

**REPORT OF THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES  
HISTORICAL RESOURCES & CULTURAL ARTS DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE DESIGNATION OF  
THE PROPERTY AT  
649 PALMARITO COURT  
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA  
AS A LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK**



1940s Photograph





LHD 2020-008  
December 16, 2020

**LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION**  
**of the property at**  
**649 PALMARITO COURT, CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA**

**Application:**

**August 27, 2020:** Historic significance request filed

**October 21, 2020:** Historic Preservation Board directed Staff to undertake a designation report

Historical Resources &  
Cultural Arts

2327 SALZEDO STREET  
CORAL GABLES  
FLORIDA 33134

☎ 305.460.5093  
✉ hist@coralgables.com

*Note: All observations regarding this property were from the public right-of-way.*

Folio Number: 03-4117-004-2211

Legal Description: Lots 18 and 19, Block 139, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Six, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 20, at Page 1, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Original Permit No/ Date: 6225 / May 1940

Original Architect: William Shanklin, Jr.

Original Builder & Owner: Batcheller Properties

Present Owner: Edmund J. Zaharewicz & Cecilia M. Danger

Present Use: Single-family residence

Building Style: Neoclassical

Site Characteristics: The 100' x 105' property is located on a corner lot on the northeast intersection of Palmarito Court and Palmarito Street one block north of University Drive.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Coral Gables was founded in the 1920s as a Mediterranean-inspired City and its buildings were initially designed almost exclusively in the Mediterranean Revival Style. In the late 1920s the economy plummeted and the building industry ground to a halt. When the construction of homes began again in the late 1930s people had adjusted to a new way of life and their priorities and aesthetic changed. This was reflected in all aspects of life including the types of homes that were built. In Coral Gables there was a concerted shift to following national home-building trends.

Sited on a prominent corner lot, the residence, built in 1940, is a noteworthy as an example of an early Coral Gables Neoclassical home. It retains a high degree of historic integrity and contributes to the historic fabric of the City. It was one of the earliest residences in this style in the City and represents an evolution from the Mediterranean Revival foundation and into a new chapter in City's architectural history. The home was designed by a well-established and Coral Gables-based team -- architect William Shanklin, Jr. and owner/builder George E. Batcheller. Building on his success in developing the Riviera Section, Batcheller significantly invested in building the Country Club Sections as a prominent area. With the Neoclassical Style, he chose to build in a style whose formality and importance suggested an upwardly mobile lifestyle.



## **CORAL GABLES REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES: Preserving the City's Story**

The built environment reflects the beliefs, values, creative expressions, and technical capacity at a place in time in history. Historic Preservation preserves those structures and spaces that tell the story of the community's historic past. The buildings that comprise the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places portray the City's story of progress, change and preservation. They are valuable, non-renewable resources that embody our collective heritage. The retention of these tangible touchstones provides a sense of community, a sense of evolution, a sense of identity, a sense of ownership, and a sense of place for the City of Coral Gables. In other words, these historic resources provide continuity and context; they are the foundation of the City's identity.

Coral Gables is a Certified Local Government (CLG) and as such must maintain a Register of Historic Places and abide by associated preservation standards. A local community works through a certification process --jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs)-- to become recognized as a Certified Local Government (CLG). Once certified the community gains access to benefits of the program and agrees to follow required Federal and State requirements.

The City of Coral Gables was certified in 1986 and was amongst the first cities in Florida to become a CLG. Hence, it is the task of Historic Preservation, and an obligation of Certified Local Governments, to identify and protect those resources that contribute to the story of the City over time. Furthermore, the City must abide by the federal regulations as put forth in The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, & Reconstructing Buildings.

### **CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANCE**

Article 3, Section 3-1103 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code--*Criteria for designation of historic landmarks or historic districts*--states that to qualify for designation as a local historic landmark individual properties must have significant character, interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state or nation.

The single-family residence at 649 Palmarito Court is eligible as a local historic landmark based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. ***For designation, a property must meet one (1) of the criteria outlined in the Code.*** As discussed below, 649 Palmarito Court meets the following **three (3)** criteria.

#### **Historical, Cultural significance**

- 4. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic or social trends of the community*

#### **Architectural significance**

- 1. Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural style*
- 2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction*

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

### Developmental and Architectural History

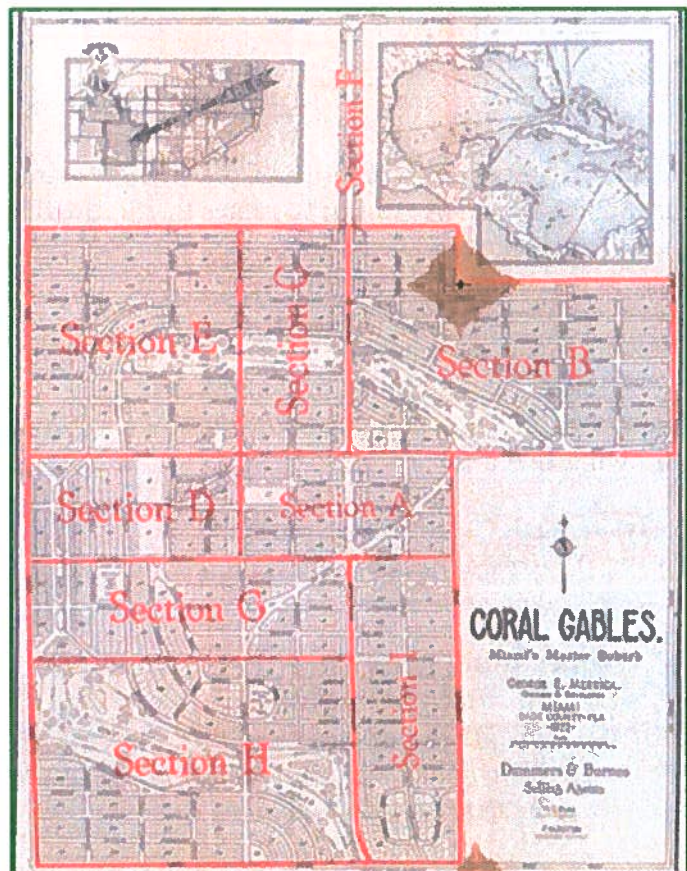
Coral Gables' developmental history is divided broadly into three major historical periods:

- Coral Gables' Initial Planning and Development/Florida Land Boom (Prior to the Hurricane of 1926),
- *Post-1926 Hurricane/Great Depression/New Deal/Wartime Activity (1927-1944)*,
- and Post World War II and Modern periods (1945-1963).

Coral Gables was originally conceived as a suburb of Miami and attracted investors from across the nation during the South Florida real estate boom of the 1920s. It is notable that the builder of this home, George E. Batcheller, with his partner financier Joseph Kresse are amongst those drawn to Coral Gables from New York. Founder George Merrick drew from the Garden City and City Beautiful movements of the 19th and early 20th century to create his vision for a fully-conceived Mediterranean-inspired city which is now considered one of the first modern planned communities in the United States. Advised by landscape architect Frank Button, artist Denman Fink, and architects H. George Fink, Walter De Garmo, H.H. Mundy, and Phineas Paist, Merrick converted 3000 acres of citrus plantation and native hammock into ornate plazas, grand entrances, small parks, monumental buildings, and tree-shaded streets. The goal was to create architectural splendor in a Spanish suburb with tropical luxuriance. The building of Coral Gables proceeded at a rapid pace until the Hurricane of 1926.

