

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received JUL 19 1979

date entered

SEP 14 1979

## 1. Name

historic Tarpon Inn

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number 200 E. Cotter St. \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Port Aransas \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 14

state Texas code 048 county Nueces code 355

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name James H. Atwill, Gordon E. Wise

street & number P.O. Box 8

city, town Port Aransas \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Texas 78373

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Nueces County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Corpus Christi, Texas state

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date July, 1976  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Texas Historical Commission

city, town Austin, Texas state



## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Tarpon Inn is a simple two-story frame structure accented by a double veranda. Vertical and horizontal elements are pleasantly proportioned, square columns balancing a long unbroken roofline. Originally all white, now only the 6/6 windows and door frames are trimmed in white; the majority of the building is painted blue.

In 1886, Frank Stephenson purchased material from a Civil War barracks building which housed the work crew for the Mansfield jetty. The lumber was used to construct the original Tarpon Inn. That building was destroyed by fire in 1900. Two new buildings were erected in its place only to be ravaged by the 1919 hurricane and a resultant fifteen foot tidal wave. The larger building was completely lost to the storm, but the smaller one was reparable and continued to be used as a hotel until 1926. One year earlier, the Tarpon Inn now standing was built at the present location on Cotter Street. The smaller building was placed behind the new larger structure, becoming the diningroom. The diningroom was a two-story structure crowned with a cupola until 1958, when a fire reduced its dimensions to one story. A gabled roof now covers the building.

Retention of the "barracks" style, when the Tarpon was rebuilt, marks a response to the climactic conditions of Port Aransas. The design was functional and rugged. A northeast orientation captures the constant Gulf breeze, cooling the twenty-six rooms opening onto the northeastern gallery. A hip roof of shingle composition overhangs the galleries, providing shade. The building has been "hurricane proofed" by sinking a telephone pole in the core of each square pillar. The poles are anchored to the roof and sunk into twenty feet of concrete. The corners of each room have pilings sunk into sixteen feet of concrete. Wooden clapboard walls are of double and triple thickness.

Two chimneys have been removed. In 1956, the structure underwent modernization with the installation of private baths and air conditioning. At that time, the front veranda was also remodeled. It was again repaired in 1975.

Tarpon Inn continues to serve as a popular hotel. The owners are investigating restoration possibilities.



## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1886/1900/1919/1925 **Builder/Architect** Frank Stephenson, James M. Ellis

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Tarpon Inn at Port Aransas has been a landmark, in various forms, for close to a century, hosting vacationers from all over the world, including many distinguished public figures. Its architectural style is typical of many structures built along the Texas Gulf Coast, and reflects skillful adaptation to the harsh climate. Having proved its worth, the "barracks" style is basically unchanged. Sound construction makes the Tarpon Inn one of the few large structures of this type to remain on the coast.

During the late 1800's, Port Aransas gained popularity as a sportsmen's paradise, thus encouraging the need for lodging. Tarpon Inn was constructed when Frank Stephenson obtained surplus lumber from a Civil War barracks, thus helping to establish the style. At this time, the only way to reach the Inn was by a sixteen mile boat ride. Stephenson owned the Inn until 1897, while he was assistant keeper of the Aransas lighthouse. It was then sold to a Mr. Hatfield, who had married the inn manager, Mrs. Mary Cotter. Until 1912, the settlement was known as Tarpon, taking its name from the Inn.

Following a 1900 fire, two new structures were built in 1904. Disaster hit again in 1919, when a hurricane severely damaged the larger structure. The rear building remained, although in poor repair. It served as the hotel until 1926. The property lessee, James M. Ellis, bought the Inn land in 1923 and reconstructed it in 1925 with the help of J. B. Earl of Waco. No architect was hired, but Ellis recalled the earlier barracks structure and rebuilt his Inn as closely as possible to the one on site in 1904.

Port Aransas became "the tarpon capital of the world." Its popularity peaked between 1920 and 1940. President Franklin D. Roosevelt came to Port Aransas to fish, his presidential yacht, the U.S.S. Potomac anchored at Harbor Island. Although Roosevelt was probably not an actual guest at the Inn, a scale from one of his catches is framed and displayed on an Inn wall. It is among 7,500 tarpon scales signed, dated, and mounted in the lobby. Sportsmen from all the United States and 21 foreign countries are represented.

Other notable guests at the Tarpon Inn included evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, Secretary of Commerce Jesse Jones, aviator Douglas (Wrong Way) Corrigan, and animal trainer Clyde Beatty, who shared his room with his pet lion. Duncan Hines recommended the Inn's restaurant and borrowed several recipes.

