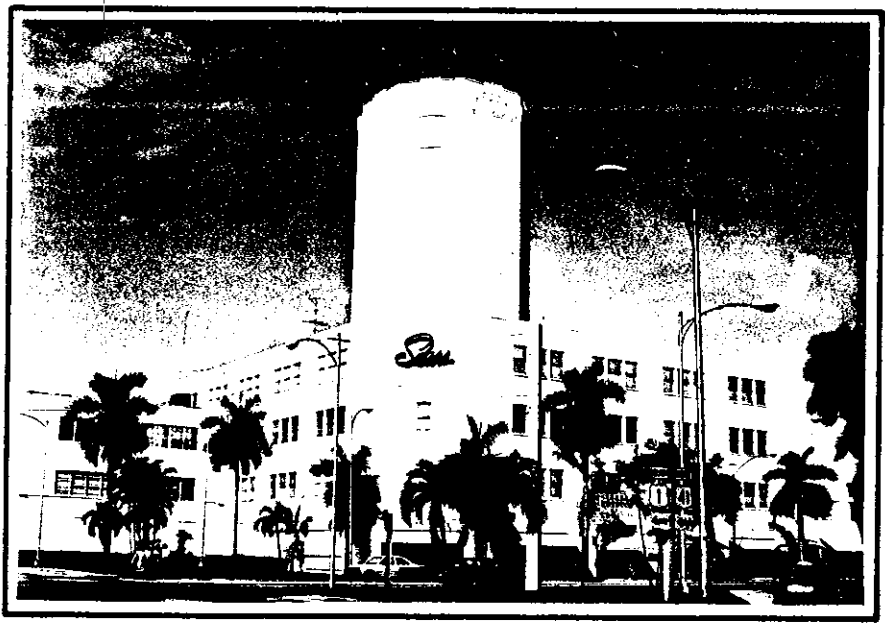

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

1300 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.
1300 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton 1-21-83
Historic Preservation Consultant Date

Accepted by Charles P. O'Connell 2/28/83
Chairman, Heritage Conservation Board Date

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. _____

Date _____

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Current Name:

Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Location:

1300 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida 33132

Present Owner:

Sears, Roebuck and Co.
TX Department 568-S
675 Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30395

Present Occupant:

Sears, Roebuck and Co.
1300 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida 33132

Present Use:

Commercial

Present Zoning District:

CBD-2

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-3231-35-0010

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Tract "A" of the plat of BOULEVARD TRACT, as recorded in Plat Book 100 at Page 65, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

HC Zoning Classification:

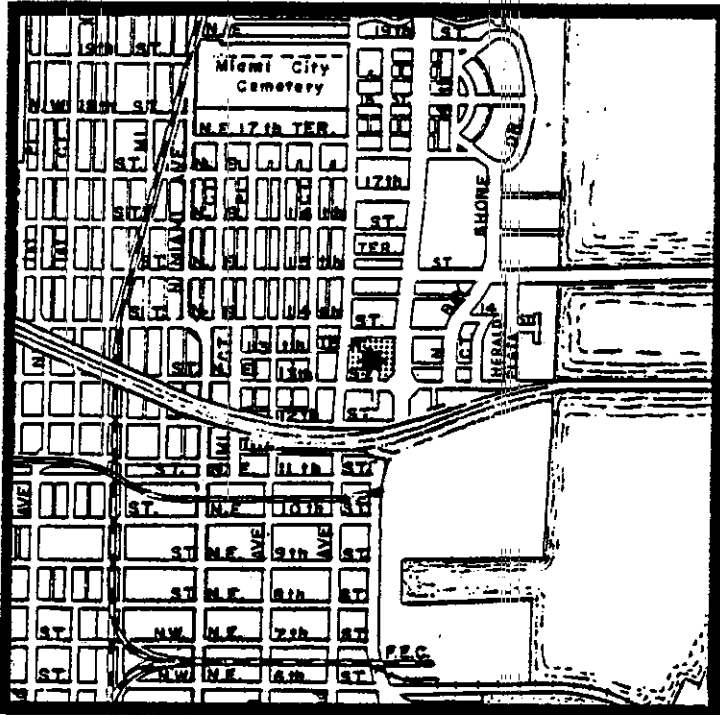
Historic Site

Dade County Historic Survey Rating:

