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# FIRST MIAMI HIGH SCHOOL

142 SW 11<sup>TH</sup> STREET

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## Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI  
PRESERVATION OFFICER  
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE  
FIRST MIAMI HIGH SCHOOL  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Consultants

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Passed and  
Adopted on March 16, 2004

Resolution No. 2004-12

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Miami High School  
Miami Senior High  
Southside Elementary

Current Name:

First Miami High School

Location:

142 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

City of Miami  
444 SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Suite 325  
Miami, Florida 33130-1910

Present Use:

Vacant

Zoning District:

PR

Tax Folio Number:

01-4138-051-0380

Boundary Description:

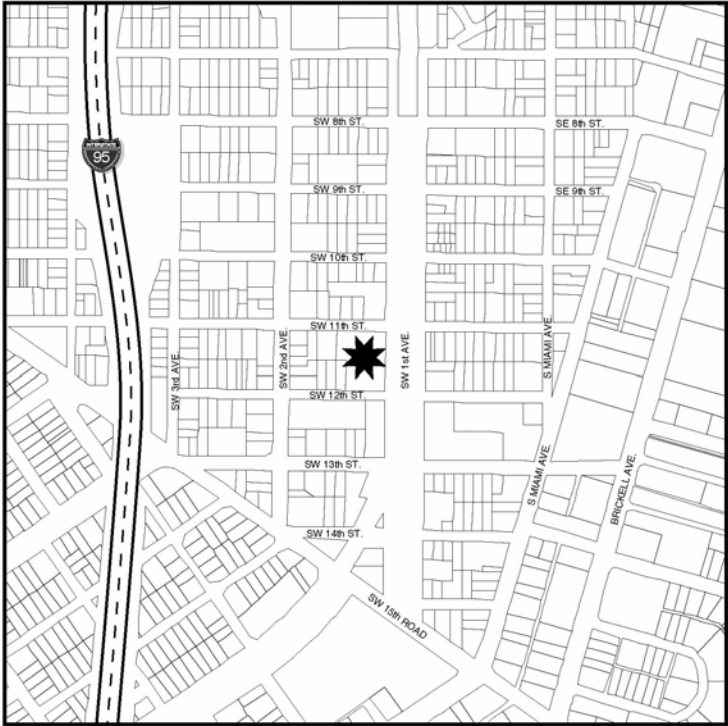
Lots 6 and 7 of Block 85, of the plat of MIAMI HEIGHTS A SUBDIVISION, as recorded in Plat Book 5 at Page 29 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

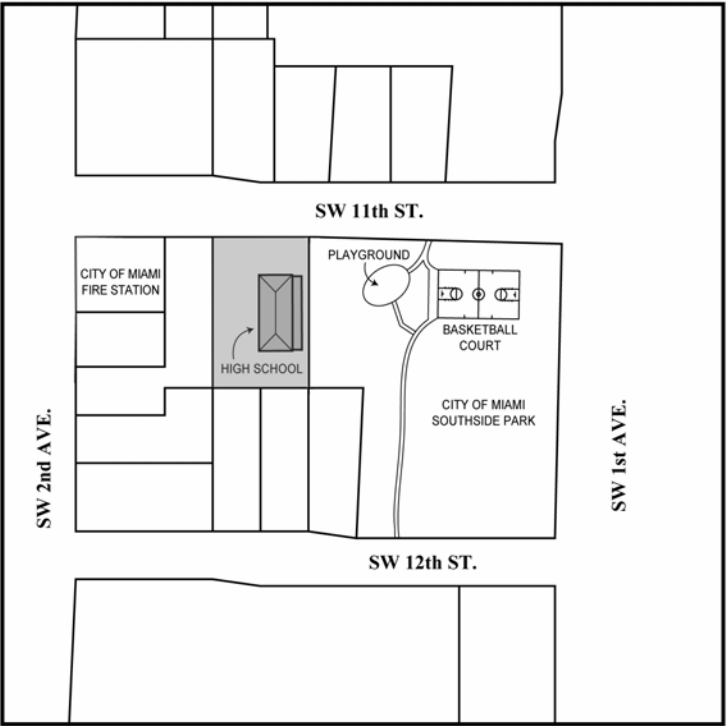
Historic Site

# FIRST MIAMI HIGH SCHOOL

## 142 SW 11<sup>TH</sup> STREET



  
location



  
site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Specific Dates:

Constructed - 1905

Moved - 1911

Moved - 2003

### Architect:

Original Architect - Unknown

Restoration - R. J. Heisenbottle

### Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

### Statement of Significance:

The First Miami High School, currently located at 140 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Street (in Miami's Southside Park), is significant for its pioneering role in the history of education in the City of Miami. It was the first building constructed especially for high school students. The building also expresses a vernacular design that is significant for its adaptation to the South Florida environment.

