

(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



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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 Cypress Gardens

other names/site number PO6756

2. Location

street & number One LEGOLAND WAY n/a  not for publication

city or town Winter Haven  vicinity

state Florida code FL county Polk code 105 zip code 33884

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.)

Barbara E. Mattick/DSHPO 2/26/2014  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
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) \_\_\_\_\_

Jerry Sullivan  
Signature of the Keeper

4-14-2014  
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

3	1	buildings
1	0	sites
15	1	structures
0	1	objects
19	0	total

Name of related multiple property listings

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE; outdoor recreation

LANDSCAPE: garden

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: outdoor recreation

LANDSCAPE: garden

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other N/A

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 67) 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)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1935-1969

**Significant Dates**

1935

**Significant Person**

Pope, Richard Downing

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Pope, Richard. and Pope, Julie

FERA

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of Repository

# \_\_\_\_\_

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Approximately 23

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	4	3	1	6	1	2	3	0	9	7	0	2	7
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
2	1	7	4	3	1	9	0	7	3	0	9	7	0	7	7

3	1	7	4	3	2	0	4	4	3	0	9	6	3	1	8
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
4	1	7	4	3	1	5	8	9	3	0	9	6	2	8	2

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 Bob Gernert, Ex. Dir. Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce; Robert Jones/HP & Barbara E. Mattick/DSHPO

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date February 2014

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough 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 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1 **CYPRESS GARDENS**  
**Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL**

**SUMMARY**

Cypress Gardens is located at One LEGOLAND Way, Winter Haven, Polk County, Florida. The historic gardens make up approximately 22.77 acres of what is Legoland. The National Register district includes the historic gardens as well as the lake-front from which the water ski shows were viewed. The period of significance is 1936, when the gardens opened to the public, until 1969, when the last important elements of the historic park were completed. The gardens is a site that incorporates the shorelines of lakes Eloise and Summit, canals, meandering pedestrian walkways, lawns, and garden objects such as sculptures and a waterfall. Set against the natural foundation of native cypress and oak trees, the extensive collections of plants include botanical specimens from around the world.

**SETTING**

The gardens and the beachfront area are located on the northeastern shore of Lake Eloise, and southern shore of Lake Summit in Winter Haven, Florida. Cypress Gardens are located on the southeastern side of the City of Winter Haven, and is located just off the north/south route of Highway 17. Between 1931 and the January of 1936 opening, a marsh area was drained and canals were cleared and dug. Pedestrian trails were laid, lawns and gardens were planted. Azaleas and camellias provide the foundation ornamental shrubbery, and native live oaks and cypress trees along the waters' edge are the foundation trees.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

Cypress Gardens fronts westward onto Lake Eloise, and the north end of the garden front northward onto Lake Summit. An open lake-front with two audience bleachers provided the setting for the world famous Cypress Gardens water ski shows that began in 1941 (Photo #1). Immediately north of this open lake-front is a cove with cypress trees located in the lake and along the shore (Photos #2 & 3). An inlet among the cypress trees (Photo #4) opens to the east into what is known as the "Big Lagoon." South of the lagoon and encircled by a canal on the east is an island. The island is accessed by a pedestrian bridge which for most visitors is the entry to the historic gardens (Photo #5). To the northeast from the lagoon is a broad lawn surrounded by a curving walkway and a white-domed gazebo (Photo #6). To the north, the lagoon extends into a canal which divides lakefront land from the main land. This canal extends northward into Lake Summit. Curving walkways along the strip of land between the lake and canal provide many beautiful lake-front views (Photo #7). Directly north of the broad lawn fronting the gazebo is a looping walkway and the location of a lawn with statues of St. Francis and St. Fiacre, patron saint of gardens (Photo #8). Immediately to the north the walkway passes the majestic and intriguing Banyan tree with its numerous branches that grow vertically and root into the ground

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(Photo #9). To the west of the Banyan tree is a waterfall that serves as the centerpiece of a garden that features plants from around the world (Photo #10). The walkway winds northward to an Oriental Garden with a large Buddha sculpture facing southward across a pool of water (Photos #11 & 12). Due west of the Oriental Garden, on the strip of land fronting on the lake, is a large swimming pool in the shape of the State of Florida, which juts into Lake Eloise (Figure #1). The pool was built in 1953, for celebrity swimming star Ester Williams for the filming of the movie, "Easy to Love." At the north end of Cypress Gardens the canal intersects with the waters of Lake Summit, and the walkway hugs the shoreline. Several small islands were sculpted there in 1955, to serve as media sets, with pedestrian bridges providing access to them (Photo #13). The islands are sometimes referred to as the "car islands," because they served as pedestals for new model automobiles to be photographed for advertising.

The gardens were designed so that beautiful views could be seen from all directions wherever one stood. Dick Pope, consciously with assistance of photographer Robert Dahlgren, decided the layout on site while the property was being cleared and canals dug. Pope's type of design is considered "natural" with scenic beauty being its aim. He used the lake-front and existing tropical growth as the garden's foundation, then sculpted the waterways and contoured the land. Winding pedestrian pathways direct the visitor sequentially from one view-scape to another; some are denser and intimate, while others are wide vistas. He balanced the use of water, lawn, and tropical volume in his compositions. Although he was designing a "natural" garden, the human manipulated elements were no more evident than in the areas of formal plantings, sculpture, and architectural features which became centerpieces to the views. Because it was important to have colorful plantings all year around, plants from around the world were incorporated so that perpetual blooming was assured. Colorful leaved plants, such as Crotons from South Asia, served the same purpose.

Garden groupings were arranged with descending sizes of plants that included blends of textures and colors. The already existing cypress trees, oak and magnolia trees were large foundational plants, and Pope added the Banyan tree from South Asia as a focal point. More than thirty varieties of palms were added to the gardens, and well as twenty-six varieties of banana trees. Foundational shrubbery mainly consisted of more than forty varieties of azaleas and thirty varieties of camellias which came from China and Japan. Flowers were used for decorative beds, to enhance the front areas of clustered plantings, and to edge the walkways in some places. The horticultural diversity of specimens from around the world was impressive. Cypress Gardens had what they called "world collection," and "plant collections." The world collections were drawn from Africa; South Asia; China; Japan; Australia/Oceania; South America; Mexico/Central America, and Florida/West Indies. The plant collections focused on varieties of arrowroot; palms; banana; azaleas; camellias; begonias; ginger, and bromeliads.

