
BRYAN MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH

3713 MAIN HIGHWAY

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF
BRYAN MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Prepared by Margot Ammidown

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton, Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on October 21, 1997

Resolution No. HEPB-97-38

CONTENTS

I. General Information	4
II. Significance	7
III. Description	10
IV. Planning Context	13
V. Bibliography	14

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church

Current Name:

Coconut Grove United Methodist Church

Location:

3713 Main Highway
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Coconut Grove United Methodist Church, Inc.
3713 Main Highway
Miami, FL 33133

Present Use:

Religious

Zoning District:

R-1, with an SD-18 Overlay

Tax Folio Number:

01-4128-004-0040

Boundary Description:

A portion of Lot C of the plat of EWANTON HEIGHTS, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 52, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida, more particularly described as follows:

A tract of land in the form of a parallelogram 125.41 feet by 330 feet, less the Northerly portion thereof used and occupied as Ingraham Highway (Main Highway), being the Northeast corner of that certain tract of land particularly described as follows (the 125.41 foot Northwest boundary line being coincident with the center line of the County Road known as Ingraham Highway), to wit:

A strip of land 150 feet wide being the Southwest part of that part of Lot "C" of EWANTON HEIGHTS, Dade County, Florida, which lies between the center line of said County Road and Biscayne Bay, more particularly described as beginning at the point in the center line of said County Road intersected by the Southwest boundary line of Lot "C" which point is 410 feet from the Southwest corner of Lot "C" which corner is 602.8 feet South of the Northeast corner of the Southwest Quarter, of the Southwest Quarter, of Section 21, Township 54 South, Range 41 East, from said point of beginning South 42 degrees and 52 minutes East along the Southwest boundary of Lot "C" 1500 feet to the low water mark of Biscayne Bay; thence Northerly along Biscayne Bay a distance equivalent to 150 feet measured perpendicularly to the last line; thence North 42 degrees and 52 minutes West 1500 feet to the center line of County Road; thence along the said center line 150.1 feet to the point of beginning.

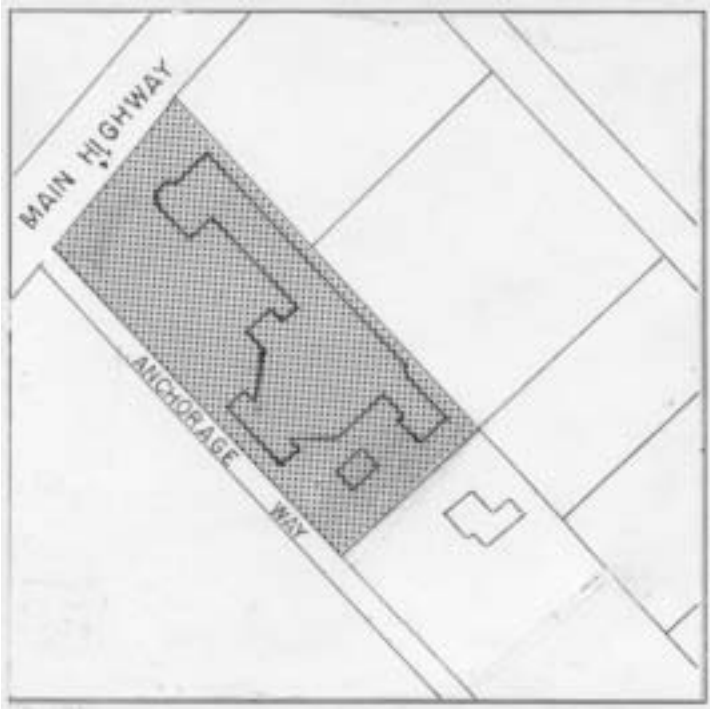
Classification:

Historic Site

BRYAN MEMORIAL METHODIST CHURCH 3713 MAIN HIGHWAY



⊕
location



⊕
site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1925-1928

Architect:

Kiehnel and Elliott

Statement of Significance:

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is historically significant for its role in the religious history of Coconut Grove and as a reflection of the City's growth during the Boom era of the 1920s. The church is also significant for its association with William Jennings Bryan, the famous American orator, theologian and three-time Presidential candidate. Designed by the renowned architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott, the church is an excellent example of religious architecture with Byzantine detailing.

