

Report of the City of Coral Gables Planning Department

Historic Preservation Division

To the Historic Preservation Board

on the designation of

The Church of the Little Flower

Historic District

Dated: March 1992

THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION



CITY HALL 405 BILTMORE WAY
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA 33134

LHD-92-03

DESIGNATION REPORT

CHURCH OF THE LITTLE FLOWER HISTORIC DISTRICT

Consisting of the **Church, Parish Hall, Rectory and School**, generally bounded by Valencia Avenue on the north, Palermo Avenue on the south, Palos Street on the east, and Indian Mound Trail on the west.

Legal Description: All Blocks 6, 6A, 7, Section "D"; Lots 9 and 10, Block 20, Section "D"; Lots 1 thru 3, Block 7; Lots 1 thru 3 and 23 thru 31, Block 8, Country Club Section Part One

Present Owner: Archdiocese of Miami

Present Use: Religious Institution

Applicant: Frank B. Abbott, Architect

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Founded in 1926, the Church of the Little Flower was the first Catholic Church to be established in Coral Gables. Planned from its inception to be one of the principal religious institutions in the City, the parish presently has over 5,000 members, and over 700 students are enrolled in the elementary and junior high schools.

Throughout its long history, the Church has served as a community focal point, and the meteoric growth of the parish and its facilities serves as a testament to this institution's significance within the religious sphere of the City.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Church of the Little Flower, dedicated in 1927, was the first Catholic church to be built in Coral Gables. Built on a site donated by Coral Gables' founder George Merrick, the 1927 church was the first in a series of buildings planned for the parish. Today, in response to the needs of its parish, the Church of the Little Flower has grown to include a number of buildings for specific functions in keeping with the mission of the church. They include a parish hall (the original church), rectory, parochial school, and an administration building. A larger church was built in 1951 to accommodate the growing parish. Constructed over a three-decade period, from the 1920's to the 1950's, these buildings are under consideration for inclusion within the Church of the Little Flower Historic District.

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JUSTIFICATION OF BOUNDARIES/INDIVIDUAL LEGAL DESCRIPTIONS

Two buildings which are owned and operated by the Church of the Little Flower have previously been designated as local historic landmarks. The parish hall (the original church) was designated in 1989, and the former Dr. McShane residence at 1253 Anastasia Avenue, (now the church's convent) was designated in 1991. The parish hall is included within this district nomination because of its long association with the Church's history. The Dr. McShane residence, however, is not included within the district nomination because of its recent association with the church, as it purchased the building in 1990. Its significance is associated with the original owner and architectural style, and is therefore not appropriate for inclusion here based solely on current ownership.

The boundaries of the Church of the Little Flower Historic District include all the properties which have been associated with the parish for a significant period of time. The properties under consideration for designation within the district are as follows:

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|
| -Church (1951, Barry and Kay, architects) |) | |
| (MAP KEY "A") |) | |
| |) | |
| -Parish Hall (1927, Gerald A. Barry, architect) |) | Lots 1 thru 3 and |
| (MAP KEY "B") |) | 23 thru 31, Block |
| (Located on the east side of Anastasia Avenue, |) | 8, Country Club |
| between Palermo Avenue and Sevilla Avenue) |) | Section Part One |
| |) | |
| -Administration Building |) | |
| (MAP KEY "C") |) | |
| 2711 Indian Mound Trail |) | |
| (1948, Steward and Skinner, architects; |) | |
| 1960 addition by Murray Blair Wright) |) | |
| |) | |
| -St. Theresa Catholic School |) | All Blocks 6, 6A |
| (MAP KEY "D") |) | and 7, Section "D" |
| 2701 Indian Mound Trail |) | |
| (1925, Walter DeGarmo; later additions) |) | |
| 1938, 1947, 1948, 1958 by various architects) |) | |
| |) | |
| -Rectory |) | Lots 1 thru 3, |
| (MAP KEY "E") |) | Block 7, Country |
| 1270 Anastasia Avenue |) | Club Section Part |
| (1924 H. George Fink, architect) |) | One |
| |) | |
| -Parking Lot |) | Lots 9 and 10, |
| (located at the west side of the |) | Block 20, Section |
| intersection at Indian Mound Trail |) | "D" |
| and Sevilla Avenue) |) | |

ASSOCIATIONS WITH HISTORICAL EVENTS AND PERSONS WHO HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO CORAL GABLES HISTORY (NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA "A" AND "B")

The Church of the Little Flower is intimately associated with the leadership of the Reverend Thomas Comber. Reverend Comber, originally from Ireland, was first assigned missionary work in Jacksonville, Florida.

In 1926 he was assigned to the parish of the Church of the Little Flower in Coral Gables, the second Catholic parish in Greater Miami. Members of the parish originally met in St. Joseph's Academy (a Catholic boarding school established in 1925 by the Sisters of St. Joseph) and it became evident that the first priority of the new parish would be to construct a church.

Land for the church was donated by Coral Gables' founder, George Merrick, and construction began in June of 1927. The church was dedicated in December. The solemn high mass was attended by such luminaries as Mayor Edward E. ("Doc") Damers and George E. Merrick. The sermon was delivered by the most Reverend Patrick Barry, then Bishop of the Diocese.

The parish was named for Saint Theresa of Lisieux, who was also known as "the little flower". One of the most popular of the modern saints, Saint Theresa was a French Carmelite nun who lived from 1873 to 1897.

The parish thrived under the leadership of Reverend Comber, and in 1932 purchased a residence across the street from the Church, at 1270 Anastasia Avenue, which became the rectory. (The residence had originally been built for C. W. DeLong, the General Sales Manager of George Merrick's Coral Gables Corporation).

In 1932, St. Joseph's Academy, located just north of the Church of the Little Flower, became part of the parish. The name was changed to St. Theresa's School.

In 1951, in response to the continued growth of the parish, a larger church was constructed to the north of the original 1927 church. Designed to seat 1,000 people, the new church was designed with reference to architecture of the Spanish Colonial period. At this time, the original church became known as the Parish Hall, and began to be used as a social and recreational center.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

The Church has been actively involved in the community from the beginning. In 1926 the Church founded a Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troop. During World War II the Church sponsored dances for servicemen, and the priests said masses at the Miami-Biltmore Army Hospital, Richmond Naval Air Station, and the Thirty-sixth Street Army Base. Members of the parish participated in the Civilian Defense Program, and a Casualty Station was established in the auditorium of the 1927 Church building.