After World War II, tarpon practically deserted this section of the coast. With fishing's decline, the Inn eventually fell into disrepair and changed hands several times. It continued to serve, however, as occasional headquarters for the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, and military units. In 1975, major repairs were undertaken. Tarpon Inn again functions as a popular hotel and restaurant.

Tarpon Inn is a suitable complement to the nearby Aransas Pass Light Station, listed on the National Register. Together these structures form the major component of the area's unadorned but locally significant architectural landscape and reflect the importance the Gulf Coast has taken in all the town's activities.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Harwood, Miller, W.A. Scrivner, Fabulous Port Aransas  
 Kuehne, Cyril M., Hurricane Junction; a history of Port Aransas, 1973.  
 Skipper, C.W., "The 'in' inn", Houston Post, Aug. 29, 1971.  
 Interview with James Atwill June 28, 1979.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property less than one  
 Port Aransas  
 Quadrangle name Port Aransas Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>6</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u>	<u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>	B					
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing		
C				D					
E				F					
G				H					

### Verbal boundary description and justification

All of lots 8, 9, 10, easterly 20 feet of lots 2, 3, 4, all of block 3 of J. Cotter subdivision, survey 4 as shown by map v. 1, p. 7 of Nueces County records. (Survey map on file at THC). Includes hotel and restaurant building and immediate environs.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alison Beck, Library Assistant  
 organization Barker Texas History Center date June 28, 1979  
 street & number UT Austin telephone 512-471-5961  
 city or town Austin state Texas

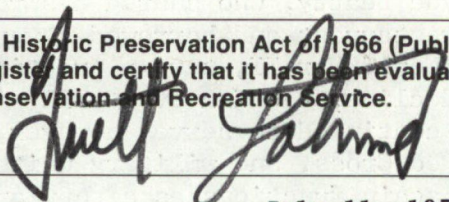
# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

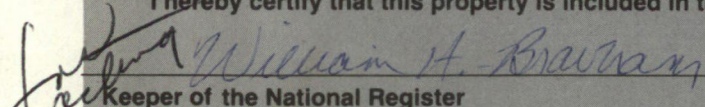


title State Historic Preservation Officer

date July 11, 1979

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
 Keeper of the National Register

date 9.14.79

Attest: Beth Braxton

date 9/13/79

Chief of Registration



Property Jaspon Inn  
State N. Mexico Working Number 7.19.79.1727

**TECHNICAL**

Photos 4  
Maps 1

**CONTROL**

*OK* *pl*  
*7.19.79*

Typical of many structures built along the TX Gulf Coast, but one of the few large structures of its type to remain. Built to withstand harsh climate. Site of hotel since c. 1886. This building ~~has~~ has hosted vacationers since 1925, including the area's peak period of popularity, 1930-1940.

**HISTORIAN**

*accept*  
*Grosvenor*  
*9/13/79*

**ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN**

**ARCHEOLOGIST**

**OTHER**

**HAER**

Inventory \_\_\_\_\_  
Review \_\_\_\_\_

**REVIEW UNIT CHIEF**

*accept*  
*9/13/79*  
*Grosvenor*

**BRANCH CHIEF**

**KEEPER**

*accept*  
*Bracham*  
*9.14.79*

National Register Write-up \_\_\_\_\_ Send-back \_\_\_\_\_ Entered SEP 14 1979  
Federal Register Entry 10-2-79 Re-submit \_\_\_\_\_





TARPON INN

Gildersleeve



Tarpon Inn  
200 E. Cotter Street  
Port Aransas, Nueces County, Texas

Photo by Gildersleeve, Waco. Courtesy  
of Tarpon Inn.

Date unknown

Photo #1 *44*

*roe*  
SEP 14 1979

JUL 19 1979







Tarpon Inn  
200 E. Cotter St.  
Port Aransas, Nueces County, Texas

Photo by Mike Yancey, Texas Historical  
Commission, 1976

Northwest oblique

Photo #2 *74*

JUL 19 1979

*008*  
SEP 14 1979







Tarpon Inn  
200 E. Cotter St.  
Port Aransas, Nueces County, Texas

Photo by Mike Yancey, Texas Historical  
Commission, 1976

Northeast oblique

Photo #344

SEP 14 1979

JUL 19 1979

DOE







Tarpon Inn  
200 E. Cotter Street  
Port Aransas, Nueces County, Texas

Photo by Mike Yancey, Texas Historical  
Commission, 1976

Southeast oblique

Photo #4 *4/4*

JUL 19 1979

*oie*  
SEP 14 1979





Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA,

Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1967. Field checked 1968. Supersedes map dated 1954.

Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS chart 523 (1969). This information is not intended for navigational purposes.

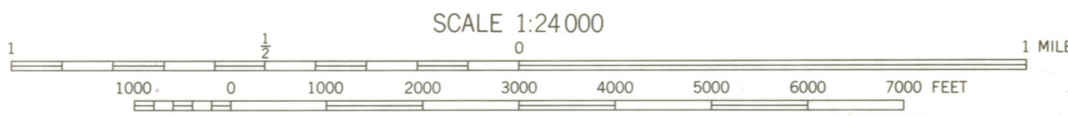
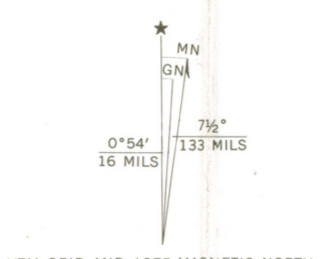
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum.

10,000-foot grids based on Texas coordinate system, south and south central zones.

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue.

Water stages in this area vary with meteorological conditions. Approximate limits of occasional inundation shown by dashed blue lines where mean high water is undetermined for lack of visual evidence. Dotted blue lines indicate the approximate limits of low water.

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1975. This information not field checked.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS NEGLIGIBLE

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Secondary highway, all weather, Light-duty road, all weather, hard surface, improved surface  
Unimproved road, fair or dry weather  
State Route



PORT ARANSAS, TEX.  
SE/4 ARANSAS PASS 15' QUADRANGLE  
N2745—W9700/7.5

1968  
PHOTOREVISED 1975  
AMS 6539 1 SE—SERIES V882

279-441





Tarpon Inn

7/31/79

P. O. BOX 8 • 78373  
PORT ARANSAS, TEXAS

(512) 749-5555

August 15, 1979

*Neces Co.*

(JX)

Dr. William J. Murtagh  
Keeper of the National Register  
Heritage, Conservation & Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Pension Building  
440 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20243

Re: H32-NR

Dear Dr. Murtagh:

We are pleased to respond to your letter of July 24, 1979, concerning our nomination for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Probably the single most important factor for including the Tarpon Inn in the National Register is that it has remained a touchstone for generations of visitors to this area. Grandparents, parents and children of the same family all have memories of their fishing or hunting stories of years past at the Tarpon Inn. Being the oldest building on the tip of Mustang Island, Tarpon Inn has been the center of activity since its inception in 1886. The following is a brief description of Port Aransas and the history of the Tarpon Inn as prepared by Mr. and Mrs. William R. Ellis in the 1960's as a part of their promotional material.

"The fame of Port Aransas as a fishing resort dates back to the early 19th Century, when sportsmen became aware that the best tarpon fishing extant was to be found here. Over a period of time the town had various names -- Star, Tarpon, and The Pass -- until Port Aransas became its accepted name.

"In 1886, material from Civil War barracks was used to construct the first TARPON INN, which was opened and operated by Mrs. Mary Hatfield and her son, Ed Cotter. That building was destroyed by fire in 1900. Two new buildings were then erected. In 1919, a hurricane destroyed the larger building and damaged the smaller, which was repaired and continued in use as a hotel.

"In 1925, Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Ellis purchased the old building and land. With financial assistance from sportsmen guests, headed by the late J.B. Earle of Waco, the pres-



Dr. William J. Murtagh  
August 15, 1979  
Page 2

ent main building was erected and the former hotel converted into a dining room. Early in 1956 rooms in the main building were completely modernized. All rooms have private baths and comfortable beds. Enjoying an international reputation, Tarpon Inn has been famous for its meals since 1886.

"Famous sportsmen, doctors, politicians, and notables from all professions are yearly visitors at TARPON INN, for here they can discard their coats and ties, and enjoy a real vacation without formality, planned programs or curiosity seekers harassing them on their well earned vacations.

"A fascinating and unusual feature of TARPON INN is found in the lobby, where the walls are literally covered with scales from tarpon caught by guests -- each scale bearing the autograph of the lucky angler who caught the tarpon. There are some 7,500 scales, carrying names from every state in the nation, as well as twenty-one foreign countries. Among the names you'll find those of Franklin D. Roosevelt; C.F. Urschel, San Antonio, Texas; Dr. R.L. Sutton, Kansas City, Mo.; N.F. Ozburn, Memphis, Tenn.; Aimee Semple McPherson, Los Angeles, Cal.; Durward Kirby, New York City; Hon. Tom Connally, Marlin, Texas; E.F. Ball (Ball Mason jars), Muncie, Ind.; H.L. Parker, Bremen, Germany; C.B. Thompson, Shanghai, China; L.B. Orrell, Le Havre, France; P.A. Gibbon, Palembang, Sumatra; Ted Donaldson, London, England; and Pauline Falkiner, Warren, N.S.W., Australia, as well as various college presidents; governors, financiers and just plain fishermen. The only requirement for putting up a scale is that you must catch the fish yourself."

