



CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

URBAN PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

STAFF REPORT

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND PRESERVATION COMMISSION REQUEST FOR LISTING IN THE ST. PETERSBURG REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Report to the Community Planning and Preservation Commission from the Urban Planning and Historic Preservation Division, Planning and Development Services Department, for Public Hearing and Executive Action scheduled for **Tuesday, September 14, 2021, beginning at 2:00 p.m.**, in Council Chambers of City Hall, 175 Fifth St. N., St. Petersburg, Florida. Everyone is encouraged to view the meetings on TV or online at https://www.stpete.org/connect_with_us/stpete_tv.php.

According to Planning and Development Services Department records, no member of the Community Planning and Preservation Commission resides or has a place of business within 2,000 feet of the subject property. All other possible conflicts should be declared upon the announcement of the item.



CASE NUMBER:	21-90300005
LANDMARK NAME:	Polish American Society Clubhouse
STREET ADDRESS:	1343 Beach Drive Southeast
PARCEL ID NUMBER:	30-31-17-03294-045-0100
LEGAL DESCRIPTION:	BAYBORO BLK 45, LOT 10
OWNER:	Polish Amer Society Inc
AGENT:	Emily Elwyn, MHP, and Roger Telschow
REQUEST:	Designation of the Polish American Society Clubhouse as a Local Historic Landmark of the St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places (owner-initiated)

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- Appendix A Application for Local Historic Landmark Designation
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Summary: Polish American Society Clubhouse	
Property Name (Current/Common):	Polish American Society Clubhouse
Historic/Alternative Names:	Polish American Club, Polish American Society Hall
Date of Construction:	1957
Period of Significance:	1957-1971
Architect and Builder:	J. H. Messineo (architect) and R. J. McGeeham (contractor)
Criteria for Landmark Eligibility:	A and F
Areas of Significance:	Ethnic Heritage (Polish American); Entertainment/Recreation; Social History; Community Planning and Development
Retention of Historic Integrity:	Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The property at 1343 Beach Dr. SE ("the subject property") was constructed in 1957 by the Polish American Society of St. Petersburg for use as their clubhouse/meeting hall. The building is still owned by the Polish American Society and is still in use as the meeting space for the club. The building retains a high degree of integrity with little alterations throughout its history. On June 29, 2021, the application for designation was submitted by Emily Elwyn, who prepared the application with Roger Telschow.

STAFF FINDINGS

In St. Petersburg, eligibility for designation as a local historic landmark is determined based on evaluations of age, context, and integrity as found in Section 16.30.070.2.5(D) of the City Code. Under the age test, a property must have been constructed over 50 years prior to designation. Historic documentation demonstrates that the subject property was initially constructed approximately 64 years ago, surpassing the required 50-year threshold.

Further, staff suggests that the subject property satisfies two Criteria for Significance and seven Criteria of Integrity. Staff, therefore, recommends **approval** of the application to designate the subject property to the St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places.

Historic Significance and Satisfaction of Eligibility Criteria

The first portion of the evaluation to determine eligibility for the St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places examines a resource's historic significance with relation to nine criteria. One or more of these criteria must be met in order for a property to qualify for designation as an individual landmark or district to be placed in the St. Petersburg Register. The nine criteria are based on the National Park Service's criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and are designed to assess resources' importance in a given historic context with objectivity and comprehensiveness.

In the case of the subject property, the applicant proposes that the property be designated under criteria A, D, E, and F for its significance in the areas of Community Planning and Development, Ethnic Heritage, Social, History and Entertainment/Recreation. Staff concurs with the areas of significance, but believes that the property satisfies the St. Petersburg Register criteria as follows:

<i>Is at least one of the following criteria for eligibility met?</i>		
Yes	A	Its value is a significant reminder of the cultural or archaeological heritage of the city, state, or nation.
No	B	Its location is the site of a significant local, state, or national event.
No	C	It is identified with a person who significantly contributed to the development of the city, state or nation.
No	D	It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose work has influenced the development of the city, state, or nation.

No	E	Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.
Yes	F	It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.
No	G	Its character is a geographically definable area possessing a significant concentration, or continuity of sites, buildings, objects or structures united in past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development.
No	H	Its character is an established and geographically definable neighborhood, united in culture, architectural style or physical plan and development.
No	I	It has contributed, or is likely to contribute, information important to the prehistory or history of the city, state, or nation.

As noted in the application, the subject property represents the important role ethnic organizations played in St. Petersburg's culture after the Second World War when St. Petersburg experienced a large population boom with many newcomers. These social groups helped create a sense of belonging in their new communities. The structure itself is a good example of utilitarian modernism that primarily focused on the function of the space. The use of the structural steel frame helped create the large open floorplan, which facilitated the space for a dance hall.

