

City of Lakeland
Historic District Narratives

Munn Park Historic District
(Local Designation: 1980; National Register of Historic Places: 1997)

The Munn Park Historic District represents the urban, commercial downtown and central business district of the City of Lakeland, established January 1, 1885. Development began in this area during the late 1870s with land subdivisions recorded by Herman Shipman's Survey and Abraham G. Munn's Survey, which laid out the city in a grid network of streets and avenues, alleys, and walkable blocks surrounding Henry Plant's South Florida Railroad. Within the District, this pattern of development is still evident in its narrow two-way streets, ample sidewalks, decorative street lamps, network of alleys, and building setbacks, as well as the existence of Munn Park at its center for which the District was named. Munn Park has served as the City's public square since its founding and was restored in 1990.

The earliest downtown buildings were of frame construction and many were destroyed by three fires in the early 1900s. Those that survived the fires were gradually replaced with more permanent masonry structures in the early decades of the 20th century. Most historic buildings in this District are two- and three-story buildings with retail shops, offices, or restaurants on the first floor and offices or residences on the upper floors. Several taller buildings exist as a testament to the exuberance and optimism of the 1920s Florida land boom era in which they were built, including the Terrace Hotel, Marble Arcade, Polk Theatre, and Lake Mirror Tower (former New Florida Hotel). The District encompasses Lake Mirror and includes the City Beautiful-inspired Frances Langford Promenade, as well as the Coca-Cola Bottling Company Building (current Lakeland Fire Dept. Administration Building), Lakeland City Hall, and All Saints Episcopal Church.

The District is bordered on the north by Bay Street, the east by Massachusetts Avenue and E. Main Street extending around Lake Mirror, the south by Orange and Lemon Streets, and on the west by Florida Avenue. Florida Avenue is a major transportation artery through Lakeland and is designated as Florida Highway 37 (FL-37).

Areas of special character within the District include the Lemon Street Promenade between S. Florida Avenue and S. Massachusetts Avenue, which is a tree-lined public art display, Munn Park, which is Lakeland's first park and "living room", and the Neoclassical Francis Langford Promenade, a 1928 City Beautiful Movement-inspired civic center and icon of downtown Lakeland.

With a period of significance between 1884-1946, the District reflects several of Florida's historic contexts, which informs its historic architecture: Post-Reconstruction Period (1877-1898), Turn-of-the-Century Period (1898-1918), Boom Time Period (1919-1929), and the Depression and New Deal Period (1929-1940). Prominent architectural styles consist of Classical Revival, Colonial Revival, Art Deco, Mediterranean Revival, and Masonry Vernacular.

Beacon Hill Historic District

(Local Designation: 1994; National Register of Historic Places: 1993)

The Beacon Hill, Alta Vista, and a portion of Mershons subdivisions make up the Beacon Hill Historic District, which were platted during the Florida Land Boom era of the 1920s and give the local District its name. Located a mile and a half south of downtown, Beacon Hill consists of approximately ten blocks south of the Dixieland Historic District (boundaries of both Districts are contiguous) west of S. Florida Avenue, north of Beacon Road, and east of Fairview Avenue. When first developed in the 1923, this District was considered “out in the country” and was surrounded by many orange groves.

Within this District, two distinct residential neighborhoods exist: Alta Vista to the north, which comprises W. Belvedere and W. Maxwell Streets, and Beacon Hill to the south, which consists of six streets named for Native American tribes (Pueblo, Comanche, Cherokee, Pawnee, Seminole, and Shawnee Trails). While some of the historic homes in the Alta Vista neighborhood are larger and more ornately decorated than the modestly-designed houses in Dixieland, the east-west street orientation and lot pattern is similar. However, sidewalks do not exist on these Belvedere and Maxwell Streets, and no alleys are present in this District. The Beacon Hill neighborhood is suburban in character with its curvilinear street system and larger lots. The District is characterized by its expansive tree canopy, and the Live Oak is used as its neighborhood symbol.

The historic housing stock in this District was built primarily in the 1920s and consists of one and two-story dwellings. A wide variety of architectural styles are present, including frame and masonry vernacular, Colonial Revival, Tudor, Mediterranean Revival, Chateauesque, Italianate, Dutch Colonial Revival, Monterey, Ranch, and modest Queen Anne. As in other historic districts, the Bungalow style is the most common. Most of the residences are one- and two-story wooden frame homes. From its earliest days, this neighborhood tended towards upper-middle class and boasted many mayors and state legislators as residents.

As the eastern boundary of this District is located along S. Florida Avenue, most of the properties in this commercial corridor have been converted to office use. Several of these properties still contain historic buildings that contribute to the generally residential character of the District.

The period of significance for this District is 1923 – 1945, which spans the Boom Time and New Deal historic contexts.

