

# **256 Orange Grove Road**



## **DESIGNATION REPORT**

**February 17, 2021**

**Landmark Preservation Commission**

**Palm Beach, Florida**

# **DESIGNATION REPORT**

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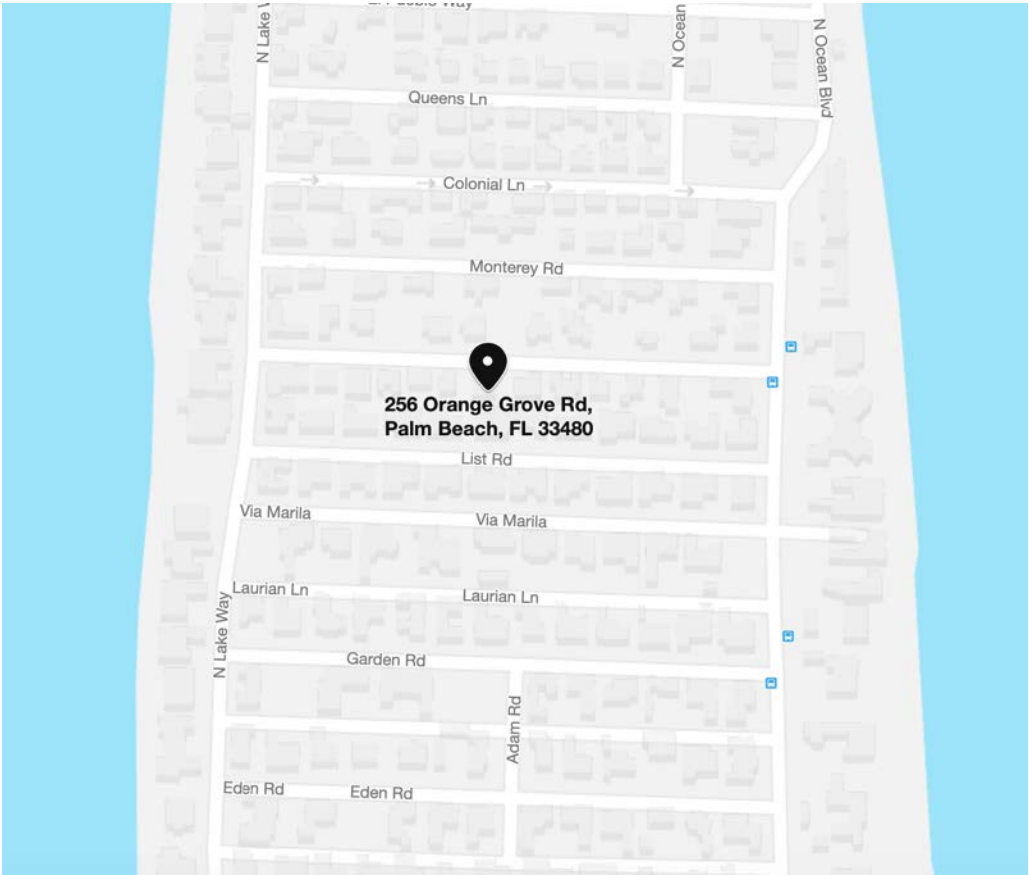
Report produced by Murphy Stillings, LLC

## **I. General Information**

Location:	256 Orange Grove Road Palm Beach, Florida
Date of Construction:	1949
First Owner:	John F. Stetson
Architect:	John F. Stetson
Builder/Contractor:	Rankin Construction Company
Present Owner:	Allen and Peggy Tomlinson
Present Use:	Residential
Present Zoning:	RB
Palm Beach County Tax Folio Number:	50-43-43-03-14-000-0271
Current Legal Description:	Lot 27 less the west 8 feet, and the west 25 feet of Lot 28, in New Siears Tract, an addition to the Town of Palm Beach, Florida, according to the Plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 16, Page 86, Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida.

