
CONGRESS BUILDING

111 NE 2ND AVENUE

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
CONGRESS BUILDING
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Passed and
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Resolution No. 2003-17

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Congress Building

Current Name:

Congress Building

Location:

111 NE 2nd Avenue
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Congress Associates Limited
2828 Coral Way, Penthouse Suite
Miami, FL 33145-3214

Present Use:

Commercial / Residential

Zoning District:

CBD

Tax Folio Number:

01-0110-030-2070

Boundary Description:

Lots 11 and 12, less the southerly 53 feet of Block 103 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 41, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

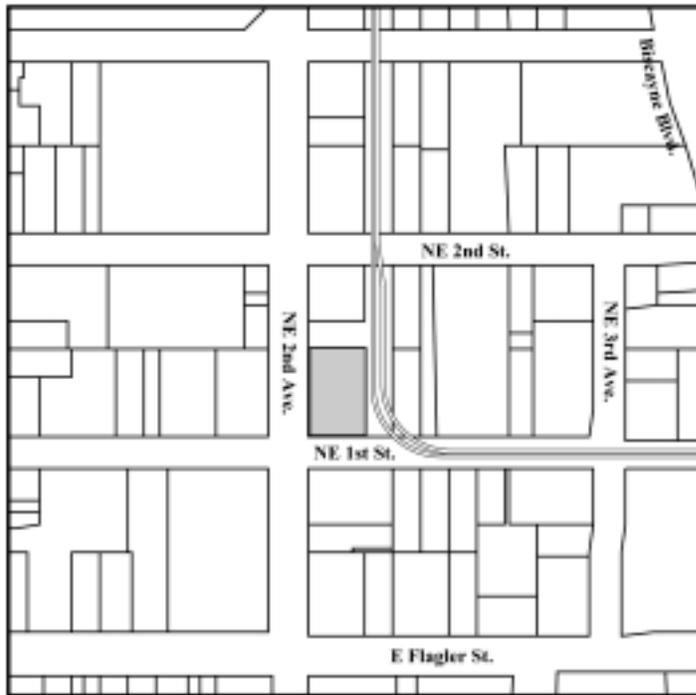
Historic Site

THE CONGRESS BUILDING

111 NE 2ND AVENUE




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

Original five-story building – 1923

Sixteen-story addition; North Wing, Seventeen stories - 1926

Architect:

Martin Luther Hampton

Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

Statement of Significance:

The Congress Building is significant as an exemplary example of 1920s commercial architecture in Miami-Dade County. The 21-story masonry and steel frame building is distinguished architecturally in that it combines the Mediterranean Revival style in its initial building, and then departs for a simpler composition influenced by the Chicago School in the addition. The building is also noteworthy for its structural design and corresponding importance in the field of engineering. The fully constructed building is actually composed of two separate buildings, built three years apart, but which appear as a single composition because of their integrated design. The Congress Building is also significant historically, as the original building and its high-rise addition reflect the frenetic pace of real estate development during the Florida real estate boom.

In 1911, Thomas O. Wilson moved from Philadelphia to Miami. In 1912, he established the Woodlawn Park Cemetery Company, creating a place of interment on SW 8th Street for some of Miami's most prominent citizens. In 1913, he organized the "Realities Security Corporation," billed as "owners and agents of city and suburban properties."

During the teens, Miami was poised for the explosive growth to come. By 1915, the City of Miami Beach had been incorporated, and new highways were constructed that linked the region with the Midwest, East and West Coasts. In 1916, *Villa Vizcaya*, James Deering's magnificent Mediterranean-inspired estate on Biscayne Bay was completed. The pace increased exponentially after that, and by 1921, Downtown Miami real estate was selling at a premium. To fill the demand for additional space, skyscrapers replaced quaint low-rise buildings, many of them single-family residences.

It was in this climate that Thomas Wilson and his Realities Securities Corporation commissioned the "New Congress Building" on NE 2nd Avenue. The company made its offices in the original five-story building, and when the building was expanded to become a high-rise in 1926, continued to make the building its home.