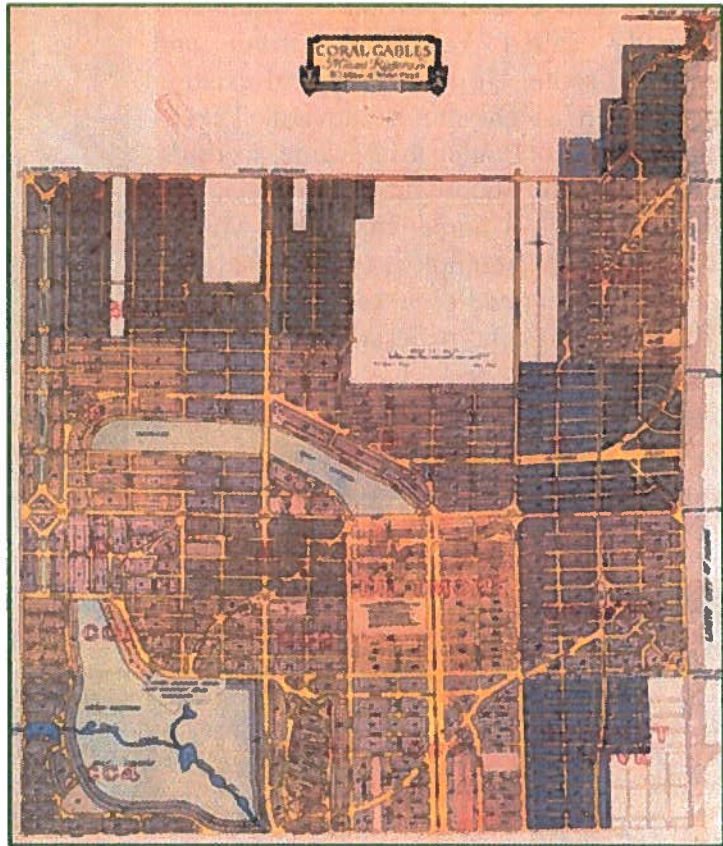
Nationally-acclaimed landscape architect Frank Button produced the first comprehensive map of what would become the City of Coral Gables in 1921. It was based on an infrastructure of the inherited grid of fruit trees from the Merrick family's citrus plantation. Laid carefully over the resulting grid of orthogonal streets (north-south) and avenues (east-west) are a series of diagonal and curved roadways. George Merrick envisioned a City with Old World style and purposefully set aside vast amounts of valuable land for plazas, boulevards, scenic spots, parkways and entrances. Merrick realized that automobile ownership was becoming increasingly commonplace and, as such, wanted Coral Gables to embrace the motorist without sacrificing the beauty of the community or the comfort of the residents. Thus, he implemented an intentional hierarchy of roadways.

**Figure 1: Coral Gables Map: "Miami's Master Suburb," 1922**



In Button's 1922 map one can clearly see the series of wide parkways with center planting medians that were major thoroughfares across the development as well as wide parkways with substantial swales for tree-planting that provided internal access and scenic routes. (Figure 1) The grid was opened up at strategic locations to include grand entrances, plazas and fountains in order to give focus to major arteries and vistas and to provide visual interest for both the pedestrian and the motorist. Broad boulevards were curved around planned features that included vast park land, golf courses, monumental public and community buildings as well as other amenities.

**Figure 2: Coral Gables Map:  
"Miami Riviera: 40 Miles of Water  
Front" Northern Section, 1925**



Coral Gables' initial development was predominantly in the area of the Merrick family's Coral Gables Plantation (Section A). Lots in Sections A, B and C were offered for sale in 1921-2. Early construction was concentrated north of, and in the direct vicinity of, the Granada Golf Course. Small pockets of early construction occurred in other areas.

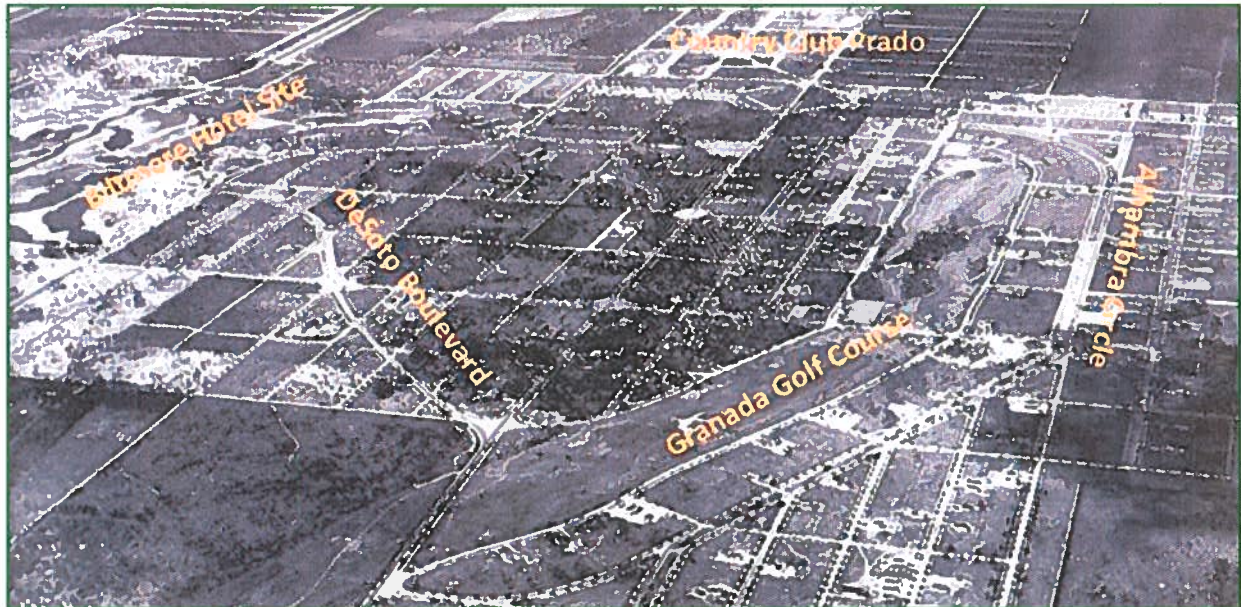
The use of Mediterranean designs, and specifically Spanish prototypes, was one of the featured selling points in early promotional materials. Merrick and his team felt that this type of architecture harmonized best with south Florida's climate and lifestyle. Careful attention was paid by his development team to ensure that the buildings and streetscape elements conformed to Mediterranean ideals. The architecture constructed during this initial period of development combined elements commonly used in Spanish, Moorish, and Italian architecture, and has come to be known as the Mediterranean Revival style. During the 1920s structures and amenities were built almost exclusively in accordance to this style.

In the mid-1920s plans for a premier hotel in Section H were announced. The associated golf course was expanded to become an 18-hole championship course designed by legendary golf course architect Donald Ross and renamed the Miami-Biltmore Golf Course. Sections G, H, and I, which were primarily undeveloped, were reworked to accommodate the large \$10 million Biltmore Hotel complex. These three sections were divided into six sections and renamed Country Club Sections Parts One through Six as well as a portion of the Biltmore Section. (Figure 2) The Biltmore Section was labelled as the "Heart of Coral Gables" and is where City Hall was later built. Button took this opportunity to add additional scenic boulevards which included Anastasia Avenue, Ocean Beach Drive (later renamed University Drive), and Segovia Street. He rerouted streets, including Alhambra Circle which eventually curved around the west side of the Miami-

Biltmore golf course (portion of which was originally called Ferdinand Drive) and continued south. He also fine-tuned existing streets such as DeSoto Boulevard. The S-shaped DeSoto Boulevard became a clearly defined scenic thoroughfare between the Granada Golf Course and the Miami-Biltmore Hotel complex, whose halfway point was celebrated by a traffic circle plaza with a magnificent pedestal-type fountain. (Figures 2 & 4)



**Figure 3: Miami-Biltmore Hotel & Golf Course, looking south, c.1926**  
**Note: Bird Road at north end of the golf course**



**Figure 4: Aerial Photo, Coral Gables, c.1925**

The home at 649 Palmarito Court is in Country Club Section Part Six of the City of Coral Gables, located one block north of the scenic boulevard University Drive on a prominent corner lot. The Country Club Section Part Six, as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, is located east of the Biltmore Golf Course. It is bounded by Anastasia Avenue, LeJuene Road, Bird Road, and Anderson Road and is bifurcated by the curving University Drive. There were only a handful of homes constructed in this section in the early 1920s. The emphasis on developing it as a prominent section coincided with the construction of the Biltmore complex. Notable undertakings during this initial development are the home at 711 University Drive at the northwest corner of the intersection of Palmarito Street and University Drive for George Merrick's sister Ethel and her husband Edwin Bishop (1925-6), the initial construction of the French Normandy Village (1926-7), and the Anastasia Hotel which started construction 1925 and was completed in 1926 by the University of Miami.



