
DADE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

73 WEST FLAGLER STREET

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
DADE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
73 W. FLAGLER STREET
AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton 6/7/85
Historic Preservation Date
Planner

Accepted by _____
Chairman, Heritage Date
Conservation Board

Designated by Miami City Commission
Ordinance No. 10060
Date 11/26/85

CONTENTS

Page

I. General Information	4
II. Significance	7
III. Historical Information	9
IV. Architectural Information	10
V. Planning Context	12
VI. HC Zoning Elements	13
VII. Bibliography	14

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Dade County Courthouse
Dade County Courthouse and Miami City Hall

Current Name:

Dade County Courthouse

Location:

73 West Flagler Street
Miami, Florida 33130

Present Owner:

Dade County
73 W. Flagler Street
Miami, Florida 33130

Present Occupant:

Metro-Dade County
Dade County Courts

Present Use:

Government

Present Zoning District:

CBD-1/9

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-0111-50-1060

Boundary Description:

All of Block 115-A, less the west 50 feet for street, and the area known as Avenue E lying east of Block 115-A, and lots 8 and 9 of Block 115-N, of the plat of MIAMI NORTH, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 41, 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

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

The Dade County Courthouse is significant in the history of government, community development, and architecture in Miami. Built between 1925 and 1928, the Courthouse has continuously served as Dade County's seat of government since that time. The courthouse was also designed to serve as the Miami City Hall, and facilities included necessary courtrooms, record rooms, judicial chambers, law library, and jails for both government entities.

Shortly after its formal dedication on September 6, 1928, the Courthouse was featured on the cover of The American City, a publication that showcased the latest developments in urban architecture and planning. The author boasted that the Dade County Courthouse "is the tallest structure south of Baltimore, and is believed to be the tallest municipal building in the United States." The Courthouse was also prominently featured in such architectural periodicals as The American Architect and Architecture and Building.

Construction of the Courthouse spanned the "boom" and "bust" years of 1925 to 1928. The completion of the building at a cost of more than \$4,000,000 marked a milestone in the development of Dade County and reflected the faith and optimism of the community in its future. According to an article in The Miami Daily News on September 6, 1928, the Courthouse "Stands for something more than a temple of justice, a place to keep public records and a forum for meetings of public bodies and of citizens. The tower, reaching 335 feet above the street, brilliantly lighted each night by electricity and visible for 100 miles by sea and 50 by land, may be regarded as emblematic of the courageous spirit of citizens in continuing to carry on and to reach even greater achievements despite temporarily changing business conditions which are insufficient to affect the permanent prosperity of this section."

The Dade County Courthouse is also significant in the architectural history of South Florida and is an outstanding example of the application of Neo-Classical style architecture to a 27 story building. The choice of Neo-Classical design was in keeping with contemporary ideas that the workings of the judicial systems of government were a solemn business to be housed in the dignified manner of the "ancients." The choice of a skyscraper met the desire for a "modern" building, as well as the County and City's needs for expandable space.

Designed by prominent Atlanta architect A. Ten Eyck Brown, who was responsible for numerous courthouses throughout the South, the Dade County Courthouse featured many innovative solutions to meet the needs of local government. As an example, an underground garage provided parking spaces at a time when parking was beginning to be recognized as a problem.

The building's history, size, use of classical ornament, and distinctive ziggurat roof have contributed to the local perception of the Courthouse as a major landmark.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Dade County Courthouse is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

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

Built between 1925 and 1928, the Dade County Courthouse has served as the seat of justice for Dade County since its construction.

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

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

The Dade County Courthouse was designed by prominent Atlanta architect A. Ten Eyck Brown. August Geiger served as associate architect.

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 Dade County Courthouse is noteworthy for its use of granite and terra cotta, its ziggurat roof, and Neo-Classic design, embodied in such features as its colossal columns, entablatures, and balustrades.

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 Dade County Courthouse is one of the county's major landmark buildings and continues to be a visually prominent feature of Miami's rapidly developing skyline. The roofline of the building is particularly distinctive.

III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

1925-1928

Architect:

The Dade County Courthouse was designed by Atlanta architect A. Ten Eyck Brown. August Geiger of Miami served as associate architect.