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St. Theresa School has likewise played an important role in the community. From its inception in 1932 to the present, it has graduated many thousands of students.

From its original parish of some 200 members, the Church has now grown to over 5,000 members, and serves the surrounding Miami community as well as Coral Gables.

ARCHITECTURAL DISTINCTION (NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA "C")

Although constructed over a three-decade span, the buildings within the Church of the Little Flower historic district relate to each other, and share an architectural continuity. Each building represents an example of the Mediterranean Revival style, as adapted to ecclesiastical, institutional, and residential architecture.

The present church, built in 1951, would not normally be considered eligible for local historic designation because it does not yet meet the minimum 50-year age criterion. However, it is being included within this nomination because of its considerable architectural distinction. (It is of special note that the architect for both the original church and the new church were the same. The continuity of buildings is much the result of the architect's desire to have them "work" as companion pieces.) Further, the Church's presence for over forty years as the focal point for the complex, lends substance to its inclusion as a "contributing building".

The Architects

Gerald A. Barry (1894-1966) (Original Church, (now Parish Hall/Present Church)

A Chicago architect, Gerald A. Barry was the nephew of the Reverend Patrick Barry, who was Bishop of the Miami diocese in the 1920's. Gerald Barry designed both the Little Flower's original 1927 church, as well as the 1951 church, with his partner Fred D. Kay.

In Chicago, Barry was a prolific church architect, and designed at least fifteen churches there, both in sole practice and with the Barry and Kay firm.

Walter DeGarmo (1876-1952) (St. Joseph's Academy, now St. Theresa Catholic School).

With degrees in civil engineering and architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University; DeGarmo originally worked for the John Russell Pope firm in New York. In 1903, he moved to Miami and opened an architectural office soon afterwards. He is regarded as Miami's first registered architect. While DeGarmo designed specifically for the tropical South Florida climate, his buildings incorporate many classical design motifs. His best-known buildings include the Miami City Hall, the McAllister Hotel (demolished), and the Miami Fire Station on Flagler Street. He also designed schools, churches, and theaters in Miami, as well as many residences in Coral Gables.

REVISED MAY 26, 1992**H. George Fink (1890-1975) (Rectory, 1270 Anastasia Avenue)**

H. George Fink was cousin to George Merrick and was responsible for much of the design of Coral Gables. Fink began work for Merrick in 1921 and in the same year, became (at the age of thirty-one) the youngest architect to be admitted to the American Institute of Architects.

Fink designed numerous Mediterranean Revival residential and commercial structures in Coral Gables and in 1924 was honored by King Alphonso XIII of Spain for his "interesting, outstanding and extremely artistic interpretation and reproduction of the Spanish Arts in America."

In 1924, he designed the residence at 1270 Anastasia Avenue for C. W. DeLong, the General Sales Manager for the Coral Gables Corporation. In 1932, the Church of the Little Flower acquired the residence for use as their rectory.

**Steward and Skinner (Administrative Office, St. Theresa School)
2701 Indian Mound Trail,**

The firm of Harold D. Steward, John L. Skinner, and Coulton Skinner was formed in Miami in 1941. Among their larger projects were the Miami Seaquarium, Mercy Hospital, several buildings at the University of Miami, and the Miami Public Library at Bayfront Park (demolished).

In 1948, they designed a convent for the Church of the Little Flower, at 2711 Indian Mound Trail. The building now houses the administrative offices for St. Theresa School.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS; PROPOSED ADDITION TO ST. THERESA'S SCHOOL

Concurrent with this application for historic designation, the Church is requesting site plan approval and a use and area map amendment from the Planning and Zoning Board/City Commission in order to expand St. Theresa's School. The addition is two stories in height, will have six classrooms, and contain approximately 5,600 square feet. Presently the Use and Area Map indicates "school playground" on a location which the building will partially occupy. The request before the Planning and Zoning Board will change it to "parochial school" use.

The new wing will connect to the 1958 classroom wing (keyed "F" on the site plan) and extrapolates for its design from the original 1925 school building. The connections between the wings of the school buildings have been carefully studied, and the use of colonnades provides cover from point to point.

The building materials, roof slope, proportions, and fenestration for the new classroom wing are intended to reintroduce the character of the original architectural design.

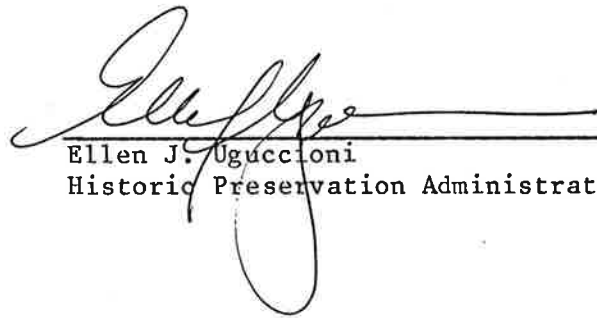
The design for the project received preliminary approval from the Board of Architects on February 13, 1992. **The Historic Preservation Board is being asked for conceptual approval of the design for the new wing, in addition to a recommendation for local historic designation.**

STAFF ANALYSIS/RECOMMENDATION

The Church of the Little Flower historic district is a collection of geographically related properties which are linked by their direct association with the Church. Although some of the properties are under fifty years of age, they are included because of their strong association with the history of the parish. The parking lot at Indian Mound Trail is included within the district to ensure that any new construction which may occur on that site conforms to the existing architecture of the district. The proposed addition principally affects the 1958 classroom building, and is considered highly compatible in terms of design, and the interrelationship of the building. The staff is of the opinion that the construction of that wing will not adversely affect the complex, nor be of sufficient size to destroy the integrity of the buildings within the District. The staff would therefore recommend conceptual APPROVAL of the addition in connection with the designation report.

Staff finds that the Church of the Little Flower historic district meets the criteria for significance because of its distinctive architecture; association with the early history of Coral Gables; and its association with persons significant in our local history. Therefore, Staff finds the "Church of the Little Flower Historic District" eligible for listing in the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places.