In 1896, the year that Miami was incorporated, the only existing schools were located in Lemon City and in Coconut Grove. There also was a school in the Lake Worth area, which was then a part of Dade County. Education in turn-of-the-century Miami was a game of "catch-up" as the population continued to swell and the school board attempted to satisfy need and demand. Higher education was itself somewhat dicey, as much of Miami's local economy was based on agricultural pursuits, and the children of farmers often were pulled out of school in their teens to participate in the family business.

In mid-October 1896, 49 students enrolled for schooling in a makeshift classroom housed in a building located at the present South Miami Avenue and 1<sup>st</sup> Street. By 1898, Miami built its first school building at today's NE 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. The two-story frame building had four classrooms that served students from the first through eighth grades. The curriculum also offered one year of high school study. By 1900, the school was expanded to six classrooms. In the fall of 1902, the school had 264 students, with 15 of those students enrolled in "the high school department." By 1905, the city's population had grown to an estimated 5,000 people, and Miami's first and only public school had far exceeded its capacity.

Miami's first high school building was considered temporary and opened on September 18, 1905 with 29 girls and 20 boys in attendance. Historian Howard Kleinberg relates, " on July 11 (1905) the school board accepted a bid of \$1,650 to build a bungalow-style addition that was reported to be 20 x 25' with two rooms, one for recitations and the other for the high school classroom." That one-story frame bungalow addition was built directly behind the existing school. This addition was actually the very first building that was dedicated exclusively for the education of high school students.

Four students comprised the first graduating class in the spring of 1906. In 1907, six students graduated, and by 1908 there were ten graduates. By 1909 the school board decided to build a new three-story concrete school to house grammar through high school students, and to demolish the original building. Once again, the high school students would share their facilities with the grammar school students. The new school was designed by the esteemed architect Walter DeGarmo, and opened in October 1911.

The fate of the bungalow addition, Miami's first high school building, was considerably different. In 1911, other than the Coconut Grove School, there were no educational facilities south of the Miami River. The School Board determined that the bungalow could be moved to the river's south side to satisfy the needs of those residents.

Initially this idea was met with great protest, as residents felt they were being shortchanged, in having to accept a second hand building instead of a new facility. After the School Superintendent explained the cost of the move and the value of the building, residents dropped their objections. No doubt a critical factor in those negotiations was the promise of a new school that would be built in about three years. The bungalow was moved to SW 12<sup>th</sup> Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. After it was repainted, new desks installed, and landscape added, the bungalow opened as the Southside Elementary School on October 9, 1911.

The bungalow served as Southside Elementary School from October 1911 until 1914, when a new school was built. The bungalow had served its purpose as a school and found its way into private hands. The building was converted into a boarding house and virtually lost its identity as a seminal landmark in the City of Miami's history.

In 2001, after the building's serendipitous rediscovery, a coalition of concerned preservation advocates joined forces to keep the school from demolition, as it was in the way of a high-rise development. Those advocates, who included distinguished Miami High School alumni and the Dade Heritage Trust and Villagers organizations, found the funding to move the bungalow to its present location in January 2003.

The rescue of the First Miami High School building is especially poignant after reading the 1914 Miami High School history written by Mamie Mizelle for the class



yearbook. That class started high school in the bungalow, and then moved to the new concrete building in 1911.

The class of 1914 began its High School career, not in this magnificent structure we are in tonight, but in a modest little two-room bungalow that has since been removed from where it stood over to the south side. Of course we love and appreciate this building—who would not? But still the memories that cluster about that little yellow High School are among the sweetest of our school days, and somehow—I don't know just why—it has always made me sad to think that as we leave there will be no class behind us to point out the spot where it once stood, and to speak tenderly and reverently of it as we have always done, or to relate the interesting things that happened there.

