

**REPORT OF THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES
HISTORICAL RESOURCES & CULTURAL ARTS DEPARTMENT
TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE REMOVAL OF THE LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION OF
THE PROPERTY AT
2900 PONCE DE LEON BOULEVARD
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA
A LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK**



ca. 1940s Photograph



LHD 2015-08
OCTOBER 15, 2015

Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts

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**STAFF REPORT
REMOVAL OF THE LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION
OF THE PROPERTY AT
2900 PONCE DE LEON BOULEVARD
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA
A LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK**

Date of Construction: 1925

Architect: Phineas Paist

Builder: Coral Gables Construction Company

Legal Description: Lots 16 and 17, Block 26, Coral Gables Crafts Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, Page 40, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Original Owner: George E. Merrick

Present Owner: Merle V. Strahl 2014 Revocable Trust – Merle V. Strahl, Trustee

Original Permit No.: 1322

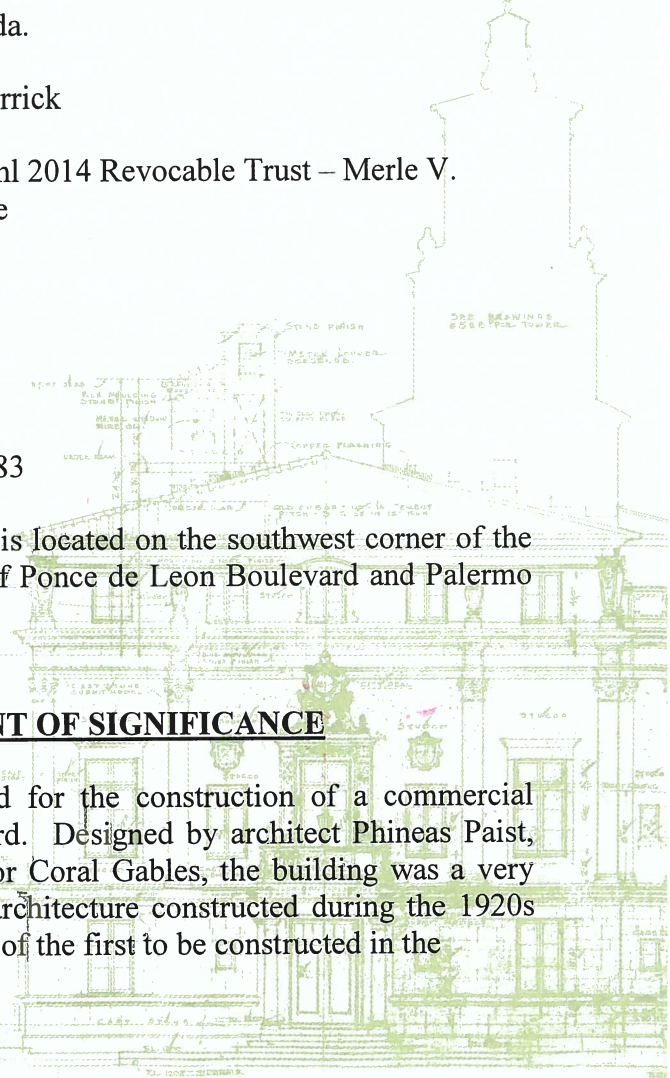
Present Use: Parking Lot

Listed on the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places: March 22, 1983

Site Characteristics: The property is located on the southwest corner of the intersection of Ponce de Leon Boulevard and Palermo Avenue.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In 1925, permit number 1322 was issued for the construction of a commercial structure at 2900 Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Designed by architect Phineas Paist, who was also the Supervising Architect for Coral Gables, the building was a very good example of Mediterranean Revival architecture constructed during the 1920s Florida Land Boom. The building was one of the first to be constructed in the



“Crafts Section” of Coral Gables and originally housed the “Granada Shops,” a furniture company that produced hand-carved, authentic replicas of old-world antiques for homes, offices, and hotels. Their products figured heavily into George Merrick’s vision and were prominently featured furnishings in his promotional material.