Respectfully submitted,



Ellen J. Ugucconi
Historic Preservation Administrator

REVISED, MAY 26, 1992Selected Bibliography

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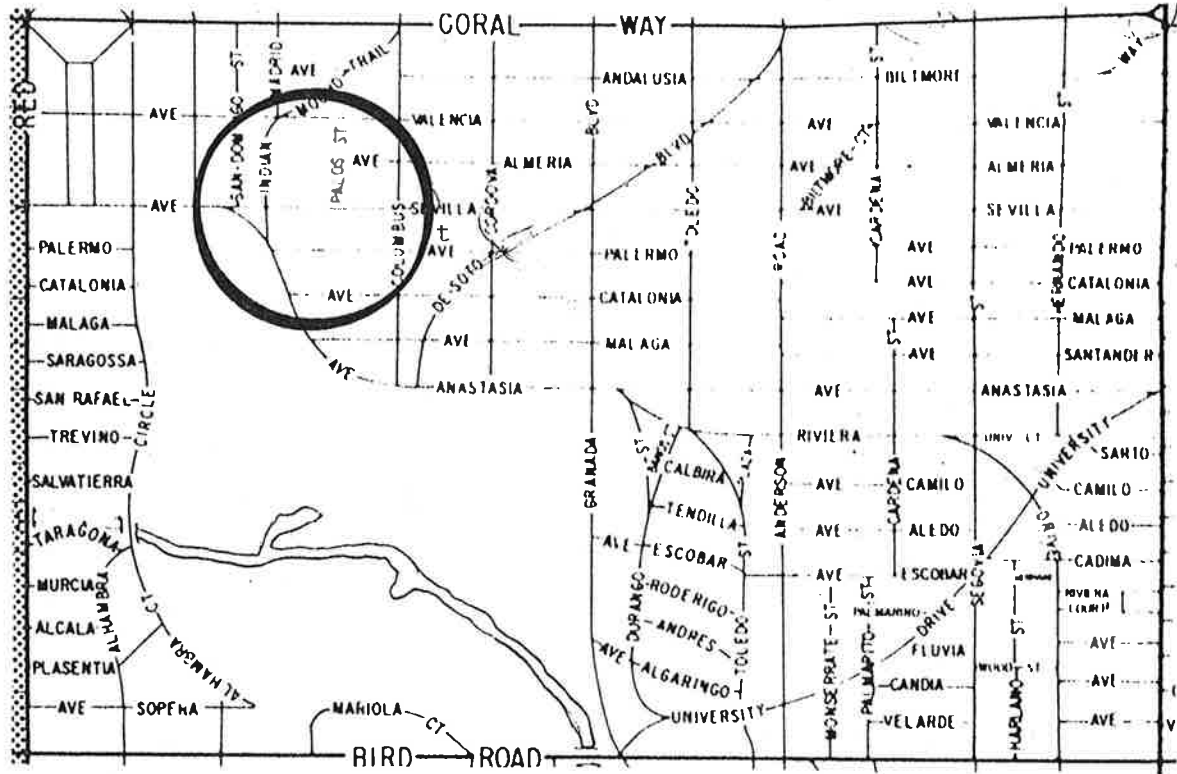
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"Walter DeGarmo: Fantasies in Concrete," Historical Association of Southern Florida Update, Volume II, No. 1, February 1984, pp. 3-6.

LOCATION MAP



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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.

*A. Parish Hall (constructed 1927)

Designed by architect Gerald A. Barry, this building served as the original church. After a larger church was constructed in 1951, the original church was used as the parish hall.

The Church was described in contemporary newspaper accounts as "Spanish Mission" in design, and featured characteristic motifs associated with the Mediterranean architectural theme of Coral Gables. These features included cast ornament above the portals, round-arched windows, bracketed balconies with wrought iron, and an open arcade on the second story composed of exposed wooden rafters.

The parish hall was rehabilitated in 1991 by the firm of Santos/Raimundez architects.



west elevation

*The parish hall was individually designed as a local historic landmark in 1989.

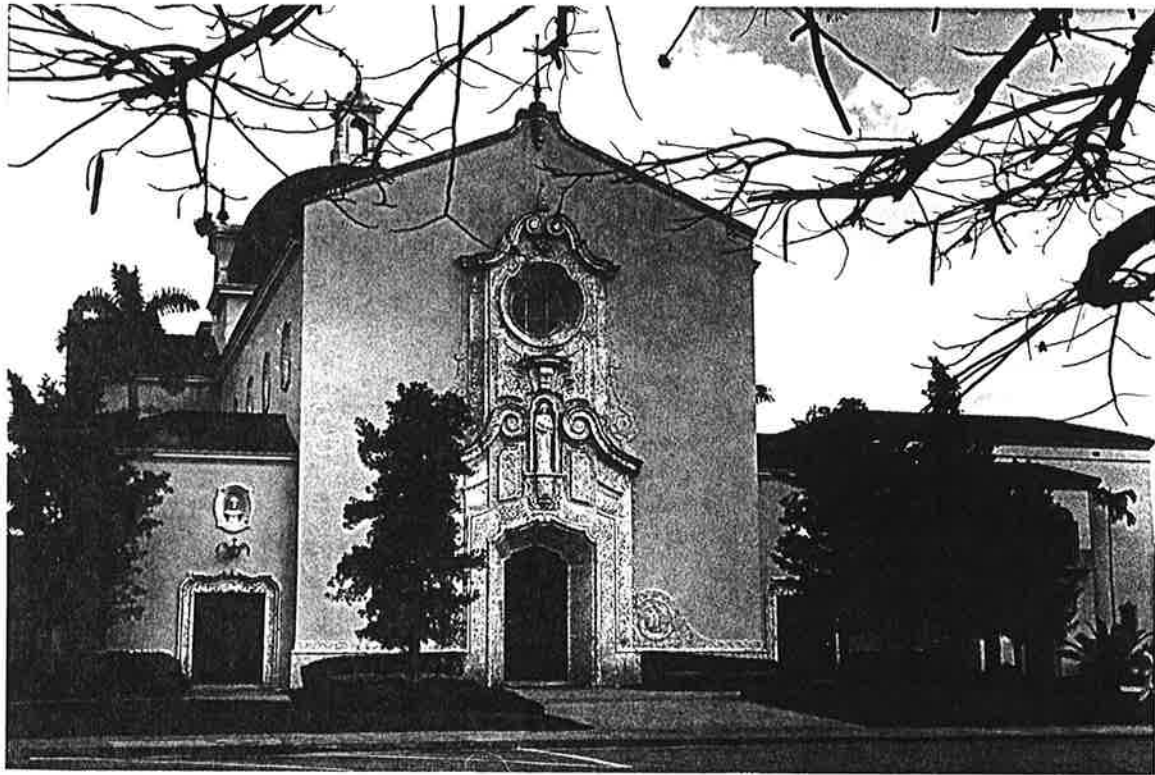
B. CHURCH (constructed 1951)

