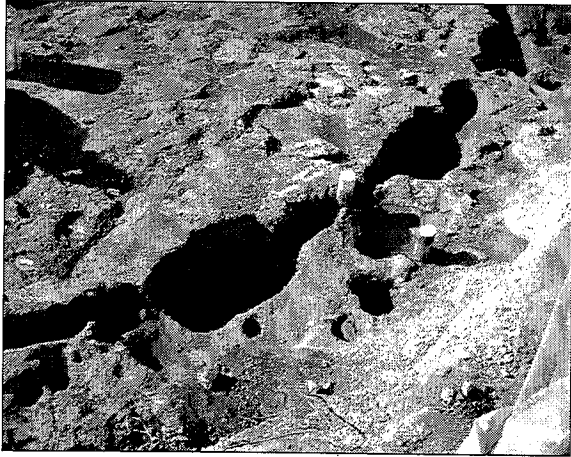

THE MIAMI CIRCLE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Approximately 401 BRICKELL AVENUE

Designation Report



Detail, Post holes
October 2002



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION OF THE
MIAMI CIRCLE
AS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

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2002

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Preservation Officer
January 5, 2010

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Unknown, determined to be a 2,000 year old Tequesta settlement
Later Brickell Point, named for the pioneering Brickell family who operated a
trading post on the site in the 19th century.

Current Name:

Miami Circle Archaeological Site

Location:

401 Brickell Avenue (approximately)
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Board of Trustees [Governor and Cabinet] of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund
for the State of Florida¹

Present Use:

The site is protected by a chain link fence in anticipation of its interpretation
leading to access by the public.

Zoning District:

R-4 [Multi-family High Density Residential

Future Land Use:

Civic Space (CS) under the Miami 21 Code

Tax Folio Number:

01-0210-000-1050

¹ The Dade County Assessor's records indicates that for mailing and inquiries, Miami-Dade County OCED, 140 West
Flagler, Suite 1000, Miami, Florida 33130

Boundary Description:

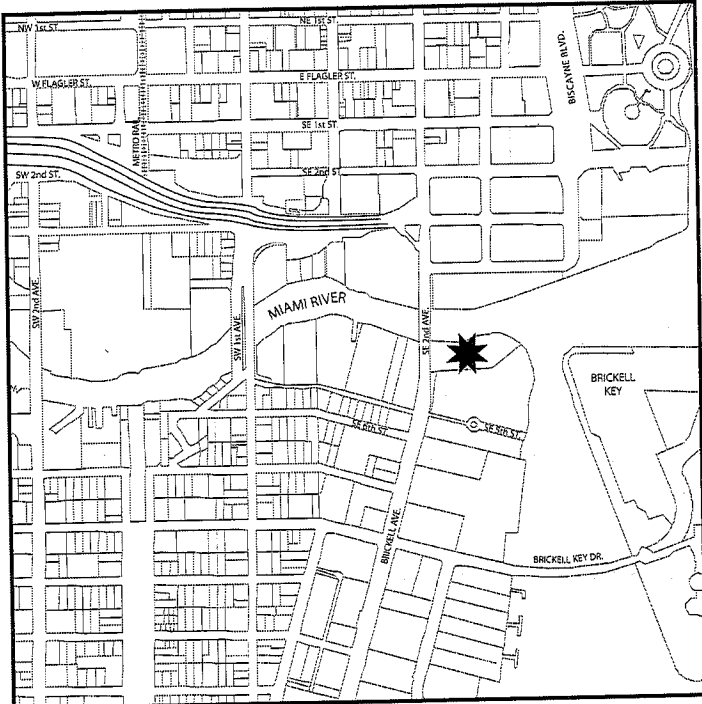
That part of Lot 1, BRICKELL POINT, described as commencing on the easterly right-of-way line of Brickell Avenue and the northerly line of SE 5th Street, northerly along the easterly right-of-way line of Brickell Avenue a distance of 141.48 ft, then continue northerly 112.78 ft to the point of beginning; continue northerly along said right-of-way 186.52 ft to the bulk-head line along the south bank of the Miami River; thence northeasterly along said bulk-head line 282.07 ft; thence northeasterly along said bulk-head 131.59 ft; thence southeasterly along said bulk-head line 97.54 ft; thence southeasterly along said bulk-head line 64.53 ft; thence southwesterly 221.00 ft; thence southwesterly 407.50 ft to the point of beginning, as recorded in Plat Book 8, page 93, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

