard. (Source: Darbi Davis, July 12, 2017)



South View Entire Landscape: Beach Access 2, The Pier, Beach Access 3, North Beach Road, Landscape populating for sunset (Source: Darbi Davis, July 29, 2017)



West View: Beach Access 2, Erosion Control Groin (The Pier) on Lot 1 of Block 7, Rip Rap
(Source: Darbi Davis, July 22, 2017)



South View: Coastline, Remnant Seawall, Tidal Pools (Source: Darbi L. Davis July 1, 2017)



West View: Beach Access 2, Sunset Scene, The Pier, Rip rap (Source: Darbi L. Davis June 8, 2017)



Southwest View: Near Beach Access 2, Elderly person with dog on bike and individual assisting to the hard sand, Numerous Signs, Bikes, Rip Rap, Remnant Sea wall in Background, Tree Trunk (Source: Darbi L. Davis June 23, 2017)



West View: Beach Access 2 at Low Tide, Rip Rap, Lots of Activity (Source: Darbi L. Davis June 23, 2017)



Southwest View from Beach Road: Signs, Bike Rack, Trash Receptacles, Bollards, Native Vegetation within Beach Access (Source: Darbi Davis, July 27,2017)



Contextual Aerial of Mira Mar Beach Subdivision, Beach Access 2 and 3 (Source Darbi L. Davis, Sarasota County GIS, and CAD)

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