II. Location Map

256 Orange Grove Road





### III. Architectural Information

The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road in Palm Beach's north end was designed in the Mid-Century Modern style by one of Palm Beach's long time and prominent architects, John Stetson. Stetson designed the single-family residence in 1949 as his own residence.<sup>1</sup>

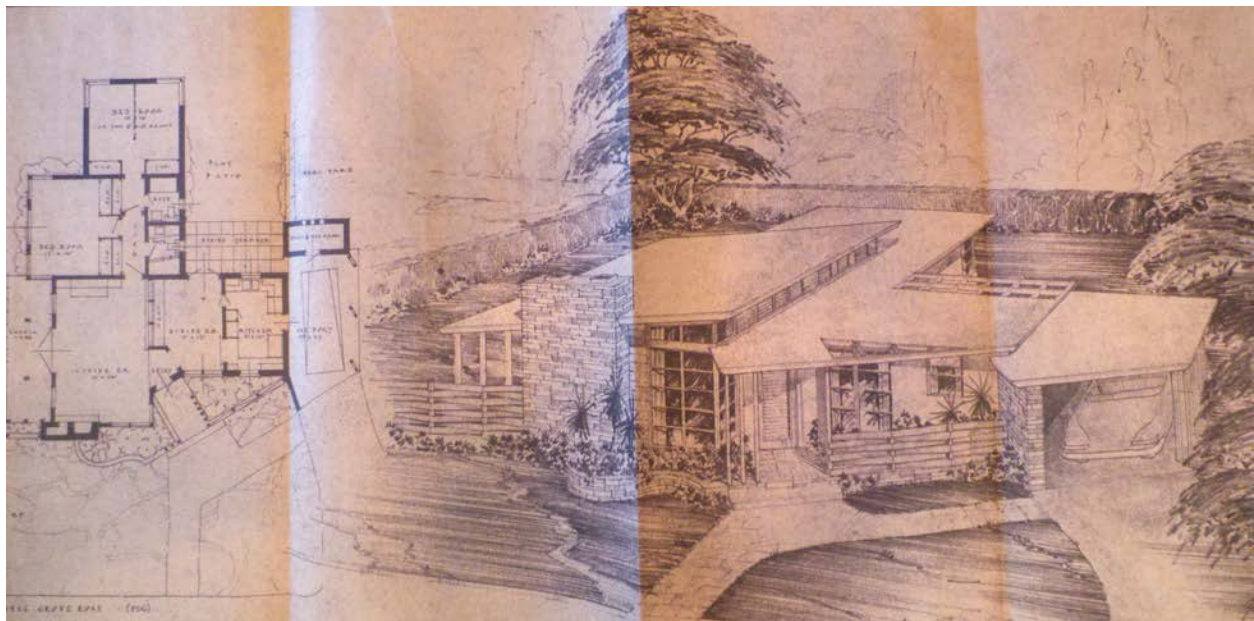


256 Orange Grove Road is an excellent example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture. Mid-century Modern architecture, built from the mid-1940s to 1970, was more about attitude than aesthetic. The style was a by-product of the post-World War II optimism and the nation's dedication to building a new future. With the desire to forget the pains of the Great Depression and World War II, architects and designers were breaking away from the past. This new architecture used modern materials and building techniques and was defined by clean lines, simple shapes and unornamented facades. It was a further development of Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture combined with many elements reflected in the International and Bauhaus movements. Mid-Century Modern architecture features design elements such as geometric forms and asymmetrical compositions, reinforced concrete post and beam construction which allowed for walls seemingly made of glass, concrete eyebrows or cantilevers running the length of the building, compressed concrete arches, flat or low pitched roofs, angular details, and minimal ornamentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Town of Palm Beach Building permit #18049 dated August 12, 1949.

256 Orange Grove Road is located on the south side of Orange Grove Road in the New Siears Tract subdivision. The one-story Mid-Century Modern style residence has an asymmetrical plan with an angled front entry and an angled carport at the western side of the property. The house was constructed of wood framing and concrete block surfaced with stucco and wood siding. The house features both flat and shed roofs with overhangs and clerestory windows that are a prominent design feature of the residence. Another focal point of the main façade is the broad brick chimney located on the east side of the main façade. The use of brick is also used for the angled wall of the carport at the west side of the main facade. The main entrance is sheltered by a flat roof that is supported by slender square posts. To the west of the entry the roof has openings over a planting area. In addition to the clerestory windows the residence has fixed and sash windows some of which are sheltered by louvered shutters.