Also designed by Gerald A. Barry in conjunction with his architectural firm Barry and Kay, this building replaced the old church, which could no longer accommodate the Little Flower's growing parish. The new church, designed in the traditional cruciform shape, could seat 1000. The architects described the church in a contemporary newspaper article as "designed in a traditional style of architecture, using the art forms of the Spanish Renaissance, and influenced by the Spanish Colonial architecture of Mexico."

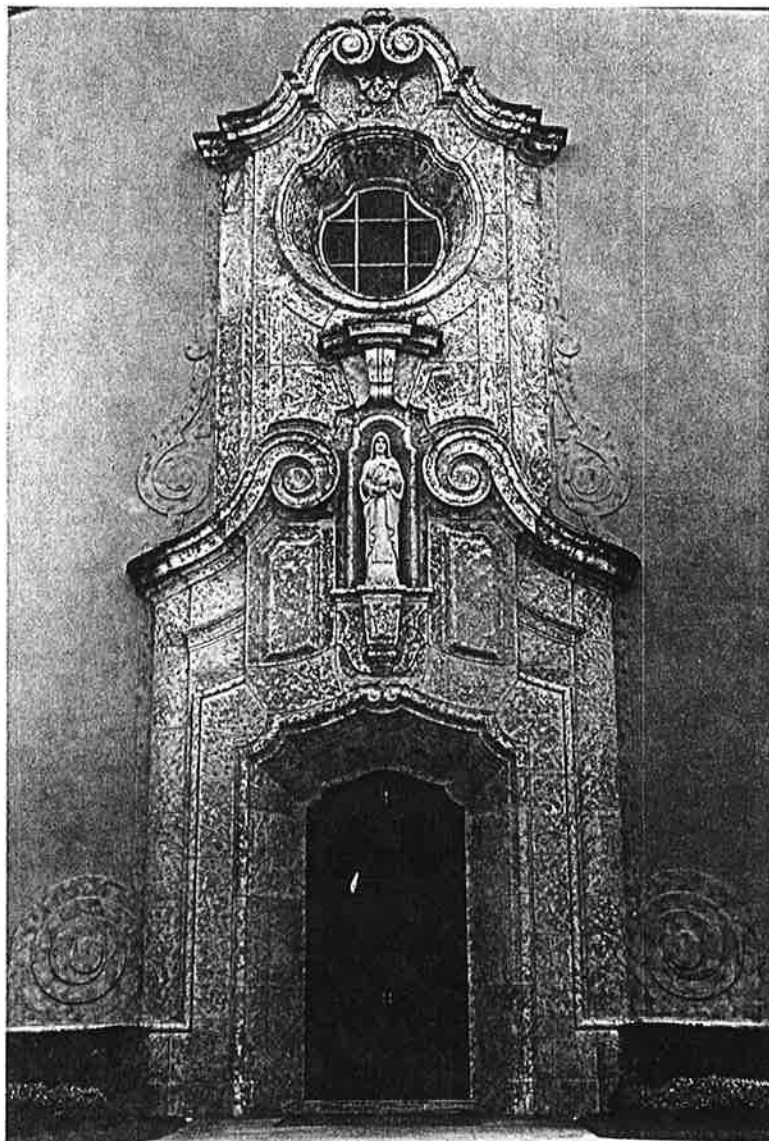


north elevation

1. Dome surmounted by round arched cupola
2. Main gable roof; shed roofs covering side aisles
3. Recessed oculus windows with decorative stone surrounds



