

**REPORT OF THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES  
HISTORICAL RESOURCES & CULTURAL ARTS DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE DESIGNATION OF  
THE PROPERTY AT  
1541 SOPERA AVENUE  
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA**



Historic Photo: c.1940s



LHD 2021-008  
November 17, 2021

**LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION:  
1541 SOPERA AVENUE, CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA**

Historical Resources &  
Cultural Arts

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FLORIDA 33134

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**Application:** A Historic Significance Determination was required by the Board of Architects. The letter was issued October 13, 2021 stating that the property does meet the minimum eligibility criteria for designation as a local historic landmark.

*Note: all observations were made from the public right-of-way. Photos of the interior of the property were provided by the owner or accessed from Realtor.com.*

Folio Number: 03-4118-006-1420

Legal Description: West half of Lot 16, Lot 17, and East half of Lot 18, Block 56, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part 4, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, at page 57 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Original Permit No. / Date: #1197, April 23, 1925

Original Architect: H. George Fink

Original Builder: H. W. Nicholes & Sons

Original Owner: H. W. Nicholes & Lindsey H. Hopkins  
Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company

Present Owner: Juliette Perez & Fidel S. Ferreiro

Building Use, Type, Style: Two-story SFR, Mediterranean Revival

Site Characteristics: The property is located on the north side of Sopera Avenue between Red Road and Alhambra Circle. The irregularly-shaped lot is approximately 100' x 110'.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The single-family residence at 1541 Sopera Avenue, constructed in 1925 during the initial development of Coral Gables, is indicative of the Mediterranean-inspired ideals founder George Merrick envisioned for the City. It was designed in the Mediterranean Revival style by architect H. George Fink, a member of Merrick's original design team, for the Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company as part of a larger building plan contracted with Merrick's Coral Gables Corporation. The partners Lindsey H. Hopkins and H. W. Nicholes were nationally-acclaimed for their building campaigns in the Atlanta area. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue was one of the first fifty homes built as part of this program as a demonstration for the contract and was approved by Merrick. It was built contemporaneous to the development of the Biltmore Hotel and Golf Course in the adjacent and newly re-platted Country Club Sections. Unfortunately, plans for these areas were curtailed due to the 1926 Hurricane followed by the downturn in the economy. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue is one of a handful of homes built in this initial development phase in Country Club Section Part 4 and stands as a testament to Merrick's vision. The property at 1541 Sopera Avenue retains its historic integrity and significantly contributes to the historic fabric of the City of Coral Gables.

## **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 8, Section 8-103 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 1541 Sopera Avenue 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, 1541 Sopera Avenue 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*

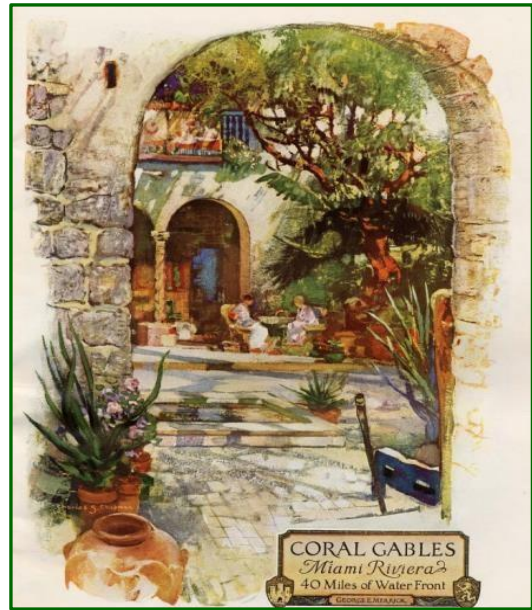


## HISTORIC CONTEXT

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

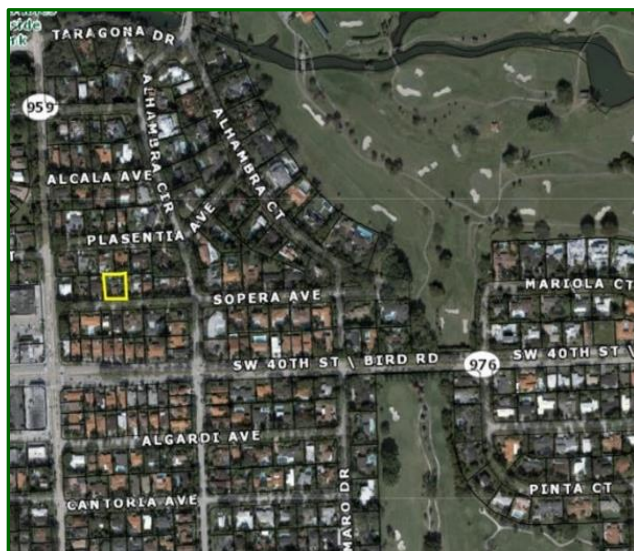
- Initial Planning and Development/Florida Land Boom (Pre- 1926 Hurricane),
- 1926 Hurricane/Great Depression Aftermath and New Deal/Wartime Activity (1927-1944),
- and Post World War II and Modern periods (1945-1963).

Coral Gables was originally conceived as a Miami suburb and attracted investors from across the nation during the South Florida real estate boom of the 1920s. 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 a community with ornate plazas, grand entrances, parks, scenic areas, and golf courses melded with monumental buildings and tree-shaded picturesque residential streets.



**Figure 1: Advertisement in  
*House Beautiful*, 1925**

Merrick and his team felt that Mediterranean designs, specifically Spanish prototypes, best harmonized with south Florida's climate and lifestyle. During the 1920s, there was careful attention to ensure that all aspects of the built environment conformed to these ideals and it was a featured selling point in early promotional materials. The architecture constructed during the initial 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 exclusively in accordance with this style with the goal of creating a suburb of architectural splendor with tropical luxuriance.



The single-family residence at 1541 Sopera Avenue was permitted in 1925 during the City's Boom years. It is indicative of the type of architecture that was the founding premise of Coral Gables, exemplifying the Mediterranean ideals espoused by founder George Merrick and his plans for this section of the City.

**Figure 2: Aerial Photo, current**  
**Note: 1541 Sopera Avenue yellow box**  
*Courtesy of Miami-Dade County Property Appraiser*

Nationally-acclaimed landscape architect Frank Button drew the first comprehensive maps of Coral Gables in 1921-2. They were based on the grid from the Merrick family's citrus plantation, as well as the native pineland. 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 within an intentional hierarchy of roadways. 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.

Button's 1922 map lays out a 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 3) The grid was opened at strategic locations to include grand entrances, plazas, and fountains to give focus to major arteries and vistas and 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. Coral Gables' initial development centered around the Merrick family's Coral Gables Plantation in 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.

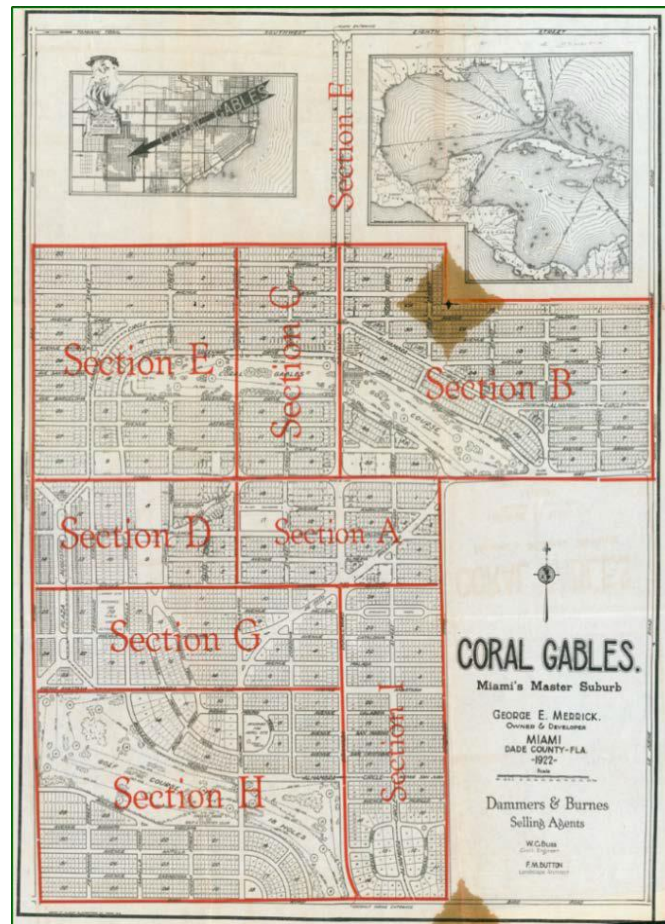


Figure 3: Map: "Miami's Master Suburb," 1922

In the mid-1920s plans for a \$10 million Biltmore Hotel complex in the undeveloped Section H were announced. The plans included an 18-hole championship golf course designed by the legendary Donald Ross. Sections G, H, and I were reworked to accommodate it. The three sections were subdivided into six sections and renamed Country Club Sections Parts 1 through 6. (Figures 4) A final portion was replatted to the Biltmore Section which 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 (renamed University Drive), and Segovia Street. He rerouted streets, including Alhambra Circle which eventually curved around the east 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 connecting the Granada and Miami-Biltmore golf courses. The halfway point was celebrated by a traffic circle plaza with a magnificent pedestal-type fountain. (Figures 3 & 4)



