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Year-long survey unearths Carrabelle's history

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Lois Swoboda

At the Carrabelle commission's Sept. 3 meeting, Beth LaCivita, of Historic Florida Consulting, summarized a survey she conducted over the last year of cultural and historic resources in the city.



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Beth LaCivita

The project sought to identify and evaluate archaeological sites, buildings and structures constructed before 1959. During the study, 121 buildings were systematically recorded, mapped and photographed based on survey methods and procedures established by the US Department of the Interior, National Park Service.

LaCivita said the property appraiser's office provided her with a list of 248 buildings that met these criteria. Working from that list, she gathered oral history from some of Carrabelle's oldest residents.

The survey identified eight archaeological sites, including one 1,400-year pre-historic village. LaCivita said Carrabelle has been a seafood destination for over 1,400 years.

She recommended three cemeteries - Evergreen, Isle of Rest and Third Street - for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Two historic districts - the Carrabelle town center and waterfront district (1880s to 1959) - and the World War II Pipeline-Three Rivers Cottages Historic District (1942-1959) were also recommended as being potentially eligible for registration. LaCivita said these areas document Carrabelle's railroad, lumber, naval stores, seafood, fishing and sponge industries and its military significance and post-war sports fishing era.

The Three Rivers site comprises an oil pipeline that ran from Jacksonville to Camp Gordon Johnston during World War II. Eight of 13 prefabricated cottages constructed for pipeline workers still stand at the site. LaCivita said no evidence of the actual pipeline remains but Mayor Curley Messer disagreed, claiming a section of eight-inch metal pipe from the pipeline stands on his property.

The survey recommended 12 buildings for possible listing on the National Register. These included the two-story brick building located at 103 US 98 which is now the Bebo Folk Art Gallery, formerly the Carrabelle General Store; Harry's Bar; the Rex Theatre / Gulf State Bank, later used as the Camp Gordon Johnston Museum; and the Crooked River Light.

The report contains a historic preservation plan for the city that discusses the economic impact, development and benefits of historic preservation including funding opportunities for properties listed on the National Register. Additional recommendations referenced land planning options and potential for local, state and national historic districts and any special districts protecting and interpreting historically and culturally significant sites.

"Communities that have documented and registered historic resources can apply for grant money to preserve them," LaCivita said, noting that she hoped the survey "will be the first step in a thoughtful, comprehensive effort to preserve the historic riches of Carrabelle."

LaCivita offered special thanks to Mary Westberg, Lillian F. Smith, Anne Witherspoon Lindsey, Jenny Justiss Sanborn, Savannah Lowery Tyler, Charles Millender and Buz and Genevieve Putnal for their contributions to the research. She also thanked the Franklin County 911 coordinator, the property appraiser's office and the Carrabelle branch of the county library.

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The Historical Preservation Team of the Carrabelle Waterfront Partnership and the Carrabelle Historical Society collaborated with the LaCivita during the survey.

The project was funded by a \$50,000 grant from the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, assisted by the Florida Historical Commission. The grant was awarded in partnership with the Carrabelle Waterfront Partnership and the Carrabelle Historical Society.

The survey is on file at the Carrabelle History Museum in Old City Hall. The Historical Society has plans to publish the document as a CD that will be available for the public at the museum. For more information please call 697-2141.

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