Though it is long in coming, the bungalow will be restored and interpreted so that its role in Miami's history can be suitably recognized. Miss Mizelle would be proud.

The existing building retains the elements of design, detail and craftsmanship that represent an adaptation to the South Florida environment. Its hipped roof, with wide, overhanging eaves and a deep-set front porch, shade these areas and they are design features that respond to the South Florida climate.

#### Relocations:

The building was first moved in 1911 to the south side of the Miami River. After many decades of neglect the building had fallen into a severe state of deterioration. The building was "discovered" in 1983 by celebrated local historian Thelma Peters. When, in 2001, it was learned that plans for a high-rise on the site would destroy the building, a campaign was launched to save the building from demolition.

*If the building had not been moved from its location, it would have been destroyed. Although it has lost its context in terms of its relationship as an addition to a larger building, it has retained a remarkable degree of its physical integrity. Because of the high degree of its importance, and the retention of its original character-defining elements, the building is deemed to be eligible for designation, despite the loss of its original location.*

#### Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The First Miami High School has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City of Miami; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

2. Is the site of a historic event with significant effect upon the community, city, state or nation.

The First Miami High School is the oldest remaining high school in the City of Miami. It was the first building built specifically for high school students.

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

The building reflects the evolution of Miami's early educational history. The very need for a separate facility for high school students reflects the change in Miami's community from a frontier settlement to a prosperous city.

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.

Frame construction was the most common type of construction method in Miami's earliest years of development. The hipped roof, wide overhanging eaves and the deep set front porch of the building are all elements that are responsive to the climate of South Florida.

### III. DESCRIPTION

#### Present and Original Appearance:

##### Setting:

First designed as a temporary structure, the Miami High School was originally constructed in 1905 on a lot behind the original Miami School located at NE 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. In 1911, a larger masonry school was built to replace both the high school and grammar school buildings. That same year, First Miami High School was moved to 79 SW 12<sup>th</sup> Street to serve as the temporary home of Southside Elementary School. In 1914, when a new Southside Elementary School was built, the First Miami High School building was converted into a boarding house. It continued as such into the late 1990s.

In 2002, the City of Miami purchased the First Miami High School building and moved it to its current location in Southside Park at 140 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Street. According to the Miami-Dade County property appraiser's web site, the size of the irregularly shaped park is 82,500 square feet.