Because of its two stages of construction, the Congress Building typifies both the predominant architectural theme of the Mediterranean Revival (favored for small commercial and residential designs during the Boom) in the original building, and the sleek, architectonic quality of the Chicago School in the massive, high-rise addition.

Architect Martin Luther Hampton designed both the original building and the addition. Hampton was one of the six architects (the others being H. George Fink, Walter De Garmo, Richard Kiehnel, Harold Hastings Mundy and L. D. Brumm), who composed George Merrick's original design team in the creation of Coral Gables, Florida. Hampton was a master of design who made a significant impact in the articulation of the Mediterranean Revival style, which proliferated in the Miami area during the Boom. Before coming to work for George Merrick in Coral Gables, he worked with Addison Mizner in Palm Beach.

In 1916, after Merrick wed Eunice Peacock, Hampton designed their first home at 937 Coral Way, known as "Poinciana Place." In February 1924, at Merrick's request, Hampton designed the Biltmore Hotel and Country Club. His design included a replica of Seville's *Giralda* tower flanked by wings containing hotel rooms. The New York firm of Shultze and Weaver, who retained much of the original Hampton concept, executed the final design for the Biltmore.

Hampton later worked throughout the Miami area, including Miami Beach and Miami Springs. He designed the Old Miami Beach City Hall and numerous residences in Glenn Curtiss' development of Country Club Estates, now known as Miami Springs.

Although Hampton designed the addition to the Congress Building, he depended on structural engineer E. A. Sturman of Miami to create the structural framework that would make the addition possible. The "first" Congress Building consisted of five stories characterized by five bays created by the monumental two-story arches of the entry bays. The addition was constructed by "straddling" the original building with two additional bays of 17 stories that were constructed as a north wing.

The truss system that supports the addition is placed through the sixth and seventh floors and is connected to a column system attached to the original building. No other buildings in Miami are known to be constructed in this manner.

The Congress Building literally portrays the evolution of architectural fashion in the City of Miami. The design for the original building relies heavily on Neo-Classical,

seventeenth-century Italian prototypes, but the use of polychromed glazed terra cotta for the roundels between the arches and the spandrels that decorate the space between the fourth and fifth stories belongs to the Mediterranean Revival interpretations so popular throughout the Boom in Florida. The turned pilasters of the fourth and fifth stories are also a product of the Mediterranean Revival phenomenon and its liberal interpretation of Moorish motifs.

For the 1926 addition, Hampton was much closer in spirit to the Chicago School designers of the late nineteenth century. Those designers include Daniel Burnham, John Welborn Root, William Holabird, Louis Sullivan and Sullivan's partner, Dankmar Adler.

The Chicago School architects were the front runners in the development of early sky-scrapers and the characteristics associated with the school include: a rectangular plan with a flat roof and terminating cornice; minimal ornamentation, the expression of the structural skeleton of the building by the emphasis on the grid of intersection piers and horizontal spandrels; large expanses of non-load bearing glass, and windows that filled a great proportion of the wall mass. The "Chicago window" type originates from these early high-rises and is defined as a large fixed central window that is flanked by two narrow casement windows that are operable.

The Congress Building addition reflects the Chicago School style in its flat roof and terminating cornice, the proliferation of windows that occupy a bulk of the wall mass, and the expression of form and verticality through the geometry of the window placement.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Congress Building 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:

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

The Congress Building reflects the historical development trends of Miami in the early part of the twentieth century. The original building and its high-rise addition reflect the frenetic pace of real estate development during the Florida real estate boom.

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

Because of its two stages of construction, the Congress building typifies both the predominant architectural style of the Mediterranean Revival in the

original building, and the sleek, architectonic quality of the Chicago School in the massive, high-rise addition. The building is also noteworthy for its structural design and corresponding importance in the field of engineering. The fully constructed building is actually composed of two separate buildings, built three years apart, but which appear as a single composition because of their integrated design.

