
TRAPP HOUSE

2521 S. BAYSHORE DRIVE

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND REVITALIZATION
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL AMENDED DESIGNATION OF
THE TRAPP HOUSE
2521 SOUTH BAYSHORE DRIVE
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Prepared by F. Marshall Connally

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton
Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on 7-19-94

Resolution No. HEPB-94-31

Amended and
Adopted on 7-16-96

Resolution No. HEPB-96-14

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Trapp House

Current Name:

Trapp House

Location:

2521-2133 S. Bayshore Drive
2520 Tigertail Avenue
Miami, Florida 33133

Present Owner:

Florence Y. Connally Revocable Trust
F. Marshall Connally, Trustee
2521 S. Bayshore Drive
Miami, Florida 33133

FYC Investments, L. P.
2651 Mabry Road, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30319

Present Use:

Residential

Zoning District:

R-1, with an SD-3 and SD-18 overlay

Tax Folio Numbers:

01-4122-001-1200
01-4122-001-1210
01-4122-001-1270

Boundary Description:

Lots 1, 13, 14, 15, and 16, less the southwesterly 9± feet of Lots 1 and 16, of Block 38, of the plat of RHODES NEW BISCAYNE, as recorded in Plat Book B, at Page 16, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

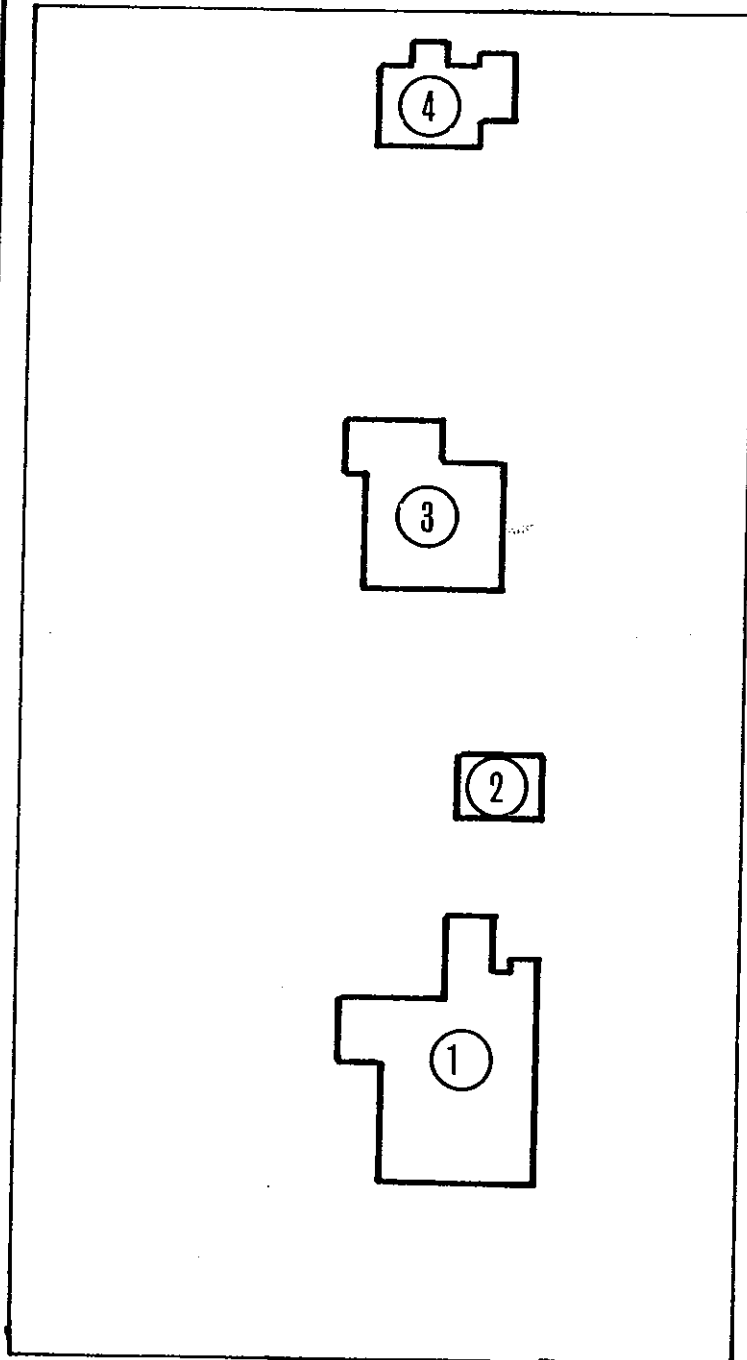
Classification:

Historic Site

TRAPP HOUSE

2521 S. BAYSHORE DRIVE

TIGERTAIL AVE.