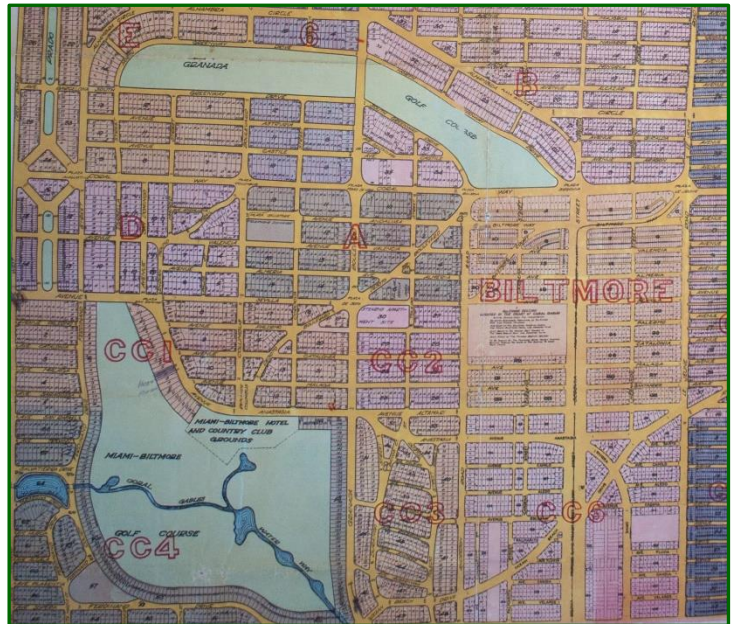


**Figures 4: Coral Gables  
1925**

**Aerial Photo, c.1925  
[left]**

**Map Detail:  
“Miami Riviera,” 1925  
[below]**

Golf courses were prominent features of Merrick’s plan and the Biltmore Hotel complex was the crown jewel in Merrick’s campaign to attract tourists and to provide social amenities for residents. The Miami-Biltmore Golf Course was designed as a championship golf course and has retained its elite status over the years. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue is in Country Club Section Part 4 which is adjacent to the southwest portion of the golf course. (Figures 3) It was permitted in 1925--the same year the golf course construction was launched. The course opened January 2, 1926. Rapid growth in the area was anticipated.



**Figure 5: Miami-Biltmore Hotel and  
Golf Course, looking south, c.1926**

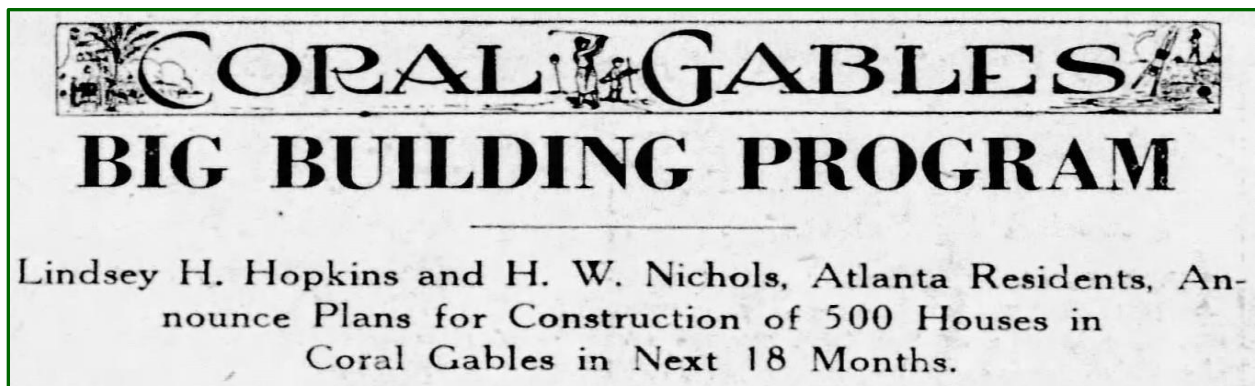
*Note: Bird Road cutting across the  
golf course in the upper portion of the  
photo.*

*1541 Sopera Avenue (located north of  
Bird Road) is just off camera on the  
right side of the photo*



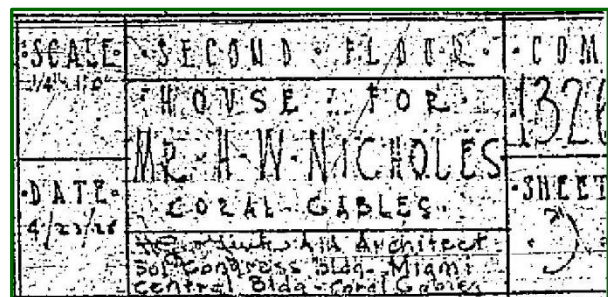
**Figure 6: Lindsey H. Hopkins**  
*Courtesy Atlantic Constitution*

As Merrick's vision for his Mediterranean-inspired city continued to grow his team recruited leading investors, architects, and builders from across the country. By mid-1920's Merrick attracted nationally-acclaimed investor, Lindsey H. Hopkins. Hopkins was a director of Coca-Cola Company, the Federal Reserve Bank at Atlanta, and the Reynolds Metal Company. He was intensely interested in aviation, automobiles and road development, and real estate (See section below) - all passions shared by Merrick. Hopkins, with partner H. W. Nicholes - a prominent builder and president of Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company, was responsible for most homes in Druid Hills, a planned exclusive suburb of Atlanta. Druid Hills was initially planned by the premier landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1893, sold to Asa Candler, president of Coca Cola in 1908, and developed in large part by Hopkins and Nicholes between 1910-1936. Druid Hills is now listed on the National Register for Historic Places. This was one of several high-profile and successful endeavors.



**Figure 7: Miami Herald, April 27, 1925**

With this experience Hopkins and Nicholes approached Merrick in early 1925 with a large building program. It was to include the construction of 500 single-family homes. In April 1925, with the purchase of the first fifty lots and the submission of some architectural drawings, a contract was issued, and the plan announced. (Figure 7) The lots were in undeveloped sections. Thirty of the homes were concentrated in the Coconut Grove Section, just south of the planned San Sebastian Apartment Hotel which broke ground in August. The other twenty were scattered over Country Club Sections Parts 3, 4, and 5 which wrap around the southern portions of the Miami-Biltmore Golf Course. As demonstrated by Tent City and the building of the San Sebastian Apartments, the City was in dire need of housing for employees working in the city in 1925. These homes were intended to help fill that need. They were designed by architects H. George Fink or Frank Wyatt Woods. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue was amongst this cadre and was permitted in mid-June 1925.



**Figure 8: 1541 Sopera Avenue  
Permit Drawings Title Block**  
Note: 4/23/25 date



The construction of these first fifty homes of Merrick's agreement with Hopkins and Nicholes was an exhibition of their design intent and their ability to mobilize resources for their large-scale plan. Evidently, Merrick approved. In July the Coral Gables Corporation announced that plans for the second set of fifty homes was contracted. Permits for these homes were filed over the next several months. Nation-wide issues with transporting building supplies led to a slowdown of construction in early 1926 and Hopkins and Nicholes paused their contract. The hurricane in September ended the continuation of the planned building campaign. It took several years but eventually they completed the one hundred homes as contracted. After the hurricane, Nicholes moved his company back to Atlanta. Hopkins however remained in the area and continued to invest in Coral Gables and the Miami area, especially on Miami Beach. In 1925 Hopkins had financed the final construction permits for the San Sebastian Apartment Hotel and in 1928 he purchased it from the Coral Gables Corporation and lived in the penthouse apartment until his passing in 1937. His estate eventually sold the San Sebastian to the University of Miami in 1939.