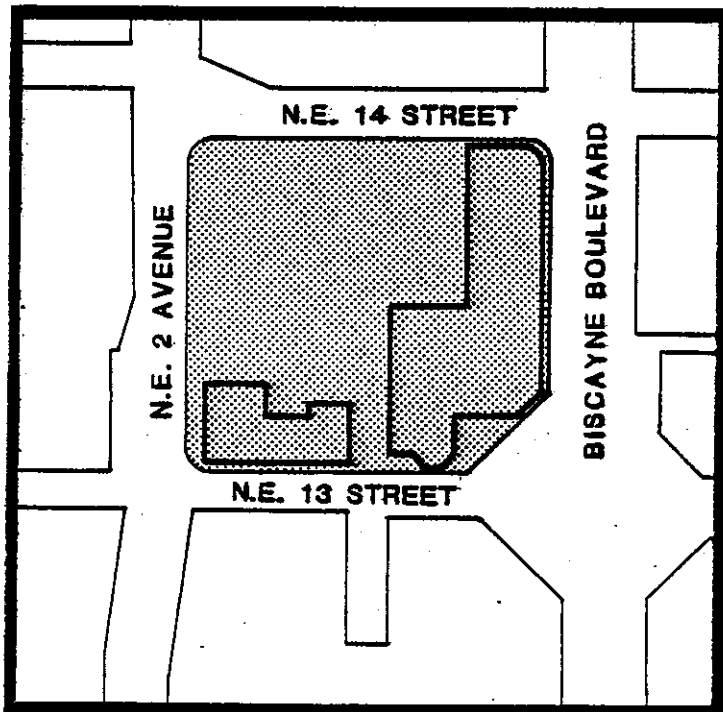
Architectural Significance - 1
Historical Significance - 1
Contextural Significance - 1

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

1300 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. Department Store is significant as a reflection of architectural tastes and commercial development in Miami during the late 1920's. Built in 1929, the Sears building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco style commercial architecture in Miami and is one of the earliest examples of the style in Dade County, predating the Art Deco buildings on Miami Beach by several years. The building is particularly noteworthy for its straight-forward expression, applied ornamentation, central tower, and massing. The design of the building, together with its prominent location on Biscayne Boulevard, has made the Sears store a landmark in uptown Miami.

Designed by the prominent Chicago architectural firm of Nimmons, Carr and Wright, the Sears building is typical of the many stores which the firm designed for Sears and reflects the firm's philosophy in the design of these stores. The firm's choice of "modern" design to express the form and proportion of the entire composition and its parts is particularly successful in the store on Biscayne Boulevard.

The Biscayne store exhibits many of those design features common to Sears stores during this period. Foremost among these is the central tower, a trademark of Sears. Other important features include the pronounced verticality of the building, emphasized by engaged fluted piers, and the variety of applied Art Deco ornamental detailing, highlighting important features of the building. Although the Biscayne store is typical of hundreds of Sears buildings constructed throughout the country during the early twentieth century, it is the only such building in South Florida.

The opening of the Sears store on Biscayne Boulevard marked the culmination of efforts by the Biscayne Boulevard Company to establish a new shopping area for Greater Miami. This type of business development was unparalleled in the City's history. Plans for the Boulevard called for a complete shopping center, carefully designed for beauty and comfort, away from the downtown. The Boulevard thus became the forerunner of the modern shopping center, with developers recognizing the increasing importance of the automobile and planning for it.

This was the deciding factor in Sears' decision to locate its new retail store here. Officials stated that although the Boulevard was far removed from downtown Miami, customers would use their cars to get to the store. Therefore, the abundance of parking spaces was of prime importance in the selection of a location. In basing its decision on such a factor, Sears foreshadowed the course of development in Miami for the next several decades.

From its opening in 1929, the Sears store was cited for excellence. During the opening ceremonies, Mayor C. H. Reeder of Miami referred to the new store as "the finest store in the south." The store was also pictured in several national architectural journals. In the May, 1933 issue of The Architectural Forum, for example, it was featured as one of "eight modern department stores."

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. Department Store is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

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

The Sears building is a reflection of commercial development in Miami during the late 1920's. The opening of the Sears Store on Biscayne Boulevard marked the culmination of efforts by the Biscayne Boulevard Company to establish a new shopping area for Greater Miami. This type of business development, which called for a complete shopping center, carefully designed for beauty and comfort, and away from the downtown, was the forerunner of the modern shopping center. Sears' decision to locate here was based on its recognition of the increasing importance of the automobile. This decision thus foreshadowed the course of development in Miami for the next several decades.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The Sears building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco style commercial architecture in Miami. Built in 1929, it is also one of the earliest examples of the style in Dade County, predating the Art Deco buildings on Miami Beach by several years. The building is particularly noteworthy for its straight-forward expression, applied ornamentation, central tower, and massing.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

The Sears building was designed by the nationally-known firm of Nimmons, Carr and Wright and is a good example of the many stores which the firm designed for Sears.

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.

The Sears building is particularly noteworthy for the excellence of its design, craftsmanship, and detailing, embodied in such features as its central octagonal tower, engaged fluted piers, and applied low-relief ornamentation.

9. Because of its prominence or spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, is an easily identifiable visual feature of a neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.