The Coconut Grove Methodist Episcopal Church, the forerunner of Bryan Memorial Methodist Church, was organized on February 14, 1915, in the Housekeepers Club of Coconut Grove. There was 25 charter members. The congregation, which changed its name to Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, constructed its first church building on Mary Street and Grand Avenue in 1918. As membership increased during the Boom years of the early 1920s, the building proved to be too small, and plans were made to construct a larger sanctuary elsewhere in Coconut Grove.

In 1924, William Jennings Bryan and his wife Mary Baird offered to sell the Main Highway frontage of their Marymont estate to the congregation for \$18,000. Although Bryan was never a member of the Methodist Church, his wife was, and he was elected to the Board of Trustees. Bryan served on the Building Committee and was actively involved with the architects in the design of the new church building.

Bryan's influence can be seen in the incorporation of ground level entrances into the design so that his wife, who was confined to a wheelchair, could have easy access to worship services. The church is therefore a rare period example of a religious building originally designed to include accessibility in the building program.

In addition to handicap accessibility, Bryan influenced the siting of the church building on property, with space for people to assemble for outdoor Bible classes. The design also provided for a unique outdoor pulpit from which to conduct his classes. A second story loggia above the pulpit was intended for use as a choir loft, and the organ console and pipes were located where they could be used either for indoor or outdoor services.

Bryan was a prominent figure on the American political scene. In 1896 he ran as the Democratic presidential candidate against William McKinley. He was a populist and gained a reputation as a great orator. His political career was essentially ended after his third failed attempt at the presidency, and he moved permanently to Miami. His public life was not over, however.

His involvement in the planning and construction of what was to become the Bryan Memorial Methodist Church began just prior to the time he became legal council for the State of Tennessee against J. T. Scopes, a Dayton school teacher who was arrested and charged with violating a state law that prohibited teaching non-creationist theory in public schools. Known as the "Scopes Monkey Trial," it is one of the most famous cases in American jurisprudence. The opposing attorney was Clarence Darrow, and the case represented a pivotal point in American consciousness in the increasingly heated debate between creationism and evolutionary theory. It is often viewed as the debate between modernism and the conservative religious traditionalism which had been predominant in the culture. Selected for the Scopes trial in part because he was an ardent believer in a literal interpretation of the Bible as well as for his oratorical abilities, Bryan won the trial, but it took a devastating physical toll on him.

The trial was grueling and highly controversial, and Bryan died of a heart attack in July 1925, shortly after the its conclusion. Construction of the church which he had helped to plan, had recently begun, but Bryan would never get to use his outdoor pulpit.

The untimely death of Bryan, the collapse of the Boom and damage to the partially completed structure by the 1926 hurricane delayed completion of the church. The church, which was then known as the Grove Temple Union Methodist Church, was renamed the Bryan Memorial Methodist Church in honor of William Jennings Bryan and was finally dedicated on Easter Sunday 1928. Department store magnate J. C. Penney, who had made a donation to clear the church of its construction debt, was the principal speaker from the outdoor pulpit.

In addition to its historic significance, Bryan Memorial Methodist Church possesses a high degree of architectural significance. The church represents an excellent example of ecclesiastical architecture in Dade County and is noteworthy for the Byzantine features in its massing and detail. The design of the church reflects the national tendency of early twentieth century church architecture to look to the past for inspiration and symbolism and to adapt details from a single historical style in a modern way.

The excellence of the design of the church is evident in the octagonal shape of the sanctuary, the treatment of the loggias and arched windows and the decorative detail found within the sanctuary. The configuration of the principal elevation is also noteworthy for its adaptation to the area's climate through its use of a loggia, which could serve as outdoor pulpit.

The church was designed by the renowned architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott, which also designed such notable buildings as the Coral Gables Congregational Church, El Jardin and the Scottish Rite Temple. A Pittsburgh firm which was founded in 1906, Kiehnel and Elliott received its first Miami commission in 1917 and opened a permanent Miami office in 1922, with Richard Kiehnel in charge. Although his buildings reflect a diversity of architectural styles, he is perhaps best known as the major force in the introduction and development of Mediterranean Revival style architecture in Miami.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, Bryan Memorial Methodist Church 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:

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

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is associated with the final years of the life of William Jennings Bryan, the famous American orator, theologian and three-time Presidential candidate. Bryan worked closely with the architects on the planning and design of the church.

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

Begun in 1925 at the height of Miami's Boom era and dedicated in 1928 during the Bust, Bryan Memorial Methodist Church reflects the City's development and is also noted for its associations with one of Coconut Grove's earliest organized churches.