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**List of Historic Garden Elements**

Gardens	1	Site	1935
Canal, including Big Lagoon	1	Structure	1935
Big island and lake-front island	2	Structures	1935
Eight arched pedestrian bridges	6	Structures	1935
Pedestrian walkway	1	Structure	1935
Gazebo	1	Structure	1947
Florida Pool	1	Structure	1953
Tropical "Car" Islands	3	Structures	1955
Boat Rental/Snack Shop	2	Building	1968
Ski Show Grandstand #1	1	Building	1968

**Non-historic Garden Elements (created in the 1970s)**

Ski Show Grandstand #2	1	Building	1973
Buddha sculpture	1	Object	1974
Waterfall	1	Structure	1974

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### SUMMARY

Cypress Gardens has **local and statewide** significance under **Criteria A and B** in the area of **Entertainment/Recreation** as one most widely recognized tourist attractions in Florida's history, and for its association with its creator and promoter, Richard Downing (Dick) Pope, who was often called the "Father of Florida Tourism." Cypress Gardens was built on the shores of Lake Eloise near Winter Haven as botanical gardens by Pope and his wife Julie, and opened as one of Florida's first theme parks in 1936. Besides its botanical gardens, the park became well known for its water skiing shows on Lake Eloise and its role in the development of water skiing as a major sport. Dick Pope used water skiing, the gardens, and photography to masterfully promote Florida's citrus and tourism industries and made Cypress Gardens in Florida a nationally recognized household name from the 1930s to the 1970s. The historic gardens of Cypress Gardens are also significant under **Criterion C** in the area of **Landscape Architecture** because they include botanical specimens from around the world, and the trails and canals that meander throughout the gardens.

### CONTEXT (extracted from **Historic Architectural Resources of Winter Haven, FL, MPS**)

#### **Winter Haven, Polk County, Florida, 1883-1895**

The Florida Legislature organized Polk County in 1861. Scattered settlement of the region had begun in earnest following Congressional enactment of the Armed Occupation Act in 1842. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Polk County settlers practices subsistence agriculture, cultivated oranges, and raised cattle. Small citrus groves provided a cash crop. Cattle herds, depleted by the wartime needs for beef, were quickly restocked.

Several events occurred shortly after 1880 to help speed the settlement of Polk County and much of south Florida. They included the Disston Purchase, the introduction of railroad lines into central Florida, and the discovery of phosphate along the Peace River. In 1881, Hamilton Disston, a Philadelphia investor and close friend of Governor William Bloxham, purchased four million acres of land from the State of Florida, enabling the state to clear its debt and offer land subsidies to railroad companies. The population of existing settlements grew as new settlers arrived, looking for cheap land. Dreams of fortunes in citrus and cattle enticed many and helped to populate south Florida. During the 1880s, settlers pushed deep into the peninsula. The area from the Indian River along the east coast to Tampa Bay on the west side of the peninsula became heavily planted in citrus.

Winter Haven was founded during this period. In 1883, tracks were extended through Polk County by the South Florida Railroad Company. The Bartow branch, opened during the closing months of 1884, extended from the

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mainline south at Bartow Junction (later Lake Alfred) through Winter Haven to the Polk County seat of government, and eventually reached Punta Gorda. Much of central Florida was introduced a national audience in 1886 when the South Florida Railroad published its promotional tract Gate City Route. Its pages waxed poetically about the communities such as Winter Haven, where "the land rolls in smooth, round waves, and in each hollow is a broad, bright pool, like [King] Arthur's shield. . ."

Realtors sold large portions of their holdings to early settlers P.D. Eycleshimer and F.A. K. Harris. Eycleshimer, who arrived in the area in 1884, and built the first house on the west side of Lake Howard. He named the community "Winter Haven" for its potential as a winter resort. Harris, a native of Vermont, also arrived in 1884 and built the first store in the downtown of the nascent settlement. Postal service was established in October 1884, and in 1890 the population reached 373.

Winter Haven's economy was closely tied of the fortunes of the citrus industry. Grove owners enjoyed several successful seasons until the winter of 1894-1895, when devastating freezes killed thousands of trees statewide, plunging the Florida economy into recession. Some families left Winter Haven, seeking a warmer climate farther south in the peninsula or giving up entirely and returning to their native homes. In 1900, the population of the Winter Haven settlement stood at 429.

### **Progressive Era Through World War I, 1896-1919**

During the period commonly known as the "Progressive era," which roughly extends between 1900 and 1919, Winter Haven experienced renewed development. The term Progressive era is often associated with reform movements in business, education, government, and labor. The era also brought substantial changes to Florida's landscape, including land reclamation, expansion of the railroads and citrus industry, and a building boom, which resulted in a multitude of commercial and residential buildings construction towns throughout the state. During the first decade of the new century new settlers poured into Winter Haven. Within a decade the population increased three-fold, reaching 1,436 in 1910.

The expansion of the citrus industry prompted the formation of growers' cooperatives throughout central Florida. In 1909, the Florida citrus Exchange was organized. The following year over 330,000 boxes of oranges were shipped from Polk Count, second only to Orange County, which it surpassed ten years later. By 1920, production levels reached over one million boxes annually. Polk County's share of Florida's \$20 million orange crop amounted to \$3.5 million that year. In 1926, the Winter Haven citrus exchange district, which then consisted of Auburndale, Eagle Lake, Lucerne Park, and Winter Haven, claimed fourteen packing houses, which shipped more citrus than all of Florida counties DeSoto, Lee, Sarasota, and Manatee combined. Between

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1922 and 1926, those packing houses exported some 1.7 million boxes of citrus annually. The Winter Haven Citrus Grower's Association, an affiliate of the Florida citrus Exchange, was organized in August 1909.

