

NEW PROVIDENCE LODGE No. 365

937-939 NW 3rd Avenue

LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION REPORT



Photograph taken shortly after construction



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION OF THE
NEW PROVIDENCE LODGE NO. 365
AS A HISTORIC RESOURCE

Prepared by: Chelsa Arscott,
Richard Eleman & Others

Reviewed and
Edited by: Ellen J. Uguccione,
Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on March 3, 2009

Resolution No. HEPB-2009-15

CONTENTS

I. General Information	4
II. Significance	6
III. Distinguished Early Members of the Lodge	7
IV. Description	8
V. Relationship to Criteria	8
VI. Present Trends and Conditions	10
VII. Photographs	11
VII. Partial Bibliography	12 1

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Names:

New Providence Lodge No. 365

Current Name:

New Providence Lodge No. 365

Location:

937-939 NW 3rd Avenue
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

New Providence Lodge
P.O. Box 015733
Miami, Florida 33101-0000

Present Use:

New Providence Lodge No. 365 meets on the second floor of the building. The ground floor is occupied by a branch office of the Florida Department of Transportation and one other tenant, Jackson Hewitt Tax Services.

Zoning District:

SD-16

Tax Folio Number:

01-0102-060-1070

Boundary Description:

Lots 12 and 13 of Block 26 north, PW Whites Subdivision, as recorded in Plat Book B, page 34 of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida

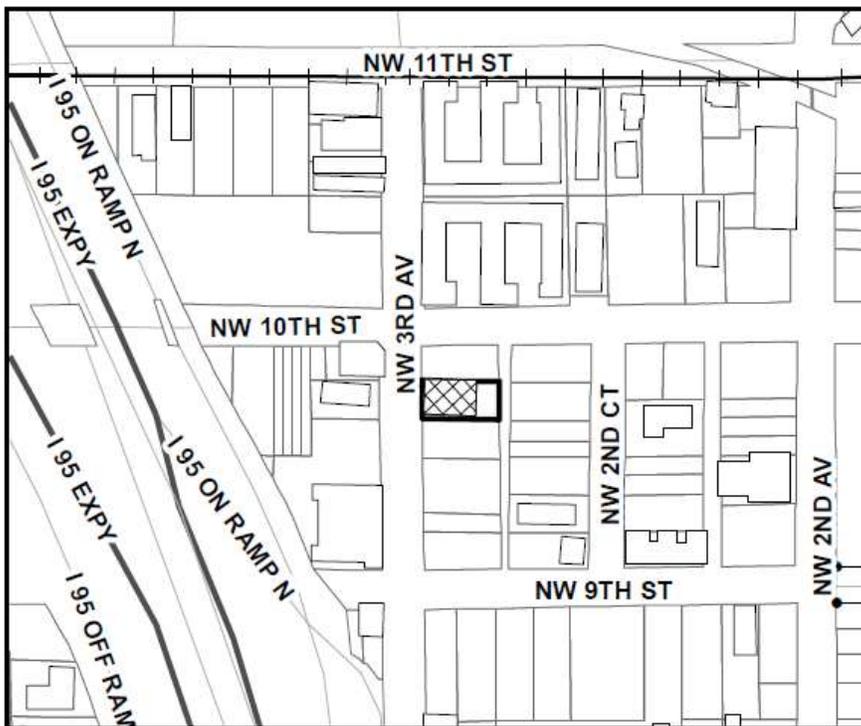
Classification:

Historic Building

NEW PROVIDENCE LODGE NO. 365
937-939 NW 3rd Avenue




Location




Site Plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1954

Architect:

None Discovered

Builder/Contractor:

Members of the New Providence Lodge

Statement of Significance:

The New Providence Lodge No. 365, located in the community historically known as Overtown, is living testament to the inhumane practice of segregation in our nation even in organizations that value brotherhood and fraternity, such as the freemasons. The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Florida was begun in 1870 in Jacksonville largely due to the efforts of Brother Charles F. Dailey (b.1820) who was originally from the West Indies. The Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge Free & Accepted Masons, Prince Hall Affiliated, Florida & Belize, Central America jurisdiction was incorporated in 1912, for the exclusive membership of African-American men.

The lodge is also a monument to the courage, commitment and perseverance of the New Providence Lodge's members, during a time when African Americans were still excluded from all white lodges. The Overtown lodge was issued its charter in 1917. Since that time, the organization has practiced its philosophy of brotherly love, relief and truth, and was a positive force in Overtown's socially isolated community.

The Brothers purchased land at NW 3rd Avenue and 10th Street, and most of its members worked through the night to finish its construction. The lodge was completed in 1954. A stone tablet on the north face of the building identifies the original members of the New Providence Lodge. The design for the lodge relies on mass and organization for its expression and the rectangular projecting surround on the second floor is, like the storefronts on the first floor, a simple method of organizing the façade into bays.

Information provided by lodge members explains that the design for the New Providence Lodge temple has subtle symbolic references to the organization including:

The second story surround which contains an arrangement of three windows refers to the original plans for King Solomon's Temple;

The three windows represent the three conferrals of "Degrees"

The entrance door is inscribed with the symbol of the Masons, the square and compass.

The stones that align with the door represent the quarries where the stone was quarried for King Solomon's temple.

The New Providence Lodge not only represents the home of one of the world's oldest fraternal organizations, but also a positive influence that brought dignity and equity to a segregated neighborhood.

III. Distinguished Early Members of the Lodge

While it would be difficult to name all of the influential and celebrated African-American men that belonged to the lodge, the following suggests the importance of the organization and the caliber of its brothers:

William O. Perry Sr.