While Nicholes and Hopkins planned to contribute heavily to the development of Country Club Sections Parts 3, 4, and 5 in anticipation of interest in the area ringing the Miami-Biltmore Golf Course, circumstances prevented the full implementation of their intentions and the area remained sparsely populated through the 1940s. (Figures 9) As noted above, construction in the City boomed until the combination of the devastating Hurricane of 1926 and the Great Depression. In Coral Gables the dire downturn in the economy, coming so closely on the heels of the hurricane, had a drastic impact on new construction. In Coral Gables few single-family homes were built during the Depression Era of the 1930s. With the implementation of New Deal and other incentives, the building industry finally experienced a small resurgence in the late 1930s and early 1940s. However, it abruptly ground to a halt during the War years of 1942-1945 as materials, expertise, and manpower were diverted to the war effort.

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 single-family homes in Coral Gables followed national trends both in numbers and in style. By the late 1950s, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part 4 was built out with new residences. (Figures 9) This area retains this context of single-family homes to present day.

It should be noted that when construction of single-family homes resumed in Coral Gables there was a distinct departure from the ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean Revival style that had dominated the City's landscape since its inception and embraced contemporary modern styles. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue was one of a handful of single-family residences built during the 1920s in accordance with Merrick's vision for the Country Club Sections Part 3, 4, and 5 -- specifically the area west of the Biltmore Golf Course. It remains as one of the few extant Mediterranean Revival style homes in this area.

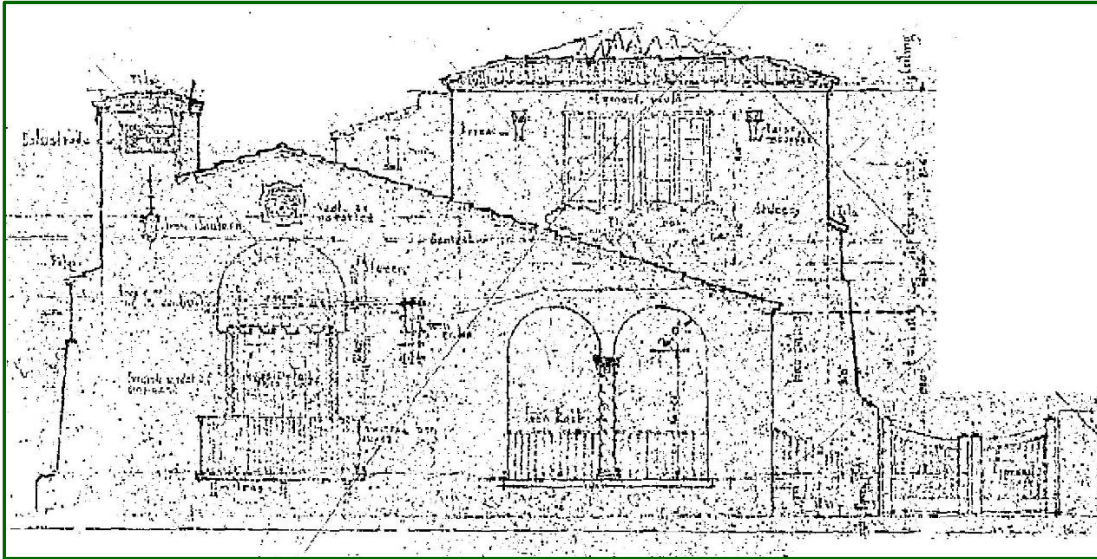




**Figures 9: Aerial Photographs**  
**Miami-Biltmore Golf Course Area, 1948 [left]**  
**Country Club Section Part 5, 1957 [right]**  
*Note: Red Arrow: 1541 Sopera Avenue*  
*Courtesy of Florida Collection, University of Florida*



**SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION**



**Figures 10: 1541 Sopera Avenue, Front (South) Facade  
Permit #1197 Drawing, 1925 [top]; c.1940s [center]; Current, 2021 [bottom]**



Situated one block north of Bird Road and two blocks west of the Biltmore Golf Course, the single-family residence at 1541 Sopera Avenue sits on an interior lot in Coral Gables Country Club Section Part 4. The home was constructed during the initial development of Coral Gables and is indicative of the Mediterranean-inspired ideals founder George Merrick envisioned for the City. It was designed by architect H. George Fink, a member of Merrick's original design team, for the Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company as part of larger building plan in coordination with Merrick's Coral Gables Corporation. It was one of the first fifty home built as part of this program as a demonstration for the contract and was approved by Merrick. The home was built contemporaneous to the development of the Biltmore Hotel and Golf Course in the adjacent and newly re-platted Country Club Sections. Unfortunately, plans for these areas were curtailed due to the 1926 Hurricane followed by the downturn in the economy. The home at 1541 Sopera Avenue is one of a handful of homes built in this initial development phase in Country Club Section Part 4 and stands as a testament to Merrick's Mediterranean vision for Coral Gables. (See Historic Context above) Hence, the property exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

1541 Sopera Avenue is a two-story residence with a detached garage built in the Mediterranean Revival style. The home honors Merrick's vision for adapting residential design to the rigors of South Florida's climate while maintaining the integrity of its style. It is built over a crawl space with thick cement masonry block walls which keep the home cool and above the low water table. The light-colored stuccoed exterior walls reflect the sun's heat and the varied windows provide much needed ventilation and light in this tropical environment.

As described below in more detail, the home exhibits character-defining features of the Mediterranean Revival style. These include, but are not limited to: projecting and recessed planes; rectilinear massing and floor plan; arched openings; twisted columns; a combination of roof types clad in barrel tile; textured stucco; a prominent and distinctive chimney; decorative vents; a wing wall; a series of coral rock walls, as well as recessed windows of various shapes and sizes with projecting sills. Hence, the home portrays the environment in an era of history in Coral Gables characterized by the Mediterranean Revival style, and it embodies those distinguishing characteristics of its architectural style, period, and method of construction.



**Figure 11: Front Entry at Southeast Corner, 2020**

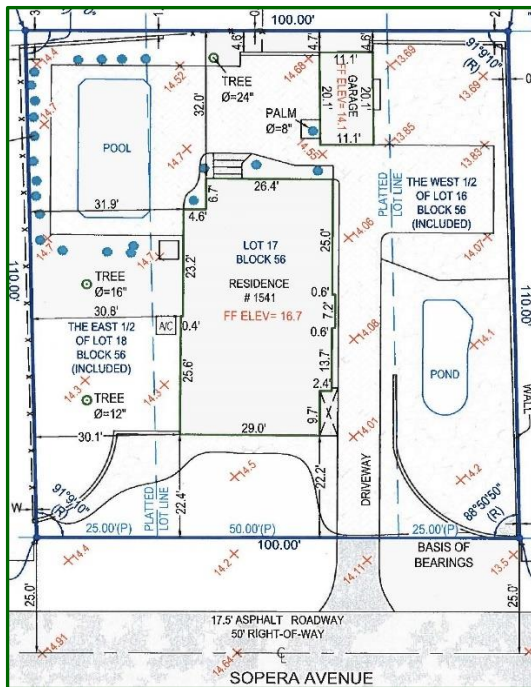
*Courtesy of Realtor.com*

The residence retains its historic integrity. Thus, the property at 1541 Sopera Avenue significantly contributes to the historic fabric of the City of Coral Gables and is part of the collection of quality residences that contributes to the City's sense of place over time.