Over the years, many of these social groups have disbanded, and their meeting halls were closed and demolished. The Polish American Society is still active, and their clubhouse continues to operate as intended, serving as a tangible reminder of the importance of these ethnic social clubs.

Historic Integrity

Under the second part of the two-part assessment of eligibility for designation as a historic landmark, staff finds that the subject property retains integrity in seven of seven given criteria, surpassing the requirement of one or more.

<i>Is at least one of the following factors of integrity met?</i>						
Location	Design	Setting	Materials	Workmanship	Feeling*	Association*
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Must be present in addition to at least one other factor.

Primary Character-Defining Historic Features

Future exterior alterations to the property will be subject to Certificate of Appropriateness review. The following list does not define all significant features of the subject property but is intended to identify the most distinct elements of this designation:

- Simple, rectangular building made of concrete block with little ornamentation;
- Brick door surround on the front entrance;
- Gable roof with small overhang and asphalt shingle cladding;

- Bent steel structural system to create large open floorplan;
- Metal awning windows in a horizontal, five light and two light configuration with concrete window sills;
- Simplicity of building massing and form with an emphasis on horizontality.

PROPERTY OWNER CONSENT AND IMPACT OF DESIGNATION

The proposed local landmark designation was submitted by Emily Elwyn and Roger Telschow on behalf of the owner, the Polish American Society of St. Petersburg. The designation is supported by the owner.

The benefits of designation include increased heritage tourism through the maintenance of the historic character and significance of the city, some relief from the requirements of the Florida Building Code and FEMA regulations, and tax incentives, such as the local ad valorem tax exemption and federal tax credit for qualified rehabilitation projects. The designation of historic landmarks protects and enhances the St. Petersburg's historic character, fulfills the City's goals as a Certified Local Government in Historic Preservation, and reinforces a strong sense of place.

CONSISTENCY WITH ST. PETERSBURG'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, EXISTING LAND USE PLAN, AND FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The proposed local historic landmark designation is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan, relating to the protection, use and adaptive reuse of historic buildings. The local landmark designation will not affect the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) or zoning designations, nor will it significantly constrain any existing or future plans for the development of the City. The proposed landmark designation is consistent with the following objectives:

Objective LU10: The historic resources locally designated by the St. Petersburg City Council and Community Planning and Preservation Commission (CPPC) shall be incorporated onto the Land Use Map or map series at the time of original adoption, or through the amendment process, and protected from development and redevelopment activities consistent with the provisions of the Historic Preservation Element and the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

Policy LU10.1: Decisions regarding the designation of historic resources shall be based on the criteria and policies outlined in the Historic Preservation Ordinance and the Historic Preservation Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Policy HP2.3: The City shall provide technical assistance to applications for designation of historic structures and districts.

Policy HP2.6: Decisions regarding the designation of historic resources shall be based on National Register eligibility criteria and policies outlined in the Historic Preservation Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan. The City will use the following selection criteria [for city initiated landmark designations] as a guideline for staff recommendations to the CPC and City Council:

- National Register or DOE status

- Prominence/importance related to the City
- Prominence/importance related to the neighborhood
- Degree of threat to the landmark
- Condition of the landmark
- Degree of owner support

RECOMMENDATION

Based on a determination of general consistency with Section 16.30.070.2.5(D) and the submitted designation application, staff recommends *approval* of the request to designate the Polish American Society Clubhouse as a local historic landmark, thereby referring the application to City Council for first and second reading and public hearing.

Appendix A

Application for Local Historic Landmark Designation

St. Petersburg Landmark Designation Application

Name of Property Polish American Society meeting hall

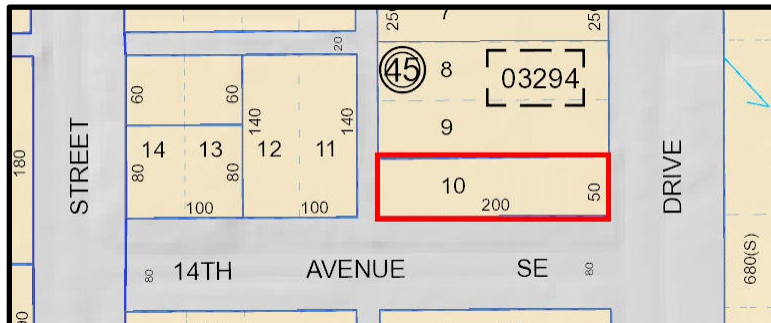
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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The boundary consists of the property and structure historically associated with the Polish American Society structure, located at 1343 Beach Drive Southeast. The boundary excluded the non-historic, city-owned power exchange structure at the southeast corner of the property.

