
THE CUSHMAN SCHOOL

592 N.E. 60 STREET

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
THE CUSHMAN SCHOOL
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton 4/6/84
Historic Preservation Date
Consultant

Accepted by John Ward Clay 4/24/84
Chairman, Heritage Date
Conservation Board

Designated by Miami City Commission
Ordinance No. 9875
Date 7/31/84

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

The Cushman School

Current Name:

The Cushman School

Location:

592 S.E. 60 Street
Miami, Florida 33137

Present Owner:

Laura Cushman – Cushman School
592 N.E. 60 Street
Miami, Florida 33137

Present Use:

Educational

Zoning District:

RO-3/6

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-3128-34-0010

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Lots 1 to 6 inclusive of Block 4 of the plat of BAYSHORE REVISED, as recorded in Plat Book 9 at Page 60, 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 - 2

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

The Cushman School is significant for its role in the history of education in Dade County and for its association with Laura Cushman, a well-respected educator in Florida. In addition, the building is an early example of the type of design favored for school construction, a design which is well adapted to the South Florida environment.

The Cushman School is the oldest private elementary school in continuous operation in Dade County. The school's founding in 1924 reflects the response of private educators to Miami's phenomenal growth during the boom. When the public school system could not keep pace with the constant doubling of attendance figures, private schools were established to meet the growing demand for educational services. Soon after its inception, The Cushman School acquired a statewide reputation as a school with an innovative approach to childhood education.

The Cushman School's reputation is primarily due to Laura Cushman and her philosophy of education. One of the most respected educators in the state, Cushman was an early advocate of child-centered education. She stressed character development and creativity and introduced the contract system of teaching. Cushman has been honored for her work by numerous organizations and is still active in the activities of The Cushman School.

The Cushman School is also significant as an early example of the type of school architecture which would predominate in Dade County. In this school, all classrooms receive cross ventilation and open onto an open porch overlooking a courtyard. The siting of the building and its design take maximum advantage of tropical breezes and have proved to be an excellent adaptation to South Florida's environment.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

The Cushman School is the creation of Laura Cushman, an innovative and well-respected educator in Florida, and is the building most closely associated with her career.

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

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

The Cushman School is an early example of the type of design favored for school buildings, both public and private.

III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

1926

Architect:

The Cushman School was designed by Russell Skipton from a plan envisioned by Laura Cushman.

Builder/Contractor:

The contractor for The Cushman School was T.F. Spragg.

Historical Context:

Laura Cushman was born in 1887 near Marcus, Iowa and attended Morningside College where she received her B.A. degree. Cushman moved to Miami in 1913 to teach at the Coconut Grove School and was accompanied by her family. Realizing after one year that she did not know how to teach, Cushman enrolled at Wheelock College, a normal school in Boston, for two years.

Returning to Miami in 1916, Cushman taught kindergarten at Riverside School and organized a school to train additional kindergarten and primary teachers. When the school board decide to close the kindergartens for lack of funds in 1923, she and a friend opened a small school known as the Park Primary School on the front porch of her parent's house.

In 1924, Cushman opened The Cushman School at 337 N.E. 38th Street. Comprised of three open air bungalows, the school was immediately well attended because of Cushman's academic philosophy and growing reputation. That school remained in operation until 1926, when the impending construction of Biscayne Boulevard through her property forced Cushman to plan a new school building.

Cushman continued to serve as principal of The Cushman School until her retirement in 1976. At that time, the school was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation and Cushman became president of the Board of Directors.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Cushman School is a two story structure of reinforced concrete construction. Topped with a flat roof with parapet and finished with textured stucco, the building features an irregular, V-shaped plan opening onto a central courtyard.

The exterior of the building is virtually devoid of decoration except for a series of four scuppers underneath the parapet. The main entrance to the school is located in the center of the "V" and features a curvilinear arched opening. The original wooden spindle gates on the entrance have been replaced by a wrought iron gate. The majority of windows in the building are paired, wooden, double hung sash with two-over-two lights.

Although the exterior of the building is very plain, the courtyard exhibits many of the features common to Mediterranean Revival and Mission style architecture. Surrounding the courtyard is a one story arcade with plain, round arches. Topping the arcade is a second story porch which is enclosed by a plain wooden balustrade. Chamfered posts with scroll-like brackets support the porch's shed roof. Covered with Mission tiles, the roof exhibits completely exposed rafters.

The tip of the "V" on the courtyard façade features a curvilinear gable with a bell cot. The bell above the entrance came from the original Deering Estate and was rung to call the workers.

The Cushman School has witnessed two major additions, both during the 1930's. These included an addition of four bays to the end of each wing and a second story library over the main entrance. The library extends over the entrance and is supported by two concrete posts.

These additions were made by Laura Cushman and show the adaptation of the building to growth and change. The additions do not compromise the basic integrity of the structure.

Description of Site:

Cushman School, whose main entrance faces northwest, occupies an entire block adjacent to Biscayne Boulevard. Also, on the site is a newer, open-air stage, as well as playground facilities.



The Cushman School
592 N.E. 60 Street
Courtyard
1984

V. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Cushman School is committed to preserving the historic school building and has recently spent \$30,000 on renovations. Historic site designation is being requested by the school as an added means of protection.

The Cushman School, which has increased its enrollment 25 percent in the last three years, has embarked upon a development program to provide an endowment for the school. Approximately \$735,000 is being sought to fund scholarships, teacher salaries, building renovations, the purchase of adjacent properties as well as other programs.

Conservation Objectives:

The efforts of The Cushman School to preserve its historic building and retain its in-town locations should be supported. The school should be notified of any available grant programs and assisted in applying for these monies. Historic site designation and the school's proximity to the proposed Morningside Historic District should focus more attention on the building.

These conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include the entire tract of land containing the original school building. Not included is the tract of land west and north of N.E. 5th Court which contains a newer building.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All facades of the main school building shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review. This shall include the two facades which face the interior courtyard or patio.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

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

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

"The Cushman School: 60 Years of Excellence." Pamphlet. 1983.

Dade County, Florida. Community and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division. Dade County Historic Survey, Site Inventory File for 592 N.E. 60 Street, Miami, Florida.

Lutton, Joan. "The Cushman School: The History of an Independent School in Dade County, Florida." Doctoral Dissertation. University of Florida, 1982.

"The Private Schools of Dade County: The Cushman School." The Teacher of Dade County. November 1936, p.3.

"Progress in Education: Children Busy on Contracts." The Christian Science Monitor. October 28, 1933.

Scrapbook, newspaper clippings, pamphlet and brochures in the collection of The Cushman School.