Builder/Contractor:

The Dade County Courthouse was built by Fleischer Engineering and Construction Company.

Historical Context:

When the county seat of Dade County was moved from Juno to Miami in 1899, judicial affairs were conducted from a wood frame building on the Miami River just east of the old Miami Avenue bridge. A new courthouse was built on the site of the present courthouse in 1904. That building was designed to meet the needs of Dade County for 50 years.

A new courthouse was planned in 1925 after the old one became inadequate. Several locations were considered, but the County later decided to utilize the site occupied by the old courthouse. The earlier building was to be torn down from within the rising steel structure of the newer edifice.

The Courthouse was occupied by both the County and the City of Miami until 1954, when the City vacated its space. The jail, originally located on the upper tower floors, was closed in 1961. County offices are currently in the process of moving to the new County Administration Building. When the move is complete, the Courthouse will be occupied exclusively by the judiciary for the first time in its history.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

The Dade County Courthouse is a 27 story symmetrical building of steel frame construction. Neo-Classical in style, the building features a double square base with a central tower. The Courthouse is faced with Stone Mountain granite on the first three stories and terra cotta tiles in an accurate imitation of the granite slabs on the rest of the building. A stepped pyramid roof or ziggurat tops the structure.

The building mass consists of a three-story base approximately 168 feet square, with a secondary base of three stories about 138 feet square. From the seventh to twentieth floors, the tower is a square shaft. The tower changes to an octagonal shape at the twentieth floor, with a further decrease in area at the twenty-fourth floor. The pyramid surmounting the tower is three stories in height.

Surrounding the building and five feet above the sidewalk is a broad slate-paved terrace. The terrace and main floor, which is six feet above the terrace level, are reached by two flights of granite steps on the north and south facades. This raised first floor provides space for a partially excavated basement, used for parking since the building opened.

The main floor of the building was originally open, equipped with folding wrought iron and bronze grilles rather than doors for security. Aluminum and glass revolving doors were installed when the building was air conditioned in the 1940s. A majority of the building's original steel casement windows remain, although windows on several floors have been replaced. The twelfth floor, for example, now contains bronze finished, aluminum fixed windows with bronze colored solar glass. Aluminum awning windows are now found on the seventh floor. Recently, windows on the fourteenth floor were replaced with new windows that closely replicated the originals in muntin configuration. The only concession to energy conservation is a light gray tinting.

Six colossal, fluted Doric columns flanked by two colossal pilasters highlight the north and south facades of the base. Similar colossal, engaged columns mark the east and west facades. Above is a full entablature with triglyphs and metopes, followed by an attic story.

Six engaged columns or pilasters with Egyptian capitals adorn the secondary base, which is surmounted by a classical balustrade. Decorative plaques with classical motifs embellish the ninth and nineteenth floors. The twenty-third floor is encircled by a classical entablature, with a pediment and tympanum at the twenty-fourth floor.

Except for the alteration of some windows and doors, the exterior of the Dade County Courthouse remains virtually unaltered.

Description of Site:

The Dade County Courthouse occupies the entire block bounded by W. Flagler Street, N.W. 1 Avenue, N.W. 1 Street, and N.W. 1 Court.

V. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Dade County Courthouse has been continuously occupied as a public building since its construction in 1925-1928. The Courthouse is currently in transition, with County offices vacating the building for the new County Administration Building nearby. The courts will continue to occupy the building.

In 1979, Dade County commissioned Milton C. Harry and Associates to prepare a recommendation for the renovation of the Courthouse. The report recommended the cleaning and repair of the terra cotta cladding, new windows that would replicated the originals, a new roof, and interior renovations. Since that time, the exterior has been cleaned and repaired, a new roof has been installed, and one floor of windows has been replaced. Funds are not currently available to complete the restoration.

Conservation Objectives:

Dade County is to be commended for its restoration program. All work to date, unlike earlier work, has been in keeping with the historic character of the building. It is hoped that the County will continue to explore the availability of funds to complete the restoration.

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 block owned by Dade County.

Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades of the Dade County Courthouse 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 requirements for tree removal permits, as set forth in Chapter 17 of the City Code.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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