The Polk County road system, historically one of the finest in the state, expanded significantly during the period. Although Florida's Good Roads Association had been active since the late 1890's, it was not until 1915 that the movement gained momentum, leading to funding and construction of the Dixie Highway, which was completed during the 1920s. Polk County's paved roads totaled fewer than twenty miles in 1900 and developed initially with little state support. Activity began in earnest in 1914 with the sale of bonds, which enabled Polk County to build more miles of road than other county in Florida. By 1916, Polk County had paved 217 miles of asphalt roads, and in 1923 that figure reached 340. Among the most important paving projects undertaken by the county during the period was the "Scenic highlands highway," which resulted in a stretch of paved road that ran down the Highlands Ridge through Polk and parts of Highlands, Hardee and DeSoto counties. The road system greatly facilitated communication with neighboring counties and promoted development and tourism.

The Peace Creek Drainage District, created in 1915, was organized in part to drain some 48,000 acres in the Winter Haven area. Canal construction eventually connected twenty lakes. The drainage project effectively lowered and equalized the level of Winter Haven's lakes and permitted recreation boats to travel throughout central Polk County.

The period between 1896 and 1919 brought expansion to Winter Haven as the commercial and residential sections of the town began to mature. The town's location among numerous lakes and gently rolling terrain presented an attractive site for settlers. Several hundred buildings sprinkled the Winter Haven landscape. Many lots in the downtown had been filled with commercial buildings facing central park. Neighborhoods with boarding houses, churches, and school, and residences had appeared around the downtown. Generally, after 1916 the domestic building trade declined as the United States turned its energies toward assisting the allied forces in World War I. Federal government restriction on the construction industry reduced residential building, causing a postwar housing shortage that was then compounded by rising material costs. Nevertheless, Winter Haven's infrastructural improvements in the form of an electricity plant, some five miles of paved roads, and rail service laid a solid foundation for growth when development resumed in the 1920s.

### **Florida Land Boom, 1920-1928**

The war's end ushered in an era of enthusiastic economic expansion throughout Florida. Real estate sales almost at once mushroomed. It is difficult to exaggerate the speculative proportions of the ensuing "boom". Miami and Palm Beach are generally regarded as the scenes of the most frenetic activity, but few communities in the state failed to experience a fever for real estate. In early 1925, some 25 passenger trains, filled with

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visitors, were arriving daily in Jacksonville, whose chamber of commerce also reported that 150,000 automobiles from out-of-state passed through the city that season. An estimated 20,000 people arrive daily in the state in December 1924. That fall, the Florida Legislature issued an open invitation to wealthy investors with approval of a constitutional amendment prohibiting either income or inheritance taxes. The resulting capital influx accelerated an already well developed surge of land purchases.

Property values rose dramatically and quickly. In virtually every city and town, new subdivisions were platted and lots sold and resold for quick profits. Polk County and Winter Haven shared in the growth. Property assessments countywide doubled from \$15 million in 1917 to \$35 million by 1927. Bank deposits swelled. Winter Haven's population rose from 3,403 in 1920 to 7,130 in 1930, peaking in mid-decade. Building construction surged. In the opening nine months of 1924, some \$3,125,000 worth of buildings were constructed, and in November 1925 alone, near the height of the land boom, buildings valued at \$898,200, an enormous figure at the time, were constructed in the city.

Citrus production remained the underpinning of the local economy. About 1922, the Winter Haven Citrus Grower's Association built a new office and packing house. The Association packed the fruit harvested by 180 area growers and shipped some 170,000 boxes of citrus during the 1915 season. Thousands of additional acres were planted in citrus during the 1920s and hundreds of thousands of boxes shipped. Polk County became an attractive target for developers. In Winter Haven, several ambitious projects, residential and commercial, were undertaken.

### **Great Depression, World War II, and the Late 1940s – 1929-1949**

The Great Depression fell like a shroud upon the country in the early 1930s. Nearly 150 Florida state and national banks collapsed between 1928 and 1933. Several financial institutions in Polk County closed. Approximately one out of four Floridians were receiving some type of public relief and assistance by 1933. In March 1934, Winter Haven's municipal government reduced the size of the city limits from seventeen square miles to four-and-one-half. Further measures to reduce the limit to one square mile failed. Nevertheless, the action lowered the city's population by some 3,000 residents. Winter Haven's population figures in 1930 (7,130) and 1940 (6,199) reflect that decline, notwithstanding additional growth in the latter half of the decade. Although construction activity diminished, development persisted throughout the decade.

Winter Haven's municipal government took advantage of the federal relief programs which the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt organized to assist states and municipalities to improve infrastructure, construct buildings, conserve natural resources, and create recreational facilities. Providing jobs to the unemployed, a series of "Alphabet Programs," so-called for the acronyms assigned to them, were created, such as the Civilian

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Conservation Corps (CCC), Civil Works Administration (CWA), Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), Public Works Administration (PWA), and Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Winter Haven, with the rest of the nation, crawled out the Depression on the back of a growing defense industry. Annual personal income rose from \$513 in 1940 to \$1,090 in 1945. One of the few states to show a population increase during the war, Florida became an important location for military installations, particularly airfields, due its generally good weather and flat terrain. Winter Haven's population grew appreciably during the war, rising from 6,199 to 8,109 between 1940 and 1945.

The physical development of Winter Haven resumed following World War II as the state entered another period of growth. Many veterans who had served on military bases in Florida during the war returned at its close to seek permanent residence. The cultivation of Florida's image as a retirement haven resulted in statewide population growth. Dim patterns of future urban sprawl began to take form with the destruction of older residential and commercial buildings that fell victim to the wrecking ball to make way for parking lots, church expansions, and new commercial buildings. Countless new acres were planted in citrus as some older groves were sold by farmers and replaced by residential subdivisions. Citrus continued to provide hundreds of jobs and in 1949, the Florence Citrus Growers Association built a frozen concentrate factory. In the 1949-1950 season, Florida's citrus farmers reaped their richest harvest in history. Concentrate juice became the "Cinderella Product" of the industry, spurring still more planting of groves in Polk County. In 1950, the population of Winter Haven reached 8,605.