Unfortunately, Merrick's plans for this area were curtailed by the 1926 hurricane and were eventually abandoned as the building industry crashed along with the economy. In the aftermath of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the economy in Florida declined steeply. Between 1929 and 1933, one hundred forty-eight (148) state and national banks in Florida collapsed. By 1933, approximately one out of four Floridians was receiving some type of public relief and assistance. As the decade wore on, relief measures expanded under the direction of the New Deal administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. As people adjusted to a new way of life, their priorities and aesthetic changed. This was reflected in all aspects of life, including the types of homes built.

In Coral Gables the dire downturn in the economy, coming so closely on the heels of the devastating 1926 Hurricane, had a drastic impact on new construction. Not only did the number of new houses greatly decrease but the types and style of the homes also changed. For example, the dollar value of permits issued in 1926 was \$13,402,012. Permits steadily declined over the next few years plummeting to \$71,605 in 1931. Recovery was slow. By 1936 permit dollar values rose to approximately \$1,000,000 where it held steady for several years until 1942 when all efforts and materials were diverted to war endeavors and the domestic building industry ground to a halt. In this six-year period between 1936 and 1941 there were approximately seven hundred homes built in the City. Amongst them was the home at 649 Palmarito Court, built in 1940.

Historic structure surveys of Coral Gables (i.e., North Gables Section, Flagler Section) conducted by Janus Research indicate that the predominant architectural style in Coral Gables throughout the 1920s was Mediterranean Revival. It also indicated that when the construction of new homes began to rise in the late 1930s, there was a dominant shift towards Minimal Traditional, Neoclassical and masonry vernacular styles along with a few Art Moderne and early Traditional Custom Ranch houses. The construction of the single-family home at 649 Palmarito Court occurred during the New Deal era. It was amongst the first several hundred homes built as building began to resurge in the City. It is indicative of the type of architecture that emerged during this period as the City moved away from the Mediterranean Revival style and embraced contemporary styles that followed national trends.

The home at 649 Palmarito Court was built for and by George E. Batcheller who was a noted builder in Coral Gables. His partnership with New York financier Joseph Kresse in the mid-1920s initiated the development of the Riviera Section in the mid-1920s. Architects Robert Law Weed and R. A. Klingbeil designed over forty homes for them in this section. Several of these homes are currently part of the Italian Village Historic District. In 1928 Batcheller re-invested his earning from the sale of the homes in the Riviera Section in Coral Gables. He purchased fifty lots in the Country Club Sections to facilitate Merrick's vision in developing it as a prominent area. He built only a few homes before he was curtailed by the economy. In 1940 when Batcheller began to build in this section again he chose a lot on a prominent corner and engaged architect William Shanklin, Jr. (see Architect & Builder section below) to design the home in the Neoclassical style (see overview below). Shanklin moved to the Miami area in 1926 after earning his architecture degree from Cornell University and practiced with John Bullen and Walter DeGarmo – a member of Merrick's original design team. In 1935 Shanklin opened his own firm in Coral Gables. Between 1935 and his death in 1946 he designed approximately 100 single-family homes in Coral Gables.

The Neoclassical style first appeared in Coral Gables in the late 1930s and became popular in the City after World War II. Shanklin was well-versed in the Neoclassical style and produced some of

the earliest examples of the style in Coral Gables. In 1940 when he designed a home for his parents at 3402 Toledo Street it was in this style. There are currently two early examples of the Neoclassical style listed on the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places; both are listed as contributing structures in historic districts. Built in 1940, the home at 649 Palmarito Court is a significant example of an early Neoclassical style home in Coral Gables. It exemplifies the type of prominent home that was built during the New Deal era during which the City expanded from its Mediterranean Revival foundation and it aided in launching a new chapter in Coral Gables architectural history.

### **Single-Family Residence Context: Country Club Section Part Six**

Apart from the northeast corner, the Country Club Section Part Six was platted as a single-family residence neighborhood. The northeast corner was initially dedicated to the Anastasia Hotel which prior to completion was sold to the University of Miami. The site is now occupied by the City of Coral Gables Youth Center. A large triangular greenspace at the intersection of University Drive, Riviera Drive and Segovia Street initially buffered the residential neighborhood from the Anastasia. The site is now occupied by the Coral Gables Library.



**Figure 5: Plat, Country Club Part Section 6**

As stated above only a handful of homes were built in this area prior to 1925-6 when it was re-platted to Country Club Section Parts One through Six. An attempt to develop this area as a prominent neighborhood adjacent to the Biltmore Golf Course began in earnest at this time. Builder George E. Batcheller was a noted contributor to this endeavor. The combination of the devastating Hurricane of 1926 and the Great Depression curtailed this effort and eventually ended Merrick's grand plans for completing his Mediterranean-inspired City.

With the implementation of the New Deal and other incentives, the building industry throughout the City resurged slightly in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During this period many homes were designed in contemporary styles launching a new chapter in Coral Gables' architectural history. The Country Club Section Part Six reflected this city-wide movement. The home at 649 Palmarito Court was designed in the Neoclassical style in 1940 and is amongst the earliest homes that ushered in a new era in the City. The use of the Neoclassical style for the home at 649 Palmarito Court aligns with the original intention of this section. Aerial photographs document that there was little contemporaneous construction in this area when the home at 649 Palmarito Court was built in 1940. (Figures 6)

The Post-War prosperity that followed these lean years created an optimism which reigned through the 1950s and 1960s and resulted in an unprecedented building boom. During this time the building of single-family homes in the City of Coral Gables followed national trends both in numbers and

in style. As is evident in the aerial photos in Figures 6 the area in the immediate vicinity of the home at 649 Palmarito Court was built out during this boom. The area has to date retained its context as a single-family home neighborhood.



**Figures 6: Aerial Photographs – 649 Palmarito Court indicated in red  
1948 [top left]; 1957 [top right]; Current Context [bottom]**

*Courtesy of Aerial Photography: Florida Collection, University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries  
Courtesy of Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser*

### **Neoclassical Style (1895-1955): Historical Overview**

Single-family homes are, to a great degree, a distinctly American phenomenon. No other country in the world has invested so much time, money, and energy in designing, building, and living in individual homes. During the twentieth century home ownership became synonymous with the American Dream.

In Coral Gables, when home-building began to regain its footing in the mid-1930s there was a distinct departure from the ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean Revival style that had dominated the City's landscape since its inception. The trend moved to contemporary, nationally popular styles -- predominantly Neoclassical, Minimal Traditional and masonry vernacular.

Renowned architectural historian Virginia McAlester in her seminal publication [A Field Guide to American Houses](#) offers the following historical overview regarding the rise of the Neoclassical style (also known as Classical Eclecticism) in the United States:

“The revival of interest in classical models dates from the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. The exposition's planners mandated a classical theme, and many of the best-known architects of the day designed dramatic colonnaded buildings arranged around a central court. The exposition was widely photographed, reported and attended; soon the Neoclassical models became the lasting fashion throughout the country.