### Extant Exterior Description

The single-family residence at 1541 Sopera Avenue sits on an interior south-facing 100' x 110' lot. The 1645 SF home sits at the center of the lot with a detached garage off its northeast corner. A swimming pool is located at the northwest corner of the property and a pond feature is east of the home. (Figures 12) There are several coral rock wall features on the property which include a low perimeter wall. In addition, a serpentine low wall extends from the home's wing wall at the southwest corner of the home to the southwest corner of the lot. Another wall curves from the southeast corner of the property sweeping along the driveway and the pond. (Figures 19 & 13)



**Figures 12: Property at 1541 Sopera Avenue**  
**Property Survey, 2020 [left] Courtesy of Pinnacle Surveying**  
**Aerial View, 2020 [right] Courtesy of Miami-Dade Property Appraiser**



**Figure 13: Pond and Coral Rock Wall, 2020**  
*Courtesy of Realtor.com*



The home is approached by a paver driveway which runs between the east side of the home and the pond feature to the garage. The house is one-story with a two-story, one-room 'tower' along the east façade. The one-story portions are under gable, flat, and shed roofs. The two-story roof is flat with low-pitched faux-mansard that rings its perimeter. On the second story a small, shed-roofed stairhall bay projects from the tower over the one-story gable roof below. The pitched roofs are clad in S-tile. The house is built of masonry block units over a crawl space and is covered with textured stucco. The windows are recessed with protruding sills and are casement and fixed in type. A chimney stack rises along the west façade of the two-story home and is capped in barrel tile. (Figures 12-19)



**Figure 14: Aerial View, 2020** *Courtesy of Miami-Dade Property Appraiser*



**Figures 15: Front (South) Elevation, 2021**

The south-facing front bay is under a low-pitched, front-facing gable roof whose eastern gable extends asymmetrically over the entry loggia. At the western end the gable roof terminates at the chimney, but a wing wall extending from the southwest corner gives the impression that the gable roof extends to the other side of the chimney. (Figures 15 & 10, center) Centered under the gable apex is a circular louvered vent recessed in a square opening. Below the vent is an arched window.

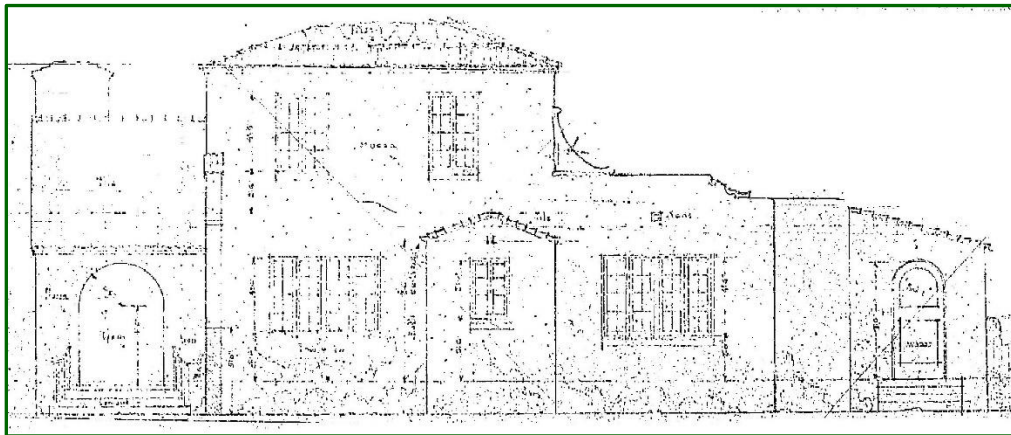


The southeast corner of the home was originally a screened entry loggia. (Attachment A: Permit 1197) The double arched openings on the front south façade are now enclosed by windows. The arches spring from a central twisted column. The original cracked tile floor of entry loggia is extant. The opening on the east side façade holds an arched double front door ensemble. Three steps curve up to the entry stoop. Diamond-shaped tiles are inset into the step risers. A decorative metal railing curves with the steps along the stoop.



**Figure 16: Entry Loggia, 2020**  
**Note: original cracked tile floor**  
*Courtesy of Realtor.com*

On the east side façade, the two-story 'tower' rises behind the entry loggia. It is currently covered in vegetation. A narrow, one-story, front-facing gable roof bay projects slightly at the northern end of the tower. A curved 'wing' wall cascades down along the northeast corner of the tower to the parapet of the one-story, one-bay section behind it. At the northern end of this bay, the parapet slopes down to the shed roof of the one-bay portion at the rear of the home.



**Figures 17: Side (East) Façade**  
**Drawing Permit 1197, 1925 [top]; Current photos [bottom]** *Courtesy of Realtor.com*



The rear façade is under a shed roof with the parapets of the central living space behind. This shed-roofed area was originally a porch (Figure 17 & 20) that is now enclosed with fenestration for living space. Near the western end of the rear façade, a set of double French doors serve as the back entry to the home. The side (west) façade with its varying roof heights and materials, its assortment of casement windows, and the distinctive chimney and wing wall at the southwest corner exemplifies the hallmarks for the Mediterranean Revival style. Of note, are the pair of arched windows at the southern end matching the arched window on the front façade. It is worth noting that while this façade is currently not visible from the street originally this home sat on a larger lot and this façade was prominently visible.



**Figures 18: Rear (North) and Side (West) Facades**  
**Permit 1197, 1925: rear [top left]; side [top right]**  
**Rear and side facades from northwest corner [bottom]** *Courtesy of Realtor.com*

The one-car detached garage, off the northeast corner of the home, is one-story under a flat roof with parapets. (Figures 15, 17 bottom right & 18 bottom) A pair of faux carriage doors fill the vehicular opening. A pair of French doors on the east façade open to the backyard behind the pond. A single door on the west side opens onto the back patio leading to the pool.

The property has a series of coral rock wall features. Most notably are the walls curving in front the front corners of the property to frame the home. A serpentine low wall curves from the southwest corner of the lot to the meet the wing wall extending from the southwest corner of the home. It is currently obscured by vegetation but is extant and can be seen in the 1940s photo in Figures 10. Extending from near the southeast corner is a wall that is low as is curves back across the lot and rises along the driveway and the pond. (Figures 19 top & 13) There are also low perimeter walls along the east side and rear property lines. (Figures 19 bottom)





### Figures 19: Coral Rock Walls

**Front wall extending from southwest corner, 2021 [top]**

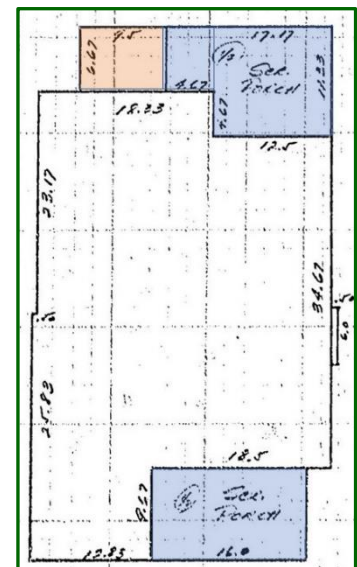
**Side (east) perimeter wall as seen from neighboring yard (1533 Sopera Avenue), 2021**

**Rear perimeter wall, 2020** *Courtesy of Realtor.com*

### Additions / Alterations

A comparison of historic photographs and the original architectural plans with the extant home, as well as an examination of building records, indicates that the property at 1541 Sopera Avenue has retained its historic integrity for nearly one-hundred years. There have been no substantial changes to the form or style of the home. Alterations of note are discussed below.

As illustrated in the 1957 Tax Card in Figure 20, the original design of the home included an entry porch at southeast corner of the home and a rear / sleeping porch at the northeast corner (the latter a deviation from the Permit #1197). A 1965 permit for the installation of HVAC indicates that these porches were present at that time. At an unknown later date, the screened openings of these porches were enclosed with windows and doors. Most notably the front door was moved from the west wall of the entry porch to the exterior east wall. The arched opening was retained. (Figure 11) Additionally, what is now the location of the back door (Figures 18, bottom) and indicated in orange in Figure 20 was labelled as a utility room without exterior access in early surveys and permits. The date of its conversion to a back door



**Figure 20: 1957 Tax Card**  
**Blue: screened porches**  
**Orange: utility room**

area is unknown. In 2013 impact-resistant windows were installed in eleven locations, which included all arched openings. The size of all openings was retained. The original barrel tile roof was removed in 2009 and replaced with the current S-tile barrel. The pool was also installed in 2009.