### **Context: Richard (Dick) Downing Pope (1900-1988)**

Richard Downing Pope, better known as Dick Pope, was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on April 19, 1900, the son of L. Walker Pope and Lily May. The elder Pope was a real estate broker and developer in Winter Haven and Lake Wales at the beginning of the 1920s Florida real estate boom, and taught his son the trade. At the age of 12, Dick would help his father, even making his own sale when his father was away. When Dick was 18, his father became ill, so the teenager began working at the real estate firm, doing so well, he dropped out of Stetson College (in DeLand, Florida) to pursue a career in real estate sales.

Dick met Julie Downing in North Carolina, and they were married on April 7, 1926, just as the Florida land boom was about to collapse. Abandoning real estate, Dick turned to outboard boat motors, which were just becoming popular at the time. He started working for Johnson Outboard Motors of Waukegan, Illinois. To promote Johnson Motors, he filmed dangerous boat races all over Florida that featured the company's motors. He became the first person to water ski off a 25-foot ramp, and his brother Malcom ski jumped over a boat, thus boosting the sport of water skiing. Always a promoter, Dick left Johnson Motors to go to Chicago, where he

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worked with two public relations firms, until the 1929 stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression.

## SIGNIFICANCE

### Criteria A & B: Recreation and Entertainment

Shortly after the stock market crash of 1929, Richard (Dick) Pope and his wife, Julie, read a *Good Housekeeping* article about a South Carolina plantation owner who opened his home and gardens to the public, calling it Magnolia Gardens. What interested Pope was the man's account that he had collected \$36,000 in admission fees in just three months. Pope and Julie discussed the opportunity and soon returned to Florida to create their own vision of such a garden.

Pope returned to Florida, working in the box industry while he worked to plan his gardens., He remembered a Lake Eloise vista near Winter Haven, where had camped as a young man, and knew that was place that his marketing expertise and Julie's green thumb could create the gardens. The challenge was finding the money to begin.

In 1931, he purchased a 37-acre tract of land on Lake Eloise and began the process of developing it. Because of his boating and skiing experience, he was asked to serve on the Lake Region Canal Commission. The effects of the Great Depression were taking their toll on the area's economy. Workers were earning a dollar a day at odd jobs from the Florida Emergency Relief Association (FERA). Pope approached the Canal Commission to use FERA funds and financial resources of the Canal Commission to build the gardens. His concept was a garden owned by the public, charging an admission fee, and, of course, himself being the manager. He also approached the Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce and other entities with his idea, and community enthusiasm grew. Even so, recruiting investors at \$1200 each was a real challenge.

Initially, the Canal Commission invested funds, cleaned canals, and installed some early plantings. By the spring of 1933, however, the removal of the wild vegetation and more canal digging had turned the project into a mucky mess and panic led local investors to abandon their support. While the exodus might have discouraged others, Pope, joined by good friend and citrus magnate John Snively, continued to pursue his dream. Backed by Snively, he signed notes buying all the investors out, with payments to occur over several ensuing years. Pope set about working alongside dollar-a-day workers digging canals and creating the gardens. It was then that he formed the Florida Cypress Gardens Association, Inc., with him and Julie as owners.

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Through hard work and determination, the canals were completed, the swamp was drained, paths were laid, and \$300 worth of azaleas, carnellias, and other plants were joined with donations from neighbors throughout Winter Haven to create the beautiful Cypress Gardens.

Dick Pope had been derided as "Swami of the Swamp" and "Master of Muck" – the butt of many jokes of those who doubted his resolve. With grit, determination, and Julie's green thumb Cypress Gardens opened on January 2, 1936, with one hundred eighty-two people paying 25 cents to gain admission.

By 1940, Cypress Gardens was well established. In December of that year, however, freezing weather damaged the flame vines at the Gardens' entrance. Julie Pope dressed a staff member in a colorful antebellum dress with a shawl and placed her at the entrance to hide the freeze-damaged vines, while assuring visitors that the interior of the gardens were fine. This was the birth of Cypress Gardens's iconic Southern Belles, young women dressed in antebellum-style, wide-hoop-skirted dresses, who were stationed throughout the gardens to greet visitors.

The United States joined World War II in December of the next year. Dick Pope joined the war effort in Europe, and Julie was left to manage the Gardens. It was during that time that Julie sent a photograph of the Gardens to the *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper, hoping for publicity. The Pope children were water skiing in the background. Shortly thereafter, several servicemen arrived at the garden entrance, asking when the ski show would take place. Julie, ever quick on the uptake, replied that the show would be at 3:30 p.m., and suggested they see the gardens in the meantime. She then called the school and had her children and friends prepare to "put on the show." That began what became the world famous Cypress Gardens Ski Show. Many attractions had closed during the war, but Cypress Gardens had been declared "an essential industry" during the war, and drove of military service personnel visited it during the war (Vickers, 93).

In 1943, Dick Pope returned from the war, and began to use photography extensively to promote the Gardens. In laying out the Gardens, he had the assistance of Winter Haven photographer Robert Dahlgren to assure that the landscaping produced ideal settings and views for photographs. He produced movie shorts featuring military themes, and scenes from the feature-length movie, "Moon Over Miami," were filmed at Cypress Gardens. The Gardens was gaining recognition throughout the country as a result of these promotions, and in 1948, Florida's Governor Millard Caldwell presented Dick and Julie Pope a plaque for their services in the post-war battle for the nation's tourist trade.