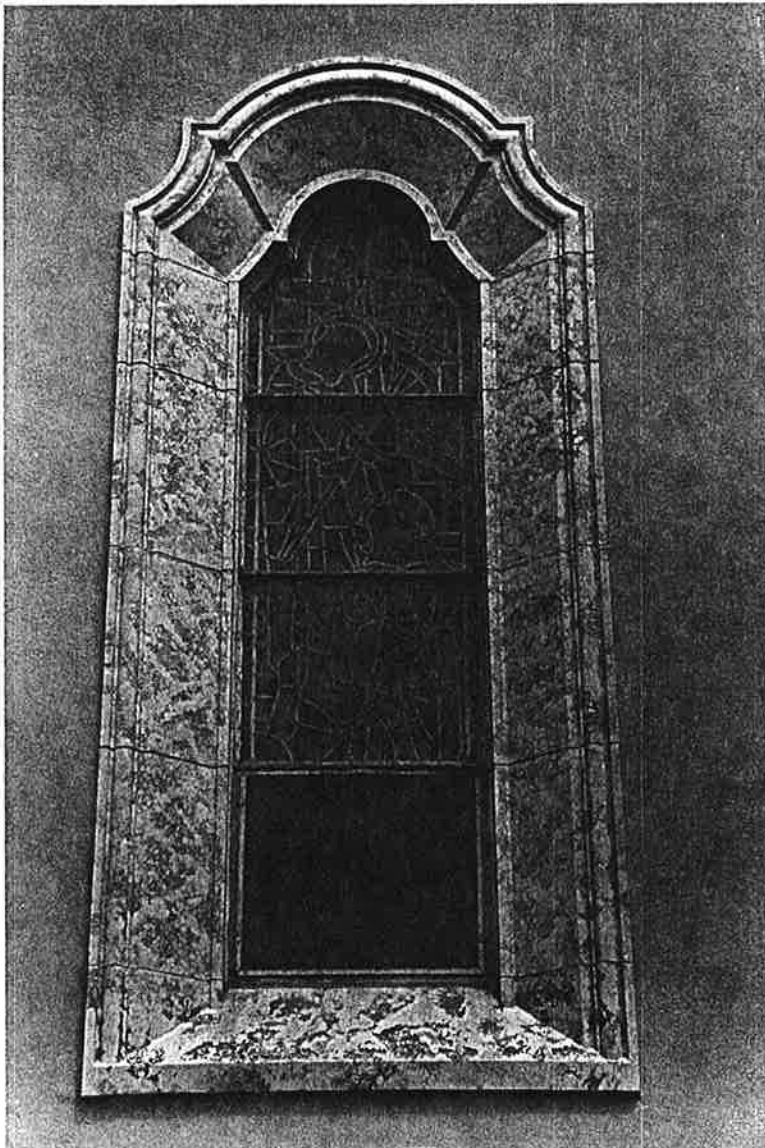
west elevation



Detail, west elevation
entrance. Carved stone
surround.



south elevation



Detail, south elevation
window

C. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (constructed 1948, addition 1960 by Murray Blair Wright)

Designed by the architectural firm of Steward and Skinner, this building was originally built as a convent for the nuns teaching at St. Theresa School. Today, it serves as the administration building for the school.



partial west elevation

1. Hipped and gabled roof, covered with barrel tile
2. Projecting central entrance pavilion
3. Quoins
4. Ornamented cornice
5. String course
6. Cast cement door surround with quoins and swan's neck pediment
7. Windows with cast cement surrounds and raised entablatures

ALTERATIONS: The original casement windows have been replaced by aluminum awning type.

- D. ST. THERESA SCHOOL (original three-story building constructed 1925, architect unknown. Later additions constructed 1938, 1947, 1948, 1958 by Howard Knight, Steward and Skinner, Baxter and Gorman, Murray Blair Wright, and T.J. Madden, Jr.)

The three-story building which now comprises the main wing of St. Theresa School was originally built in 1925 for the Sisters of St. Joseph. It opened in the fall of 1925 as St. Joseph's Academy, a private Catholic boarding school for girls. In 1932, the school became the Church of the Little Flower's parochial school, and was re-named St. Theresa School. Until 1958, the school enrolled students through the high school level. Since that time, only kindergarten through junior high students matriculate.

Over the years, the school has had several additions, and new structures have been added on the surrounding property, including a kindergarten building, cafeteria, locker rooms, and a classroom wing.

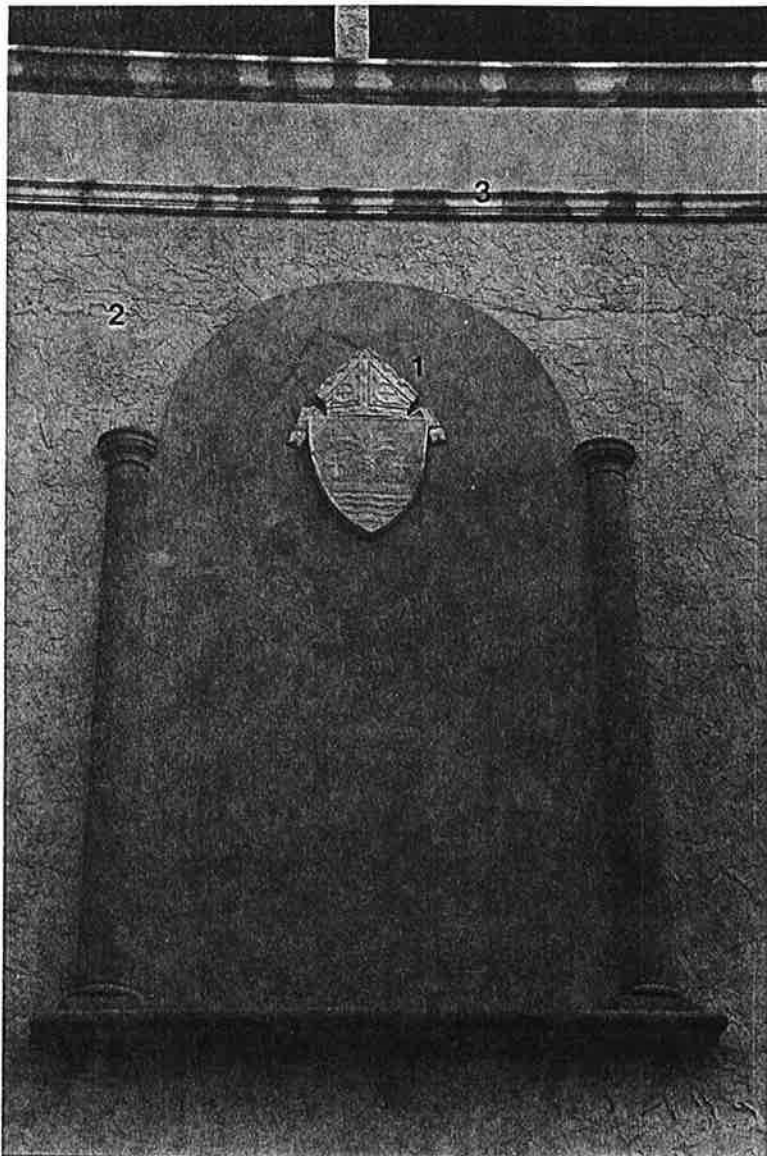


Original 1925 school, west elevation

1. Round arched doorway with pilasters supporting an entablature, leading onto balcony
2. Round arched niche projecting above roofline
3. Casement windows in unornamented rectangular surrounds
4. recessed oculus window with cast cement ornamentation
5. Cement grilles over windows and doorway, first floor