It should be noted that by 1943 the property entailed four lots (16-19) for a size of 200' x 110'. In 1943 and 1944 the owner built the coral rock walls along its side and rear boundaries as well as the coral walls 'framing' the house. In October 1959, in advance of selling the eastern half of Lot 16, a permit was filed to move the coral rock wall along the eastern boundary 25' to reflect the new property line which is its location at present. (Figure 19 bottom left) When the western half of Lot 18 and all of Lot 19 were sold the coral rock wall along western boundary was not moved but is still extant in its original location at the border of Lots 19 and 20 between 1551 and 1553 Sopera Avenue. (Figure 21)

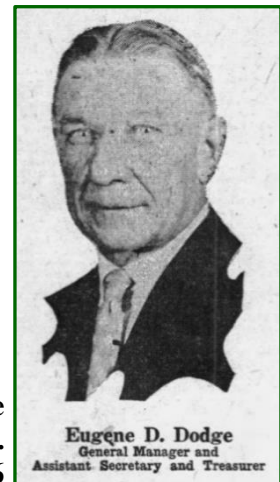


**Figure 21: Coral Rock Wall at  
Original Location Between  
Lots 19 & 20, 2021**

### **Ownership History**

*Note: The ownership history for this period is based on numerous sources including R. L. Polk City Directories (available from 1926-65), building permits, realtor notes, deeds, and records on file within the Coral Gables Historical Resources Department and the Miami-Dade County Clerk.*

The first owners of the home at 1541 Sopera Avenue were Eugene and Bessie Dodge. They purchased the home in May 1926. Eugene D. Dodge was the general manager of the Dade County Title Insurance Company. In 1933, after years of advocating for automobile regulations, he was appointed by the governor to the newly created position of State Motor Vehicle License Inspector. Records indicate that the couple occupied the home until the early 1930s when they began to lease the home. After the couple's death in an automobile accident in 1934, their estate sold the home back to Lindsey Hopkins who facilitated repairs to the home and then sold the home to John and Gertrude Hardeman.



**Figure 22: Eugene D. Dodge  
Dade County Title Insurance & Trust Co.  
Advertisement, Miami News, October 3, 1926**

John was the president of Hardeman Insurance. During World War II, 1541 Sopera Avenue served as the headquarters for the local Defense Council. These councils were appointed by Governors to manage the needs and safety of the community. Hardeman was the leader of the council and served as a precinct air raid warden. The home served as the hub for the assembly and dissemination of emergency provisions, for the messenger corps drills to ensure communication protocols were in place, and for coordination of the augmentation of fire, law enforcement, and medical facilities. The Hardeman's sold the home in 1943 and it passed through several owners.

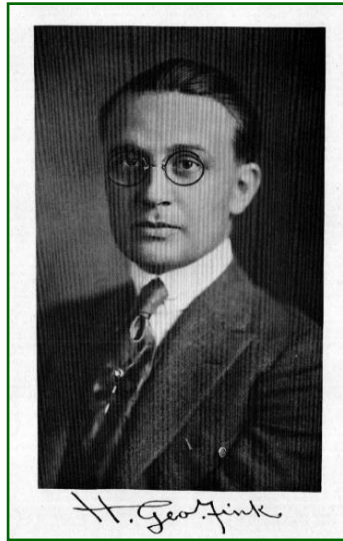


In 1962 Edwin and Sylvia Noennich purchased the home and held it for the next thirty-five years. Edwin Noennich served in the Army Air Corps in World War II and afterwards became a test pilot eventually flying for Pan American Airlines. Noennich was also part of an elite Miami Research Flight Facility team who tracked and flew into weather conditions. Starting in 2003 the home was owned for the next eleven years by Suramy Cabrera who is the current Coral Gables Building Official. The current owners purchased the home in 2020. Since its construction, the home has served as a single-family home that was predominantly owner-occupied.

**List of Owners & Occupants:**

1925-1926	Coral Gables Corporation via contract with: Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company: H. W. Nicholes & Lindsey Hopkins
1926-1934	Eugene D. Dodge, manager Dade County Abstract Title Insurance & Trust Co State Motor Vehicle inspector Bessie M. Dodge Catalonia Corporation
1931	George W. Johnson, insurance Rose Johnson Terry C. Spencer, insurance Mary Spencer
1932	John Quattlebaum, police Delia Quattlebaum
1933	Robert Leishman, jockey Lois Leishman Philip Leishman Owen Laconche
1934	Kate Lorber
1934	Lindsey H. Hopkins
1934-1943	John V. Hardeman, president, Hardeman Insurance Gertrude A. Hardeman
1943-1952	Herman J. Helpenstein
1952-1956	Lloyd Kratz Helen Browing
1956-1960	Imez Sandhammer & Frank Sandhammer
1960-1962	Edmond M. Kerge & Delores S. Lewis
1962-1997	Edwin W. Noennich & Sylvia Noennich
1997-2003	Jacinto J. Gonzalez & Ana M. Gonzalez
2003-2014	Eric J. Gomez & Suramy Cabrera
2014	Suramy Cabrera & Francisco Alvarez
2014-2020	Joshua A. Kaehler & Amanda Holcomb Kaehler
2020-Present	Fidel S. Ferreiro & Juliette Perez

## Architect



**Figure 23: H. George Fink, Portrait, c.1920s**

**H. George Fink** was the architect for 1541 Sopera Avenue. Fink was a cousin of City founder George Merrick and was responsible for much of the early design and planning of Coral Gables. Over 100 of his buildings are designated as Local Historic Landmarks within the City of Coral Gables (individually or in a historic district).

Architect H. George Fink, a key member of Merrick's original design team, was instrumental in creating the fabric of 1920s Mediterranean Revival architecture which characterizes Coral Gables. He designed numerous Mediterranean Revival residential and commercial structures in the City in the early 1920s. His residential designs ranged from cottages to elaborate residences for the City's leaders including George Merrick and Edward E. "Doc" Dammers. Fink's architectural practice was so busy during the early 1920s, that by the end of 1923 he outgrew his office and built an office at 2506 Ponce de Leon Boulevard that served as a showcase for the Mediterranean Revival style. He was regularly featured in newspaper articles discussing the progress of development in Coral Gables, and in advertisements for

the community during the 1920s. In 1924, Fink travelled to Spain to study the architecture and was honored by King Alfonso XIII of Spain for his "interesting, outstanding, and extremely artistic interpretation and reproduction of the Spanish Arts in America." During his visit to Spain, Fink was also made a "Don," the Spanish equivalent of English knighthood.

H. George Fink's architectural career spanned over four decades in Coral Gables. Fink's family moved to the Miami area from Springdale, Pennsylvania in 1904. He graduated from Miami High School in 1907. He studied architecture at the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia and supplemented it with special classes at the University of Pennsylvania. From 1915 to 1921 Fink designed numerous buildings for Miami Beach Developer Carl Fisher and Associates. In 1921 he began working with George Merrick. That same year, Fink became a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) -- the youngest member of the organization at the time of his appointment.

The devastating hurricane in 1926 abruptly halted much of the construction in Coral Gables. In 1928, Fink left the City accepting a position as the Designing Architect for the J. C. Penney Company of New York. He remained with them until 1932 when he became a Supervising Architect for the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He was assigned to the State of Maine and remained with the WPA until 1937.

Fink returned to Coral Gables in 1937 and resumed his private architectural practice. During World War II, he was Architectural Designer for Robert & Company, of Atlanta, assisting with the Richmond Naval Air Station, the Glynn County Base in Brunswick, Georgia, and the Chamblee Naval Base in Chamblee, Georgia. In 1943, Fink became Architect in Charge, Architectural Division, Bell Bomber Plant, Marietta, Georgia, where the famous B-29s were built and assembled. Fink returned to Coral Gables in 1945 and continued to design there until the middle of the 1960s. He served on the Coral Gables Board of Architects from 1945 through 1956, acting as its chairman for seven years within this period. Fink also served as the Secretary of the Florida South Chapter of the AIA from 1952-1955.

## Investor & Builder

### **Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company H. W. Nicholes & Sons**



**and H. W. Nicholes  
*Miami Herald*, July 19, 1925**

In early 1925 Lindsey H. Hopkins, an Atlanta financier, partnered with H. W. Nicholes, the president of Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company, and approached George Merrick with a large building program in Coral Gables. In April they announced their contract with Merrick whose ultimate goal was to build 500 single-family homes. (Figures 7 & 24) The first phase, already launched by April, included constructing fifty homes in sections of Coral Gables that were primarily undeveloped but ready for construction. These were the Coconut Grove Section and the Country Club Section Parts 3, 4, and 5. H. W. Nicholes & Sons would build the homes. The first fifty homes would be evaluated by Merrick's Coral Gables Corporation for quality and style before the purchase of additional lots. Designed by architect H. George Fink, a member of Merrick's design team, the single-family at 1541 Sopera Avenue was amongst this cadre.