The Sears building is an impressive landmark on the Miami skyline and is the "gateway" building on Biscayne Boulevard to uptown Miami.

III. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Date of Erection:

Ground breaking for the Sears building took place on May 15, 1929, with the official opening on November 14, 1929.

Architect:

The architects for the Sears Building were Nimmons, Carr and Wright, a well-known Chicago architectural firm. The firm was responsible for designing many of the stores for Sears throughout the country.

Builder/Contractor:

The general contractor for the Sears building was Harrison Construction Company of Miami.

Historical Context:

During the late 1920's, Sears, Roebuck and Co. was opening a new store every two working days. South Florida's first store opened in 1928 in a four story building at 835 West Flagler Street. The success of this store and a careful survey of the community by company experts prompted Sears to open a larger retail department store on Biscayne Boulevard.

The Biscayne store, established at a cost of \$750,000, was the thirty-third store in the Southern Territory and the third store for the State of Florida. The opening of the Sears store was heralded as a great event for Miami. The Miami Daily News published a special eight-page supplement about the store, and the opening was given widespread publicity elsewhere. As a result, more than 6,000 people visited the store during the first two hours it was open.

Although the Sears store opened just as the country was entering into the Depression, it survived and even flourished. The Burdines store next door, however, did not, and Sears soon expanded into that two story building. The building has been in continuous operation since its construction.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. Department Store is a four story structure with a seven story tower placed on a 45 degree angle on its southeast corner. Rectangular in plan, the building originally featured four bays across the east (front) facade and six bays across the south facade. The building is of reinforced concrete construction with a smooth stucco surface, and is topped with a flat roof.

The verticality of the building is emphasized by engaged fluted piers dividing each bay, and by the octagonal tower. The tower is decorated with intricate geometric bas-relief detailing, including ziggurats, filigree, and zigzag lines.

The main entrance of the building is located in the second bay on the east facade and is surrounded by stylized decoration. Windows, which are grouped in threes, are double hung metal sash with one over one lights.

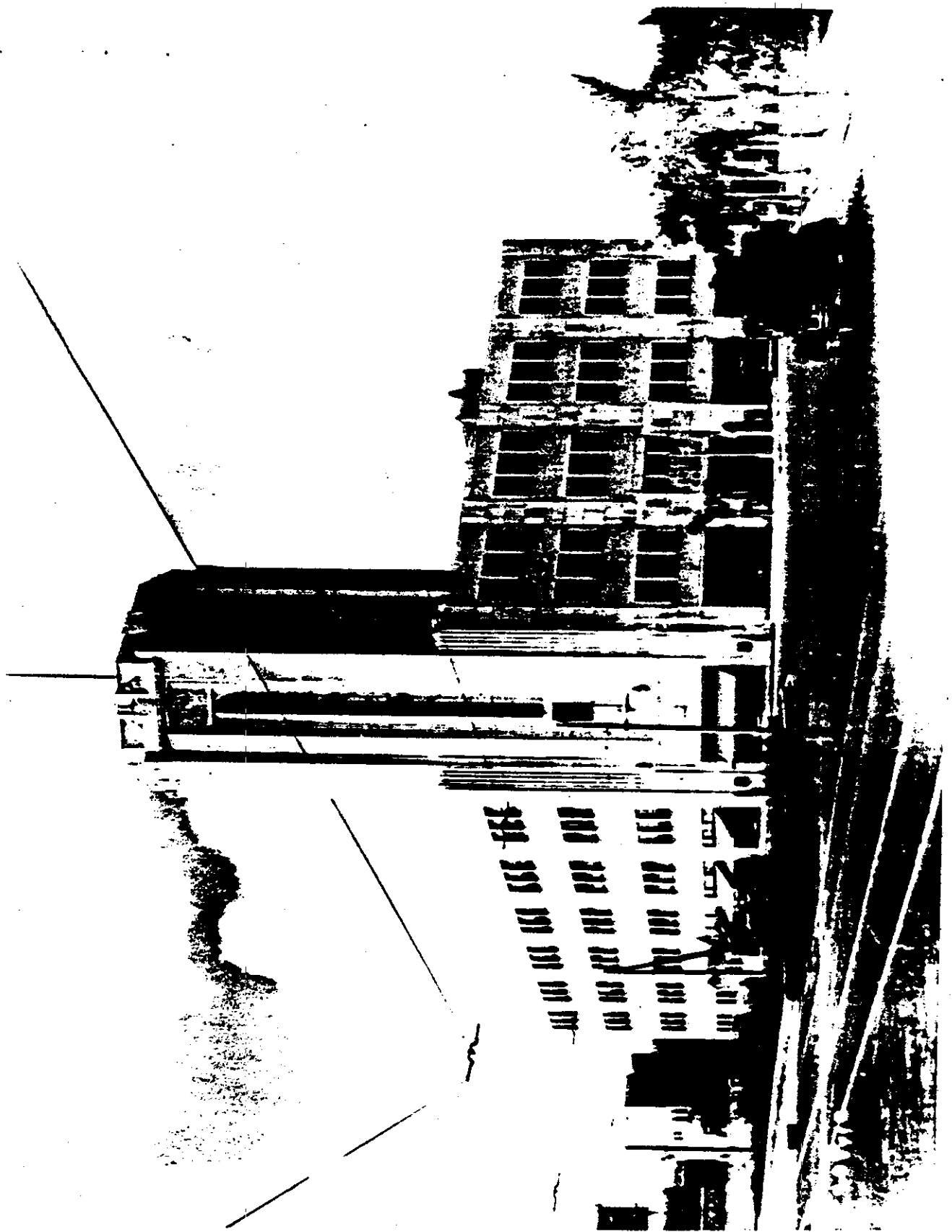
Large additions have been made to the building at two different times during its history. In the early 1930's, a two story structure directly north of the Sears store was annexed. This building, also built in 1929, originally housed a Burdines store. That store, however, was forced to close shortly after opening because of the Depression. A one story service station was added to the south facade in 1934. This addition was enclosed, and a second and third story were added in 1958.