Rendering by John Stetson, 1949  
Provided by the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach

Since the original construction, there have been only minimal exterior alterations and additions to the residence. In 1950, John Stetson designed a 300 square foot, one story addition that was constructed to the rear of the carport.<sup>2</sup> Exterior alterations to the home consist of re-roofing, replacement of windows and doors and installation of shutters.<sup>3</sup> The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road maintains

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<sup>2</sup> Town of Palm Beach Building Permit #20950, dated June 12, 1950.

<sup>3</sup> Town of Palm Beach Building Permits records from 1949-2021.



its architectural significance and the architectural integrity of John Stetson's 1949 modern design.



#### **IV. Historical Information**

The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road was designed and constructed in 1949 after the end of World War II. The war years and the years following brought significant changes to Palm Beach. During the war there was very little construction because nonessential construction had been halted. However, after the war ended Florida saw significant economic and demographic growth. The country began to recover and move to a peacetime economy. Thousands of soldiers who came to Florida during the war decided to return to live afterwards. In addition, as in previous years, retirees were moving to Florida for the climate, but the number increased as air-conditioning began to be used in residences during the 1950s. The post-World War II era was the start of another building boom in Palm Beach. However, this boom in development generally consisted of houses that were smaller in scale than those of the 1920s Boom Era. During this time, Palm Beach's north end received a surge in single-family residential development and 256 Orange Grove Road was part of this significant growth.

As development in Palm Beach increased during the post-World War II period, the architectural styles of structures being constructed was also changing. During this time, modern architectural styles were popular for residential and commercial architecture throughout the United States, and Palm Beach was no exception. The

Modern style was a by-product of the post-war optimism, the nation's dedication to building a new future, and a desire to forget the pains of the Great Depression and World War II. The residence at 256 Orange Grove is significant as an example of the modern architectural movement during the post-World War II era in Palm Beach.

In an article by Augustus Mayhew in the *Palm Beach Daily News* (March 6, 2011) titled "Unforgettable Palm Beach: Modernist buildings among town's most endangered cultural resources" he speaks of the modern movement during the post-World War II period and the loss of many of these structures since the 1980s.

"In Palm Beach, being modern is a thing of the past. However as much of Palm Beach's architectural tradition remains best known for its Spanish adaptations, Italian variations and Caribbean inspirations, progressive designers, as notable and diverse as Edward Durell Stone, Howard Chilton, John Volk, Eugene Lawrence and John Stetson, among them, once crafted sleek Modernist buildings throughout Palm Beach...For more than three decades, Modernism prevailed as Palm Beach's post-World War II paradigm of style...Considering the town's more welcome appreciation for contextual new construction and spec builder's passion for the curb appeal of colossal French-styled chateaus and high-volume Palladian-modeled villas, several hundred of the town's residential mid-century houses have been demolished, leaving its Modernist architectural tradition fragmented, and thus more predominantly evident among its commercial and condominium buildings... Palm Beach's Modernist buildings are among the town's most endangered and devalued cultural resources. They are a reminder of when Palm Beach was an international center for architecture, fashion and design with some of the nation's most refined elegant Modernist-designed houses and buildings."

The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road was designed by architect John Stetson in 1949 as his personal residence. Stetson was born in St. Lucie County and graduated from the University of Florida School of Architecture and Allied Arts. Stetson came to Palm Beach in 1936 when he joined Lester Geisler's architectural firm. He later became associated with Howard Major's office and then joined the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at the start of World War II. In July 1947, John Stetson passed the Florida State Board of Architecture exam and opened his own practice in Palm Beach which continued until he retired in 1985. He was a noted architect who was known for his Modern architectural designs.



The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road remained in Stetson's family until 1989 when his daughter, Teresa Stetson Wilson, and her husband, Thomas Wilson, sold the property to the current owners. While in the Stetson family, the residence was used as a rental property for a number of years. The current owners, Allen and Peggy Tomlinson, purchased the property in 1989 and have been excellent stewards of the residence.