Over the next several decades the Popes would do even more to promote the state of Florida as they made "Cypress Gardens" a household name known throughout the country and even internationally. In 1949, the Gardens sent its first "Traveling Ski Show" to appear at the Rail Show in Chicago, Illinois. In 1951, Steve Trumbull of the *Miami Herald* wrote: "Florida's most fantastic press agent owns a swamp near here so isolated

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CYPRESS GARDENS  
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and primitive that no more than 500,000 tourists find it each year and pay \$1.25 [a far cry from the 182 people who paid 25 cents to visit the gardens in 1936]. In 1952, Dick Pope was formally named "Mr. Florida" by the *Orlando Sentinel* publisher, Martin Anderson. Anderson is quoted as saying, in regard to Pope, "... the man who had done more to publicize the state than any other." In 1953, "Easy to Love," a water-based musical with Esther Williams playing the girlfriend of Cypress Gardens's owner (played by Van Johnson) was released nationwide. The Florida Pool, located on Lake Eloise, at the southwest corner of the botanical garden, was constructed for one scene of that movie. Pope's magic formula of promoting Florida -- citrus and Cypress Gardens -- is evident throughout the movie. Pope also used print media for his promotions. In 1954, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that each day of the year, a Cypress Gardens photo appears in at least 100 newspapers. More than 1000 newsreels were produced that year, and 170,000 people a day and saw the 3D Cinerama "Easy to Love" movie in New York City. Photographs of Cypress Gardens appeared on the pages of national magazines, including *Life*, *Coronet*, *Red Book*, *Outboard*, *Household*, and *Columbia*.

Pope's emphasis on photography was a major factor in the success of Cypress Gardens. Besides laying out the gardens to ensure that visitors would always have an excellent view to take pictures, visitors were afforded the benefit of expert photographic help, and cameras were even available to borrow (Anniversary Booklet, 16). Pope had numerous promotional techniques to make Florida's Cypress Gardens a household name: he regularly sent gardenia-scented packages of photos of the Gardens to newspapers and nationally distributed magazines; he arranged for the crowning of "queens" at the Gardens, e.g., Citrus Queen, Watermelon Queen, and even Miss America. To get good photographic shots of the Gardens water skiers, he invented special photo boat that had special equipment to move along with the skiers and enable the photographer to get shots from various angles. A by-product of the promotions was a boost in the popularity of water skiing. In 1955, General Motors shot a double-spread advertisement at Cypress Gardens to introduce their newest automobile. This resulted in the development of what were known as the "Car Islands," man-made islands that served as "pedestals" for new car models, at a time when cars looked distinctively different from year to year. Pope began calling this area "Studio B," and it was set aside for shooting motion pictures and television shows.

Pope's many movie shorts gave way to major Hollywood productions, many of which featured some of the era's most popular stars. In 1945, *Moon Over Miami*, starring Don Ameche, Betty Grable, and Robert Cummings, was shot at Cypress Gardens, followed in 1947 by "On an Island With You," starring Esther Williams and Ricardo Montalban, which premiered in Winter Haven. Williams also starred in "Easy to Love," with Van Johnson and Tony Martin; the iconic "Florida Pool" was built for the movie. He also used photography to promote Florida's citrus industry, with clever photos, such as those showing the Florida pool filled with floating citrus, and a trick picture showing a swimmer, surrounded by oranges supposedly holding her head in her hand. In 1958, he served on the Florida Citrus Commission.

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A ski tournament at Cypress Gardens was also the vehicle for the introduction of Cinerama filming techniques. Television was also used. The Cypress Gardens Aquamaids and Dick Pope Jr., skiing barefoot, were aired on WPIX in 1948. Other television shows included the 1950s' NBC Comedy Hour, Arthur Godfrey Show, Ed Sullivan Show; and the 1960s' Mike Douglas Show.

In 1962, Dick Pope Sr. was elected the president of the Florida Attraction Association, and his son, Dick Jr. became the president of Cypress Gardens; Dick Sr. became the Chairman of the Board of Cypress Gardens, and remained involved. Among changes that occurred in the park in the late 1960s was the addition of a stadium to view the ski show (Ski Show Stadium #1) and the adjacent Boat Rental Building with a snack bar in 1968, and the now iconic gazebo in 1969. The Popes had long envisioned such a focal point for the gardens.

In the late 1960s, it was clear that big changes were coming to the region, as Walt Disney prepared to open up Disney World in Central Florida. In 1965, Dick Pope officially supported the arrival of "Disney" for he believed, "what's good for Florida is good for Cypress Gardens." He was not alarmed, for the Gardens had been drawing over one million visitors annually for many years. Little did Pope realize how much impact Disney World would have on the region and the competition Disney World would bring to Florida's smaller traditional attractions after it opened in 1971. Many of Florida's historic attractions, despite efforts to update themselves, could not compete with Disney World. The impact of Disney World, combined with the fact that the newly constructed interstate highways by-passed them, resulted in the closure of many of the old Florida style attractions. Even Cypress Gardens, as well-known as it was, suffered great losses, despite efforts to update the park with additions such as the "Gardens of the World," among them the Oriental Garden, which featured a large Buddha sculpture, created in 1974. In 1985, the Pope family sold Cypress Gardens to Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. The sale was the first in a string of owners, who each tried to revamp the park to meet the perceived entertainment wishes of the public. Nothing, though, could overcome the impacts on the general economy after the 9/11 attacks, and the fact that Cypress Gardens was 45 minutes away from Disney World; Cypress Gardens closed, for what seemed like the last time, on Sunday, April 13, 2003.

The park's closing brought an immediate call for preservation. The Winter Haven Chamber of Commerce quickly organized a taskforce to recommend action. They ultimately asked that the original park area be preserved, but others demanded complete preservation (including post-Disney expansions and greenhouse areas). Ultimately, then-Governor Jeb Bush and the Cabinet approved a creative arrangement - developed by the Trust for Public Lands - that allowed Polk County to purchase the original 30 acres including the botanical gardens and shoreline, Snively mansion and ski show area for \$2.2 million. The state would purchase development rights on the remaining 120 acres (\$11 million) and Georgia theme park owner Kent Buescher paid \$7 million to complete the sale in February 2004.

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**Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL**

Buescher set about revamping the entire layout of the acreage around the botanical gardens and, as he neared completion and prepared to reopen, the park was ravaged by Hurricane Charlie and later storms Jeanne and Frances. While the Cypress Gardens Adventure Park did open in December 2004, the losses from the storms became more than the owner could overcome, and in 2007 the park was in bankruptcy and sold at auction to the Land South Corporation of Mulberry, Florida. Land South tried several operational strategies that failed to turn the park around, and in fall 2009 they closed the gates and set out to find an appropriate buyer.