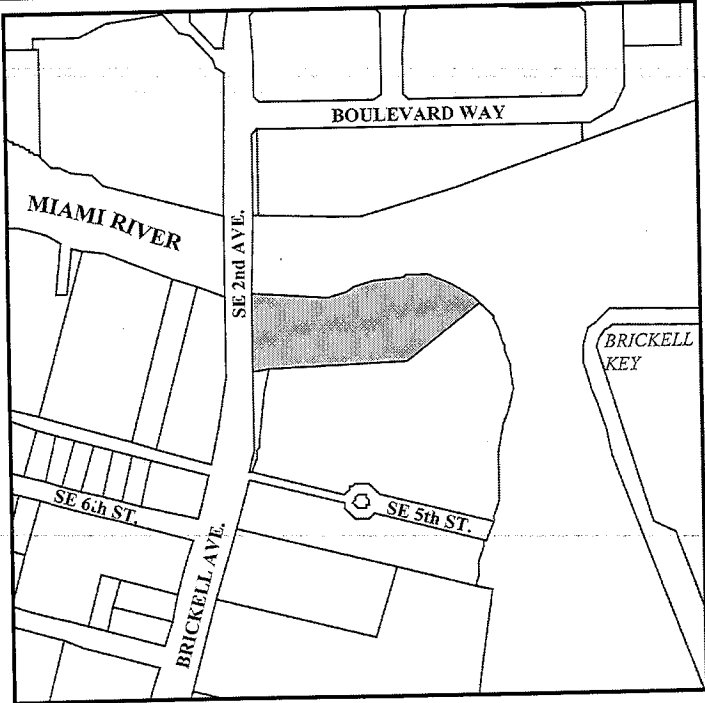
Archaeological Site

MIAMI CIRCLE

Approximately 401 BRICKELL AVENUE




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

Glades I early (500 B.C.–A.D. 500)

Glades II a (A.D. 750–900)

Architect:

Not applicable

Builder/Contractor:

Not applicable

Statement of Significance:

The Miami Circle site is significant on a local, state and national level because of its identity and context as a Native American site, as well as in its value to scientific research and the potential for new information that can be gained from it.

The Brickell Point/Miami Circle site is an important component of what was once a large Native American village complex. During the period of European contact, occupation was concentrated on the north bank of the Miami River. The village, and the Native Americans who lived there, were known as "Tequesta." The Brickell Point/Miami Circle site represents an earlier component of the village, which apparently existed for more than 2,000 years at the mouth of the Miami River. Despite the modern urban setting, the site contains well-preserved midden deposits as well as evidence of precontact structures, preserved as holes and basins cut and carved into the Miami oolitic limestone. The Miami Circle feature is one of these structures.

The prominent position of this feature at Brickell Point and high number of exotic artifacts associated with the site suggest that this may have been an important building, such as a chief's house. The presence of undisturbed midden and architectural features such as the Circle make this a significant site. Little is known about Native American architecture in southern Florida and few sites have been investigated by block excavations. Analysis of the Circle feature and the ecological and artifactual material will help improve our understanding of the Glades cultural region. The preservation of the site allows for future investigation, which may help answer additional questions about the site complex and its inhabitants.

The Miami Circle's position in the landscape suggests that it had an important role at the Brickell Point site. Situated near the water's edge, it was easily accessible

by canoe via the mouth of the Miami River. Situated on a point, it was widely visible from Biscayne Bay and the Miami River. Its location afforded wide views overlooking both Biscayne Bay to the east and a stretch of the Miami River to the west.

The Miami Circle's location at the Brickell Point site suggests that it had an important role in local and regional Native American society. The Brickell Point site is a portion of a regionally important Indian village. During the historic contact period, ca. A.D. 1500–1750, this village was known as Tequesta and was the seat of a Native American polity. Excavation and research at Brickell Point may help in better understanding the other components of this village, including the Granada site (8DA11)², which was the focus of study almost 20 years ago.