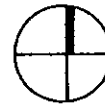
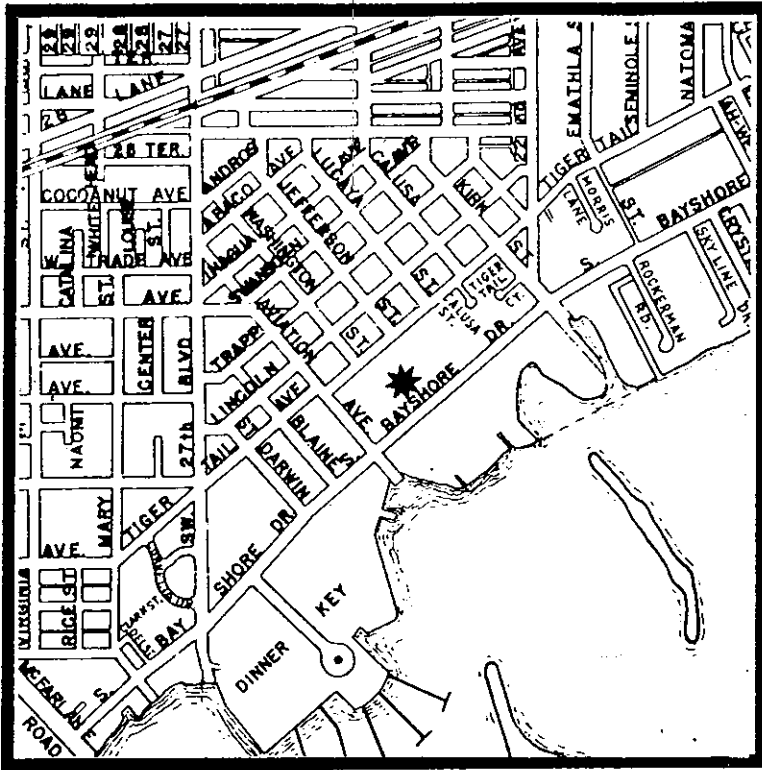


- 1. MAIN HOUSE
- 2. EFFICIENCY
- 3. BIG APARTMENT
- 4. LITTLE COTT.

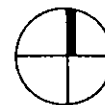
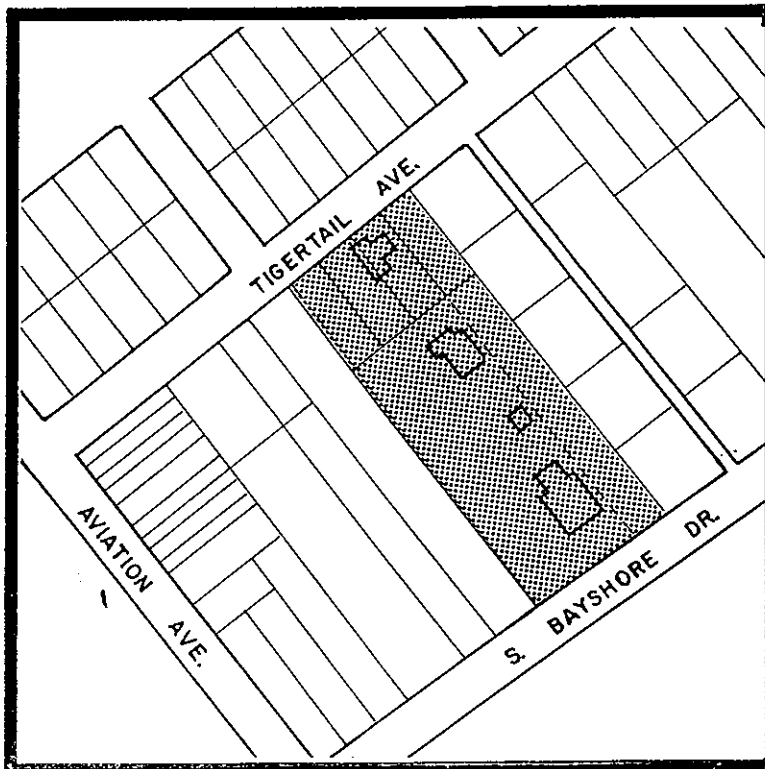
SO. BAYSHORE DR.