The central buildings of the exposition were of monumental scale and inspired countless public and commercial buildings in the following decades. The designs of smaller pavilions representing each state of the union were more nearly domestic in scale and in them can be seen the precedents for most Neoclassical houses. Those of Ohio, Utah, and South Dakota, for example, all had semi-circular, full-height entry porches. Nebraska and Kentucky were represented by more traditional full-height porches with triangular pediments. The Connecticut pavilion had a full-height porch with a lower full-width porch. All of these drew heavily on the country's previous interest in the Early Classical Revival and Greek Revival styles. Thus, Georgian, Federal, Early Classical Revival and Greek Revival traditions, which originally spanned a century and a half of the nation's early history, became fused into the eclectic Neoclassical style.”

The most common application of the style was for public and commercial buildings and for larger and/or more affluent domestic homes. The Neoclassical style was a dominant style for domestic architecture throughout the country for over five decades. It had two general waves of popularity. The initial phase of the style lasted from roughly 1900 until 1920 and emphasized hipped roofs and elaborate, but academically accurate, columns and orders. Between approximately 1920 to the 1950s, during the style's second phase, side-gabled roofs were introduced as well as simplified, slender columns.

### **Neoclassical Style: Hallmark and Character-Defining Features**

The dominant characteristic and driving force of Neoclassical design is proportion and symmetry. Neoclassical architecture includes simple geometric forms, symmetry, and balance with austere ornamentation drawn from the classical orders. At its inception in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century these stately homes presented a dramatic contrast to the Baroque and Rococo styles' elaborate ornamentation, asymmetry, curves, moldings, and serpentine lines. In Coral Gables it offered a similar contrast to the Mediterranean Revival style.

The style, with its uncluttered appearance and grandeur of scale, most often features full-height or full-façade front porches, elaborate front doors, massive columns with classical Corinthian, Doric, or Ionic capitals, and flat or low roof lines. Noted architectural historian Vincent Scully described domestic Neoclassical style homes as intending to be 'austere symbols of affluence;' their formality and importance seemed to suggest an upwardly mobile lifestyle,

Earliest examples of the styles prior to the 1920s typically have more ornate columns which are typically of the Ionic or Corinthian order. Typically, these columns supported a two-story or full-height porch. Doorways were generally elaborated with detailed, decorative surrounds based on Greek Revival, Federal, or Georgian models and featured elements such as pediments, pilasters, sidelights and fluted or paneled details. Post-1920s tended towards simpler and sleeker ornamentation; typically, in the Doric order

Hallmark and character-defining features are the visual and physical features that give a building its identity and distinctive character. McAlester identifies the following as distinctive hallmark features that when present are often indicative of the Neoclassical style:

1. Symmetrical purity and balance that reiterate the concepts of simplicity and order.
2. Tall classical columns that support a full-height front porch – usually an even number.
3. Elaborate doorways with pediments that serve as decorative touches.
4. Evenly spaced windows across the front facade and flanked by shutters.
5. Flat roofs with a center dome.

Other Neoclassical style character-defining features include:

- rectangular massing, most often is the form of a larger central mass flanked by symmetrical lower 'wings'
- a boxed eave with a moderate overhang, often with dentils or modillions
- wide frieze band
- windows: typically, rectangular sash in type; arched windows and windows with transoms also common; windows always have divided panes
- paired windows; lower window panel elongating the prominent front façade's first story windows
- prominent ornamentation emphasized and elaborated the porch, cornices, doorways and windows
- attached garage with side or rear entry as to not impair the symmetry of the front façade

As describe below, the home at 649 Palmarito Court was designed with four of hallmark features of the style as well as all the character-defining features typically associated with the style.

## **SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION**

*Note: All observations regarding this property was from the public right-of-way. There was no access to the property.*



**Figure 7: 649 Palmarito Court: Front (South) Façade, c.1940s**

The residence at 649 Palmarito, built in 1940, is significant as an example of a Neoclassical home. It was one of the earliest Neoclassical style residences in the City and represents a breaking away from the city's Mediterranean Revival foundation and the launching of a new chapter in Coral Gables architectural history. Over the past 80 years the home has had no marked modifications and hence, retains its architecturally-significant character.

In 1940, when this Neoclassical style home was built, the Country Club Sections were largely undeveloped. The single-family residence was designed for, and by, a well-established and Coral Gables-based team of architect William Shanklin, Jr. and owner/builder George E. Batcheller. Shanklin and Batcheller both arrived in Coral Gables in 1925 and both made significant and noteworthy contributions to the development and building fabric of the City of Coral Gables. Batcheller is credited with substantially developing the Riviera Section of Coral Gables, which included homes the Italian Village Historic District. In the late 1920s he purchased fifty lots in the Country Club Sections and began developing it in a manner consistent with Merrick's up-scale plans for the area. Unfortunately, the downturn of the economy halted these plans. The home at 649 Palmarito Court was the first of the homes he built as owner/builder when construction resurged.

Batcheller chose to resume the development of this area by building on a prominent corner in a style whose formality and importance suggested an upwardly mobile life-style. The Neoclassical style first appeared in Coral Gables in the late 1930s and became popular in the City after World War II. Shanklin was well-versed in the Neoclassical style and produced some of the earliest examples of the style in Coral Gables, including this home. The home was purchased by George and Minnie Simpson in 1940. It remained with the Simpsons for next forty-eight years. George was an attorney and Minnie Simpson was extremely active in the Daughters of the American

Revolution at both the local and state level. Both were leaders in the community (see below) and newspaper accounts reflect that the Simpson's frequently hosted events in their home.

The original permit (#6225) drawings for the residence were recorded in May 1940 for a two-story single-family home with an attached garage. (Attachment A: Permit #6225 / May 1940) The home includes many prominent and defining features of a Neoclassical house. It clearly exhibits the hallmark character-defining elements that are distinctive to this style including:

- Symmetrical purity and balance that reiterate the concepts of simplicity and order;
- A dominant rounded portico comprised of an even number (4) of two-story slender classical columns supporting a flat roof with a molded entablature;
- Elaborate front doorway with fanlight with radiating muntins, sidelights, niches and molded framing;
- Evenly spaced windows across the front facade flanked by louvered shutters.

It also includes the following character-defining features: rectangular in the form of a larger central mass flanked by lower bays imparting an aesthetic symmetry; low-pitched roofs; smooth textured stucco; a large boxed eave with a moderate overhang and molded cornices; rectangular windows with divided panes; paired windows on front façade; brick ornamentation over the arched front doorway and on step risers of the rounded stoop further emphasizing the prominent front entry portico, as well as brick lintels on windows flanking the portico; molded cornices on one-story bays; planter box; an attached garage with side entry as to not impair the symmetry of the front façade; two-car garage with one large door; and roof porch railings.

As discussed below, this home retains a high degree of historic integrity. Thus, the property at 649 Palmarito Court contributes to the historic fabric of the City of Coral Gables and is part of the collection of quality residences that serves as a visible reminder of the history and the cultural heritage of the City.