BACKGROUND

The following is a brief timeline of events regarding the property.

The property was designated by the Historic Preservation Board as a Local Historic Landmark on February 24, 1983 and ratified by the City Commission on March 22, 1983. (Resolution number 24133). At the time, the building was occupied by the Charade Restaurant. On October 22, 1995 a fire broke out and the structure was a total loss. The fire was later determined to be the result of an arsonist.

Following the loss of the structure, it became apparent that there were no provisions under the Historic Preservation Ordinance (at that time located in the City Code) to address the reconstruction of destroyed historic buildings. In March 1996, the City Commission passed an ordinance which amended the historic preservation section of the Code by adding language for the reconstruction of a historic landmark.

In 1997, a Certificate of Appropriateness application was submitted for the reconstruction of the building. Variances were requested at that time from the Zoning Code to allow the reconstructed building to not provide the required landscaped open space and to only provide two off-street parking spaces in lieu of the 91 required. Case file COA (SP) 97-12-17 was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board on August 28, 1997. The Board made a motion to approve the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the reconstruction of the building. Another motion was made recommending the granting of the two requested variances.

The variances were heard by the Board of Adjustment on December 1, 1997. (At that time, the Historic Preservation Board did not have authority to grant variances for historic properties.) The Board of Adjustment recommended that the parking variance be denied. The item was presented to the City Commission at its May 12, 1998 meeting. After consideration, the City Commission agreed with the Board of Adjustment and denied the requested variances. No structure was ever constructed on the site and it remains a vacant parcel. In 2013, a permit was issued for site work on the property consisting of paving (parking lot), CBS wall, a dumpster enclosure and landscaping. The property currently functions as a parking lot for the adjacent building

The current request before the Board is to determine whether the property meets the criteria for designation as a Local Historic Landmark in its current state, without the original structure.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The City of Coral Gables has no criteria for the de-designation of a local historic landmark. In looking for an example from the National Park Service, arbiters of the National Register of Historic

Places, one finds within Title 36 Section 65.9 entitled “Withdrawal of National Historic Landmark Designation.” This section provides a set of conditions for the de-designation of a National Historic Landmark. It states, in part:

- (a) National Historic Landmarks will be considered for withdrawal of designation only at the request of the owner or upon the initiative of the Secretary.
- (b) Four justifications exist for the withdrawal of National Historic Landmark designation:
 - (1) The property has ceased to meet the criteria for designation because the qualities which caused it to be originally designated have been lost or destroyed, or such qualities were lost subsequent to nomination, but before designation;
 - (2) Additional information shows conclusively that the property does not possess sufficient significance to meet the National Historic Landmark criteria;
 - (3) Professional error in the designation; and
 - (4) Prejudicial procedural error in the designation process.

It is important to note, however, that the City of Coral Gables standards do differ from those of the National Park Service. The most notable example of the differences is that the City has the authority to designate without owner consent while the Park Service does not.

As stated above, the City has no criteria for the withdrawal of local historic designation from a property. In absence of criteria, if one applies the National Register standards to this property, only criteria (b) (1) would be appropriate because the structure at 2900 Ponce de Leon Boulevard was lost.

The Historic Landmark Site Fact Sheet (precursor to Designation Reports) prepared in 1978 bases the designation on the architectural significance of the structure. The property description on that fact sheet reads as follows:

“This structure represents a fine example of Mediterranean Revival architecture, noteworthy for its stylistic features. George Merrick, who owned the land, had the building constructed to coincide with his master plan for the ‘City Beautiful.’ The structure was originally built for and occupied by Ralph and Leland Wilkins, who ran the Granada Shops, the first tenants.”

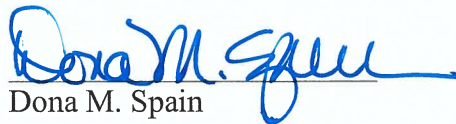
The architecture of the building, coupled with the fact that it was one of the earliest commercial buildings in the Crafts Section of the City, were the reasons that the property was sought for designation.