TRAPP HOUSE

2521 S. BAYSHORE DRIVE



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1889; 1929

Architect or Builder:

Caleb and Harlan Trapp, Builders

Statement of Significance:

The Trapp House is historically significant for its association with important early settlers of Coconut Grove. The Trapp family played a major role in many aspects of the city's growth and development and made important contributions in the Miami area in education, religion, agriculture, and construction. The Trapp House is also architecturally significant as an unusual example of Masonry Vernacular architecture, adapted to the climate and designed to take advantage of its setting.

Among the early settlers of the Coconut Grove area was the Trapp family. Caleb Trapp, his wife Henrietta Rhodes Trapp, and their seventeen year-old son Harlan moved from Iowa to Florida in 1887. They were probably encouraged in the venture by Mrs. Trapp's brother Samuel Rhodes, who had purchased 400 acres of government land and settled in the area around 1876. Caleb Trapp had worked as a merchant and as a brick mason in Iowa.

During their first year in Florida, the Trapps lived in a palmetto thatched hut. Then, taking advantage of his masonry experience, Caleb Trapp, assisted by his son, undertook the construction of a more substantial dwelling. Working with chisels and hatchets, father and son hewed native oolitic limestone and built one of the first stone structures in the area. They salvaged timbers from foundered lumber vessels for the beams of the house and ordered hardware from New York. At a time when most people in the area were living in modest frame dwellings, the stone house was a noted structure. In his memoirs, John Sewell, an early Miami businessman, recalled seeing the Trapp house when he arrived in Miami in 1896. The Trapps were noted for their hospitality and they often housed guests when the nearby Peacock Inn was full.

In 1895 Harlan Trapp returned to Iowa to marry his childhood sweetheart Minnie Hobart. Harlan homesteaded south of Coconut Grove. Both pioneering Trapp families had to be resourceful to make a living along the rocky shore between Biscayne Bay and the wild, tropical interior. The jungle-like terrain made farming limited and transportation difficult. In 1940, Minnie Trapp recounted the difficulties

and the rewards of pioneer life in this rugged landscape in a small work, My Pioneer Reminiscences.

Life in the Coconut Grove area centered around Biscayne Bay. Until 1897 there was no road from Coconut Grove to Miami, and boating was the predominant means of travel. Harlan Trapp built a sloop to bypass the dangerous panthers and bears in the Brickell Hammock. He and his wife went on outings up the Miami River to the Everglades.

Most homesteaders at the time were involved in the area's first industry, the production of coontie starch. By 1880 there were twenty-two starch millers in Dade County. The root of the fernlike coontie, a cycad dug out of the pine woods, was ground and refined into a starch equal to the finest arrowroot. Coontie starch was a popular commodity in the Key West markets. The red water by-product of the grinding process was an excellent fertilizer for plants. The coontie is too slow-growing, however, to have lasted as a harvest crop. By the 1890's, vegetable growing had become more profitable, and the industry began its slow decline. Both Caleb and Harlan Trapp and Samuel Rhodes were active in this industry during their early years in Florida.

The Trapps also cultivated the Trapp avocado. They developed this late-bearing variety with the assistance of the noted horticulturist George Cellon in 1896. Minnie Trapp recalled that they were able to sell the fruit for a dollar each at the Royal Palm Hotel, where they made their deliveries by boat.

The Trapp families were involved in the first efforts to provide education for the Coconut Grove community. The first school examination for teachers was held in Coconut Grove in 1886 at the home of Mrs. Caleb Trapp. Her brother Samuel Rhodes was appointed to the Dade County School Board in 1887. In September of 1887 she was hired as a teacher for the county's district #3 school (Coconut Grove), at a salary of \$175 for the five month term. Classes were held in Samuel Rhodes's home. Her son Harlan was hired at the same time to teach in district #2 (Miami). Mrs. Trapp was rehired for the 1888-1889 school year, but Harlan was not rehired because of his inability to teach music.

In 1887 the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club was organized by Commodore Ralph Monroe, who had settled in Coconut Grove in 1877. Harlan Trapp was one of the eight charter members.