Boundary Description

The structure is located on parcel 30-31-17-03294-045-1000 described as Lots 10 of Block 45, of W J Overman's rearrangement of J P Titcombs Plan of Bayboro, Pinellas County, Florida, comprising of East Section, Township 31 South, Range 17 East, according to plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 1 Page 19, Public Records of Pinellas County, Florida.



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Boundary Justification

The boundary consists of the property currently owned and historically associated with Polish American Society.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Setting

The Polish American Society is located at 1343 Beach Drive Southeast, on a small 200' x 50' parcel at the corner of Beach Drive SE and Fourteenth Avenue SE. The surrounding area is a mix of institutional and light industrial properties. Immediately adjacent to the north of the Polish American Society is property owned by the US Coast Guard and containing the US Coast Guard Exchange building, and several Florida Master Site File surveyed structures including the 1942 Coast Guard Auxiliary building (FMSF PI11955) and 1942 Reserve Administration Building (FMSF PI11953). The Lt Max Stover Army Reserve property sits to the east of the structure across Beach Drive (FMDF PI03163). To the South and West of the club building is the Old Southeast Neighborhood and the Salt Creek Industrial area. The area surrounding the club is light industrial with some residential. The 1948 United Seafood Imports building, FMLS PI03163 is on the block to the south of the Polish American Society.

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c1923 Birdseye of Site



1923 Sanborn Map

The site is essentially unchanged since the structure's construction in 1956. The 1923 Sanborn map shows the site undeveloped, with very few structures in the immediate

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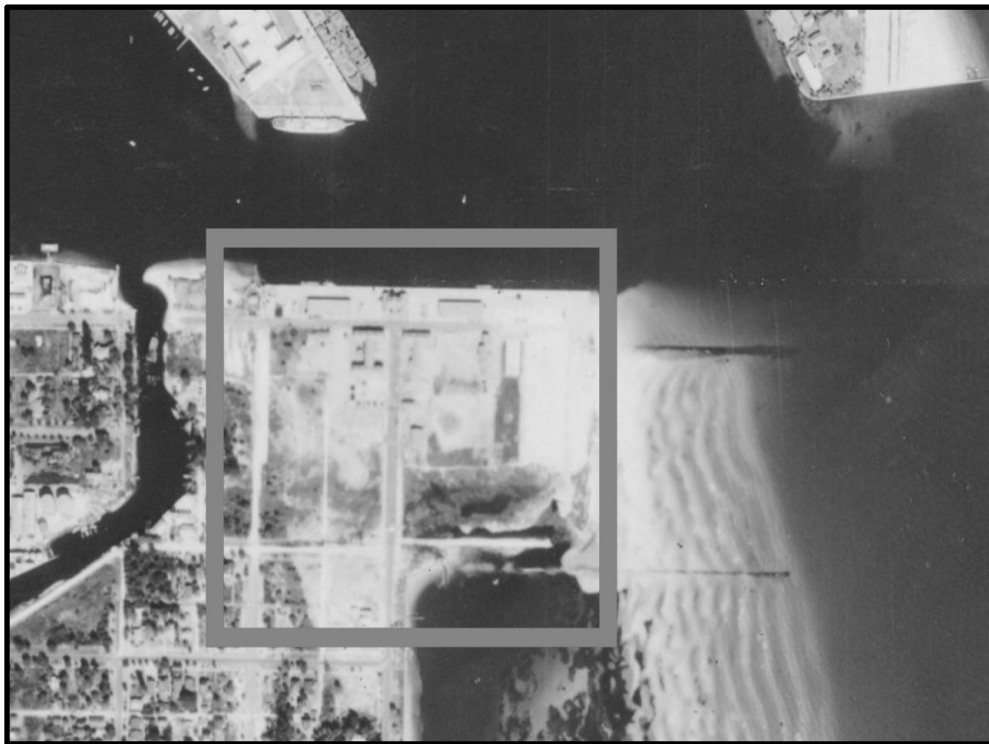
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vicinity. An aerial photograph of the site in 1953 catalogs significant changes to the location, with the construction of the Army Reserve Administration structure, several structures associated with the Coast Guard Station, and the United Seafood Imports Building.

An aerial photograph in 1957 reveals the newly constructed Polish American Society along with significant development in the area. Although it is notable that 13th Avenue South appears to be unpaved. Additional bird's eye photographs from 1963 and 1970 also show the Polish American Society building and the continued industrialization of the surrounding area.

The Polish American Society building is not located in a Local or National Historic District and has not been surveyed or identified in the Florida Master Site File and is not on the City of St Petersburg's Potentially Eligible list.