**Lindsey H. Hopkins** (1879-1937) (Figures 6 & 24) was a prominent capitalist, philanthropist, and noted Atlanta banker. He was the director and major stockholder of the Coca-Cola Company, the director of Federal Reserve Bank at Atlanta and the Reynolds Metal Company. Hopkins was intensely interested in aviation, automobiles, and road development, as well as real estate. He was very active in the Good Roads Movement and made a fortune selling Overland automobiles. Hopkins owned the first private plane in Atlanta,

invested heavily in early commercial aviation, and was a passenger on the second trip of the Zeppelin Hindenburg between Germany and the United States in 1936. He was a voting trustee in the Sperry Corporation which dealt with airplane and navigation control devices. He was a life-long director of North American Aviation, of which Eastern Airlines was a subsidiary.

In the 1910s Hopkins and H. W. Nicholes were responsible for most homes in Druid Hills, a planned and exclusive suburb of Atlanta. Druid Hills was initially planned by the premier landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1893, sold to Asa Candler, president of Coca Cola in 1908, and developed in large part by Hopkins and Nicholes between 1910-1936. Druid Hills is now listed on the National Register for Historic Places. This was one of their several high-profile and successful endeavors.

In Miami, separate from his joint endeavors with H. W. Nicholes, he headed a separate real estate firm, Lindsey Hopkins Properties. His real estate holdings in the Miami area were extensive. At his death it was said he was perhaps the largest individual owner of Metropolitan Miami real estate. Most notably, he was largest stockholder in the Carl G. Fisher hotel chain, owned the Shoreland



Arcade, the largest arcade in the south, and the San Sebastian Apartments. In 1936 Hopkins purchased the Roosevelt Hotel which had remained unfinished since it incurred damage in the 1926 Hurricane. After his passing the completed building was sold to the Miami Dade Public Schools who turned it into a vocational school which was named in his honor.

**Figure 25: Postcard, Lindsey Hopkins Vocational School, undated**



**Herbert W. Nicholes** (1871-1959) was the founder and president of H.W. Nicholes & Sons (1910-1971). The firm was based in Atlanta, Georgia and included his sons Martin, Roy, and David. During the mid-1920s H. W. Nicholes & Sons had an office in Coral Gables at Ponce De Leon Boulevard at Palermo Avenue. H. W. Nicholes' career spanned over fifty years. His firm H. W. Nicholes & Sons closed in the 1970s when his oldest son retired.

Nicholes was a prominent suburban builder in the Atlanta area. He is responsible for, or contributed heavily to, several early twentieth century suburbs in the Atlanta area. Most of these are listed on the National Register for Historic Places and include Druid Hills, Peachtree Battle, Collier Heights, Avondale Estates, Roswell, and Cameron Court. He also has several individual building listings on the National Register for Historic Places. Most notable is 61 16th Street Apartment Building. Constructed in 1924, it is a three-story, masonry building built to look like a large Colonial Revival home.

H. W. Nicholes dominated the construction scene in Coral Gables from 1925 to 1926. As cited above he built 100 homes under his firm Builders' Finance & Mortgage Company with investor Lindsey Hopkins. To facilitate the construction, they erected a concrete plant in the Industrial Section of Coral Gables. (Figures 26 left) Nicholes also had dozens of independent commissions for which his firm H. W. Nicholes & Sons served as the builder and in some cases also the designer. One notable commission was for Robert M. Davidson, Coral Gables city manager, on Castile Avenue. For this home Nicholes used hollow coral stone building blocks made from a process Nicholes invented. (Figures 26 right)

**BUILDING PROGRAM  
IS BEING HELPED**

Builders Finance and Mortgage Company Erects Concrete Block Plant to Facilitate Its Program.

To facilitate its building program now in progress in Coral Gables, the Builders Finance and Mortgage Company is erecting a concrete block plant in the industrial section. The plant is to be located on the LeJeune road, two blocks north of the tracks of the Florida East Coast Railroad Company.

**NEW MATERIAL  
USED IN HOUSE**

Hollow Building Blocks of Coral Stone Selected by Gables Executive

Hollow building blocks, made of coral stone, will be used in the construction of the new residence for Robert M. Davidson, city manager of Coral Gables, on Castile av. Frank Wyatt Woods, architect for the residence, said that this new material shows great promise of becoming enormously popular for building in this section. It is made by a special process invented by the head of the Nicholes Construction Co., which will build the Davidson residence.

**Figures 26: H. W. Nicholes Coral Gables Construction Contributions**

*Miami Herald*, August 2, 1925 [left]

*Miami News*, July 17, 1925 [right]

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The purpose of historic designation within the City of Coral Gables is defined in Article 8, Section 8-101 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 8, Section 8-103). 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 8, Section 8-103.

Permitted in 1925, the property at 1541 Sopera Avenue (legally described as W1/2 Lot 16, all of Lot 17, & E1/2 Lot 18, Block 56, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part 4, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 10, at page 57 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.) is significant to the City of Coral Gables’ history based on the following **three (e)** criteria found in the Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 8, Section 8-103:

#### **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*

#### **Staff finds the following:**


The property located at **1541 Sopera Avenue** is significant to the City of Coral Gables history based on:

#### **HISTORICAL, CULTURAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **Therefore Staff recommends the following:**

A motion to **APPROVE** the Local Historic Designation of the property at **1541 Sopera Avenue** (legally described as W1/2 Lot 16, all of Lot 17, & E1/2 Lot 18, Block 56, Coral Gables Country Club Section Part 4), based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams

Historic Preservation Officer



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"15 Permits Are Issued: work will begin next week on a block of houses in Coral Gables," June 5, 1925, p.33.

"50 Mansions To Be Built: noted Atlanta builder of fine homes and a member of the Federal Reserve Bank are associated in large construction project for Coral Gables Miami Riviera," April 13, 1925, p.6.

"Big Building Program: Lindsey H. Hopkins and H. W. Nichols, Atlanta Residents, announce plans for construction of 500 homes in Coral Gables in next 18 months," April 27, 1925, p.25.

"Building Program is Being Helped: Builders Finance and Mortgage Company erects concrete block plant to facilitate its program," August 2, 1925, p.11.

"Eight Homes Are Sold," May 10, 1926, p.16.

"For Sale By Owner," July 25, 1943, p.36.

"Hopkins Confers Here," July 15, 1925, p.11.

"Hopkins' Properties Many In This Area," December 1, 1935, p.148.

"Permits Half Million," June 28, 1925, p.4.

"Permits Total \$75,000," June 18, 1925, p.33.

"Permits Total \$363,000," June 27, 1925, p.8.

"Real Estate," December 28, 1934, p.31.

"Special Building Block: unusual construction will be used in Davidson residence," July 17, 1925, p.2.

"They Found the Storm," October 8, 1961, p.150.

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"8 Coral Gables Homes Are Sold," May 10, 1926, p.17.

"Gables Has New Building Rush," June 24, 1925, p.21.

"Gables Permits Exceed \$75,000," June 18, 1925, p.19.

"H. George Fink Designs Many Fine Buildings" Sunday, January 4, 1925.

"New Material Used in House: hollow building blocks of coral stone selected by Gables executive," July 17, 1925, p.12.

"Three Drown As Car Plunges Tamiami Canal: motor vehicle inspector, wife and visitor lose lives," May 5, 1934, p.14.

"Widely Known Miami Realtor Dies in Atlanta: Lindsey Hopkins stricken on visit to his former home," August 18, 1937, p.11.

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"Coral Gables Building," May 29, 1925, p.5.

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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. Hallmark and character-defining features are the *visual and physical features that give a building its identity and distinctive character*.