Biltmore-Cumberland Historic District

(Local Designation: 2004; National Register of Historic Places: 2004)

The Biltmore-Cumberland Historic District is located east of Lakeland’s downtown and the Lake Morton Historic Districts. The establishment of Florida Southern College to this District’s south in 1922 prompted the opening of the Biltmore-Cumberland subdivisions, which consist of all or parts of sixteen blocks east of Ingraham Avenue, west of Hollingsworth Road, south of E. Lime Street, and north of Frank Lloyd Wright Way. The District is largely laid out along an east-west and north-south grid arrangement, but the blocks are of varying sizes and some streets are not continuous. The northern portion of the District,

north of E. Palmetto Avenue, has an irregular shape due to the diagonal alignment of Francis Boulevard and Biltmore Place; with its landscaped divider and wide lanes, the layout of Francis Boulevard is reminiscent of City Beautiful movement ideals. While most streets within the District are paved with asphalt, some brick streets remain. The mature tree canopy in this District provides a shady environment.

Thematically, Biltmore-Cumberland is more suburban in character than the nearby East and South Lake Morton Historic Districts. The relatively narrow lots feature modest building setbacks and some homes from the 1940s and 1950s feature single width, front-facing carports or garages. Sidewalks are not common along many streets. The typical historic house rises between one and two stories, and most facades retain their original detailing with exterior walls of horizontal wooden siding or stucco, although concrete block and asbestos shingle appear on later dwellings. Gable and hip roof types are common, as are front porches. Stoops exist on homes built in the 1940s and 1950s.

This District embodies the frenzied nature of development by local and out-of-state investors during the Florida Land Boom, the unfulfilled expectations of some of those developers, and the resumption of significant construction in the post-World War II interval. The District was subdivided by some of Lakeland's most prominent builders and developers of the 1920s, including William P. McDonald, John E. Melton, Gertrude Overstreet, and Paul H. Calvin.

Houses in this District are representative of its professional and middle-class residents. Most of the houses are derived from the vernacular tradition for this area, which reflects the modern architectural styles common in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Typical of this era, Masonry Vernacular construction is predominant. However, a few of the structures display the influences of the Colonial Revival, Craftsman/Bungalow, Mediterranean Revival and Tudor Revival styles, which is consistent with national and statewide trends in architecture. The District possesses an important concentration of buildings united historically by plan and physical development. These dwellings contribute to Lakeland's sense of time, place, and historical development through their location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, providing an architectural link to the heritage of Lakeland.

The period of significance for this District is 1922 to 1953, which spans the Boom Time, New Deal and the beginning of the Post-War Boom historic contexts.

Dixieland Historic District

(Local Designation: 1995; National Register of Historic Places: 1994)

Located between the east shore of Lake Hunter and S. Florida Avenue is the Dixieland Historic District. This District reaches north to the southern boundary of "downtown" Lakeland along Walnut Street and is anchored on the south by Dobbins Park. One of the Lakeland's traditional urban neighborhoods, it contains a typical grid pattern of streets and alleys, narrow lots, sidewalks, and a mature tree canopy. Many brick streets still exist, but most are paved in asphalt.

On the District's eastern border, S. Florida Avenue represents a commercial corridor featuring offices, shops, and other consumer services; this area encompasses the Dixieland CRA (Community

Redevelopment Agency) Commercial Corridor, both a designated redevelopment area and a Special Public Interest district, and is subject to separate Design Guidelines.

This District was established as an essentially blue-collar working-class neighborhood following the platting of the historic Dixieland subdivision. Originally conceived by prominent developers John Patterson, Edward Finney, and John F. Cox, the subdivision was acquired and subsequently revised by the Carter-Deen Realty Company in 1907, creating approximately 600 lots. Building was slow until the 1920s, when the population of Lakeland, and demand for residences, increased. Bungalows were particularly popular in this District as inexpensive but comfortable, modern, and expandable housing. The proximity to downtown Lakeland made Dixieland a popular place to live. While building construction tapered off during the Great Depression, a small number of contributing houses were built during this time.

While a few small churches exist in this District, along with the historic Dixieland elementary school, the majority of historic buildings are residential in nature. The Craftsman Bungalow architectural style is predominant, but Colonial Revival, Neoclassical, Mediterranean Revival, and Spanish Mission dwellings also exist. The frame vernacular style also accounts for a large portion of homes. Homes in this district are mainly one and two-story structures, and feature building setbacks close to the street. Attached porte cochères and detached garages are common. Common building materials consist of wooden siding, stucco, and brick. As a working-class neighborhood, architectural ornament and decoration is minimal.

The period of significance for this District is 1905 to 1940, which spans the Turn-of-the-Century, Boom Time, and New Deal historic contexts.

Lake Hunter Terrace Historic District

(Local Designation: 2002; National Register of Historic Places: 2002)

Located on the western shore of Lake Hunter, this District is located southwest of Lakeland's downtown. Although the widening of Sikes Boulevard distanced the neighborhood from Lake Hunter, it still maintains much of the natural beauty and characteristics that have always made it a charming place to live. Gently sloping brick streets laid out in a traditional grid, a mature tree canopy, and a concentration of unaltered older homes contribute to the character and sense of community in this small historic district.