City Staff is requesting the removal of the Local Historic Landmark Designation from the property. Staff finds that because the building is no longer standing, the property has lost the architectural integrity and significance for which it was initially designated.

Therefore, Staff recommends the following:

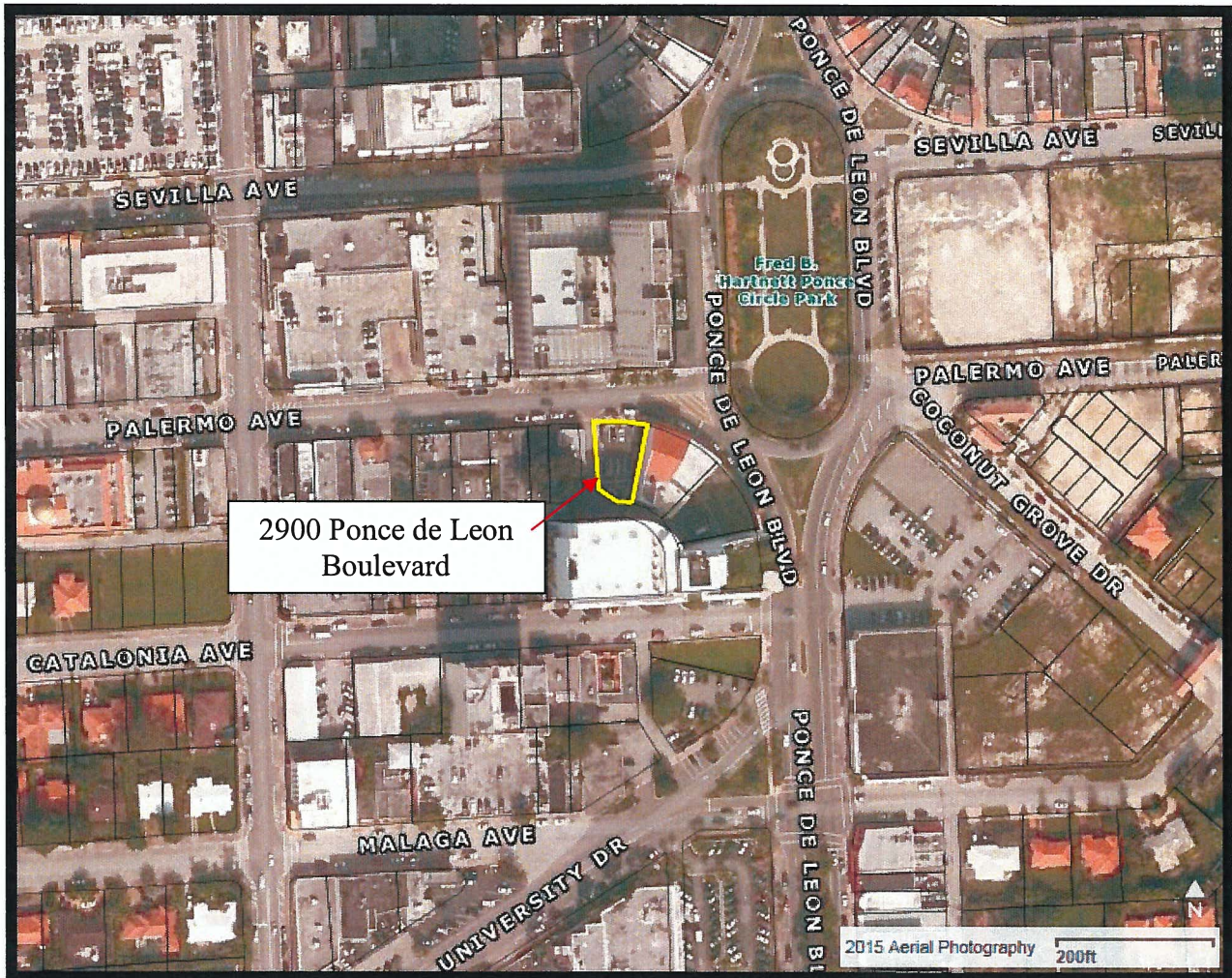
A motion to **APPROVE** the request for the removal of the Local Historic Designation of the property at 2900 Ponce de Leon Boulevard, Lots 16 and 17, Block 26, Coral Gables Crafts Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, Page 40, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Respectfully submitted,