## **V. Architect Biography**

### **John F. Stetson**

John F. Stetson, a Florida native, was one of Palm Beach's most prominent Modern architects. Born in St. Lucie County on June 26, 1915, he graduated from Ft. Pierce High School and the University of Florida School of Architecture and Allied Arts. Stetson came to Palm Beach in 1936 when he joined the architectural firm of Lester Geisler, who had been Addison Mizner's "right hand man". Following two years with Geisler, Stetson began working with another prominent Palm Beach architect Howard Major. At the start of the Second World War, John Stetson joined the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and was responsible for converting many hotels and condominiums in Miami into barracks and facilities for soldiers. He was later assigned to Trinidad and South America for the last year and a half of the war.

Following the war, in July 1947, Stetson passed the Florida State Board of Architecture exam and opened an office in Palm Beach. John Stetson's architectural firm, with his individualist approach and desire to mentor young architects, became a source of much of Palm Beach's modern architecture. Licensed in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio in addition to Florida, Stetson was a member of the American Institute of Architects and in 1955 served as president of the Palm Beach chapter. In 1963, John Stetson was awarded the highest architectural award when he was named a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. This was only the second fellowship granted to a Palm Beach architect with the first being awarded Marion Sims Wyeth in 1954.<sup>4</sup>

John Stetson was very civically and socially active in Palm Beach and the State of Florida. He served under three governors as an official of the Governor's Hurricane Advisory Committee and as a panelist for the American Arbitration

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<sup>4</sup> "Architect Achieves Fellowship" *Palm Beach Post*, March 24, 1964.

Committee. In Palm Beach, Stetson was a close follower of Town business and policies. He was active in social and civic organizations such as the Islanders Club, Fraternal Order of Police Association, Kiwanis Club of Palm Beach, Old Guard Society, the Sailfish Club, The Beach Club, Sons of the American Revolution, and the Royal Poinciana Chapel.

John Stetson retired after 49 years in the architectural profession and closed his office in 1985. He designed hundreds of private residences and commercial buildings in Palm Beach, as well as in the surrounding area, including the master plan for Old Port Cove in North Palm Beach, Temple Israel in West Palm Beach, the Federal Office Building in West Palm Beach, the Palm Beach Country Club, the Armour Building, the Dorset House, the original buildings of Florida Atlantic University, and Palm Beach Fairground buildings. He was also instrumental in the relocation of the Royal Poinciana Chapel to its current location. In addition to his commissions in Palm Beach County, Stetson also designed residences in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Montana and Spain and was a patentee for plumbing connections for rotating buildings. On November 22, 1986, John Stetson passed away. Following his death, architect Eugene Lawrence said “John was a strong individualist. Through the years, he made a strong contribution to his profession. He always was very involved and never minced words – he spoke his mind. John was one of the architects of an era in Palm Beach.”<sup>5</sup>

## **VI. Statement of Significance**

256 Orange Grove Road is significant as a very good example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture as designed by prominent Modern architect John Stetson during the post WWII building boom in Palm Beach’s north end.

## **VII. Criteria For Designation**

Section 54-161 of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation of a landmark or landmark site and suggests that at least one criterion must be met to justify the designation. Listed below are the criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation:

- (1) “Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county or town.”**

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<sup>5</sup> Romoser, Chris “Architect John Stetson Dies”. *Palm Beach Daily News*, November 24, 1986.

The residence located at 256 Orange Road was constructed in 1949 during Palm Beach's second boom time era. Following World War II, Florida had explosive economic and demographic growth and the lifting of wartime restrictions coupled with an increasing supply of materials accelerated Florida's post-World War II economy with new construction. Palm Beach's north end received a surge in single-family residential development and 256 Orange Grove Road was part of this significant development. In addition, the residence is a very good example of the modern architectural trend that became popular during the post-World War II period in Palm Beach.

- (3) **“Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or is a specimen inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.”**

256 Orange Grove Road is an excellent example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture. Mid-century Modern architecture, built from the mid-1940s to 1970, was a by-product of the post-World War II optimism and the nation's dedication to building a new future. With the desire to forget the pains of the Great Depression and World War II, architects and designers were breaking away from the past. This new architecture used modern materials and building techniques and was defined by clean lines, simple shapes and unornamented facades. It was a further development of Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture combined with many elements reflected in the International and Bauhaus movements. Mid-Century Modern features of this house include its geometric forms, asymmetrical compositions and angled features, flat and low-pitched shed roofs with overhangs and clerestory windows, use of natural materials, such as brick and wood, along with concrete, and minimal ornamentation.