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

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is an excellent example of early twentieth century ecclesiastical architecture with Byzantine detailing.

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

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church was designed by the renowned architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott, which also designed such notable buildings as the Coral Gables Congregational Church, El Jardin and the Scottish Rite Temple.

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.

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is noteworthy for the excellence of its design, as well as the rare adaptation of Byzantine detailing to the South Florida environment, as demonstrated by such features as the outdoor loggia/pulpit.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Bryan Memorial Methodist is prominently located on the bay side of Main Highway at the intersection with Anchorage Way. The main church building is set back a considerable distance from the street and is approached by a concrete driveway on the southwest side of the property.

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is a large three-story masonry structure executed with elements of Byzantine style architecture. The main church building is an octagonal block topped with a smaller octagonal rotunda. Both octagons feature pyramidal hipped roofs. The building, which is finished with smooth stucco, is embellished with a corbel table on the lower octagon and a cornice with dentils on the upper octagon. A bronze cupola with a cross tops the rotunda.

The exterior of the church is characterized by two two-story projecting gable roofed wings. The one on the northwest facade contains an exterior, second-story loggia with five slender arched bays demarcated by Byzantine columns. Below the loggia is an outdoor pulpit. It is this loggia, rather than the main entrance, that is the principal facade facing Main Highway, making the orientation of the structure somewhat unusual. The main entrance is located on the southwest facade in the second major gable-roofed wing and has been modified by the addition of a newer gable-roofed doorway. A small one story polygonal office, added later, extends from the west wall of the entrance to the sanctuary.

The fenestration of the main octagonal block is characterized by tall, tripartite arched openings, separated by engaged Byzantine columns. The central arch is flanked by shorter, more slender arched openings, and all contain multiple windows glazed with an opaque marble-like material. A circular stained glass window is found within the central arch on the northeast facade.

The original church was designed with a one-story classroom building, which extends northwestward from the sanctuary. This gable-roofed wing with exposed rafter ends features large arched openings, which have been partially blocked in. The original arches, however, remain clearly visible. The aluminum awning windows contain the same glazing as the sanctuary. The chapel at the westernmost end of the classroom building was added in 1953, although the style and detailing is compatible with the original structure.

The major alteration to the church has been the replacement of the original barrel tile, which covered all roofed surfaces, with asphalt shingles.

The interior of the main sanctuary comprises a very imposing space. The plan is unusual for a Christian church in that it is neither rectangular nor the cruciform of the traditional Roman plans typically adapted by most Christian sects in the West.

Instead, it features a rotunda more typical of the Eastern churches of Byzantium. The side aisles extend around the perimeter of the rotunda.

The main altar, which replaces the original altar, is set below a series of tall round arches, the center of which contains the round stained glass window. Groups of Byzantine columns support the space. Balconies decorated with Byzantine ornamentation and supported with arcades surround the sanctuary. Few alterations have been made to the space.