Dona M. Spain
Historic Preservation Officer

LOCATION MAP



Map Courtesy Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser

REVIEW GUIDE

Definition: The Review Guide lists some of the more prominent features, which contribute to the overall character of a structure and/or district. It is not intended to be all-inclusive, as photographic documentation fully illustrates the present physical character of the property.

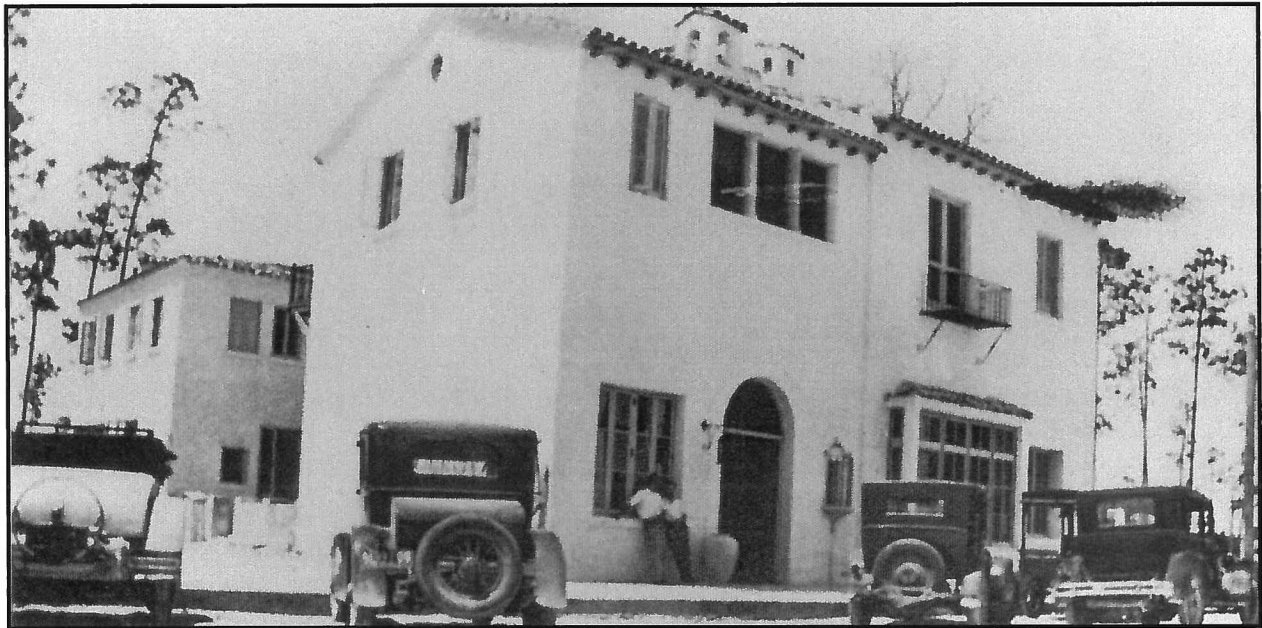
Use: The Review Guide may be used to address the impact of new construction, additions/modifications/alterations and/or renovations which may become the subject of some future Certificate of Appropriateness consideration....and

The Review Guide by describing EXISTING physical characteristics may be used to determine whether or not elements which create the character of the structure and/or district is present and/or whether or not later additions or alterations have so changed that character so as to cause the property (ies) to become ineligible for listing.

Property Address: 2900 Ponce de Leon Boulevard

Date of Construction: 1925

Material: Original structure was masonry covered with stucco, barrel tile



Photograph ca. 1926



Photograph ca. 1940s



Photograph 2015



Photograph 2015



Photograph 2015