The Miami Circle represents the most complete remains to be identified archaeologically in southeastern Florida of what appears to be a Native American architectural structure. As such, it is a rare and possibly unique cultural resource which caused it to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 2009.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Brickell Point/Miami Circle site has significance in the archaeological heritage of the City of Miami and southern Florida and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

Brickell Point contains evidence of precontact structures, preserved as holes and basins cut and carved into the Miami Oolitic limestone. The Miami Circle feature is one of these structures.

Little is known about Native American architecture in southern Florida. In fact, the Miami Circle represents the most complete remains to be identified archaeologically in southeastern Florida of what appears to be a Native American architectural structure. As such, it is a rare and possibly unique cultural resource.

Further analysis of the Circle's pattern of holes and basins could reveal more information about little-known Native American architecture in Florida. It is possible that the Miami Circle represents only the central portion of a larger structure, other remains of which are still unexcavated and covered by earth

² This number refers to the Florida Master Site File form that was completed for the Miami Circle, and is on file with the Florida Division of Historical Resources. The Granada Site is just north of the Miami Circle, in the area now occupied by the Knight Center, and formerly DuPont Plaza.

at the Brickell Point site. At this point, field observations indicate that the Miami Circle can be divided into roughly symmetrical north and south halves, each consisting of pairs of large and small basins that are roughly rectangular in plan-view. Most of the paired basins appear to be accompanied by a round hole lying immediately outside the circle defined by the basins. This indicates that the holes and basins comprising the Circle were planned and very carefully executed, providing additional insight into aspects of Native American aesthetics and architecture.

8. Has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The Brickell Point/Miami Circle Archaeological Site incorporates the remains of a portion of the Native American village known as Tequesta. The archaeological remains contain data that could provide significant insight into the daily life of the Tequesta. Analysis of materials excavated from the Miami Circle (e.g., ceramics, faunal³ bone, botanical remains, etc.) can help determine more about the Circle's age and function, and about the people who used it. The relatively high frequency of exotic materials is especially interesting, and will allow insight into the exchange networks in which the ancient inhabitants of the site participated.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Miami Circle occupies a 2.2-acre parcel of land on the southern bank of the Miami River, where it meets Biscayne Bay. The property is situated in downtown Miami. The Icon Brickell high-rise tower is immediately to the south; to the north is the Miami River; to the west is the approach to the Brickell Avenue Bridge; and to the east is Biscayne Bay.

Description

The Miami Circle is an archaeological feature identified during archaeological salvage excavations at the Brickell Point archaeological site (8DA12) in 1998. The Circle consists of holes and basins carved or cut into the Miami Oolitic limestone formation that is the bedrock in the local area. Research suggests that the Circle represents the "footprint" of a pre-Columbian structure.⁴ Black earth midden

³ Faunal refers to the animal life of a particular region or period, considered as a whole.

⁴ The Pre-Columbian period refers to the period before the appearance of significant European influences on the American continent. Technically the era refers before Christopher Columbus' voyages from 1492-1504. The term usually includes the history of American indigenous cultures until they were conquered or significantly influenced by Europeans.

⁵deposits occur stratigraphically over and in the holes that make up the Circle. Artifacts found during excavations are typical of the Glades (Everglades) Area, but a number of exotic items, such as basaltic stone celts (axes) and galena, have also been recovered. Since 1998, additional research elsewhere on the parcel that contains the Circle has revealed intact black earth midden and similar collections of holes cut through the limestone bedrock. Additional research since 1998 at Brickell Point revealed similar collections of holes cut through the limestone bedrock in other portions of the property.

The subject parcel is located on the Atlantic Coastal Ridge, a limestone formation that underlies all of coastal Miami. The bedrock underlying the site is Miami Oolitic, which is comprised of egg-shaped, calcium carbonate sands and is reported to be 125,000 years old. Scarry's reconstruction of pre-contact vegetation zones in the vicinity indicates that the immediate area of Brickell Point was dominated by hardwood hammock forest fringed by mangrove along the bay and riverfront, with vast tracts of pine flatwoods and prairie within a mile of the site. However, it is possible that mangrove communities along the banks of the Miami River were minimal because of the large volume of fresh water that drained eastward from the Everglades.