Mr. Perry opened "Magic City Florist" (Miami's first African-American Licensed Florist) in 1933 at 3rd Avenue and 8th Street. The business was later called "Perry's Florist."

Clyde Killens

Mr. Killens was an influential promoter of events at the historic Lyric Theater, booking such acts as black musicians B.B. King and the Count Basie Orchestra , and comedian Redd Foxx.

Willard Hart

Mr. Hart was an activist, teacher and confidante to President Richard Nixon on Black affairs. He was a classmate of Martin Luther King at Morehouse.

Enos Hart

Mr. Hart was one of the builders of the Overtown lodge.

Garth Reese

Mr. Reese was the owner of the *Miami Times* which he founded in 1923 to cover the activities of the Black community. The paper is still published today

Reverend George Sawyer

Descended from one of the signers of Miami's articles of incorporation in 1896 (his father, William Sawyer,) the Reverend Sawyer was one of the builders of the lodge and preached at Temple Baptist Church.

Dr. I.P. Davis

Dr. Davis practiced dentistry and was the first president of the NAACP.

Reverence J. W. Drake

Reverend Drake was the pastor of St. John's Baptist Church

Reverend Evans

Reverend Evans was the pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Dr. H.H. Greene

Dr. Greene was one of Overtown's local physicians.

Dr. Murrel

Dr. Murrel practiced dentistry

Shaddie Ward

Mr. Ward was the owner of the Shaddie Tavern lounge.¹

IV. DESCRIPTION

The New Providence Lodge No. 365 is located at the southeast corner of NW 10th Street and NW 3rd Avenue. The building faces west onto NW 3rd Avenue.

The building is built on a slab foundation and is constructed of reinforced concrete. The exterior walls are finished with stucco, and the roof is flat, covered in built up materials.

There are no significant landscape features on the site.

V. RELATIONSHIP TO THE CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANCE

(Chapter 23, Section 23-4)

(1) Are associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

The brothers of the New Providence Lodge No. 365 are a veritable "Who's Who" of the African-American community. Their investment in the community was more than a matter of financial affairs. Their leadership and example for others continues to inform the community.

(3) Exemplify the historical, cultural, political, economical or social trends of the community.

In 1896, the vote to incorporate the City of Miami passed with 368 men voting. Of that number, 162 of the voters were Black, for the most part comprised of laborers

¹ New Providence Designation Report, written by Chelsa Arscott, Miami Community Revitalization Agency

working on Henry Morrison Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway, which made its appearance in Miami that same year.

Miami's original Charter called for a separate area to be set aside for African-Americans, first known as "Colored Town." The commercial spine of NW 2nd Avenue defined that area, which eventually became known as "Overtown." The population of Overtown soon expanded almost exponentially as migrants from northern Florida and other southern states arrived. Émigrés from the Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago expanded the growing settlement even further.

The Black men and women who made their home in Miami provided essential services to the growing community. In particular, many of the Bahamians were master stone carvers and were vital to the burgeoning construction industry. George Merrick, the founder and developer of the City of Coral Gables is quoted in Marvin Dunn's book *Black Miami in the 20th Century* as stating:

In the Bahamas, there is the same coral rock; and the Bahamian Negroes knew how to plant on it; and how to use it; and they knew too that all kinds of tropical trees would grow and thrive on this rock. They, too, had a vital influence upon our civilization in bringing in their own commonly used trees, vegetables and fruits.²

While many of the immigrants were day laborers working in the farming and construction industry—there was also an often overlooked cadre of professional men and women who provided for the educational, spiritual, and medicinal needs of their community. It was these men who made up the brotherhood of the Masonic Lodge.

Therefore, the New Providence Lodge No. 365 particularly meets this criterion as a reminder of the social and cultural experience of a segregated Miami.

(5) Embody those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The building's articulation, particularly the rectangular framing of the windows across the main elevation is illustrative of fifties architecture. In this case, the building itself is not the overarching reason for its significance, but rather what it symbolizes. Built with limited funds—those of its members—and by the same hands who erected many of the outstanding structures that form a distinctive part of Miami's architectural history, the building's architectural merit lies in its symbolic representation of a community and a trade.

² Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the 20th Century*

VI. Present Trends and Conditions

In 2002, the brothers of the New Providence Lodge established the New Providence Lodge, Inc. as a not-for-profit organization. The purpose of the organization is to promote and educate residents of the Overtown community about the resources available to them in the City of Miami.

A portion of the building would be rehabilitated for use as a museum and a tutorial outreach program for students in the community. To accomplish this major repairs and systems replacement will occur, including: the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, and repairs to the structural system. Life safety mechanisms will be installed and the building modified to accommodate ADA requirements. All of these repairs and modifications will be accomplished in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.

The recognition of the New Providence Lodge as a locally designated historic building, in this historically African-American section of Miami, is an appropriate and well-deserved honor. The designation will help to remind all our citizens of the selfless talents of these Masons who made their community all the better.

VII. Photographs



Photograph provided by New Providence Lodge
Brothers of the New Providence Lodge



Contemporary Photograph
New Providence Lodge
Courtesy: Miami Community Redevelopment Agency

VIII. PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arcott, Chelsa and Others, Designation Report for The New Providence Lodge No. 35. Miami Community Revitalization Agency

Dunn, Marvin. *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.

"Oldest Black Group Survives, Thrives" *Miami Herald*, 13 November 1983, 10.

Oral histories between Ms. Chelsa Arcott and members of the Lodge

Stafford, Anthony T. (Worshipful Master) *A Living Schism: A History of the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons, Prince Hall Affiliates, Inc., Florida, Belize, Central America Jurisdiction 1868-1915*, December 19, 1997