Site in 1943

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Site in 1963 in lower corner of image

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1957 Polish American Society and site



1970

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Architectural Description

Exterior

The property, designed by architect J. H. Messineo, built by contractor R J McGeeham, consists of a single-story steel-framed concrete block structure measuring approximately 49'x100'. The use of concrete blocks had proliferated in post-World War II St Petersburg because of its low-cost functionalism. The ribbed steel framing of the Polish American Society is unique and is a creative solution to allow for an interior unobstructed by columns. The seven lightweight, structural bent spans, faced with a stained plywood skin, produce a strong integral form. The bents begin at a small base and become wider at the knuckle in order to support the structural force, and then taper to form cantilevered rafters. The overall shape is that of a number "7" or an open scissor. The angled lines of the structural bent were popular in the middle of the last century and used widely in modern designs. The angle of the spans forms a front-facing gabled roof. The steel frame is not visible on the exterior of the structure.

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The structure is oriented to the south, with its primary facade facing Thirteenth Avenue South. The fenestration consists of three large aluminum five-light awning windows which dominate the southern facade with three smaller aluminum single-hung windows on the western third of the south facing facade. The primary entrance is recessed and located off-center on the 13th Avenue facade. The area surrounding the entrance is faced with painted brick. Non-historic aluminum glass doors have been installed to enclose the entrance and create a vestibule. Two secondary entrances with replacement aluminum double doors are located also on the southern facade. The northern facade, directly adjacent to the Coast Guard facility has 6 historic window openings which have been partially filled with glass blocks. The eastern facade, facing Beach Drive Southeast, has three evident window voids which have been filled with concrete blocks. The gabled section of the roof is faced with vertical corrugated aluminum siding. The eastern facade gable has a similar treatment. The western facade has two aluminum awning-covered windows and a single entrance door. The club erected a chain link fence topped with

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three strands of barbed wire in 1966 in order to protect the air handling units. The roof consists of asphalt shingles.

Asphalt parking abuts the southern facade and a small city-owned utility structure is located on the southwest corner of the lot, which should not be considered for this designation. The site has concrete curbing and no sidewalks.



Polish American Society Club, 1961



Polish American Society building 2021

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Interior Features

The interior of the Polish American Society remains largely unchanged since the building's construction. The meeting hall



consists of a large unobstructed space with the structural bents forming the primary architectural feature. Life-sized stylized portraits of dancers and musicians in traditional Polish dress painted by Polish American Society members Wilma and Walter Walsek, adorn the walls. The eastern wall of the structure, centered under the gable, is a small, raised stage. The western end of the structure consists of a catering kitchen and traditional bar

separated from the main hall. A small office and storage room have been built-out into the main space. The entrance to the meeting hall is through a small vestibule built into the open space to provide a transition from the exterior and the interior of the space. The flooring is terrazzo with a wooden "floating" dance floor.



Polish American Society building 2021

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Primary Character-Defining Historic Features

The Polish American Society meeting hall is functional in its design, lacking exterior ornamentation. The primarily defining feature is the form of the building created by the pre-fabricated structural steel bents.

Period of Significance

A historic resource's period of significance is the time frame during which a historic resource is associated with important events, activities, themes or people which qualify it for consideration as significant. The period of significance for the subject property spans from its construction in 1957 until the end of the historic era in 1971.

Historic Integrity

Under the second part of the two-part assessment of eligibility for designation the Polish American Society retains all seven of the seven given criteria, surpassing the requirement of one or more.

Is at least one of the following factors of integrity met?

Location	Design	Setting	Materials	Workmanship	Feeling	Association
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

The structure has changed little since its construction in 1957. The original sign has been removed and some window openings, though clearly visible, have been enclosed. The structure is still owned by the Polish American Society of St Petersburg, the original owners of the building. The structure is still used as intended at the time of construction.

Location

The Polish American Society meeting hall had not been moved.

Design

The Polish American Society meeting hall is essentially unchanged since its construction in 1957 and retains the functional yet modernist aesthetic.

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Setting

The setting, in the light industrial area of Salt Creek and adjacent to the US Coast Guard South Mooring, essentially unchanged since the construction in 1957.

Materials & Workmanship

The functional design of the Polish American Society meeting hall has served the society well and few alterations have been made since its construction. The exception is the glass block that fills the window openings on the northern facade, the concrete block infill of the still-evident window openings on the east facade, and the addition and awning and replacement of the entrance doors.

Feeling and Association

The Polish American Society is still owned by the Polish American Society of St Petersburg and has operated in much the same fashion since its inception. It is a strong reminder of the significance of ethnic heritage societies in fulfilling the desire to associate with others with the same cultural background and create a cohesive network to replace the kinship and cultural ties left behind upon migration to St Petersburg.