An auger survey⁶ of the Brickell Point property revealed that approximately 70 percent of the property is underlain by Oolitic limestone formation. The remaining 30 percent of the property is composed of a filled portion of the Miami River. The auger survey further demonstrated that black earth midden deposits, some exceeding 50 cm in thickness, occur on approximately 35 percent of the property. The midden deposits overlie the Miami Oolitic formation, though in some places a very thin lens of white or tan sand was observed at the interface. This is consistent with reports of a similar lens encountered during excavations of the Miami Circle feature. Other deposits routinely encountered across the site include a disturbed midden, which contains nineteenth, and twentieth century artifacts, as well as deposits of modern construction fill and twentieth century dredge fill. The entire 2.2-acre Brickell Point parcel is included in the Brickell Point/Miami Circle Archaeological Site, including the Miami Circle feature, surrounding midden, and other archaeological features present on the property.

The Miami Circle is the most well known feature of the Brickell Point site. The Circle is characterized by a patterned group of large and small holes, dug into the oolitic limestone bedrock underlying the Brickell Point Site, that collectively form a circle approximately 11.4 m (38.5 ft.) in diameter. The features comprising the Circle are arranged in a readily discernable pattern, alternating between relatively large oval and quasi-rectangular "basins" and smaller oval and round holes, many of which contain smaller secondary holes within them. Twenty-four (24) of the large oval and roughly rectangular shaped basin holes occur along the Circle's circumference and are, for the most part, well defined. Multiple

⁵ A midden is literally an area where trash was deposited.

⁶ An auger survey records the sediments beneath the ground surface

additional, typically circular, holes occur both within and immediately outside the Circle's circumference, although their relationship to the main Circle feature are in most cases unclear and some parallel the arc of the basins forming a discontinuous outer ring.

Archaeological and geological evidence supports the antiquity of the Miami Circle feature. Additional cut holes uncovered during an investigation by the State of Florida match closely the configuration and contents of those associated with the Miami Circle. The cut holes vary in size and shape, and are filled with dense, intact, black earth midden. Marks left by cutting tools can often be observed on the sides of the holes. Typical shapes range from cylindrical to conical, and sizes vary widely from 10 cm to more than 25 cm in diameter. Depths also range considerably. Holes in various stages of manufacture also suggest a human origin. Indurated crust or precipitate crust observed on the limestone and in the cut holes demonstrates considerable geological antiquity for these features.

Evidence of 19th and 20th century disturbances are abundant at the Miami Circle. The occupation of the property by the Brickell family included the construction of several buildings, driveways and sea walls. Evidence of this occupation is found in the artifacts and building debris. Construction of the Brickell Point Apartments in 1950 probably led to the most significant alteration of the property. Archaeological evidence shows that the natural topography was altered when portions of the black earth midden and Miami Oolite formations were cut away to provide a level platform for construction of the six apartment buildings and swimming pool. Associated disturbances include excavation for septic tanks and related pipes, exaction for ornamental tree planting, and excavation for footings and trenches for the buildings. In some cases, these excavations disturbed the midden deposits and removed parts of the limestone bedrock that held the carved and cut holes and basins. These disturbances are obvious and can be seen in the photographs and plans of the Circle. This type of disturbance is expected at an urban site like Brickell Point, but led to some controversy concerning origin of the Miami Circle Feature. Extensive historical, geological, and archaeological research by Carr and Ricisak, Wheeler, and Means and Scott however, argue for the antiquity of the site and the Circle feature.

Today, the Miami Circle parcel lacks native vegetation. Previous filling and leveling have removed most traces of original topography as well as ornamental trees.

Today, the Brickell Point/Miami Circle parcel lacks native vegetation. Previous filling and leveling have removed most traces of original topography as well as ornamental trees.