west elevation



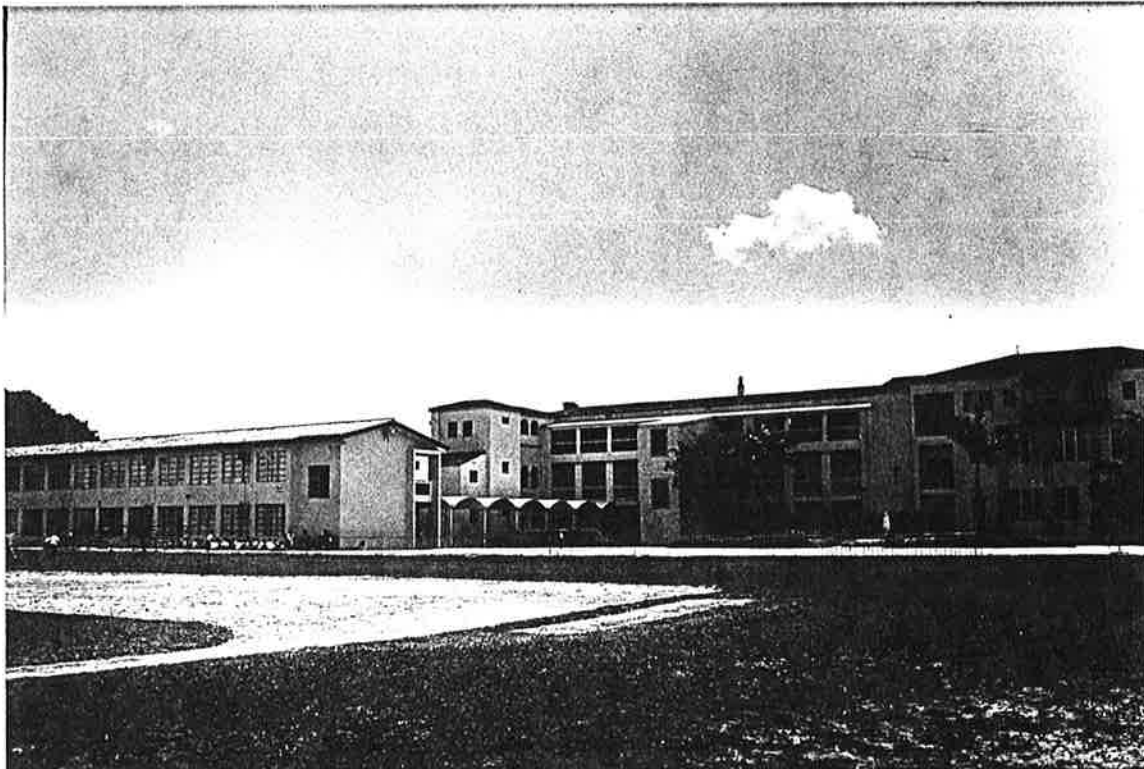
Detail, west elevation

1. Blind arch with Plaster medallion, flanked by columns with Tuscan capitals
2. Rough texture stucco
3. String course



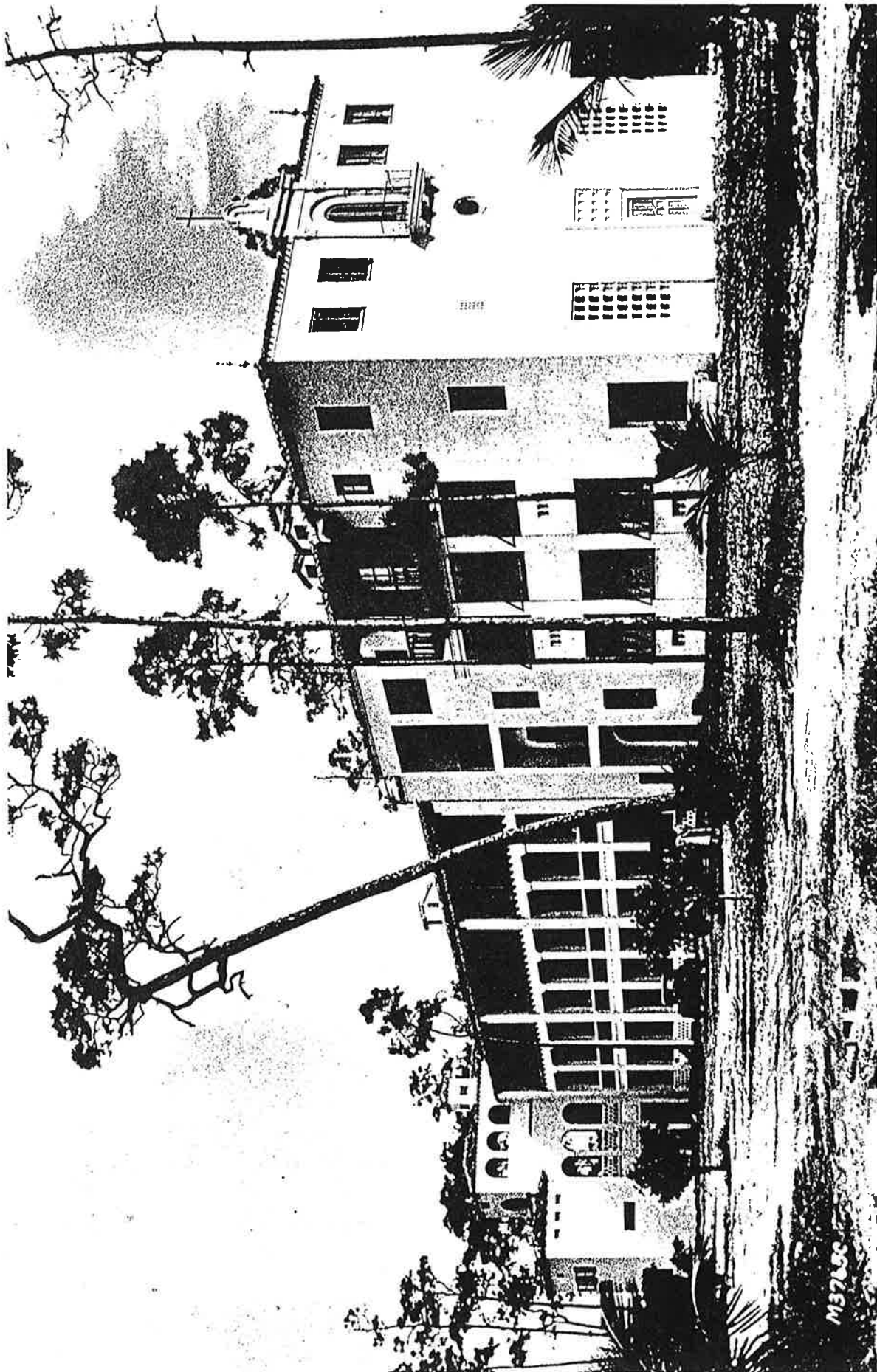
1925 school

north elevation

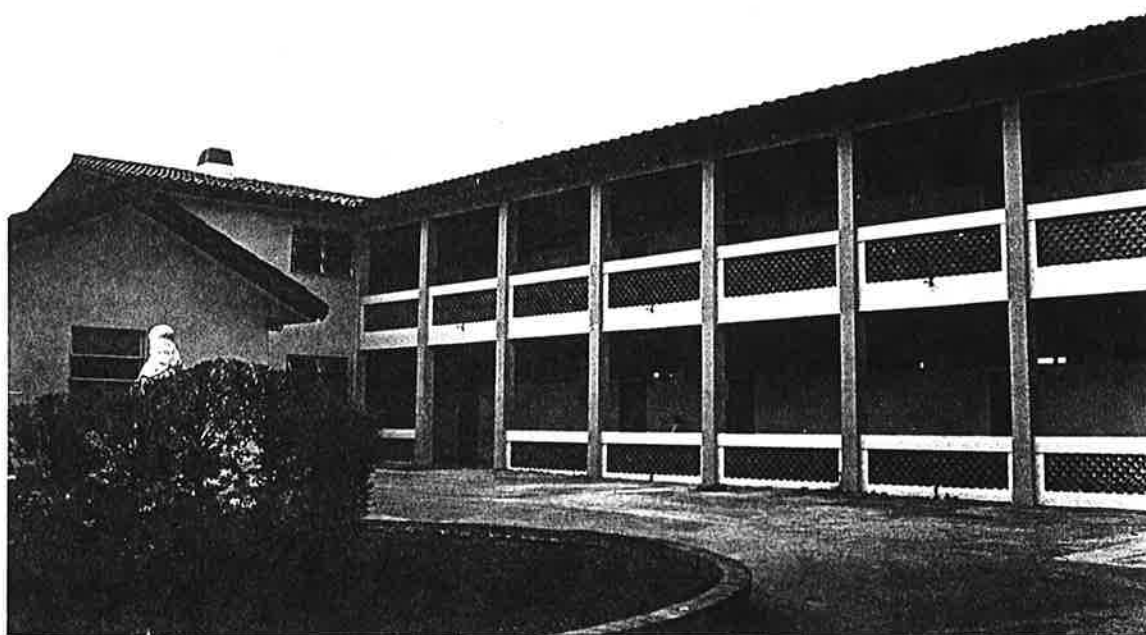