A chance meeting with Merlin Entertainments CEO Nick Varney produced an invitation for him to tour the Cypress Gardens property as a potential site for LEGOLAND Florida. Varney was immediately taken with the site's beauty and lakefront vistas. In January 2010 Varney announced the purchase of the property and on October 15, 2011, following \$150 million in improvements, LEGOLAND Florida opened to massive crowds. The park surrounds the original botanical gardens and maintains them in exchange for their use for the enjoyment of park visitors. In a tip of the hat to history, life-sized southern belles made from thousands of LEGO bricks greet visitors to the botanical gardens.

Dick Pope, often called "Mr. Florida" and the "Father of Modern Florida Tourism", died on January 28, 1988. Ten weeks later, Julie, Dick Pope's wife and the co-creator of Cypress Gardens, also died.

### **CRITERION C: Landscape Architecture**

The design of the naturalistic, picturesque, Cypress Gardens as planned by Dick Pope and Robert Dahlgren is intact. Although detail elements of the gardens have been changed and inserted over time, the primary arrangements and features such as the canals, big lagoon, bridge placement, lakefront strip of land, meandering walkways, broad lawn fronting the lagoon, and islands are intact. Pope's design scheme, to have large foundation plantings supported by smaller plantings of numerous varieties that added texture and color, conveyed a tropical setting of repose. The blend of intimate formal plantings and scenic vistas remain balanced. The design has always included dramatic focal points such as the distinctive Banyan tree, which was an original planting. The most dramatic addition was the lake-front Florida Pool added in 1953, originally built for a motion picture production, and later used for promotional events. Non-historic inserts to the gardens were the gazebo and statue of the Buddha in the early 1970s. In the search for plantings that would thrive in the Florida climate, specimens from around the world were collected. The extensive collections from various continents provided an educational experience that was interpreted to visitors, and were of horticultural interest.

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**Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL**

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Section number 10 Page 1 **CYPRESS GARDENS**  
**Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL**

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**PHYSICAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

THAT PT LYING IN SECS 2 & 3 T29 R26 KNOWN AS PROTECTED PCL FURTHER DESC AS: COMM  
NE COR OF W1/2 OF SEC 2 W ALONG N LINE SEC 2410.24 FT S00-21-58E 24.25 FT TO POB S38-33-  
27E 37.74 FT S19-03-30W 142.04 FT S79-58-29W 171.04 S53-23-17W 119.48 FTS10-35-40W 70.04 FT S69-  
45-51E 254.51 FT N84-27-39E 427.74 FT S00-17-09W 206.06 FT S02-56-58E65.95 FT S00-50-48W 22.66 FT  
S03-57-28W 52.53 FT S02-00-01E 120.03 FT S06-38-11E 80.92 FT S41-01-10W 129.96 FT S38-22-50W  
45.14 FT

See boundary maps. Approximately 22.77 acres, a portion of this described parcel  
#26-29-02-0000-033020

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

This described boundary is historically associated with the historic botanical gardens and the ski show area of  
Cypress Gardens.

[Home](#) » [Return To Search Results](#)

**Parcel Details: 26-29-02-000000-033020**

 TAX EST  
  PRT CALC  
  PRC  
  TRIM  
  TAX BILL

**Owners**

POLK COUNTY 100%

**Mailing Address**

Address 1 **PO BOX 988**  
 Address 2  
 Address 3 **BARTOW FL 33831-0988**

**Site Address**

Address 1 **CYPRESS GARDENS**  
 Address 2  
 City **WINTER HAVEN**  
 State **FL**  
 Zip Code **33880**

**Parcel Information**

Neighborhood **6666.00**  
 Show Recent Sales in this Neighborhood  
 Subdivision **NOT IN SUBDIVISION**  
 Property (DOR) Use Code **Counties (Other than Pub Schools, Colleg (Code: 8600))**  
 Acreage **29.10**  
 Taxing District **UNINCORP/SWFWM/LAKE REGION (Code: 92000)**

**Property Desc**

**DISCLAIMER:** This property description is a condensed version of the original legal description recorded in the public records. It does not include the section, township, range, or the county where the property is located. The property description should not be used when conveying property. The Property Appraiser assumes no responsibility for the consequences of inappropriate uses or interpretations of the property description. No warranties, expressed or implied, are provided for the data herein, its use, or its interpretation.

THAT PT LYING IN SECS 2 & 3 T29 R26 KNOWN AS PROTECTED PCL FURTHER DESC AS: COMM NE COR OF W1/2 OF SEC 2 W ALONG N LINE SEC 2410.24 FT S00-21-58E 24.25 FT TO POB S38-33-27E 37.74 FT S19-03-30W 142.04 FT S79-58-29W 171.04 S53-23-17W 119.48 FTS10-35-40W 70.04 FT S69-45-51E 254.51 FT N84-27-39E 427.74 FT S00-17-09W 206.06 FT S02-56-58E65.95 FT S00-50-48W 22.66 FT S03-57-28W 52.53 FT S02-00-01E 120.03 FT S06-38-11E 80.92 FT S41-01-10W 129.96 FT S38-22-50W 45.14 FT

**Area Map**



**Mapping Worksheets (plats) for 262902**

Mapping Worksheet Info  
[Section\\_262902.pdf](#)

**CYPRESS GARDENS  
WINTER HAVEN, POLK COUNTY, FLORIDA**



Google earth

feet 2000  
meters 600



- 1) Zone: 17 Easting: 431612 Northing: 3097027**
- 2) Zone: 17 Easting: 431907 Northing: 3097077**
- 3) Zone: 17 Easting: 432044 Northing: 3096318**
- 4) Zone: 17 Easting: 431589 Northing: 3096282**