Description of Site:

The Sears building faces southeast and is located on the northwest corner of Biscayne Boulevard and NE 13th Street. The building fronts directly on the street and originally faced a planted traffic circle. A service station and a large parking lot are located west of the building.



Sears, Roebuck and Co.
1300 Biscayne Boulevard
South and east facades
1983



Sears, Roebuck and Co.
1300 Biscayne Boulevard
c. 1930
(Courtesy Historical Association of Southern Florida)

V. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. building is located on a portion of Biscayne Boulevard, commonly referred to as the "Omni area." The area is considered to be a part of downtown Miami, but is physically separated from the core area by 6 to 10 blocks of underdeveloped commercial uses. The Omni area is planned to be more closely linked to the downtown core through an extension of the elevated rapid transit system known as the DCM, and through development of a residential community, Park West, in the intervening deteriorated commercial area.

The area's historic role as a retailing district was solidified in the early 1970's with opening of the Omni shopping mall. The restaurant, entertainment, hotel, and residential uses within the area also contribute to the desirability and development opportunity of the general area. In 1982, the City of Miami approved a major change in the development regulations, allowing 3 to 5 times the building intensity previously permitted in the area. This is expected to pave the way for a massive development boom of office, residential, and commercial uses. In early 1982 several such projects were planned, the largest of which was a joint venture by Sears and Cadillac-Fairview involving the subject site. All of these projects were stalled by the nationwide recession, but are expected to revive within a few years.

Conservation Objectives:

The historic portion of the Sears building should be encouraged to be rehabilitated and incorporated into an intensive, mixed-use development of the entire site.

Engineering reports on the building reveal evidence of deterioration within the steel reinforcement rods supporting the concrete structure; however, this can be corrected within the scope of an overall rehabilitation job. The cost can be offset through use of the 25% rehabilitation investment tax credit for certified historic structures. The two significant facades of the building, fronting on Biscayne Boulevard and NE 13th Street, require only superficial treatment to revive their architectural beauty. The intricate Art Deco relief patterns should be highlighted with subtle pastel colors, the windows should be repaired and glazed, colorful canvas awnings should be placed at street level, and retail displays returned to the curtained grand floor windows.

It is in the interest of the City to work with Sears to achieve a combination of rehabilitation and new development on this site, not only for the objective of historic preservation, but also to promote broad planning objectives for urban design and mixed-use development in the Omni area.

Such assistance could potentially take the form of an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG), whereby the City would apply for federal funds to build a parking structure or some other portion of the new on-site development. The City should also nominate the building to the National Register of Historic Places, in order to make it eligible for tax credits.

The Sears Company should be encouraged to keep their own retailing business in the building (with surrounding expansion) because it is such a well known landmark associated with the Sears name. The image and desirability of the store could be enormously improved by rehabilitation of the interior and exterior. Considering the dramatic growth expected in the surrounding area, such an investment should be highly profitable.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by applying the proposed HC-4: Commercial Area Heritage Conservation Overlay District to the property. The HC-4 overlay district permits certain incentives for preservation of commercial properties. Specifically, an HC-4 overlay district would exempt the existing Sears building from the calculation of floor area ratio. This should serve as a further incentive to preserve the building while maximizing the development potential of the site.

VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. Department Store have been drawn to include the entire tract of land owned by Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

Only the east (front) and south facades of the building facing on Biscayne Boulevard and NE 13th Street shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all features which are subject to the requirements for the removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

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