
GEORGE E. NOLAN HOUSE

1548 BRICKELL AVENUE

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 THE
GEORGE E. NOLAN HOUSE
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton, Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on June 17, 1997

Resolution No. HEPB-97-23

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

George E. Nolan House

Current Name:

Nolan/Harris House

Location:

1548 Brickell Avenue
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

H. N. Harris and G. E. Nolan, Jr.
1548 Brickell Avenue
Miami, Florida 33129

Present Use:

Residential

Zoning District:

R-3

Tax Folio Number:

01-4139-001-0250

Boundary Description:

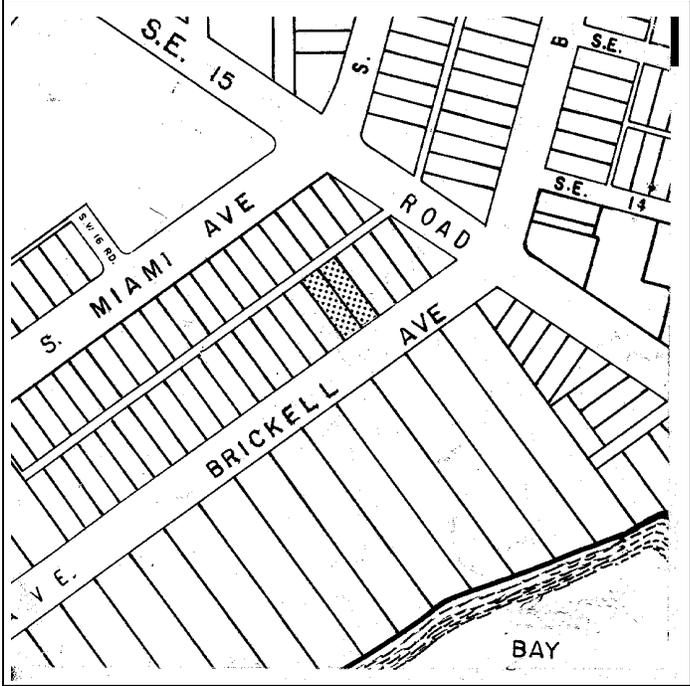
Lots 37 and 38 of Block 55 of the plat of BRICKELL'S FLAGLER, as recorded in Plat Book 5 at Page 44 of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

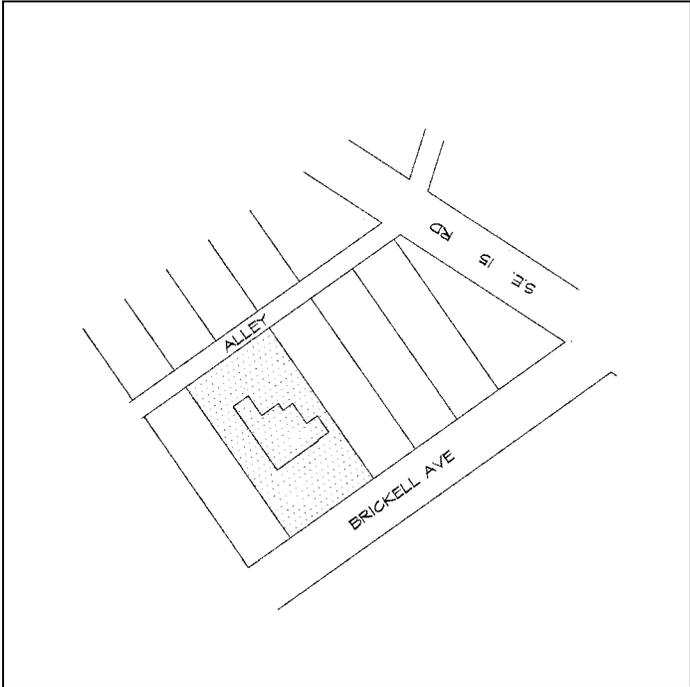
Historic Site

GEORGE E. NOLAN HOUSE

1548 BRICKELL AVENUE




location




site plan

II, SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1925

Architect:

The architect for the George E. Nolan House was J. C. Gault, a noted Miami architect of the 1920s and 1930s. Gault designed several apartment buildings on Miami Beach, including the Southland Apartments at 1501 Alton Road, the Neptune Apartments at 1632 Meridian Avenue, the Sunny Haven Apartments at 410 Collins Avenue, and a building at 1345 Pennsylvania Avenue. Gault also designed the Gesu Church Parish School at 118 N.E. 2nd Street and other downtown structures including an addition to the Vine Villa Hotel at 251 N.E. 2nd Street.