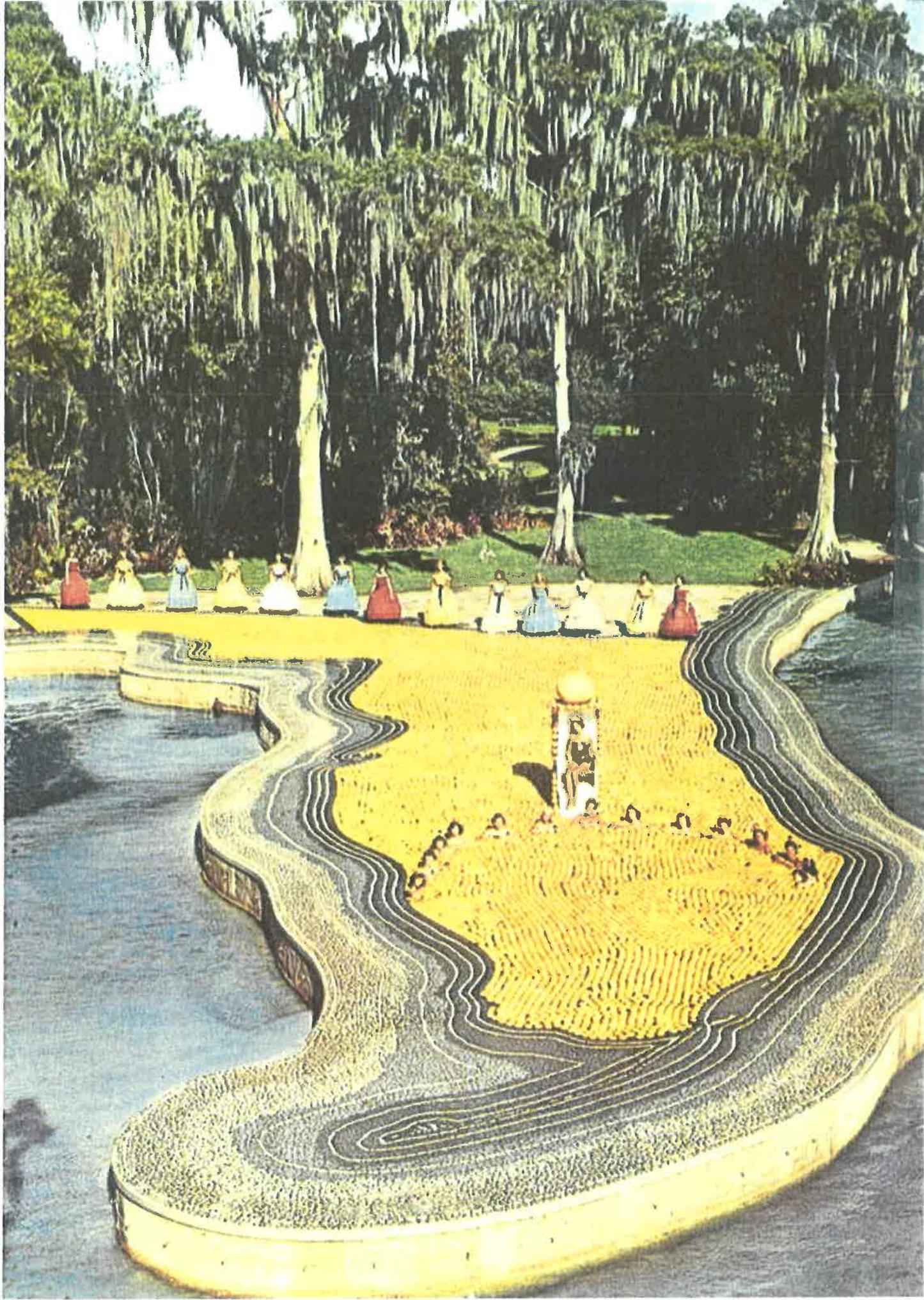
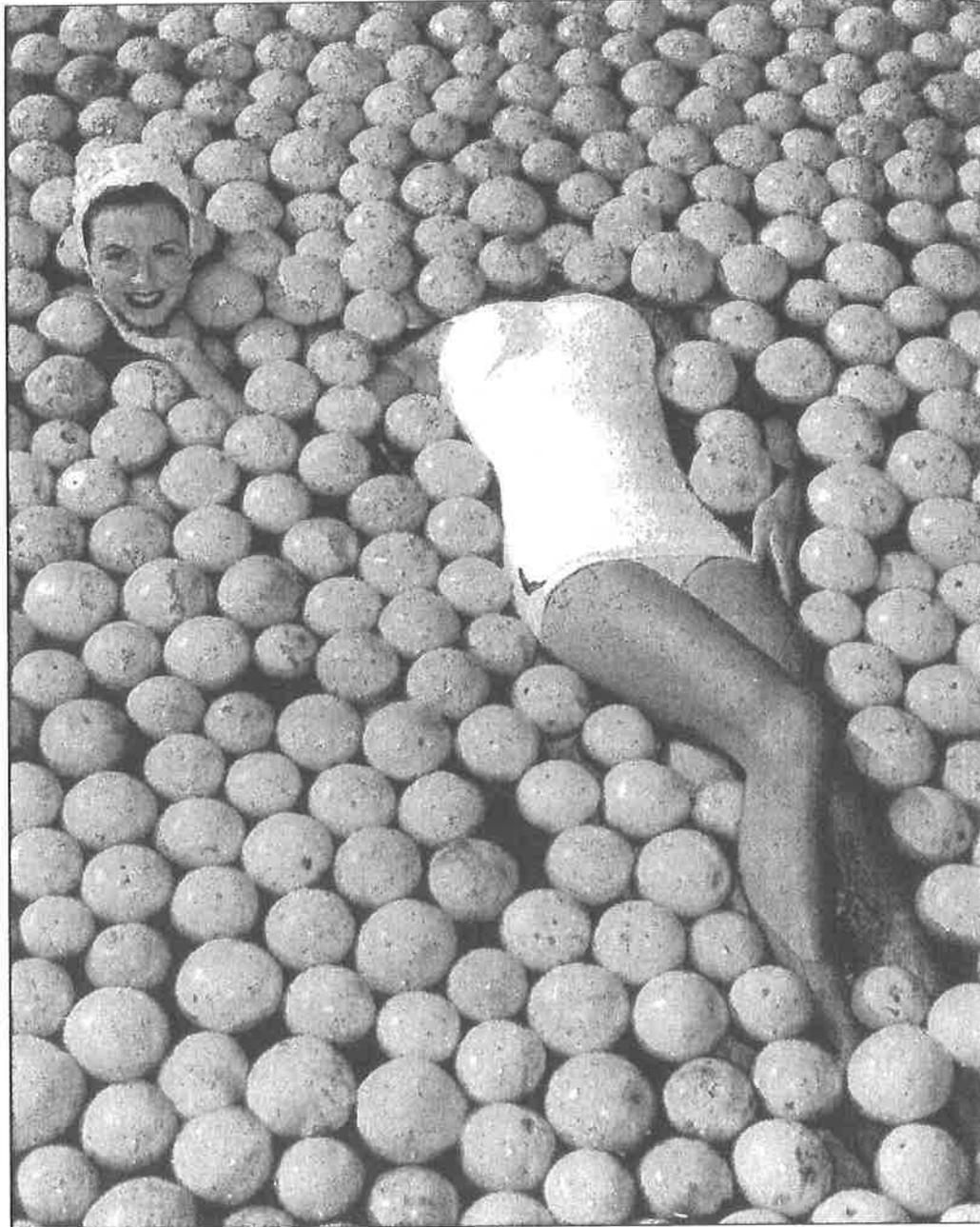