- (4) **“Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual ability has been recognized or has influenced his age.”**

The residence at 256 Orange Grove Road is a very good representation of the notable work of architect John Stetson. Stetson, who was a Palm Beach resident for 50 years, began his Palm Beach architectural career in 1936. He worked with Lester Geisler's architectural firm and Howard Major before starting his own firm in 1947. During the thirty-eight years that followed until his retirement in 1985, Stetson designed several hundred commercial and

residential buildings most of which were in modern architectural styles, including several Mid-Century Modern residences in the north end of Palm Beach.



## **VIII. Selected Bibliography**

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# IX. Florida Master Site File Form

Page 1

☐ Original  
☒ Update



## HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE Version 5.0 3/19

Shaded Fields represent the minimum acceptable level of documentation.  
Consult the Guide to Historical Structure Forms for detailed instructions.

Site#8 **PB12846**  
Field Date 11-22-2019  
Form Date 9-14-2020  
Recorder # MAP

Site Name(s) (address if none) 256 Orange Grove Rd Multiple Listing (DHR only) \_\_\_\_\_  
Survey Project Name Palm Beach Historical Site Survey Survey # (DHR only) \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register Category (please check one) ☒ building ☐ structure ☐ district ☐ site ☐ object  
Ownership: ☐ private-profit ☐ private-nonprofit ☒ private-individual ☐ private-nonspecific ☐ city ☐ county ☐ state ☐ federal ☐ Native American ☐ foreign ☐ unknown

### LOCATION & MAPPING

Address: Street Number 256 Direction \_\_\_\_\_ Street Name Orange Grove Street Type Road Suffix Direction \_\_\_\_\_  
Cross Streets (nearest / between) \_\_\_\_\_  
USGS 7.5 Map Name PALM BEACH USGS Date 1986 Plat or Other Map \_\_\_\_\_  
City / Town (within 3 miles) Palm Beach In City Limits? ☒ yes ☐ no ☐ unknown County Palm Beach  
Township 43S Range 43E Section 03 1/4 section: ☐ NW ☐ SW ☐ SE ☐ NE Irregular-name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tax Parcel # 50434303140000271 Landgrant \_\_\_\_\_  
Subdivision Name NEW SIEARS TR IN Block 000 Lot 0271  
UTM Coordinates: Zone ☐ 16 ☒ 17 Easting        Northing         
Other Coordinates: X: \_\_\_\_\_ Y: \_\_\_\_\_ Coordinate System & Datum \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Public Tract (e.g., park) \_\_\_\_\_

### HISTORY

Construction Year: 1949 ☐ approximately ☐ year listed or earlier ☐ year listed or later  
Original Use Private Residence (House/Cottage/Ca From (year): 1949 To (year): 2020  
Current Use Private Residence (House/Cottage/Ca From (year): 1949 To (year): 2020  
Other Use \_\_\_\_\_ From (year): \_\_\_\_\_ To (year): \_\_\_\_\_  
Moves: ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ unknown Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Original address \_\_\_\_\_  
Alterations: ☐ yes ☐ no ☒ unknown Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Nature \_\_\_\_\_  
Additions: ☐ yes ☐ no ☒ unknown Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Nature \_\_\_\_\_  
Architect (last name first): Stetson, John Builder (last name first): Rankin Construction Company  
Ownership History (especially original owner, dates, profession, etc.)  
original owner - John Stetson; current owner - TOMLINSON ALLEN &

Is the Resource Affected by a Local Preservation Ordinance? ☐ yes ☒ no ☐ unknown Describe \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIPTION

Style Mid-Century Modern Exterior Plan Irregular Number of Stories 1  
Exterior Fabric(s) 1. Stucco 2. Wood siding 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Roof Type(s) 1. Shed 2. Flat 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Roof Material(s) 1. Built-up 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Roof secondary strucs. (dormers etc.) 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Windows (types, materials, etc.)  
single & paired 1/1 sash, divided trapezoidal fixed light, Bermuda shutters  
Distinguishing Architectural Features (exterior or interior ornaments)  
flat & shed roof masses w overhang, rectangular roof openings, broad facade chimney, engaged masonry knee wall, semi detached angled carport  
Ancillary Features / Outbuildings (record outbuildings, major landscape features; use continuation sheet if needed.)  
paver semicircular drive, mature vegetation, palms