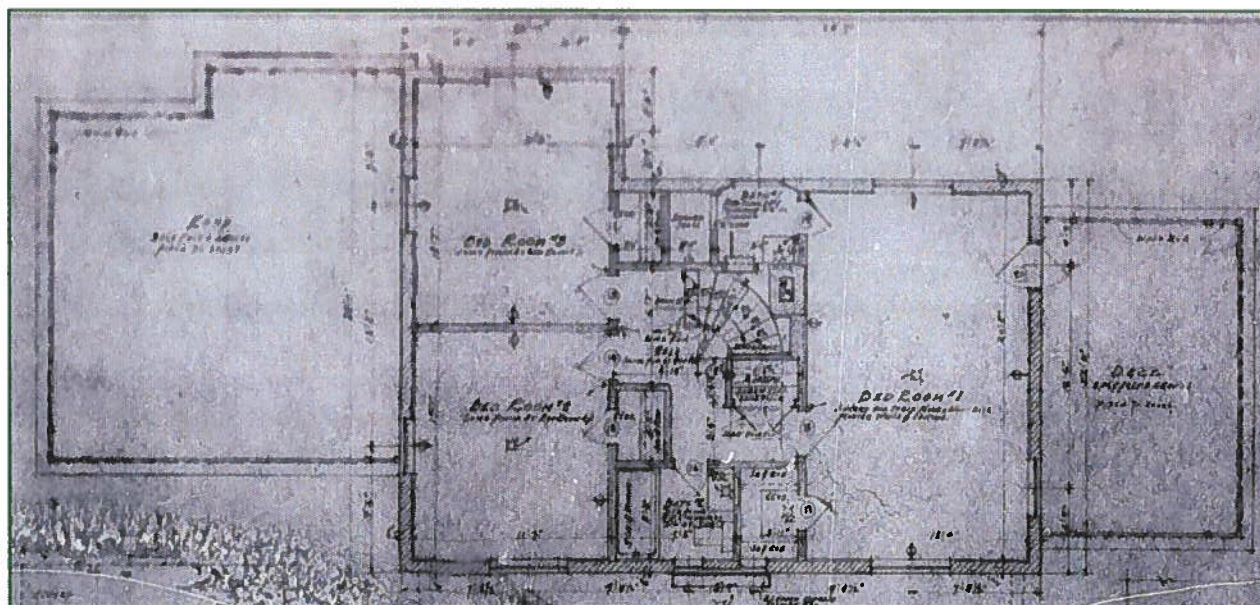
**Extant Exterior Description**



**Figures 8: 649 Palmarito Court, Front (South) Facade** *Courtesy of Google Earth*



The single-family residence sits on a 100' x 105' corner lot, one block north of University Drive, at the northeast intersection of Palmarito Court and Palmarito Street. (Figure 8, bottom) The front façade faces south onto Palmarito Court and sits approximately 40' from the sidewalk. The siting of the home is in keeping with Neoclassical Style buildings which are often positioned to offer full views of their stately front facades. The two-story residence is rectilinear in plan. According to the construction permit filed in May 1940, the building footprint is approximately 69'-9" x 33'-2". The home's massing presents as a central two-story core flanked by one-story bays. The central core is a truncated "L" in shape (Figures 9 & 12) and is under two roofs. The home was originally permitted as a three-bedroom home with an attached two-car garage as the west bay and a screened porch (now enclosed) as the east bay. The home is approached by a paver walkway leading from the sidewalk to two steps of the front portico stoop. The west-facing garage is accessed by a brick paver driveway from Palmarito Street. The rear and east side yard is enclosed by a metal picket perimeter fence.



**Figure 9: Permit 6225, 1940, Second Story Floor Plan**

The home, built over a crawl space, is of concrete block construction with a smooth stucco finish. The roofs over the two-story core are hipped and clad with flat tile. These roofs have moderate boxed eaves with a running molded cornice. The one-story bays have flat roofs with molded cornices and friezes. The roofs of the bays are utilized as decks and are encircled with a white metal capped picket railing. A squat chimney stack rises from the two-story core at approximately its mid-point. The recessed windows, originally steel casements, are currently awning in type with a muntin pattern that largely replicate the original window configurations. Original black louvered shutters with metal 'S' tie backs flank most of the windows on the front and side elevations.

The massing of the front façade is symmetrical with its central two-story core flanked by one-story bays that are setback from the core's front plane. The ornamentation and fenestration of the projecting central core are wholly symmetrical. It is also interesting to note that the original landscaping was also symmetrical and framing the front entry features. (Figure 7)



**Figures 10: Front Façade, 1940 [left], Current [right]  
Neoclassical two-story columned round portico and front door assembly**

The front façade is dominated by a Neoclassical two-story columned round portico and front door assembly at its center. The round, flat roof with a simple molded entablature is supported by four two-story, slender and stylized Tuscan columns. The entry porch and steps are likewise rounded. The steps are faced with brick adding emphasis to the entry and balancing the rounded roof assembly. The front door is the focal point of the portico ensemble. The front door is framed by an elliptical fanlight with side lights. The assemblage has an elegant three-dimensionality that accentuates its elements and becomes the focal point of the front façade. The fanlight and the front door are recessed and framed by rounded moldings. The sidelights are comprised of narrow windows on its upper two-thirds that project out to the plane of the moldings and the lower one-third is solid and recessed to simulate niches. The ensemble is further highlighted by a brick arch over the fanlight. The panel front door is currently painted red. The final element of the portico assembly is the second story window feature. It is comprised of two narrow windows that align with the sidelights below. A single planter box below the windows ties the windows together as single feature. This grouping provides balance to the elaborate front entry without detracting from it.

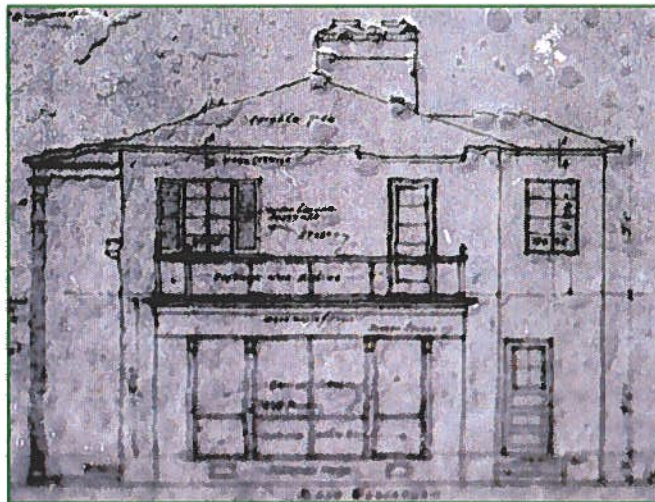
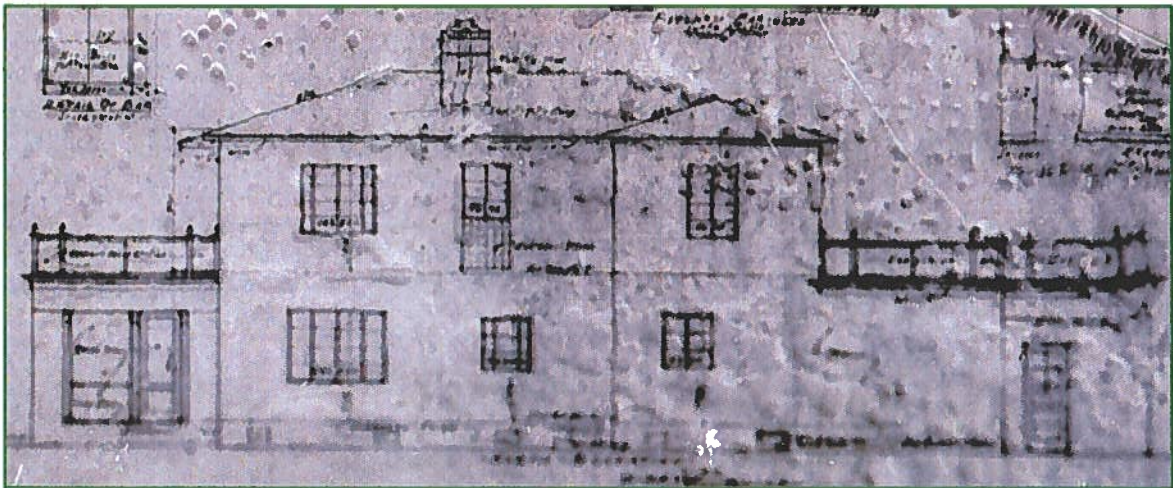
The portico ensemble is flanked and balanced by large windows on the first and second stories. The first story windows are slightly larger in height – they were originally configured with a narrow transom – and are accented with a brick lintel. The first story windows also have a ‘panel’ below the windows. The height of the shutters for these windows incorporates the panel and the window. (Figures 8 & 14) The windows are aligned both vertically and horizontally and complete the wholly symmetrical central core of the home.