Port Aransas became a haven for sport fishermen who came from all over the state of Texas as well as every state of the union. Being the only place on the island to house visitors in those times, it naturally developed quite a reputation. The Tarpon Inn had the island's second telephone, with the first being acquired by the Coast Guard to Aransas Pass. With the advent of indoor plumbing the Tarpon Inn installed their own water system and used a windmill in the dunes a half-mile east of the Inn and ran a pipeline to its cedar cistern. All the fishing guides had flags of their own shape and color which were kept in the Tarpon Inn in the flag box. When a customer arrived and asked for particular guide, his flag would be hoisted atop the Inn, signaling that business awaited him at the Tarpon. Sometimes as many as three or four flags were flying at once.



Dr. William J. Murtagh  
August 15, 1979  
Page 3

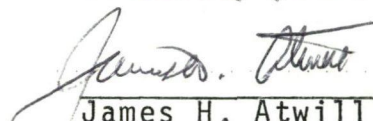
Not only was fishing for tarpon a main attraction, but duck hunting filled out the winter months of sports activity in the nearby bays and ponds on the back of Mustang Island and Saint Joseph Island. Mr. Bill Ellis, owner of the Inn up until 1970, recalls how the earlier duck hunters would arise at 4:30 in the morning, proceed down the wide porches to the shower at the end of the building, take a cold shower (as there was no hot water then), return to dress and then down to the restaurant for a substantial breakfast and finally to get aboard a small skiff to partake in the day's hunt.

The structure itself is an amazing creation of native engineering. Pilings were driven 16 feet into the ground and extended all the way up into the attic of the two-story building. Even today, looking down the top of the pilings in the attic, which are pointed almost as fine as toothpicks, one can see that the alignment is indeed amazing. Contractors today have difficulty in alginig pilings at the ground, much less two stories above. It was quite a feat to establish this type of construction in 1925. The wood in the attic reveals yellow heart pine which still looks as fresh as the day it was put into place. In the 1930's the east end of the Inn was added to include four new rooms. On the west end, a wing was added which included the lobby and a small apartment on the first floor, and an owner's apartment on the second floor.

Although the Inn is operating on a fulltime basis, it is imperative that immediate work be started to combat the harsh effects of wind, water, humidity and everpresent termites. We believe the above information shows that the Tarpon Inn has been associated with lives of persons significant in our past, that it employed a method of construction which has proven successful and probably should be implemented in all Gulf coast construction, and has been an integral part of the development and recreation of the Port Aransas area.

We will answer any further inquiries you might have in connection with this nomination.

Sincerely yours,

  
James H. Atwill

  
Gordon E. Wise



THE NATIONAL ... PLACES

**AUG 21 1979**

DATE REC'D \_\_\_\_\_

RESPONSE (ATTACHED) \_\_\_\_\_

TEXT SENT \_\_\_\_\_

CALL (ATTACHED) \_\_\_\_\_

DATE ACTION TAKEN \_\_\_\_\_

INITIALS LA 8-23

ADDITIONAL ...

... and ...

... and ...

... and ...

1979 2  
 AUG 21 1979



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# TELEPHONE REPORT

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OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

---

PROJECT: *Tarpm Inn*

---

TO/FROM: *Lissa Anderson*

DATE: *9/13/79*

---

ADDRESS: *TX / SHPO staff*

PHONE: *512-475-3094*

---

STAFF MEMBER: *Beth*

DIVISION:

---

REPORT:

*The building was "hurricane-proofed" as part of the original construction in 1925.*

*The "major repairs" of 1975 include repair of worn boards, repairs to the porch and steps, plumbing and electrical work, repair to the interior walls, painting, and remodeling of the interior of the front entry.*

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ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE TEXAS

Date Entered SEP 14 1979

Name

Location

Tarpon Inn

Port Aransas  
Nueces County

Also Notified

Honorable Lloyd M. Bentsen

Honorable John G. Tower  
Honorable Joseph P. Wyatt

State Historic Preservation Officer  
Mr. Truett Latimer  
Executive Director  
Texas State Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276, Capitol Station  
Austin, Texas 78711

NR Byers/bjr 9/21/79

For further information, please call the National Register at (202) 343-6401.