DHR USE ONLY		OFFICIAL EVALUATION		DHR USE ONLY	
NR List Date	SHPO - Appears to meet criteria for NR listing: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/> insufficient info	Date		Init.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Owner Objection	KEEPER - Determined eligible: <input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	Date			
	NR Criteria for Evaluation: <input type="checkbox"/> a <input type="checkbox"/> b <input type="checkbox"/> c <input type="checkbox"/> d (see National Register Bulletin 15, p. 2)				

## DESCRIPTION (continued)

Chimney: No. 1 Chimney Material(s): 1. Brick 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Structural System(s): 1. Masonry - General 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Foundation Type(s): 1. Continuous 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Foundation Material(s): 1. Concrete, Generic 2. \_\_\_\_\_

## Main Entrance (stylistic details)

slightly off center multi panel door on recessed angled facade, under flat roof

## Porch Descriptions (types, locations, roof types, etc.)

slightly off center entry, brick stoop, horizontal wood siding exterior, row of decorative privacy wood slats, roof openings over vegetation beside entry

Condition (overall resource condition): ☒ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ deteriorated ☐ ruinous

## Narrative Description of Resource

This 1949 Mid-Century Modern building is in excellent condition. It was previously recorded as a Ranch style building.

Archaeological Remains \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Check if Archaeological Form Completed

## RESEARCH METHODS (select all that apply)

☒ FMSF record search (sites/surveys) ☐ library research ☐ building permits ☒ Sanborn maps  
☐ FL State Archives/photo collection ☐ city directory ☐ occupant/owner interview ☒ plat maps  
☒ property appraiser / tax records ☒ newspaper files ☐ neighbor interview ☐ Public Lands Survey (DEP)  
☒ cultural resource survey (CRAS) ☐ historic photos ☐ interior inspection ☐ HABS/HAER record search  
☒ other methods (describe) Town Staff

## Bibliographic References (give FMSF manuscript # if relevant, use continuation sheet if needed)

Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach; Town Staff

## OPINION OF RESOURCE SIGNIFICANCE

Appears to meet the criteria for National Register listing individually? ☐ yes ☐ no ☒ insufficient information

Appears to meet the criteria for National Register listing as part of a district? ☒ yes ☐ no ☐ insufficient information

## Explanation of Evaluation (required, whether significant or not; use separate sheet if needed)

This building appears to be in excellent condition, but as it was previously recorded as a Ranch the extent of alterations is unknown and would need to be verified prior to an individual determination.

Area(s) of Historical Significance (see *National Register Bulletin 15*, p. 8 for categories: e.g. "architecture", "ethnic heritage", "community planning & development", etc.)

1. Community planning & developm 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. Architecture 4. \_\_\_\_\_ 6. \_\_\_\_\_

## DOCUMENTATION

Accessible Documentation Not Filed with the Site File - including field notes, analysis notes, photos, plans and other important documents

1) Document type \_\_\_\_\_ Maintaining organization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Document description \_\_\_\_\_ File or accession #'s \_\_\_\_\_  
 2) Document type \_\_\_\_\_ Maintaining organization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Document description \_\_\_\_\_ File or accession #'s \_\_\_\_\_

## RECORDER INFORMATION

Recorder Name Patricia Davenport-Jacobs Affiliation Environmental Services, Inc.  
 Recorder Contact Information 7220 Financial Way, Suite 100, Jacksonville, FL 32256/9044702200/pdavenport  
 (address / phone / fax / e-mail)

## Required Attachments

① USGS 7.5' MAP WITH STRUCTURE LOCATION CLEARLY INDICATED

② LARGE SCALE STREET, PLAT OR PARCEL MAP (available from most property appraiser web sites)

③ PHOTO OF MAIN FACADE, DIGITAL IMAGE FILE

When submitting an image, it must be included in digital AND hard copy format (plain paper grayscale acceptable). Digital image must be at least 1600 x 1200 pixels, 24-bit color, jpeg or tiff.