Builder/Contractor:

Jack Denman, Builder

Statement of Significance:

The George E. Nolan House is historically significant as a reflection of the importance of Miami's Brickell Avenue during the Boom era of the 1920s. One of the few remaining remnants from Miami's first "Millionaire's Row," the Nolan House played a major role in the city's social and cultural life through its association with the Nolan and Harris families. The house is also an excellent example of the application of Neo-Classical style architecture to the Miami environment and is particularly distinguished by its two story Corinthian portico.

In the late nineteenth century, Miami was still a wilderness, home to a few intrepid pioneers. When William and Mary Brickell brought their family to the area in 1870, scarcely a dozen families called the area home. With foresight and faith, the Brickells sank \$3,500 into 2,000 acres of impenetrable jungle-like hammock land because it was one of the area's most valuable parcels, fringing Biscayne Bay from the Miami River to Coconut Grove.

By the time the railroad arrived in 1896, spurred in part by the Brickells' gift of land to Henry Flagler, the Brickells had already paved a rock road, known as the Coconut Grove Trail, through their property. In 1898, the trail became a 145 foot wide roadway called Brickell Avenue and extended from the Miami River to Broadway (15th Road).

After William Brickell's death in 1908, his wife Mary took over all the family affairs. In 1911, she transformed Brickell Avenue into what the newspapers called "Miami's most beautiful street" complete with a 25 foot "central park" median of shrubs and trees. Even though the Brickell Avenue Bridge over the Miami River was not built until 1928, the Avenue quickly became one of the city's most fashionable residential addresses. Early Brickell Avenue residents included Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher and Mayor C. D. Leffler.

Its value increased in 1912 when James Deering purchased 130 acres from Mary Brickell on which to build his Villa Vizcaya. By the time James Deering's home was completed in 1916, other well known luminaries were also moving onto Brickell Avenue. Mary Brickell took advantage of the Deering mystique and extended Brickell Avenue south from Broadway (15th Road) to Vizcaya. Three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan built a home just north of Vizcaya. Others like Louis Comfort Tiffany, "shoe king" Charles Briggs, M. J. Elser and W. W. Wheeler soon followed suit. By the Boom-era of the 1920s, Brickell Avenue had indeed become one of Miami's most storied streets. Through the years many well known Miamians and winter visitors shared the neighborhood.

By the 1920s, Miami exploded with growth as spirited adventurers, charmed by the City's tropical climate and booming businesses, came to the area by the thousands. Like so many of the era, banker George E. Nolan welcomed the opportunity to resettle in Miami. Originally from Marietta, Georgia, Nolan was living in Orlando when he ventured south to become an executive at the Miami Bank and Trust Co. Located on East Flagler Street, the bank was in heart of the wheeling and dealing of boomtime Miami. Nolan joined a renowned list of bankers, including James H. Gilman, Charles D. Leffler, James E. Lummus and Edward C. Romfh, whose fortunes rose and fell during Miami's real-estate frenzy.

Arriving in 1921, George, his wife Mai Belle, daughter Henriette, and son George Jr. moved into a rented house at 1038 Brickell Avenue and sought a paradise in the burgeoning city. Within four years they found just that, when they built a large Neo-Classical style house at 1548 Brickell Avenue. This 14-room house, originally built for \$28,000, was the realization of a life-long dream. Henriette Nolan Harris remembered that her mother was from Georgia and "always wanted a big, Southern colonial home. And that's what my father built for her."

A gathering place for magnates and millionaires, the Nolan House highlighted Miami's social scene. The third floor ballroom housed tea parties and formal dances. According to Henriette Harris and her brother George Nolan, Coral Gables developer George Merrick and his wife Eunice were friends and frequent visitors. William Jennings Bryan was also a friend of the family.

After retiring from the banking business in 1933, George Nolan formed Practical Traveler's agency on East Flagler Street. Nolan died in March 1948 at his home on Brickell Avenue. His wife Mai Belle lived in the home until her final illness forced her to live with her son in his one story home. She died in 1982. Daughter Henriette

Harris continued to live in the family home until her sudden death in November 1994. Thus, 1548 Brickell Avenue remained with the Nolans and their descendants for over seven decades. Today, the Nolan House is one of only a few homes remaining on Brickell Avenue and the only one still in original family ownership.

The George E. Nolan House is also significant architecturally as an excellent example of Neo-Classical style architecture. Particularly noteworthy is its portico supported by four massive Corinthian columns. The house demonstrates the adaptation of this national style to the South Florida environment through the use of a clay tile roof. Although the portico and porte-cochere were removed in the 1970s when they deteriorated beyond repair, the portico has recently been reconstructed according to the original plans. The building therefore possesses sufficient historic and architectural integrity to qualify for designation.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The George E. Nolan 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.