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

Both the original building and the addition were designed by Martin Luther Hampton, a prominent local architect who produced many outstanding structures in the Miami area and who made a significant impact in the articulation of the Mediterranean Revival style.

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 Congress Building is noteworthy for its use of decorative elements such as polychromed glazed terra cotta and turned pilasters, as well as for its expression of form and verticality through the geometry of the window placement.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Congress Building is located at the northeast corner of NE 2nd Avenue and NE 1st Street. The main elevation faces west onto NE 2nd Avenue. A three-story building is immediately to its south. The First Street stop of the elevated Miami Metromover is immediately east of the Congress Building. The building occupies a 9,700-square-foot lot, and has a zero-foot frontage on all sides.

Original 1923 Five-Story Base:

In 1923, the five-story, highly ornamented section of this now-high-rise structure was constructed. It is designed with five vertical bays and three horizontal divisions. The monumental round arches of the five bays each contain a storefront on the ground level, with two pairs of double glass doors and sidelights at their entrance. Each storefront has a transom set into a rectangular recess. The storefronts, which were modified over the years, were restored to their original condition in 1998.

Between the arches at the second story are polychromed terra cotta roundels consisting of gold shields set against a blue background. Two stories of narrow rectangular windows, grouped in threes, fenestrate the third and fourth stories. The groups of three windows in each bay are divided vertically by engaged spiral, (or turned), pilasters resting on a projecting window ledge. A polychromed terra cotta panel, composed of a shield and swag motif, interrupts the pilasters between the third and fourth stories across the west façade.

1926 Addition:

The high-rise tower rests on the five-story original building base. The building reads as a series of blocks that move in and out as well as up and down. The north end of the west, or principal, elevation features a 17-story block that projects beyond the wall plane of the 21-story block at the south end. Only the south block of the addition reaches the full 21-story height (which includes the uppermost story containing the mechanical equipment).

A flat tiled parapet wall and full entablature with a decorative frieze occurs at the center of the west elevation, making the transition from the smaller building to the high rise. A second entablature with a similar frieze and tiled parapet terminates the 17th story of the lower projecting wing and continues across the façade of the main block of the building. A less elaborate stringcourse extends across the building between the 14th and 15th stories. Above the fifth story, the west elevation is faced with glazed terra cotta. On the 17th through 19th floors of the tallest block,

fluted pilasters are used to separate the individual bays, and as it resembles a Greek temple, creates a suitable termination for the building.

The wall mass is almost entirely taken up by the windows. The windows are rectangular and are a single-hung sash type. The proliferation of windows adds to the pronounced verticality of the structure.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The contributing structure within the site is the Congress Building as described in the preceding text. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.



Congress Building
111 NE 2nd Avenue
West (front) and south elevations
2002



Congress Building under construction
111 NE 2nd Avenue
West (front) and south façades
March 13, 1926

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Congress Building is one of the relatively few remaining early high-rise buildings in the City of Miami. The building was identified as a historic site in the Downtown Miami Development of Regional Impact (DRI), and individually listed in the *National Register of Historic Places* on March 14, 1985.

In January 1998, a total rehabilitation of the building was undertaken, converting it from office to residential use. During that rehabilitation, the lobby, which had been covered with acoustical tile, was fully restored revealing its original wood-beamed ceilings. The copper and bronze elevator doors and marble floors also were restored to their original condition.

The Congress Building reopened its doors in May 1999, now configured with 128 apartments and retail space on the ground floor.

Preservation Incentives:

The Congress Building serves as model illustrating the opportunities for economic investment in historic buildings. The developer of the building made use of the 20% Investment Tax Credit available for depreciable properties listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*, and added a low-income housing credit to achieve a highly successful return on the investment.

The availability of apartment units in Downtown Miami is highly desirable, as its revitalization depends upon the establishment of a local community. The Congress Building is a paradigm for others to emulate.

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