Accounts of Caleb Trapp's death date are not consistent. He died either in 1894 or 1901. His wife Henrietta died in 1900. The house evidently remained in the family after Henrietta's death. There were four daughters in addition to son Harlan, so perhaps one of them resided in the house for a time. City directories list Harlan Trapp as a contractor between 1914 and 1925, but he is not listed as residing at 2521 S. Bayshore Drive until 1928. He and Minnie are then listed at the Bayshore address from 1928 until 1936. Harlan Trapp remodeled and enlarged the home in 1929. Between 1919 and the 1930's, he also added three more buildings to house

guests, servants, and tenants. By 1937 Harlan and Minnie Trapp no longer resided in the big stone house. The city directory that year shows John Proctor to be the resident. Harlan Trapp was still alive in 1943, but his date of death has not been uncovered. Minnie lived until 1959.

During the years that Harlan Trapp operated a successful general contracting business, he built a number of important Miami structures, including the Miami Bank and Trust Company at 116-118 E. Flagler Street, the Townley Building at 77 E. Flagler Street, the Dr. P. T. Skaggs Building at 217 12th Street, and the first reinforced concrete building in Miami, the Havlin Building, at 31 N.E. 1st Street. He also built the Fourway Lodge for W. J. Matheson.

Minnie Trapp was prominent in the social life of Coconut Grove and Miami. The Trapps were invited to luncheons with Julia Tuttle, and twice they met Henry Flagler. Famous visitors to the Trapp home were James Whitcomb Riley, Jack London, William Lighton, a contributor to the Saturday Evening Post, and Minnie Moore Wilson, who wrote authoritative books on the Seminole Indians. In 1897 Minnie Trapp was one of the three founding members of the Plymouth Congregational Church. She was a talented singer and organist and helped organize the Miami Musical Club. Mrs. Trapp was also a member of the Audubon Club and the Miami Women's Club.

The Trapp family home is one of the earliest surviving in the Coconut Grove area. The stone house was constructed at a time when most dwellings in the area were of wood. Although it was enlarged c. 1927, its noted stone construction is still visible. The residence provides tangible evidence of Caleb Trapp's abilities as a stone mason. The enlarged residence reflects the prosperity of the Boom Period and shows Harlan's skill in working with reinforced concrete.

The secondary contributing structures are also integral elements in the historic evolution of this property. The "Big Apartment" may have been moved to the Trapp homestead from the site of the Peacock Inn by Harlan Trapp. It was definitely on the property by 1919. The other two structures were probably built by Harlan Trapp in the late 1920's or early 1930's. The "Little Cottage" was occupied by the Trapps when Mrs. Trapp could no longer climb the stairs in the main house.

The Trapp property originally contained all of Lots 1, 13, 14, 15, and 16 of Block 38, and additional houses were located on either side of the property which contained the original Trapp House. The parcels on either side were sold off, and eventually the houses were demolished. The parcels have only recently been rejoined under a single ownership, and the boundaries of the Trapp House now are the same as at the turn of the century.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Trapp House has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City, state, and nation; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

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

The Trapp House was the home of important early settlers of Coconut Grove. The Trapp family played a significant role in many aspects of the City's growth and development and made important contributions in education, religion, agriculture, and construction.

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

The Trapp House is an unusual example of Masonry Vernacular architecture, adapted to the climate and designed to take advantage of its setting. Although the house was enlarged c. 1927, its noted stone construction is still visible. The enlarged house reflects the prosperity of the Boom Period in Miami.

III. DESCRIPTION

Setting:

The Trapp House consists of four structures: the main house; an efficiency apartment; the "Big Apartment;" and the "Little Cottage." The main Trapp House was built in 1889 and enlarged c. 1927. The other three structures were built between 1919 and the 1930's.

The size of the original Trapp Homestead is unknown. Today it comprises a long rectangular parcel, approximately 200 feet in width and approximately 546 feet in length, extending the entire block between South Bayshore Drive and Tigertail Avenue, in Coconut Grove.

The main house, known as the Trapp House is set back approximately 237 feet from South Bayshore Drive, facing slightly southeast and elevated on the natural limestone bluff overlooking Biscayne Bay. Rows of royal palm trees lead from a wrought iron gate supported by stone piers, across the sweeping front lawn up to the steps carved into the natural oolitic limestone bluff, which extends across the entire property. The mature vegetation of the grounds includes a variety of flowering bushes and tropical trees.

A stone wall extends across the rear of the property and an opening in this wall provides access to a driveway that leads past the three secondary structures to the rear of the Trapp House. The three accessory buildings are located in a linear fashion at the rear two-thirds of the property.