The George E. Nolan House has been occupied by a member of the Nolan family for more than 70 years. The Nolans were involved business, civic, and social life in Miami during the 1920s, and their daughter Henriette Nolan Harris was well known in Miami and frequently opened her home for social gatherings to benefit worthy causes.

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

Built in 1925, the George E. Nolan House demonstrates the importance of Miami's Brickell Avenue during the Boom era of the 1920s. As a center of the city's social life for several decades, the house also reflects the social habits and cultural life of Miami during this period. The house is one of the few remaining structures on Brickell Avenue that predates the 1926 hurricane.

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

The George E. Nolan House is an excellent example of the adaptation of Neo-Classical style architecture to the South Florida environment and is particularly noteworthy for its front portico with its four massive Corinthian columns.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

The George E. Nolan House is prominently located on the north side of Brickell Avenue on top of the bluff that extends along Biscayne Bay. The house sits approximately five feet above the street level. The house occupies two lots and is approached by an asphalt driveway on the west side of the property.

The house is a two-and-one-half story, Neo-Classical style building with a structural system of terra cotta tile and reinforced concrete with a smooth stucco finish. The building is symmetrical in composition and is topped with a gable roof covered with Spanish "S" clay tiles and wide overhanging eaves.

The front (southeast) facade is characterized by a two-story, flat roofed portico, which was reconstructed according to the original plans in 1997. Supported by four monumental Corinthian columns, the portico was originally topped by a cast concrete balustrade. The primary facade is further ornamented with stucco quoins at both front corners.

The original design of the house featured one-story wings on both side elevations. A flat-roofed sun room projects from the northeast facade, while a porte-cochere of a similar design (removed in the 1970s) was located on the southwest facade. The porte-cochere was supported by two Corinthian columns similar to those which support the front portico. Both the sun room and the porte-cochere were topped with an ornamental cast concrete balustrade similar in design to the one on the portico.

The main entrance, located in the center bay, features a pair of sash-type wood doors with one central fixed glass light. The entrance is topped with a segmental arched transom with ornamental side lights. The large three-part windows on the primary elevation are topped with a flat arch with a pronounced keystone. Windows throughout the house are the aluminum awning-type, replacing the original double hung wood windows, which featured nine or twelve lights over one.

Other modifications to the primary facade include the removal of a second story balcony and the replacement of its entrance with a three-part window, as well as a modification of the swan's neck pediment on the dormer window.

The northwest elevation, which originally contained the porte-cochere, features two pairs of French doors on either side of the exterior chimney. The chimney is scrolled where it steps down in size above the second floor and is ornamental with a large "colored" diamond at the second floor. The chimney terminates in a simple rectangular stucco skirt above the apex of the high point of the main roof. A pair of garage doors is also located on this facade.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The subject structure is a contributing structure. Contributing landscape features include all specimen trees on the property.



George E. Nolan House
1548 Brickell Avenue
Southwest and southeast (front) facades
c. 1967

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The George E. Nolan House is located on Brickell Avenue in an area which is currently zoned for multifamily residential use. The north side of Brickell Avenue is rapidly being developed with mid-rise apartments and condominiums. One such complex was recently constructed immediately west of the subject property.

Because the value of the land is worth more than the value of the house, it will not be economically feasible to retain the property as a single-family residence when the current owners sell the property.

Preservation Incentives:

The preservation of the last remaining historic homes on Brickell Avenue should be a preservation priority, and the City should be prepared to work with property owners in identifying solutions to retain these properties.

The HP zoning overlay district is one incentive that could be applied to historic estate homes such as the George E. Nolan House. This zoning overlay district allows certain uses, such as professional offices, within the historic building. The use is tied to the preservation of the building. This type of incentive would provide an economically productive use for the property while preserving its historic integrity.

Petit Douy, a former single family residence at 1500 Brickell Avenue, received an HP zoning overlay in 1982 and has been operated as a professional office since that date. The property has maintained its single-family feeling and is considered a successful use of HP zoning overlay in order to preserve one of the last historic houses on Brickell Avenue.

In order to institute the proposed new use, the property owner would need to apply for an HP zoning overlay district, which he is prepared to do. The Department of Planning and Development is prepared to support such an overlay district.

An additional incentive is the property tax abatement program currently available in Dade County. It is hoped that the City will adopt a similar program in the future.

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