PROPERTY HISTORY

Historical Context

Early Migration and Development in St Petersburg

St. Petersburg originated with the arrival of the Orange Belt Railroad in the mid-1880s. Tireless efforts to promote tourism and bring new residents to the peninsula commenced immediately and essentially never ceased. *St. Petersburg Times* editor William Straub and *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* editor Lew Brown, were early promoters of the community during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Although World War I limited tourism, St. Petersburg quickly rebounded following the war with the winter season of 1918-1919 more profitable than before the war. Thanks in part to the efforts of John Lodwick, publicity agent for the Chamber of Commerce and the City of St. Petersburg, the hotels and boarding houses were filled to capacity during the season. The construction of a national, state, and local road system opened St. Petersburg to an increasing number of middle-class vacationers and by the 1920s, St Petersburg was a popular destination.

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These vacationers, who swelled the city's population by fifty percent every winter, usually stayed for long periods of time and returned year after year. Because these tourists were essentially semi-permanent residents, local leaders encouraged them to treat the city as their adopted hometown. In order to provide connections and familiarity in an unfamiliar tropical place, the city established tourist societies, organized around a state or region. These societies allowed the winter residents to feel at home among those with similar backgrounds and solidified the winter resident's ties to St Pete. Tourist state societies were a valuable means of advertising and actively promoted others to migrate to St Pete, competing with one another to be the largest society. The first society to be formed was the Illinois Society in 1902, followed by New England, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York-New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Southland, Canada, Ohio, and Indiana (Arsenault, 1946).

A relatively healthy tourist trade initially kept the local economy afloat during the early years of the depression and Federal relief projects helped revive the local economy by the mid-1930s. Local projects included the construction of Bay Pines Veterans' Hospital, an addition to Albert Whitted Airport, Bartlett Park, an addition to Mound Park City Hospital, a new city hall, the construction of the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station near Bayboro Harbor, a National Guard armory, and a new campus for the St. Petersburg Junior College. By providing these kinds of projects throughout the nation, the New Deal agencies brought partial economic recovery to residents of St. Petersburg as well as other cities. With an improved financial outlook, tourists returned to St. Petersburg during the late-1930s (Arsenault 1996, 257-260).

Although tourism had rebounded by 1940, the activation of the military, rationing, and travel restrictions of World War II severely curtailed St. Petersburg's tourism-based economy. Most of the city's hotels and boarding houses remained empty during the winter of 1941-42. Realizing that the empty rooms could be an asset as military housing, city leaders successfully lobbied the War Department for a military base. The opening of a technical services training center for the Army Air Corps brought over ten thousand soldiers to the city during the summer of 1942. The military leased almost every major hotel and many of the smaller hotels in the city. By the time the training center closed in July 1943, over 100,000 soldiers had visited St. Petersburg. Although the training center closed, the United States Maritime Service Bayboro Harbor Base, which trained merchant seamen, continued to grow. Other bases and support facilities throughout the area

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brought thousands of soldiers to central Florida and the St. Petersburg area (Arsenault 196, 298-301).

After World War II, many of the service members who trained in St Petersburg returned, taken with the idea of the easy life in Florida. City boosters capitalized on the idea of the good life in St Petersburg by publishing advertisements in northern and midwestern newspapers and in promotional films (Wilson, 18). The promotional efforts hit their mark and the city's population boomed. Between 1950 and 1960, the population of St Petersburg nearly doubled, growing from 97,000 to 181,000 residents. The percentage of local residents born in Florida fell below 20 percent. The new arrivals were primarily from Northern and Midwestern cities, where most would have had strong kinship ties and deep community roots. Once they arrived in St Pete the new residents bonded over the experience of transience and migration rather than ties to local history and tradition. (Wilson 10, Arsenault 308-313)

Coinciding with the migration of returning servicemen to St Petersburg, was the migration of retirees to the Sunshine City. The passage of the Social Security Act of 1935 along with an increased life span meant that many Americans now had a stable income and were no longer as reliant on their families to care for them in their old age. Florida, with its low cost of living and promise of perpetual sun, drew many of the new retirees away from their homes to live out their final years. St Petersburg proved particularly adept at attracting America's elderly (Mormino 126-137).

Clubs and Social Organizations in St Petersburg

New residents and returning winter tourists flocked to the long-established state societies and traditional fraternal clubs like the Elks Club, Shriners Club, and Moose. Retirement clubs such as the Retired Western Union Employees Association, Western Electric Pensioner's Club, and the New York Central Retired Railroad Social Club as well as clubs centered around hobbies such as the Sunshine Camera Club also flourished.