The overall impression of the front façade is also one of symmetry with its two-story central core and flanking one-story bays. The bays however are different in size, placement, and fenestration. The east bay was originally a screened porch. The large openings have been retained and the screens replaced with awning windows. (Figures 12) The west bay is substantially larger than the east bay but is set back further from the front plane of the home than the east bay. It has one centrally-located single window. This arrangement helps visually balance the façade.

The west bay houses a two-car side-facing garage with a single large garage door. These are all hallmarks of later Neoclassical style homes. Likewise, as is typical of Neoclassical homes, the windows on the side elevations that are visible from the front-facing street have shutters. Other than the molded cornices (and the previous roof deck railings) there is no additional ornamentation on the side and rear facades. (Figures 11 & 12)



**Figures 11: 649 Palmarito Court**  
**West Façade, Southwest Corner [top]; Northwest corner of Property [bottom]**  
*Courtesy of Google Earth*



**Figures 12: Rear (North) and Side (East) Facades  
Current Photo [top]**

*Courtesy of historic significance application*

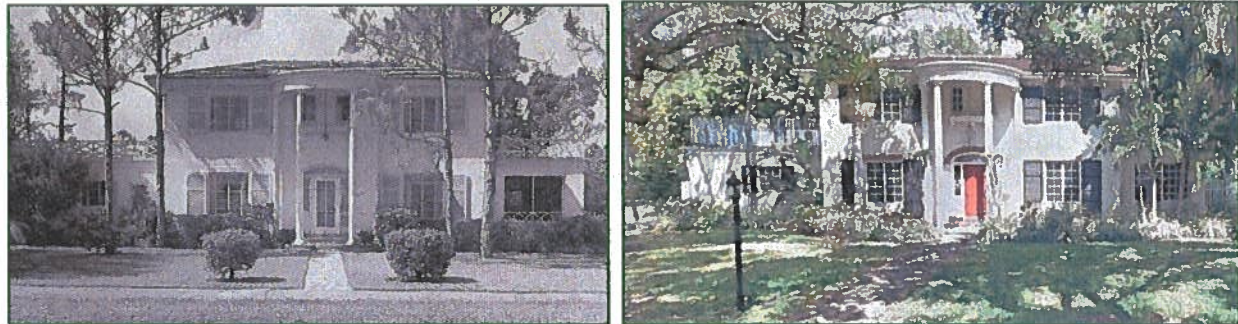
**Rear Façade, Permit 6225, 1940 [center]**

**East Façade, Permit 6225, 1940 [bottom]**

*Note: permit plans from damaged microfilm*

**Additions / Alterations**

From a comparison of historic photographs and the original architectural plans with the extant home as well as an examination of building permits and records it is determined that the home has retained a high degree of historic integrity over the past eighty years. (Figures 13)



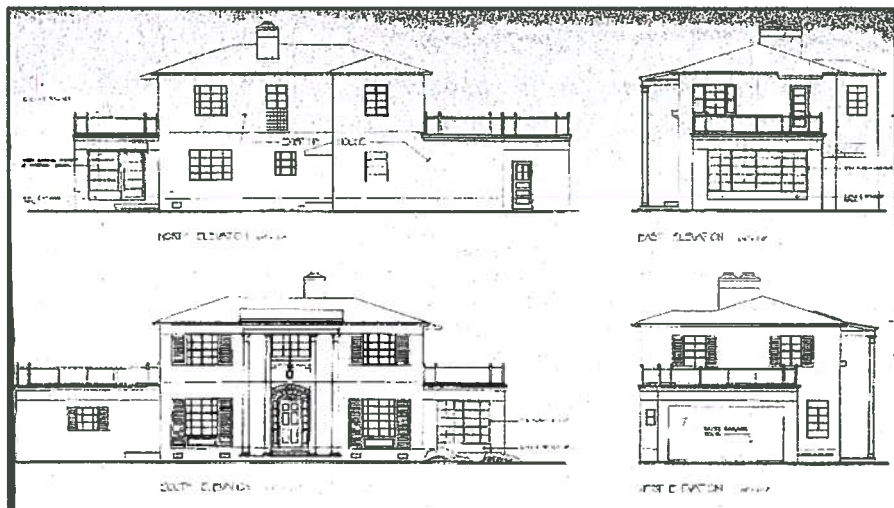
**Figures 13: Front (South) Elevation  
Historic Photo c.1940 [right]; Current Photo [left]**

The home has retained its massing and most of its character-defining features. There have been no additions to the home. All notable exterior alterations occurred in 1988 when the home was purchased by Nostalgic Homes who ‘renovated’ it and sold the property a year later.

The most dominant alteration was the replacement of the original twenty-five steel casement windows for awning windows in 1988. The building permit states that all windows will be placed “in existing openings.” The muntin patterns of the replacement windows largely replicate the original window configurations. A notable exception are the pair of large first story windows flanking the front door. The transom configuration was not retained.

The screened porch at the east bay was also enclosed with awning windows in 1988. As indicated Permit #70065 drawings (Figure 14), the bottom of the openings were infilled several inches to accommodate windows smaller in height than the openings.

In 1988 the front and garage doors were also replaced. A brick patio to the rear of the house was installed. Central HVAC was introduced into the home in 1968 and replaced in 2004. The hipped roofs were retiled in 1978 and in 2008 with the color change occurring in 2008. The rear yard fence was installed in 2004. The driveway and front walkway were replaced with pavers in 2009.

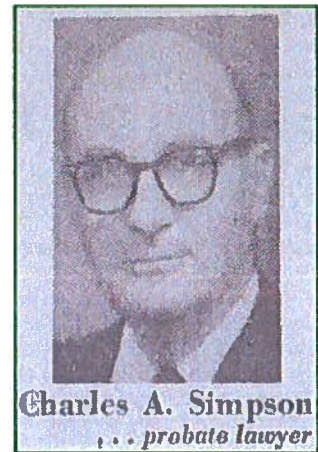


**Figure 14: Permit #70065, 1988; H. Carlton Decker & Associates  
Note: reduction of west bay screen porch openings with infill at bottom**

## Ownership History

The single-family home at 649 Palmarito Court has had five resident owners. The home was built in 1940 by owner and builder Batcheller Properties. (see below) The permit was issued in May. Building permits indicate that by September 1940 the property had been sold and new owners George and Minnie Simpson were in residence. It was the Simpson's home for the next forty-eight years.

George and Minnie Simpson were both very active in the Coral Gables community. George C. Simpson (1894-1970) and Minnie Talbott Simpson (1898-1987) both hailed from Georgia. Shortly after graduating from Mercer University George was elected the mayor of Talbotton, Georgia at the age of 27. George and Minnie moved to the Miami area in 1923. George, an attorney, initially practiced with the firm Hudson & Cason before opening his own firm in 1930. George served as president of the Miami Civitan Club, the Vice President of the Riviera Country Club, nominated as Commander of the Harvey Seeds Post, American Legion, and selected as a Governor's Colonel under Governor Fuller Warren. He died in 1970 at the age of 76.