On the westernmost parcel, the limestone bluff is topped with a molded masonry balustrade with a cap rail at the top. A stone wall encloses what at one point was a separate parcel.

Trapp House (Main House):

The Trapp House is an irregular shaped, two story structure. A partial third-floor, an observation room known as the "Crow's Nest," projects from the center of the roof. Both the main roof and the roof of the third floor are hipped with composition shingles. Exposed rafters are visible under the deep eaves. The building rests on a stone foundation, with openings to access the three-foot crawl space. Portions of the walls are constructed of oolitic limestone, quarried from the site. These stone walls are 16 inches thick. Other wall sections are constructed of concrete block, and veneered with stucco in a pattern to imitate the stone wall segments.

The main facade faces to the southeast. An open porch extends across this facade. Extending over this porch is an enclosed second story, poured concrete

porch. Three large reinforced and poured concrete columns extend from the floor of the first floor porch to the second floor roof.

The main entrance to the house, centered on the southeast facade, is a double, ten-light, French door. A variety of windows are used throughout the residence. Most are 6, 8, 10, and 12-light casement windows, frequently grouped in fours, but also, paired and placed singly.

A porte-cochere extends from the southwest facade. Its hipped roof is supported by two rectangular piers with a low wall between them. The porte-cochere, which has a concrete floor, opens into a two-story screened foyer that contains a poured concrete staircase. A wrought iron outer door, backed by a 15-light French door, opens directly into the living room from the porte-cochere.

The northeast elevation features an exterior chimney, constructed of concrete block and surfaced with stucco. A gable oriel projection is also located at the north end of this facade.

The Trapp House was enlarged c. 1927 by the addition of the poured concrete front porch and columns, the porte-cochere, and the first floor kitchen and power room at the rear of the structure. In 1978 the concrete floor of the front porch was replaced with marine plywood.

Efficiency Apartment:

The two-story, rectangular building is located to the rear of the Trapp House. It is constructed of concrete block, covered with stucco, and has a flat, tar and gravel roof. The first floor consists of a single-car garage, accessed by double swinging wood garage doors on the southwest elevation. Double hung sash windows are found on the second floor. A door providing access to the stairs leading to the second floor is located at the southeast corner of the building. The second floor consists of a 15' by 19' efficiency apartment.

"Big Apartment":

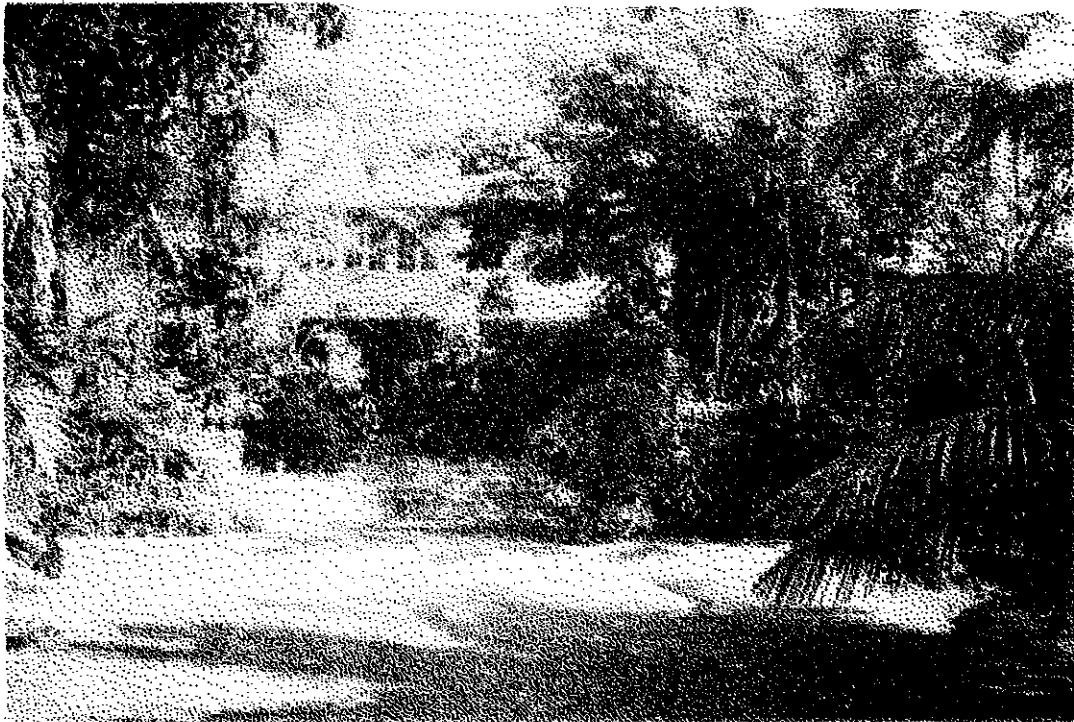
This two-story structure is located to the rear of the Efficiency Apartment. It has an irregular plan and is constructed of concrete block with stucco. The low hipped roof has deep eaves, exposed rafters, and is covered with roll roofing. The main facade faces southeast and on the first floor is divided into 3 recessed garage bays. Each bay has double swinging wood doors with glass panes in the upper portion. Stairs leading to the second floor are located at the southeast corner of the building. The second floor consists of a five-room apartment. A second floor porch extends across the southeast facade. A smaller porch is located on the northwest elevation. A small balcony projects at the southwest corner of the building.