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:	1541 Sopera Avenue
Lot Description:	interior lot
Date of Construction:	1925
Use:	single-family residence
Style:	Mediterranean Revival
Construction Material:	concrete block covered clad with textured stucco
Stories:	one- and two-story SFR; one-story detached garage
Other:	Coral Rock walls: curved front-framing, grotto, perimeter



## CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

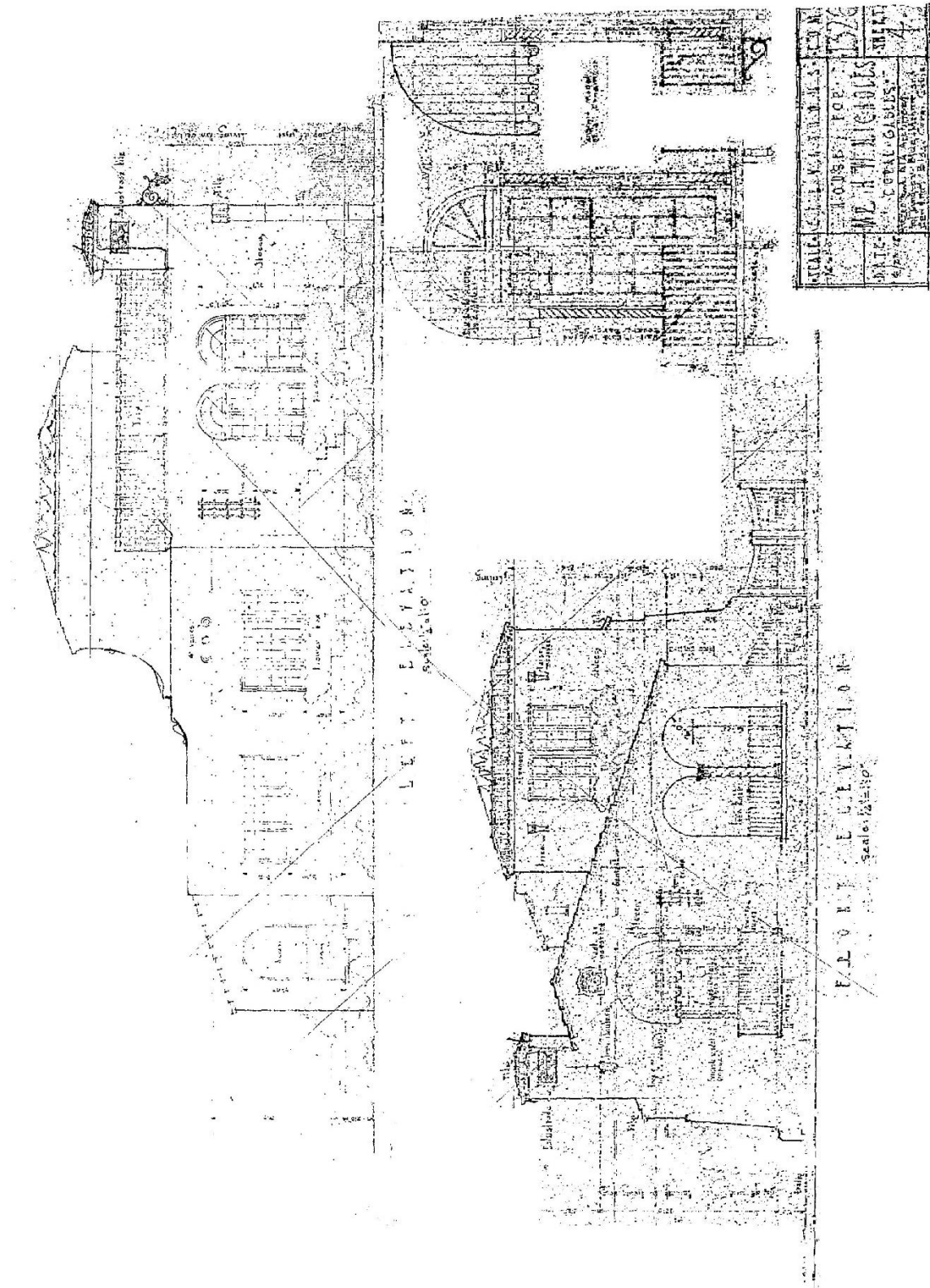
**Property: 1541 Sopera Avenue**  
**Style: Mediterranean Revival**



- ✓ projecting and recessed planes
- ✓ rectilinear massing and floor plan
- ✓ arched openings
- ✓ twisted column
- ✓ combination of roof types clad in barrel tile
- ✓ textured stucco
- ✓ prominent and distinctive chimney
- ✓ decorative vent
- ✓ wing wall
- ✓ windows of various shapes and sizes with projecting sills
- ✓ built over crawl space
- ✓ a series of coral rock walls

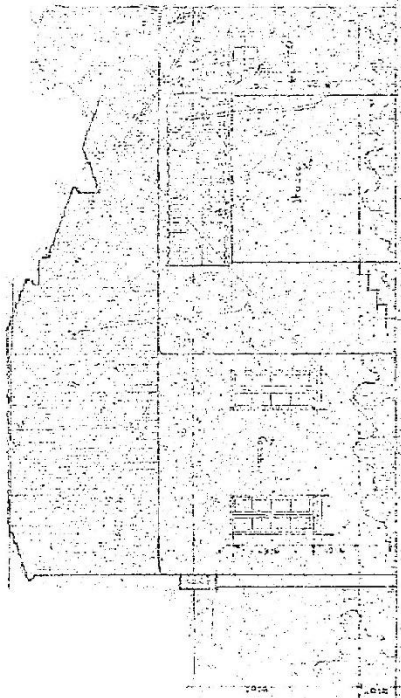


ATTACHMENT A: Permit #1197, 1925, H. George Fink, architect

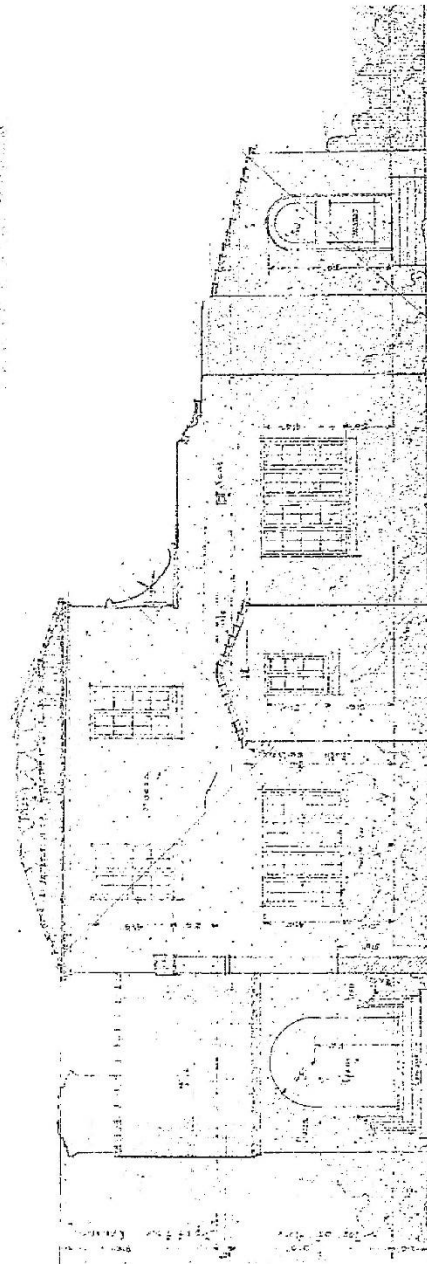


1197





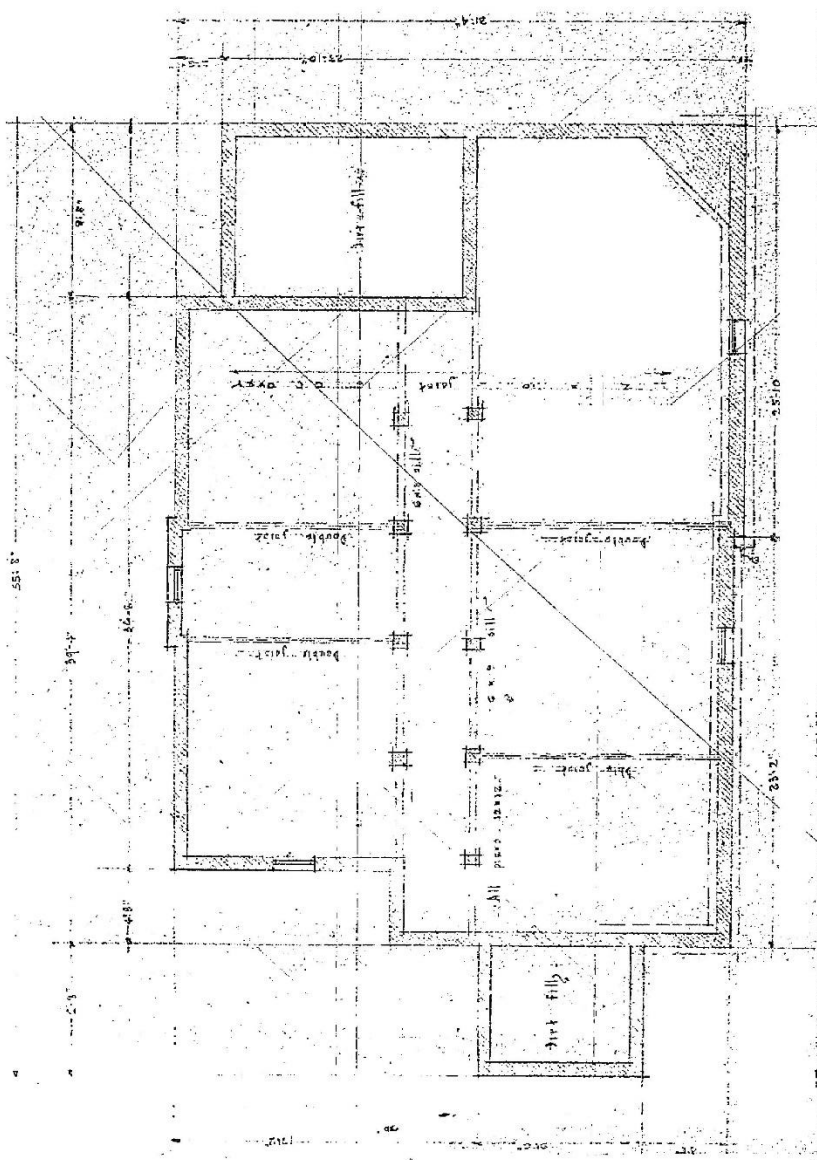
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RIGHT ELEVATION  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"	DATE: 11/17/21	PROJECT: 2021-008	SHEET: 28
DRAWN BY: M. H. NICHOLS		CHECKED BY: M. H. NICHOLS	
PROJECT: 2021-008			