Other transplanted residents looked to replicate the ethnic social clubs they belonged to in their home states. Although St Petersburg did not have a large foreign-born community, the number of ethnic heritage clubs was notable. Many of these ethnic heritage clubs had large memberships and owned their own buildings. Some of the clubs that at one time

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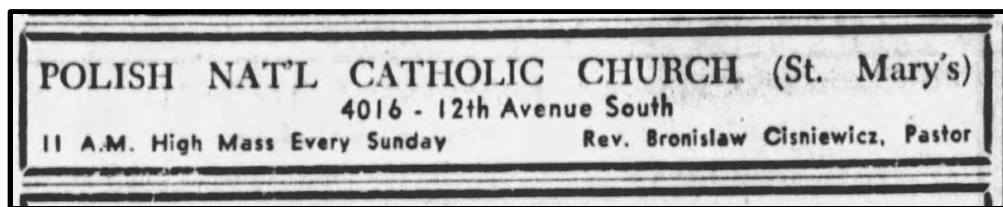
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owned their own buildings included; the German American Club, Lithuanian American Club, the American Czechoslovakian Tourist Society, Italian American Club, and the Al Kareem Club for Syrian and Lebanese Americans. Smaller groups such as the French Speaking Society, the Welsh Society, and Ukraine Society, met in rented space. Typical social offerings of all of these clubs included, bingo, Wednesday afternoon card parties, and Saturday night dances (SPT 17 Aug 1969) Other active clubs included; Club Parisian, the Dutch group the Holla Ders, the English Speaking Union for those from Great Britain, and the Zionist Organization of America, the Hungarian Social Club, the Belgian American Sunshine Club and the Scandinavian Club and the Swedish Club which annually hosted the Lucia festival. The Canadian American society was the largest and most active in St Petersburg of the international and ethnic clubs. (SPT 23 Aug 1959) Although most of the clubs were social in nature, many also raised funds through activities for community assistance.

Polish American Society Of St Petersburg

The majority of the Polish immigrants to the United States settled in the large industrial cities of the North and Midwest, including Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo and Toledo forming strong, cohesive communities. Like many Americans from the snow belt, Polish Americans were not immune to the lure of the Florida Dream and a strong advertising campaign convinced many that life in St Petersburg would be an embodiment of that dream. Stories featuring St Petersburg appeared in Polish Language Papers in Chicago, New York, Toledo, and New Britain, Connecticut (SPT 6 June 1959).



Poles who relocated to St Petersburg, like those who migrated at other times and in other places, brought their own identities, experiences, religion and culture. St Mary's Catholic Church in St Petersburg sought to accommodate the new Polish American arrivals by offering Mass in Polish (SPT 13 Feb 1960). Many sought to recreate the communities they had left behind and the things they enjoyed such as the food, language and costumes (Radziłowski, 7). The need to form supportive networks in a new home that felt unfamiliar is part of the push to form organizations such as the Polish American Society.

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From the desire for familiarity and to associate with others with the same cultural background, emerged the Polish American Society of St Petersburg, the first Polish Society in the State of Florida. Prior to its official forming in 1951, several families of Polish descent who had retired and moved to St Pete, gathered informally for camaraderie and to enjoy the traditions of Polish culture. For years they discussed forming a Polish American society, but the hurdle had always been how to connect with other Poles living in the area. According to club legend, it was a parking ticket that sparked the creation of the club. Mr. and Mrs. Nawojski found a parking ticket on the windshield of their car signed by a police officer named Edward Mogelnicki. Immediately, the Nawojskis sought out the police officer with the Polish name in order to connect with another Pole. Officer Mogelnicki too had the desire to connect with other St Petersburg residents of Polish descent and was able to use his connections in the city, along with the “zeal and eagerness” of Mrs. Nawojski and her Polish friends, to jumpstart the process.

The first step was to gather as many of St Petersburg’s Polish Americans as possible for an organizing meeting. To locate others, they mailed invitations to fifty Polish sounding



names in the phone book and placed advertisements for the event in the *St. Petersburg Times* and *Evening Independent*. The organizing event took place at the Million Dollar Pier on January 9, 1951. An overwhelming 120 Polish Americans answered the invitation and attended the event. All were in favor of organizing as the Polish American Society of St Pete.

A month later a general membership meeting was held at St. Mary’s Church to formally incorporate and elect officers. The initial slate included: E. Mogelnicki, President; M. Krupa, Vice President; W. Ziarko, Treasurer; J. Thomas and E. Chrzanowski, Secretaries; L. Swiderski, Sergeant-at-Arms. The purpose of the Polish American Society was to provide activities to improve the social and cultural life of the community, the preservation and retention of the Polish language and culture, and to instill pride in the Polish heritage of the members.

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The first event the Polish American Society planned was a large fundraising ball at the Armory, featuring the Police Department orchestra. The ball was a great success with as many attendees of Polish descent as those who had no connection to Poland attending. The ball also successfully raised significant funds.