"Little Cottage":

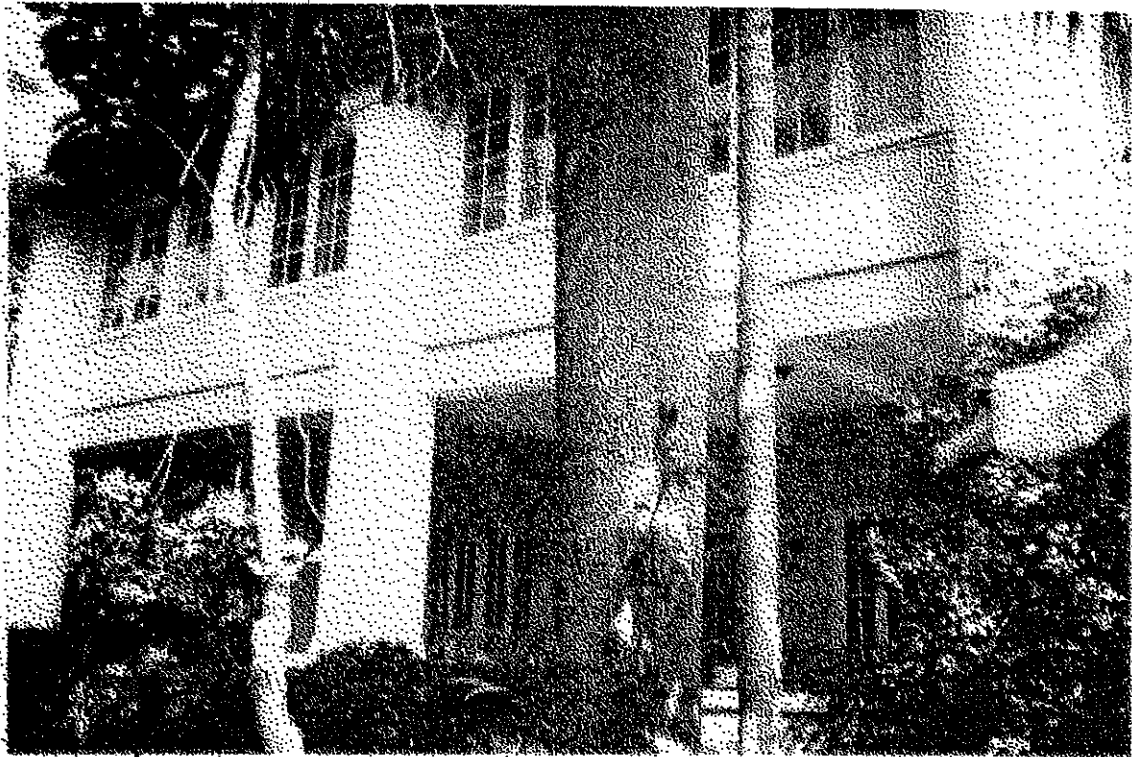
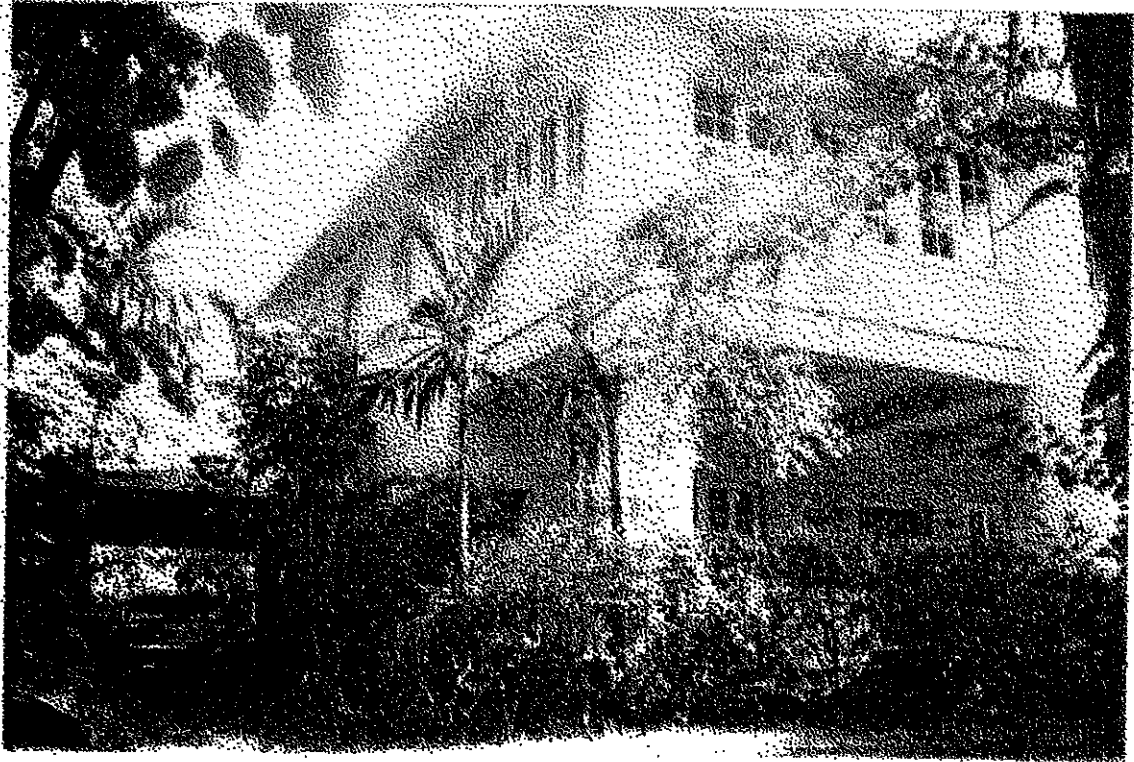
This is a one-story, concrete block and stucco building, located at the north end of the lot, adjacent to Tigertail Avenue. It has a hipped roof with roll roofing. The main facades faces southeast. A masonry staircase on this facade leads to a pair of 12 light French doors that provide access directly to the living room. The cottage has both casement and double-hung sash windows. The screened porch was added in 1959.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