Suburban in character, this District was originally subdivided in the early 1900s, mainly by prominent developer John E. Melton. This District takes in parts of seven historic subdivisions, comprising approximately 65 acres. Due to the availability of lots in Dixieland and the Lake Morton Districts, this District remained largely undeveloped through the early twentieth century. In fact, platted vacant lots still exist today. Two thirds of building construction in this District took place during and immediately following World War II. The majority of buildings in the District occupy narrow lots oriented on a north-south axis and display moderate setbacks from the street. Like Dixieland, this District was established to accommodate the housing needs of Lakeland's working-class residents.

The District contains a well-defined concentration of buildings displaying wood frame and masonry vernacular architecture, as well as Classical Revival, Mediterranean Revival, and Craftsman/Bungalow styles. The typical residence is one to two stories in height, rests on brick piers, and has a front porch or stoop. Gable and hip roof types exist, and many homes have an attached carport, detached garage, or in later styles, an attached one-car garage.

The period of significance for this District is 1924 to 1951, which spans the Boom Time, New Deal, and Post-War Boom historic contexts.

South and East Lake Morton Historic Districts

(Local Designation: 1989 and 1994; National Register: 1985 and 1993)

The South and East Lake Morton neighborhoods (the Lake Morton Historic Districts), are located primarily south and east of Lake Morton, north of Lake Hollingsworth, and west of Ingraham Avenue. While the character of these Districts is considered urban today, they represent the first-generation suburbs of Lakeland. Land located to the south of downtown and the railroad was considered more desirable for residential development in the early twentieth century. The development of these neighborhoods began around 1906, but most of the houses were built during the Florida Real Estate Boom between 1920 and 1926. This era provides the basis for the predominant architectural character of Bungalow and Mediterranean Revival styles. The area's rolling topography, mature tree canopy, and occasional angular streets and lake shores provide pleasant spaces and vistas, creating a character unique in Lakeland and rare in Florida cities.

Both Districts were laid out in a grid pattern encompassing numerous historical subdivisions established by Lakeland's prominent early developers such as John Morton, brother-in-law of Lakeland founder Abraham Munn, the Carter brothers, Columbus Deen, John Patterson, Edward Finney, and John Cox. This grid pattern is enhanced with a network of alleys and sidewalks. Many of the streets in these Districts is paved with original or replacement brick. Lots within these Districts are generally narrow, with building setbacks close to the street. While the narrow lot configuration exists within the East Lake Morton District, several lots between E. Lime Street and E. Lemon Street are up to 200 feet in depth, which are uncharacteristically and unusually deep.

Areas of special character within these Districts include the Florida Southern College campus, the East Palmetto Street and Frank Lloyd Wright Way commercial corridors, and the Garden District. Located between the northern shore of Lake Hollingsworth and Frank Lloyd Wright Way at the southern boundary of the South Lake Morton Historic District, the Florida Southern College campus features nine buildings and structures designed and built by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright between 1938 and 1955, as well as several other historic college buildings from the 1920s. East Palmetto Street between Lake Morton Drive and Michigan Avenue is a neighborhood commercial corridor that includes the Lakeland Public Library, the Polk Museum of Art, and several other architecturally significant commercial buildings. Another neighborhood commercial corridor exists along Frank Lloyd Wright Way between South Florida Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue, which includes historic buildings serving light commercial uses with easy accessibility from the neighborhood's residents. Finally, the Garden District

is a Special Public Interest (SPI) district overlaid on a portion of the East Lake Morton Historic District that is a designated redevelopment area allowing additional land uses not otherwise permitted under the base zoning for these properties. A portion of the properties located in Sub-Districts 2 and 4 within the Garden District SPI are eligible for building height bonuses of four stories, not to exceed 40 feet (Sub-District 2) or 60 feet (Sub-District 4). The Garden District is prime for mid-rise, multi-family and mixed-use redevelopment designed to fit in with the existing historic fabric.

Architectural styles exemplified in these Districts include the Craftsman/Bungalow, frame vernacular, Classical Revival, Mediterranean Revival, Spanish Mission, and Tudor Revival styles. A few community churches, schools, and apartment complexes occupy large footprints within the Districts. Aside from these community organizations, the residential buildings within the Districts are primarily one to two stories on raised foundations and feature prominent porches. Porte cochères and detached garages and/or accessory buildings are common throughout the area. As these Districts represent the first-generation suburbs of Lakeland, many of the homes were built for prominent citizens and therefore display a high degree of architectural integrity, quality, and neighborhood cohesiveness.

The period of significance for this District is 1900 to 1942, which spans the Turn-of-the-Century, Boom Time, and New Deal historic contexts.