1958 school wing in foreground;
1925 school in background

north elevation



St. Theresa School (then St. Joseph's Academy) as it appeared in 1925.
(Photograph by William Fishbaugh)



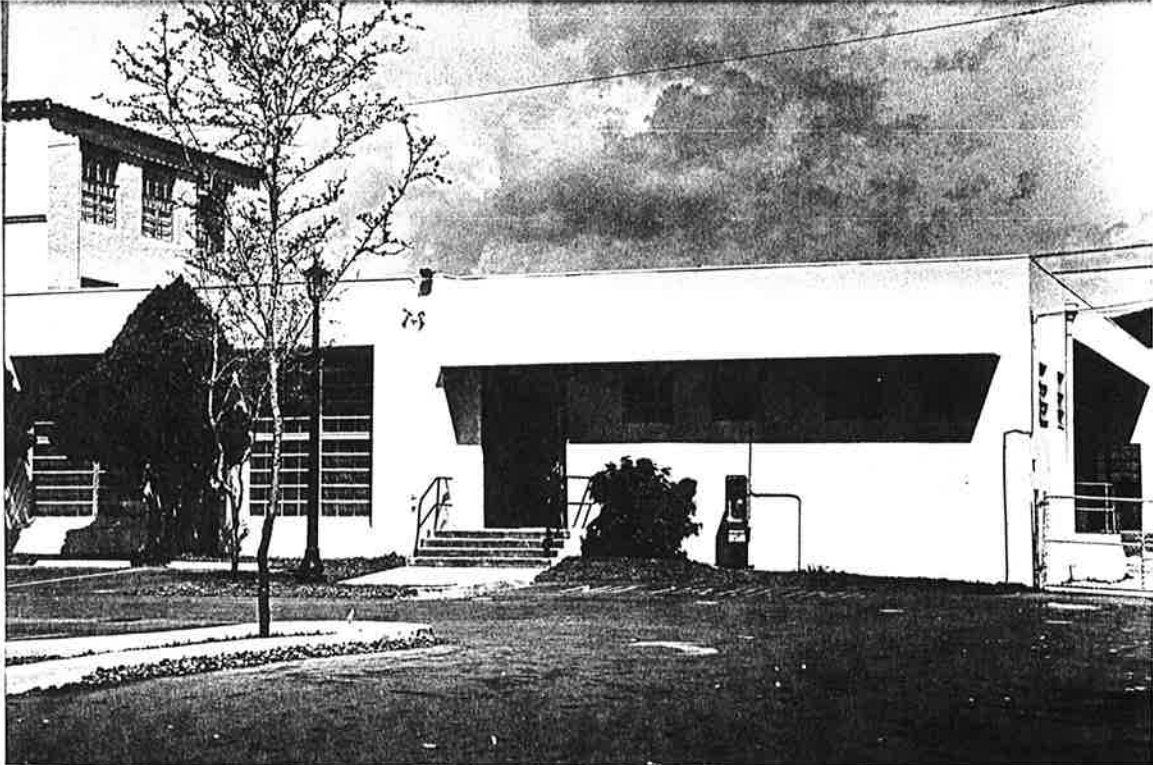
1958 school wing

partial south elevation



Kindergarten (1947)