Over the next several years, meetings of the Polish American Society were held in private homes and larger events held in backyards, picnic grounds, the Municipal Employees Hall, and the Knights of Columbus Hall. As the society continued to grow it became clear that they needed a permanent home. A building fund, established in 1952, had enough funds by 1955 to begin identifying sites and planning construction of the new building. The building committee chose a site at the corner of Beach Drive and 14th Ave SE. Architect Joseph Messineo drew up the plans for a pre-fabricated steel and concrete block structure for the fee of \$500 and R. J. McGeehan was awarded the bid for construction. The building was formally dedicated on May 5, 1957. The total cost for construction was \$51,000. The mayor of St. Petersburg, the honorable S. G. Johnson officiated at the opening ceremony by cutting the tri-colored ribbon guarding the entrance to the building.

In 1956 two members of the Polish American Society, Anton Miller and Anthony Kosiba, purchased two additional lots for the construction of a parking lot and an outdoor picnic area and donated the land to the club. By 1959 the club had grown to 550 members. In addition to promoting the preservation of Polish culture and providing camaraderie, music and dancing to their members, the club began offering scholarships to St Petersburg Junior College and supported student exchanges between Poland and the United States.

By the mid-1960s the Polish American Society was offering the hall for rent and was a top destination for a number of the City's social functions. Every spring the club hosted a dinner for all the Major League baseball players of Polish descent visiting St Pete during spring training.

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For many years now, each winter the club hosts a Tea Dance for the greater community every other Wednesday, featuring a variety of dance music and a dance instructor.

Today the club functions much as it has since its inception. The bar serves Polish beer and has a liquor license. The catering kitchen specializes in Polish food such as kielbasa sausage and perogies. Members gather to enjoy one another's company and camaraderie. Music and dancing are still central to the club with weekly polka band performances during the winter season. The celebration of Polish holidays such as Paczki Day and Dyngus Day every spring are much anticipated events. The club's membership has expanded to include those of all ethnicities who enjoy the many social events the club sponsors.



Architect Joseph H. Messineo

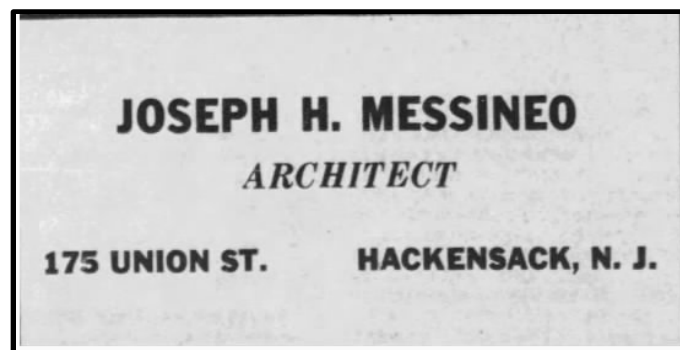
The architect of the Polish American Society meeting hall, Joseph H. Messineo was a prolific designer in Pinellas County in the middle of the last century. Primarily known for his ecclesiastical architecture. Messineo came to St Petersburg in 1948, at the age of 49, after a full career in Garfield, New Jersey. He received his education at the Pratt Institute and Yale University. He was a prolific designer of ecclesiastical and municipal buildings. His most prominent ecclesiastical commissions include: St Luke's United Methodist Church, Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 5th Avenue Baptist

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Church, First United Methodist Church of Gulfport, Seminole United Methodist Church, Redeemer Lutheran Church, and the church school building of Allendale Methodist Church. His most significant municipal commissions include: Roberts Youth Center, Northwest Youth Center and "Negro" youth center at Wildwood Park for which he donated a proportion of his services in order to encourage the City to proceed with the project (SPT, 20 Jan 1960 p13). Messineo was also responsible for the design of the Phillippe Park Amphitheater where the *Florida Afire* outdoor pageant took place.



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Historic Significance and Satisfaction of Eligibility Criteria

The first portion of the two-part test to determine eligibility for the St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places examines a resource’s historic significance with relation to nine criteria. One or more of these criteria must be met in order for a property to qualify for designation as an individual landmark or district to be placed in the St. Petersburg Register. The nine criteria are based on the National Park Service’s criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and are designed to assess resources’ importance in a given historic context with objectivity and comprehensiveness.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes			

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Polish American Society Club building is significant at the local level in the areas of Community Planning and Development, Social History, Ethnic Heritage, Entertainment/Recreation, and Architecture.

It meets the following criteria for designation of a property found in Section 16.30.070.025(d) of the City of St. Petersburg Code:

A) Its value is a significant reminder of the cultural or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.

D) It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the City, state, or nation.

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E) Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance.

F) It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.

Criteria A

Community Planning and Development

The Polish American Society is significant at the local level in the area of Community Planning and Development as an example of the important role ethnic organizations played in the social, cultural, and political development of St Petersburg after World War II.