161197



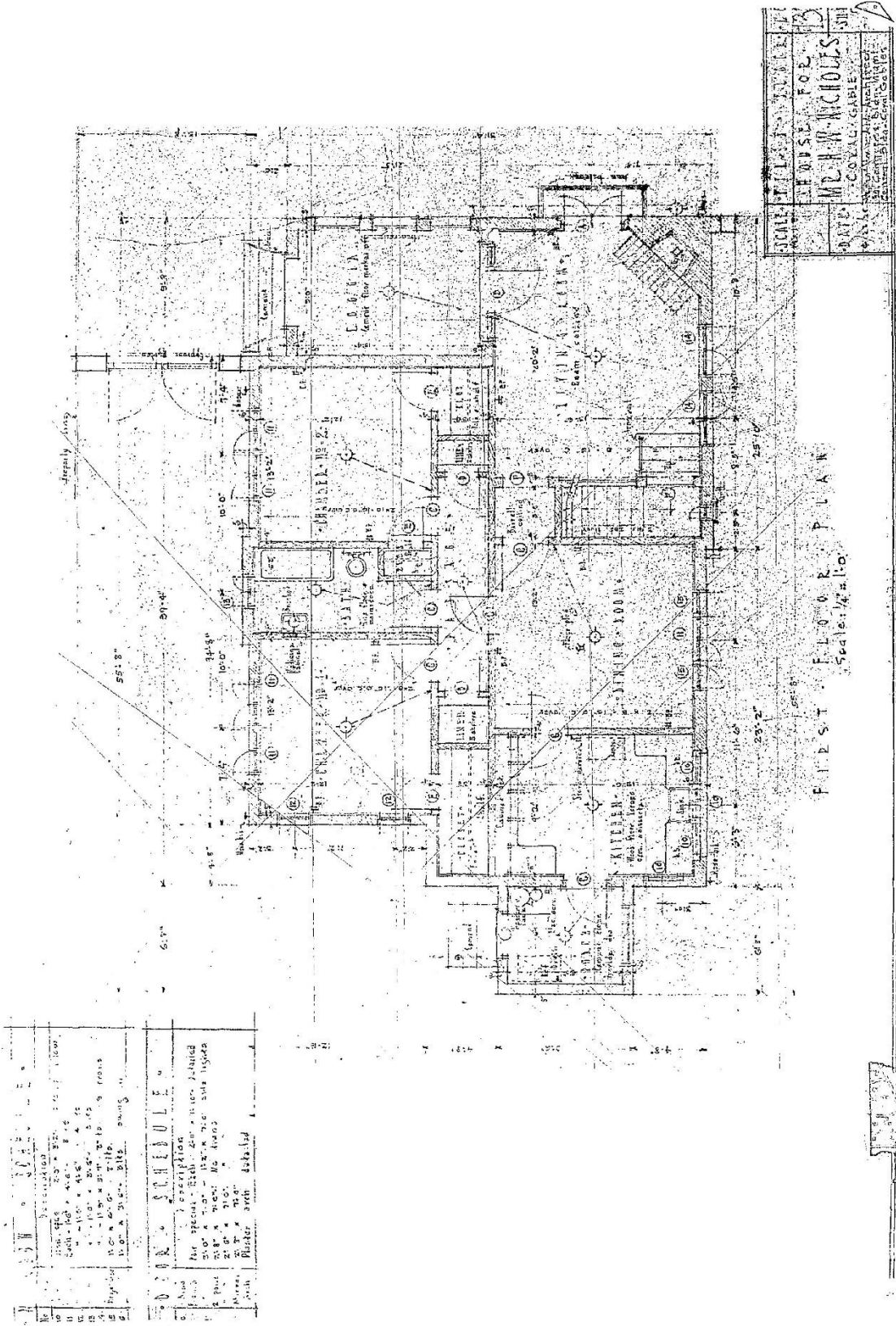
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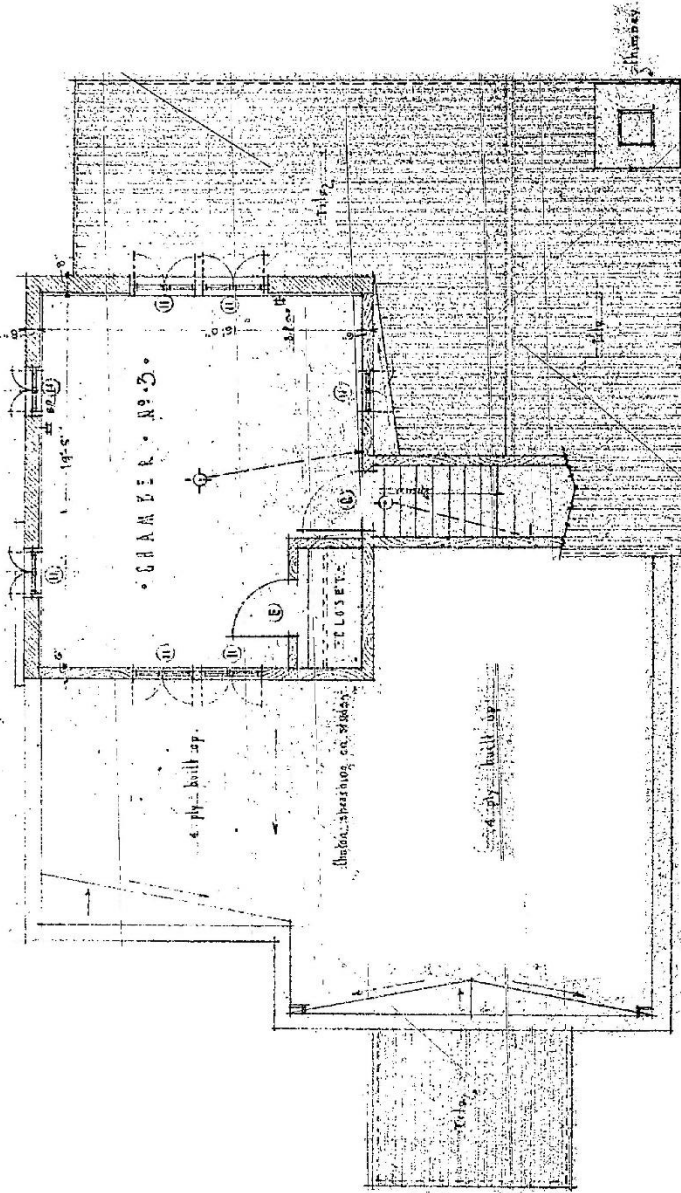
LOIS 39-40 56-17  
COCOA GROVE MO 12

DATE	APR 1	1925	FOR	1925
NAME	MR. H. W. NICHOLS	COMMISSIONER	HOUSE	FOR
STATE	MASS.	100	100	100





161197



SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

DESIGNED BY J. H. M. MICHAELS	CHECKED BY J. H. M. MICHAELS	DATE 4/21/19	PROJECT Coral Gables
SHEET 132		COM HOUSE FOR	

1197