Minnie Wolcott Simpson was a direct descendant of "Oliver Wolcott" one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence. Minnie was extremely active in the Daughters of the American Revolution at both the local and state level and became the Regent of DAR Everglades Chapter in 1940. Newspaper accounts indicate she often hosted DAR events at her home at 649 Palmarito Court. She was an avid supporter and fund-raiser for the DAR Museum in Washington, DC. She also volunteered for Daughters of Founders and Patriots. Other civic involvement included: Coral Gables Garden Club (president 1938-1940); Coral Gables Women's Club; Ladies of the Civitan Club; University Baptist Church (officer); and ardent supporter of the Opera Guild of Greater Miami. She died in 1987 at the age of 89.



After Minnie's death the property was purchased in 1988 by Nostalgic Homes who 'renovated' the home and sold it in 1989 to Rosenda D. Diaz and Luisa Diaz. The Diaz's called 649 Palmarito Court home for nine year. The current owners, Edmund J. Zaharewicz and Cecilia M. Danger purchased the home in 2007.

**Figures 15:**  
**Miami Herald:**  
**George C. Simpson,**  
**1970 [top];**  
**Minnie Wolcott**  
**Simpson, 1946**  
**[bottom]**

### **List of Owners:**

1940	Batcheller Properties
1940-87	George C. Simpson & Minnie Wolcott Simpson
1987-88	Estate of Minnie W. Simpson, Lon M. Hudwall & Gustav E. Rott, co-reps
1988-89	Robert Eis & Rebecca Eis / Nostalgic Homes Inc. (Robert Eis, president)
1989-98	Rosenda D. Diaz & Luisa Diaz
1998-04	James M. Meyer & Norma Meyer
2004-07	Robert Ferguson & Magali Vigo
2007-Present	Edmund J. Zaharewicz & Cecilia M. Danger

## **Architect & Builder**

### **Architect: William Shanklin, Jr. (1903-1946)**

William Shanklin, Jr. lived and practiced architecture in the Greater Miami area for over twenty-one years. He was born in Cuevas, Mississippi and raised in Puerto Rico where his father was a civil engineer for South Puerto Rico Sugar Company. In 1923 Shanklin earned an architecture degree from Cornell University. Upon completion of an apprenticeship, in October 1925, he placed an ad in the Miami Herald which read: "Boston architect wants to associate with a man who will get work for him in Florida; fourth architect's commission to be paid." In February 1926 William Shanklin, Jr., architect was granted a license to conduct business at 245 Metropolitan Building in Miami. One of his earliest projects was The Canterbury, a Miami Beach multi-family building on Lincoln Road (1610 Euclid Road). Shanklin's engagement announcement in the February 9, 1927 Miami Herald edition stated he was "connected in business with John Bullen." His obituary further elaborated that in the late 1920s and early 1930s he was associated with the architecture firms of John Bullen as well as Walter DeGarmo. DeGarmo was a member of Merrick's original design team.

In 1935 William Shanklin, Jr. opened his own firm, William Shanklin Architects, in Coral Gables. Initially his office was located at 218 Alcazar Avenue and later at 121 Giralda Avenue. One of Shanklin's first commissions with his own firm was a single-family home, a detached garage and a chapel built of coral rock blocks on the grounds of 8021 Old Cutler Road for Garner Royce, the founder of Radiant Oil Company. The property was listed on the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places in 1994. Shanklin designed projects throughout the Greater Miami area but the core of his practice was in Coral Gables. It appears that he was particularly devoted to revitalizing Coral Gables. The projects ranged from single-family homes to commercial buildings, from multi-family residences to noteworthy filling stations. Between 1935 and his death in 1946 he filed nearly 200 building permits. Over half of those permits were for new single-family residences. Four of those homes are currently designated as individual historic landmarks in the City and another nine are contributing resources in historic districts. (see list below) Shanklin also has projects listed on the historic registers in Miami Beach and Miami Shores.

#### **Coral Gables Individual Historic Landmarks**

- 8021 Old Cutler Road – 1935
- 3603 Granada Boulevard – 1938
- 2320 Segovia Street – 1938
- 3615 Harlano Street – 1939

#### **Contributing Structure in a Coral Gables Historic District**

- 633 Alhambra Circle – 1937
- 2817 Alhambra Circle – 1937
- 1300 Coral Way – 1937
- 2200 Alhambra Circle – 1940
- 1125 Alhambra Circle – 1940
- 418 Alcazar Ave – 1940
- 1306 Castile Ave – 1940
- 4412 Santa Maria Street – 1941
- 819 N. Greenway Drive – 1946

### Builder: Batcheller Properties

George E. Batcheller (1888-1959) was the founder of a construction and design firm. Prior to 1928 the firm was named George E. Batcheller, Inc. In 1928 it restructured to include property acquisition and sales and was renamed Batcheller Properties. Batcheller is credited with substantially developing the Riviera Section of Coral Gables, which included homes in the Italian Village, and later aided in developing the Country Club Sections.

During the early 1920s Batcheller was a well-established builder and designer in Forest Hills, New York. It is worth noting that Forest Hills Gardens, which is in the New York City borough of Queens was one of the communities that George Merrick studied when developing his plan for Coral Gables. Forest Hills, designed by architect Grosvenor Atterbury and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. in 1909, was one of the earliest--and still considered one of the greatest--Garden City communities of this period. It purposefully demonstrated the latest ideas in town planning, housing, open space, and building construction.

In late 1925 George Merrick enticed Joseph Kresse, a real estate financier from Forest Hills, to invest in Coral Gables. Newspapers record that both Kresse and Batcheller vacationed in the Miami area frequently, in fact, the latter spent his honeymoon at the Hotel Urmev. Kresse initially committed to financing forty homes in Coral Gables. The homes would be in the previously undeveloped Riviera Section. He partnered with George E. Batcheller who would handle all construction and in some cases the design of these homes. Over half of these homes were designed by architect Robert Law Weed and most of the remaining homes were by A. L. Klingbeil. An article in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle dated January 2, 1926 described the initiation of this endeavor:

*Five weeks ago, part of the Riviera section of Coral Gables was an unbroken pine forest. Today it is crisscrossed with roads, and the great Riviera Drive has been cut through for blocks. Water, electricity and other utilities serve the section, and where pine trees once towered over coral ground there is now a maze of foundations, concrete frames and houses under roof. Among those who have taken part in this almost magic transformation are the 80 men engaged on construction of homes for Joseph Kresse of New York, under George E. Batcheller, Inc., his builder. Mr. Batcheller, who worked on residential construction in Forest Hills Gardens, L. I., arrived on the ground Oct. 19th.*

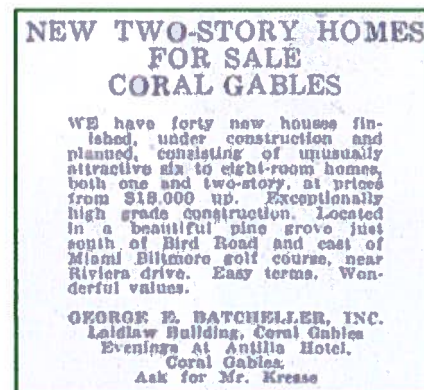


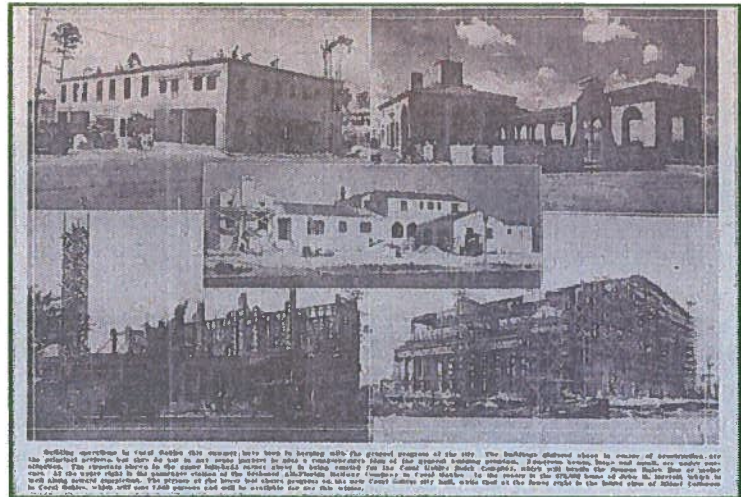
Figure 16: Advertisement,  
Miami Herald, February 6, 1926