Contributing structures within the site include all four structures described above. Contributing landscape features include the rows of royal palms, the terraced oolitic limestone steps, walls, and all specimen trees on the site.



Trapp House
2521 South Bayshore Drive



Trapp House
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Trapp House
2521 South Bayshore Drive
House on right behind steps (prior to c. 1927 alteration)

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Trapp House is one of the very few nineteenth century houses remaining in Coconut Grove. Many of the historic houses surrounding the Trapp House, including those on either side, have been demolished. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain these estates as single family houses. The intense development pressures, the value of the land itself, and the escalating property taxes are forcing owners to consider other uses for their properties.

These large estates have frequently been subdivided for multiple single family lots or planned unit developments. Although the existing zoning requires 10,000 square foot lots in this neighborhood, these estates are large enough for subdivision.

The owner of the Trapp House has recently purchased the property on either side of the historic site and now seeks to include these parcels, which were part of the original Trapp homestead within the designation.

Preservation Incentives:

The preservation of the large estates between South Bayshore Drive and Tigertail Avenue should be a preservation priority, and the City should be prepared to work with property owners in identifying solutions to retain these properties.

The HP zoning overlay district is one incentive that could be applied to estates such as the Trapp House. This zoning overlay allows certain uses, such as private clubs, guest houses, and museums, within the historic buildings. The use is tied to the preservation of the buildings. This type of incentive would provide for an economically productive use for the property while preserving the historic integrity.

An additional incentive is the property tax abatement program currently available in Dade County. It is hoped that the City will adopt a similar program this year.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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