north elevation



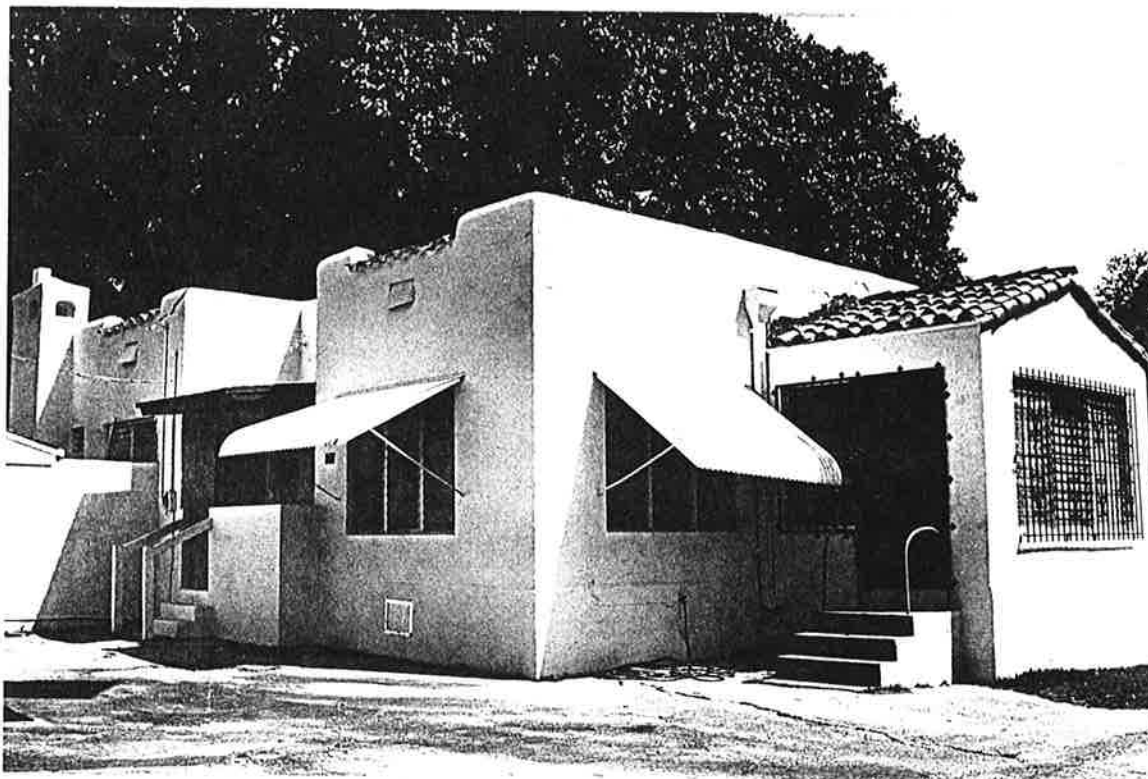
Cafeteria (1948, addition 1958)

south elevation



Boys' locker room (date of original construction unknown, addition 1958)

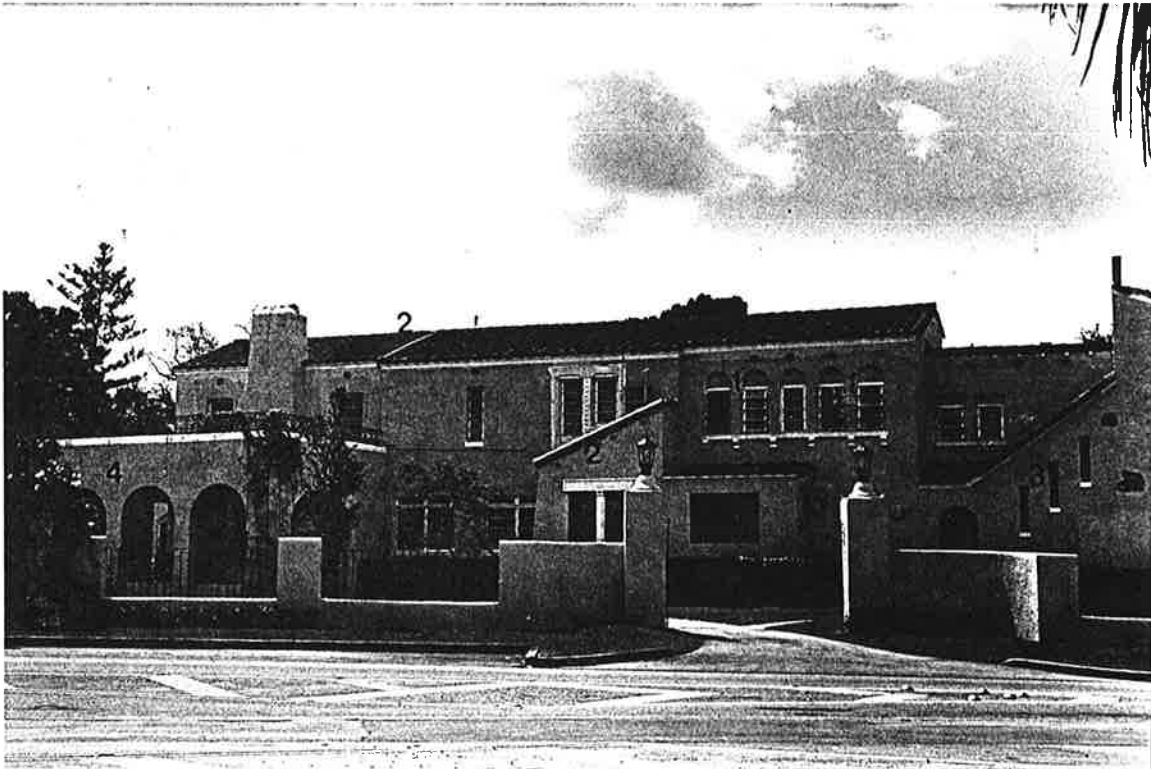
west elevation



Girls' locker room (date of construction c. 1925) west elevation

E. Rectory (constructed 1924)

Designed by H. George Fink in 1924, this was originally the residence of C.W. DeLong. The building was acquired by the Church of the Little Flower in 1932 for use as a rectory. It is located at 1270 Anastasia Avenue.



north elevation

1. Series of round arched windows
2. Gabled and shed roofs of varying pitches, covered with barrel tile
3. Staircase windows which "step down"
4. Porte cochere with round arches