Archaeological Data:

The Miami Circle parcel contains the northernmost portion of the site originally recorded by John Goggin as Miami Midden #2 (8DA 12). Karl Squires briefly

mentions this site, describing a very large village on the north bank of the Miami River and another on the south bank at Brickell Point. In 1958 and 1959, Dan Laxson, an avocational archaeologist, conducted excavations to the south of Brickell Point property prior to the construction of an Elks Lodge. His excavations uncovered extensive black dirt midden deposits that he assigned state Master Site File Number 8DA98. The Icon Brickell high-rise was built over this area. Laxson also reported that the site once extended to the west of the Brickell Bridge, perhaps as far as Miami Avenue.

The Dade County Historic Survey, completed in 1980, revealed through archival research that pre-contact occupation of the area extended along Biscayne Bay for at least 1,000 feet south of the Miami River. Field visits by Carr between 1960 and 1980 indicated that the deepest midden deposits were located Brickell Point. Carr also collected a large quantity of glass beads and other artifacts associated with the Brickell Trading Post.

Salvage excavations were conducted in 1980 by the Miami-Dade County Historic Preservation Division prior to construction of a Holiday Inn Hotel, (later the Sheraton Hotel, and presently Icon Brickell,) located immediately south of Brickell Point. The project uncovered well-preserved black dirt midden deposits averaging 50 cm in depth. The project area was designated under the Florida Master Site File number 8DA98. Six radiocarbon dates were obtained from the lower midden deposits, indicating the site were first occupied during the Glades I Early period (500 B.C.–A.D. 750). Also encountered during these excavations were several alignments of postholes "drilled" in the Miami Oolite limestone that Carr interpreted as aboriginal.

In 1998, the Miami Circle was identified at Brickell Point during monitoring and excavations associated with the demolition of the Brickell Point Apartments. Intact deposits of black earth midden also were identified over the Circle and within the holes that make up the Circle. Artifacts recovered during these investigations are typical of the Glades (Everglades) Area, but a number of exotic artifacts, such as basaltic stone celts and galena, also were recovered.

Prior to participation in the acquisition of the Miami Circle site, Florida Governor Jeb Bush and the Cabinet requested that archeologists from Florida's Bureau of Archaeological Research conduct an assessment of the property. Thus, in the Fall of 1999, State Archaeologist Dr. Ryan Wheeler, conducted investigations at Brickell Point in order to investigate other portions of the property; gain insight into the archaeological context of the Miami Circle feature, and assess the potential for other significant deposits and features. The areas outside of the Circle were subjected to a systematic auger survey. Based on the results of this survey, several units were excavated in potentially significant areas.

The auger survey revealed that approximately 70 percent of the property is underlain by Oolite limestone formation. The remaining 30 percent of the property is composed of a filled portion of the Miami River. The auger survey further

demonstrated that black earth midden deposits, some exceeding 50 cm in thickness, occur on approximately 35 percent of the property. The auger survey and unit excavations also identified collections of holes cut into the limestone bedrock, in a fashion similar to the Miami Circle, on portions of Brickell Point outside of the Circle. One of these areas, dubbed the "Valley of the Holes" is just to the west of the depression left by the demolition of a swimming pool associated with the Brickell Point Apartments. This area is about 90 feet to the northeast of the Miami Circle feature, near the original shoreline of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay.

In late 1999, shortly after the State of Florida completed its fieldwork on the Brickell Point property, the parcel was purchased by the State of Florida using a combination of State of Florida Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) Program funds, money from a Miami-Dade County bond issue for the purchase of parks, and a bridge loan by the Trust for Public Land (TPL). Since this time, the Florida Division of Historical Resources and Miami-Dade County Historic Preservation Division have managed the property.

Randolph Widmer of the University of Houston also conducted archaeological research on the Brickell Point parcel. Widmer led two, three-week field school sessions at Brickell Point during June and August 2000. This project focused on the area between the Valley of the Holes and the Miami Circle feature. A large area was excavated there in the hopes of finding additional structures like the Circle. Numerous holes and basins carved into the limestone were encountered, along with artifacts and midden, but no definite patterns were recognized.

Since that time, the Miami Circle was listed as a National Historic Landmark (a contributing site in a nomination that included other Tequesta settlements, the highest tribute the federal government can pay.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

None