A portion of this endeavor were homes for the Italian Village (608, 625, 629 Altara Avenue and 4400 Palmarito Street). A Miami News Article from April 1926 provides the following update:

*All the residences sound the mid-Mediterranean motif in architecture, with certain groups devoted to distinct types. Marked is the attention accorded Italian homes, which combine the best features of those residences which have contributed not a little in Italy's architectural glory. In designing these structures Mr. Batcheller has not permitted beauty to be obtained at the expense of utility, but rather has combined them. A distinctly novel home is to be erected by Mr. Batcheller at Palmarito Avenue and Monserrate Street. Treated in strictly Italian manner, it will stretch 100 feet from end to end, and will have the width of only one room. This innovation in construction will assure the maximum ventilation for every room, bringing into play all the advantages of a sleeping porch as well as the conveniences of a room.*



By all accounts the Kresse-Batcheller endeavor was highly successful. By August 1927 thirty-eight of the forty homes had sold for a total of over 1.1 million dollars. They also added at least twenty new commissions to their repertoire. To put this in perspective this occurred in the aftermath of the 1926 Hurricane and when the economy was plummeting. Their work was so successful that Merrick's Coral Gables Sales Association often hailed it in newspaper articles and sales literature. This included a full-page ad in June 1927 and the photo spread seen in Figure 17 where one of their homes was featured alongside City Hall and the Coliseum.



**Figure 17: Kresse-Batcheller home at center  
City Hall in lower left and the Coliseum in lower right  
Miami Herald, August 28, 1927**

In 1928 George E. Batcheller decided to reinvest in Coral Gables and replicate the Kresse-Batcheller success on his own. He purchased 50 lots on the north side of Bird Road just east of the Biltmore Golf Course throughout the Country Club Sections. Some properties sold immediately based on his work in the Riviera Section. He also began to build homes for sale which were almost exclusively designed by A. L. Klingbeil the architect of their homes in the Italian Village. It appears that he built on only a fraction of the lots in the late 1920s. In the early 1930s Batcheller sold a few of these lots but there is no record of any building permits.

As building in Coral Gables began to resurge in the mid-1930s, Batcheller was listed as the builder on a few projects including two homes designed by architect William Shanklin, Jr. in 1938 and 1939. In 1940, Batcheller filed his first building permit as owner/builder as he once again begins to develop his lots. A tax list posted in the Miami Herald on May 6, 1940 indicates that Batcheller still owned at least a dozen properties in the Country Club Sections. The home at 649 Palmarito Court, is the first of these properties that he develops as owner/builder. As was clearly his preference Batcheller chose an architect he had worked with before, William Shanklin, Jr. Over the next two years Shanklin designed at least six more projects for Batcheller before building was curtailed by the war.

George E. Batcheller and William Shanklin, Jr. both made significant and noteworthy contributions to the development and building fabric of the City of Coral Gables. That they joined forces in the early 1940s was not unsurprising. They were both professionally-based in Coral Gables and worked predominantly on projects in the City. They both tended towards higher end architectural styles. Both Shanklin and Batcheller designed properties in the City towards the end of its initial development and were both highly motivated to facilitate a building resurgence in the City, and hence, they were both instrumental launching new chapters in Coral Gables' architectural history. The home at 649 Palmarito Court is a prime example of their work and of their efforts to develop the Country Club Sections by building a distinctive home on a corner using the graceful Neoclassical Style.

## RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of historic designation within the City of Coral Gables is defined in Article 3, Section 3-1101 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code as,

*to promote the educational, cultural, and economic welfare of the public by preserving and protecting historic structures or sites, portions of structures, groups of structures, manmade or natural landscape elements, works of art, or integrated combinations thereof, which serve as visible reminders of the history and cultural heritage of the City, region, state or nation.*

It is the intent of the Coral Gables Zoning Code to recognize all buildings which possess “significant character, interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state or nation” qualify for designation as a local historic landmark (Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 3, Section 3-1103). To that end, the eligibility for designation as a local historic landmark is defined by the Coral Gables Zoning Code as meeting **one (1)** (or more) of the criteria stipulated in Article 3, Section 3-1103.

Constructed in 1940, the property at 649 Palmarito Court (legally described as Lots 18 and 19, Block 139, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Six, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 20, at Page 1, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida) is significant to the City of Coral Gables’ history based on the following **three (3)** criteria found in the Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 3, Section 3-1103:

**Historical, Cultural significance:**

4. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic or social trends of the community

**Architectural significance:**

1. Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural styles
2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction

**Staff finds the following:**

The property located at **649 Palmarito Court** is significant to the City of Coral Gables history based on:

**HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

**Therefore, Staff recommends the following:**

A motion to **APPROVE** the Local Historic Designation of the property at **649 Palmarito Court** (legally described as Lots 18 and 19, Block 139, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part Six) based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance.

Respectfully submitted,



Kara N. Kautz

Interim Historic Preservation Officer

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## REVIEW GUIDE

**Definition:**

The Review Guide comprises of some of the extant and character-defining features, which contribute to the overall significance of the structure and/or district.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties embody two important goals: 1) the preservation of historic materials and, 2) the preservation of a building's distinguishing character.

Every historic building is unique, with its own identity and its own distinctive character. Character refers to all those visual aspects and physical features that comprise the appearance of every historic building. Character-defining features are the visual and physical features that give a building its identity and distinctive character. They may include the overall building shape, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, features, and aspects of its site and environment.

**Use:**

The Review Guide may be used to address the impact that additions, modifications, alterations and/or renovations may have on the historic structure and site.

The Review guide may also inform appropriate new construction in an historic district, neighborhood, or streetscape.

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Property Address:	649 Palmarito Court
Lot Description:	corner lot
Date of Construction:	1940
Use:	single-family residence
Style:	Neoclassical
Construction Material:	concrete block covered with smooth-textured stucco
Stories:	one- and two-story
Roof Types and Materials:	hip & flat; flat tile

## CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

**Property: 649 Palmarito Court**  
**Style: Neoclassical**

*Symmetrical purity and balance that reiterate the concepts of simplicity and order*



- ✓ rectangular in the form of a larger central mass flanked by lower bays imparting an aesthetic symmetry
- ✓ evenly spaced and paired windows across the front facade flanked by louvered shutters
- ✓ low-pitched roofs
- ✓ smooth textured stucco
- ✓ a large boxed eave with a moderate overhang and molded cornices
- ✓ rectangular windows with divided panes
- ✓ brick lintels on windows flanking the portico
- ✓ molded cornices on one-story bays
- ✓ roof porch railings



- ✓ rounded portico comprised of an even number (4) of two-story slender classical columns supporting a flat roof with a molded entablature
- ✓ elaborate front doorway with fanlight with radiating muntins, sidelights, niches and molded framing
- ✓ brick ornamentation over arched front doorway
- ✓ brick step risers ornamentation on rounded stoop that further emphasized the prominent front entry portico
- ✓ planter box



- ✓ attached garage with side entry as to not impair the symmetry of the front façade
- ✓ two-car garage with one large door

**ATTACHMENT A: Permit #6225 / May 1940**  
**(Images from degraded microfilm)**