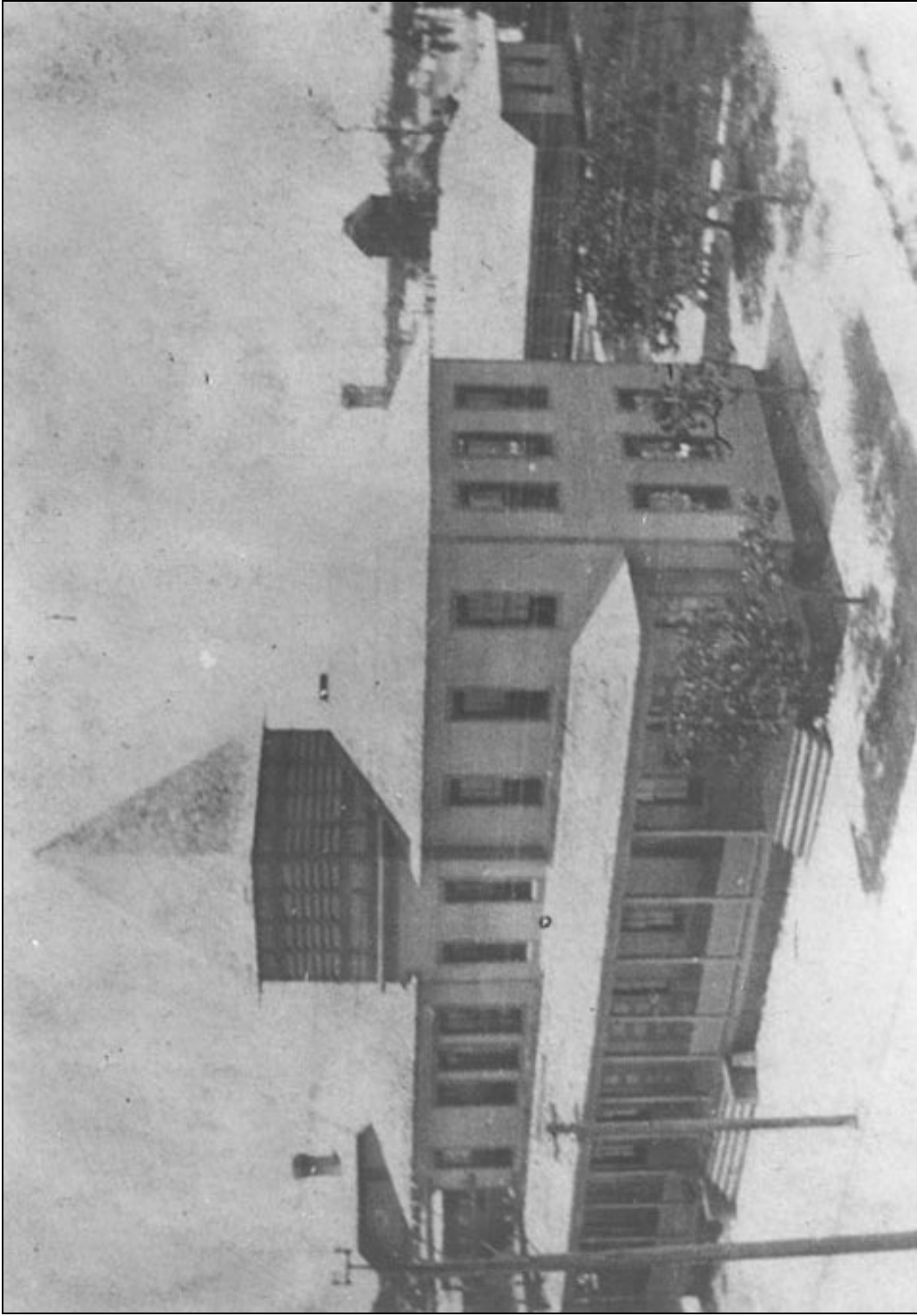
##### School Building:

This one-story, rectangular building reflecting the Bungalow style is being restored to its original condition. It has a wood frame structural system that rests on a concrete pier foundation. The hipped roof is covered in wood shingles and the exterior is clad in weatherboard siding. Although the school will have nine bays across the front when the restoration is complete, all of the windows are currently covered in plywood. A few of the original wooden double-hung sash windows with two-over-two light configurations still exist. These will be retained and replicated throughout the building. There are wood doors in what will be the second and eighth bays. The side elevations feature four windows each – the two larger symmetrical openings are clearly original with the smaller windows being later additions. These smaller windows will be removed during restoration. Exterior ornamentation includes cornerboards, wood window and door surrounds and exposed rafter tails.

The one-story, full-width front porch is the most distinguishing feature of the school. It has wood flooring that rests on concrete piers and a shed roof supported by ten evenly spaced, square, wood posts.

##### Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The contributing structure within the site is the school building. There are no contributing landscape features on the site, as the school building was relocated to this site.



First Miami High School (behind the two-story school building)  
NE 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets  
Circa 1910



First Miami High School at its new location in Southside Park  
140 SW 11 Street  
2004



Rendering of restored First Miami High School in Southside Park  
140 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Courtesy of Tom Spain, architect  
2002

#### IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

##### Present Trends and Conditions:

First Miami High School was originally located at what is now NE 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. It was eventually moved to 79 SW 12<sup>th</sup> Street to serve as the temporary home of Southside Elementary. Although a new Southside Elementary school building was completed shortly after First Miami High School was moved, the building remained, operating as a boarding house, for 90 years. In January 2003, First Miami High School was moved to its current location at 140 SW 11<sup>th</sup> Street, in Southside Park. Restoration work is underway and plans are to use the building as a community center and museum.

##### Conservation Objectives:

Based on the importance of First Miami High School to the history of the city, the preservation of this resource is a priority. It is currently well protected and maintained by the City.

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