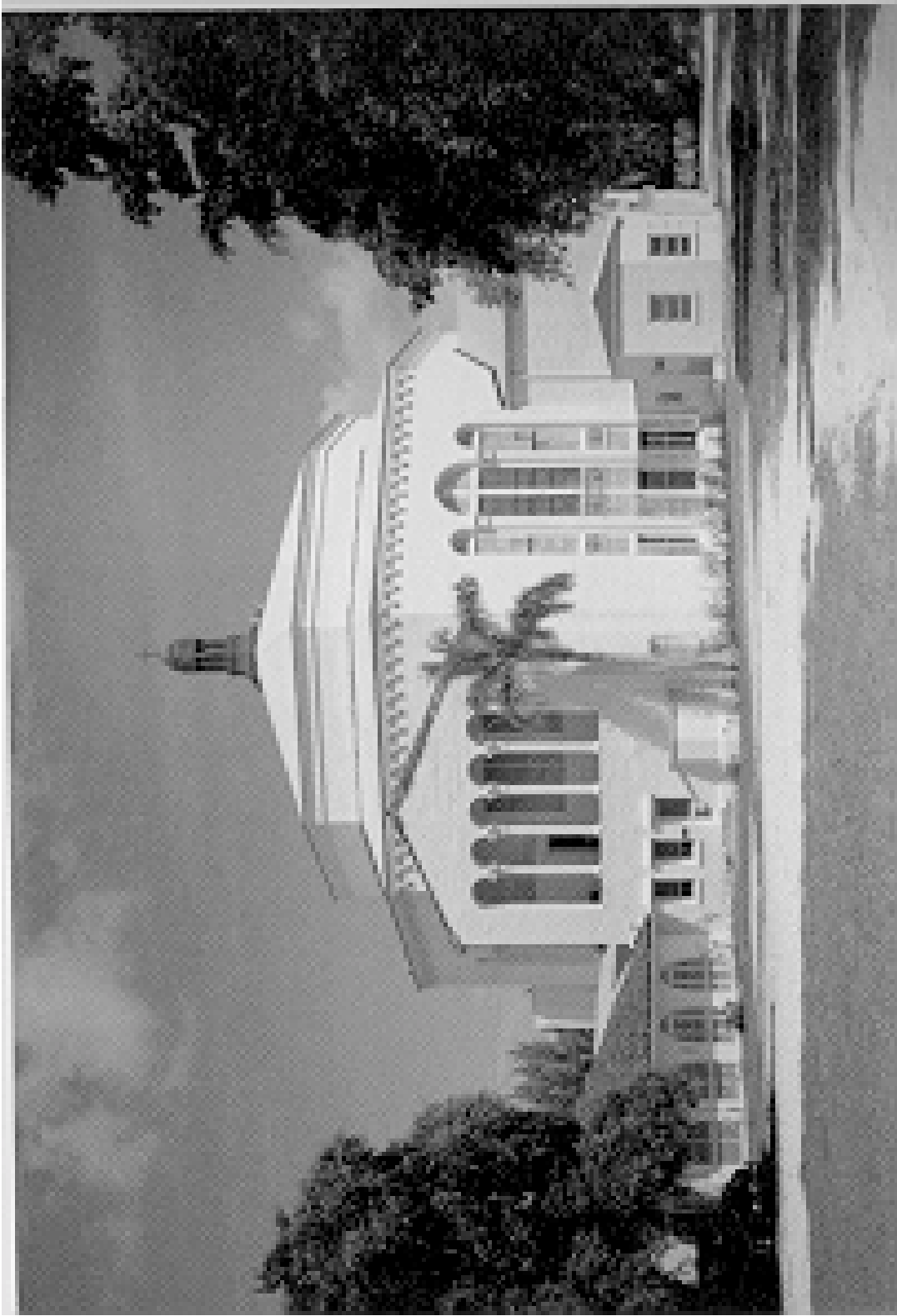
A one-car garage, constructed in 1947, is located on the rear of the property. This masonry structure is finished with smooth stucco and features a gable roof topped with asphalt shingles. A one-story cottage known as Epworth House is located behind the church on a parcel of land acquired in 1957. This parcel is not included within the boundaries of the historic site.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The church building is a contributing structure. Based on its date of construction, the garage is also a contributing structure, although its significance is minimal.

Also considered as contributing is the interior of the main entrance lobby and the main sanctuary itself. Any alterations to this space shall be guided by the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's "Standard for Rehabilitation." Nothing in this designation shall prohibit the removal of religious symbols, such as crosses and the stained glass window, by a future owner of the building.

Contributing landscape features include all specimen trees on the property.



Bryan Memorial Methodist Church
3713 Main Highway

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Bryan Memorial Methodist Church is located in the heart of southern Coconut Grove in a single family residential area. Other institutional uses, including schools and churches, are also within the immediate vicinity. The church occupies a prominent site along Main Highway, a state historic highway and a local scenic transportation corridor. This highly visible location is significant in terms of the context of the church within its physical surroundings.

On January 1, 1996, Bryan Memorial United Methodist Church merged with Christ Allapattah United Methodist Church and was renamed the Coconut Grove United Methodist Church. In 1997, following a decision to relocate to the church at S.W. 27th Avenue and U. S. 1, the former Bryan Memorial Methodist Church property was offered for sale. The church property will be purchased by the property owners of the adjacent Anchorage subdivision. It is the intent to then sell the property to a religious congregation or community organization which will preserve the church.

Preservation Incentives:

The preservation of Miami's historic church buildings should be a preservation priority, and every effort should be made to find a new owner who is willing to maintain the building either for its current use, or for a compatible adaptive use. Preserving the building is important, not only because of its own historic and architectural significance, but also because of its place in the context of the Main Highway historic highway.

The development of preservation incentives for religious properties, however, is one that is very difficult to address. If the church is purchased by a nonprofit institution, the existing tax incentives for rehabilitation would not be applicable.

The City will provide technical assistance to the new owner as plans for a new use of the property are being developed.

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