The Polish American Society was built during the post World War II period of tremendous growth in St. Petersburg. At this time the number of residents arriving from Northern and Midwestern cities with traditionally large and tight knit ethnic communities grew tremendously. The Polish American Society provided a familiar place for these newcomers to gather and socialize. Ethnic social clubs such as the Polish American Society fostered ethnic pride and identity and attracted larger memberships by sponsoring adult and youth cultural programs that celebrated ethnic history, language, literature, theater, music, dance, and sport. Ethnic clubs allowed St Petersburg's residents to assert both spiritual and cultural ties to their old home and a sense of belonging to their new one.

At one time St Petersburg had numerous ethnic social and fraternal clubs, but the makeup and associations of these organizations has gradually transformed over the twentieth century from first, to second, to third-generation Americans as their members not only assimilated to life in America but life in their new tropical home. Over the years, many organizations did not survive such changes in membership and have disbanded with their meeting halls repurposed or demolished.

The Polish American Society is still operating as originally intended and is a significant tangible reminder of the importance of ethnic social clubs in St Petersburg.

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Entertainment and Recreation

The Polish American Society is significant at the local level in the area of Entertainment/Recreation as an example of the once plentiful social halls which contributed to the social development of St. Petersburg. For over sixty years, the Polish American Society has provided facilities for recreation, entertainment and the celebration of special events within the Polish community of St. Petersburg. The meeting hall provides several functions within the building providing a meeting place for community groups, a bar for socialization, and a large floating dance floor has served to strengthen the sense of community identity in St. Petersburg.

Ethnic Heritage/European

Throughout its history St Petersburg has not had a large foreign born population, the number of ethnic heritage social clubs was significant. Many of these clubs were social in nature, providing networking, camaraderie, food, music and dancing. The Polish American Society is one of the few clubs remaining with a meeting hall and an active social calendar. The construction and continued existence of the club is testament to the strength of the Polish community in St Pete. By providing a meeting place for the Polish community, the Polish American Society has served to strengthen the sense of community identity in St Pete.

Social History

The Polish American Society club building is significant at the local level in the area of Social History, as an example of the desire for new residents of St Petersburg to create social support networks by forming clubs. Many who arrived in St Petersburg after WWII, came here to retire and enjoy the easy life. In order to enjoy the easy life in Florida, new arrivals and winter residents had to give up the strong kinship and cultural ties in their hometown. The creation of clubs, such as the Polish American Society, allowed St Petersburg's newest arrivals to recreate the communities they left behind and the things they enjoyed such as the food, language and customs.

Criteria D, E, F

Architecture

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The Polish American Society is significant in the area of architecture as an example of the functional structures built in middle of the 20th Century designed by one of the most prolific 20th Century architects in St Petersburg

It meets the following criteria for designation of a property found in Section 16.30.070.025(d) of the City of St. Petersburg Code:

D) It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the City, state, or nation;

E) Its value as a building is recognized for the quality of its architecture, and it retains sufficient elements showing its architectural significance; and

F) It has distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials;

Criteria E and F

The Polish American Society is a unique example of the use of the pre-engineered structural bent in St Petersburg. The unique construction technique, often associated with Mid-Century Modern architecture, was a creative solution to allow for a clear span interior unobstructed by columns. The structural bent was first prominently used by John Lautner in his 1957 Mauer House and later by Wayne McAllister for the drive-in canopy of Bob's Big Boy, Toluca Lake. The tapered forms with their clean angled lines and open space, ultimately became a shorthand to announce modernity.

Criteria D

The architect of the Polish American Society club building, Joseph H. Messineo was a prolific designer in Pinellas County in the middle of the last century. Messineo was primarily known for his ecclesiastical architecture. Messineo came to St Petersburg in 1948, at the age of 49, after a full career in Garfield, New Jersey. He received his education at the Pratt Institute and Yale University. He was a prolific designer of ecclesiastical and municipal buildings. His most prominent ecclesiastical commissions include: St Luke's United Methodist Church, Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, 5th Avenue Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church of Gulfport, Seminole United Methodist Church, Redeemer Lutheran Church, and the church school building of Allendale Methodist Church. His most significant municipal commissions include: Roberts

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Youth Center, Northwest Youth Center and "Nego" youth center at Wildwood Park for which he donated a proportion of his services in order to encourage the City to proceed with the project (SPT, 20 Jan 1960 p13). Messineo was also responsible for the design of the Phillippe Park Amphitheater where the *Florida Afire* outdoor pageant took place and the Orkin building in St Petersburg.



Messineo designed Orkin Building

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Appendix B
Maps of Subject Property

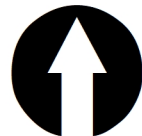


Community Planning and Preservation Commission

1343 Beach Dr. SE

**AREA TO BE APPROVED,
SHOWN IN** 

**Polish American Society
of St. Petersburg**



N

SCALE:
1" = 210'



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