FIGURE 1 CYPRESS GARDENS, Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL

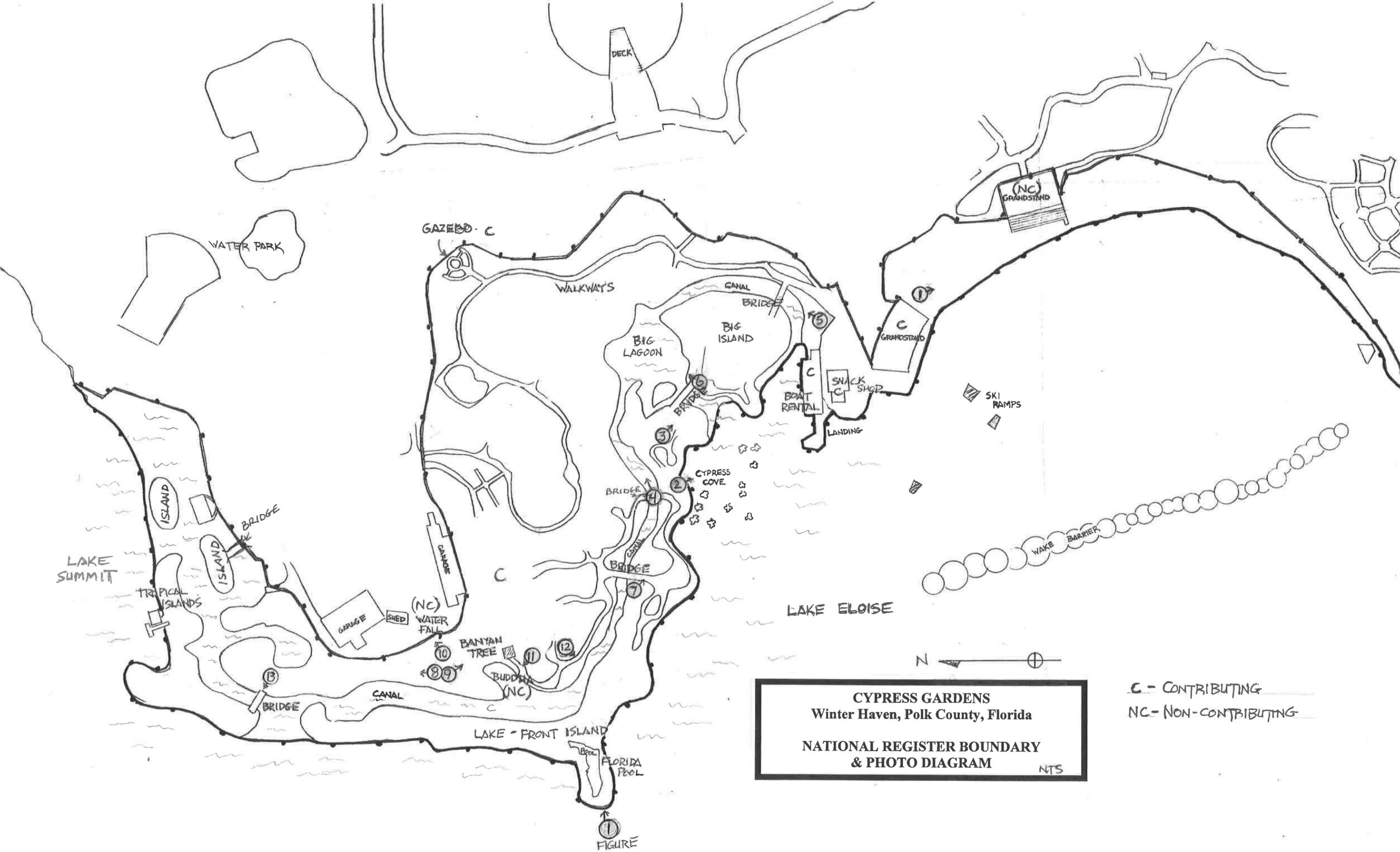


FIGURE 1 CYPRESS GARDENS, Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL



Winter Haven's Jo Tapley clowns around in the Florida pool, surrounded by hundreds of grapefruit. Advertising with citrus was productive for Cypress Gardens and for the citrus industry, which had a substantial economic impact in Polk County. (Courtesy Cypress Gardens.)

**FIGURE 2**      **CYPRESS GARDENS, Winter Haven, Polk Co., FL**



**CYPRESS GARDENS**  
 Winter Haven, Polk County, Florida  
**NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY**  
**& PHOTO DIAGRAM**
NTS

**C - CONTRIBUTING**  
**NC - NON-CONTRIBUTING**

























