
SECURITY BUILDING

117 NE 1ST 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
SECURITY BUILDING
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Resolution No. 2003-18

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Names:

Security Building (1926)
Pan American Bank Building (1945)
Metropolitan Bank Building (1957)
Capital Bank Building (1964)

Current Name:

Security Building, Capital Building

Location:

117 NE 1st Avenue
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

117 NE 1st Avenue LLC
117 NE 1st Avenue
Miami, FL 33132

Present Use:

Vacant

Zoning District:

CBD

Tax Folio Number:

01-0110-040-1060

Boundary Description:

The northerly 50 feet of Lots 11, 12 and 13 of Block 104 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:

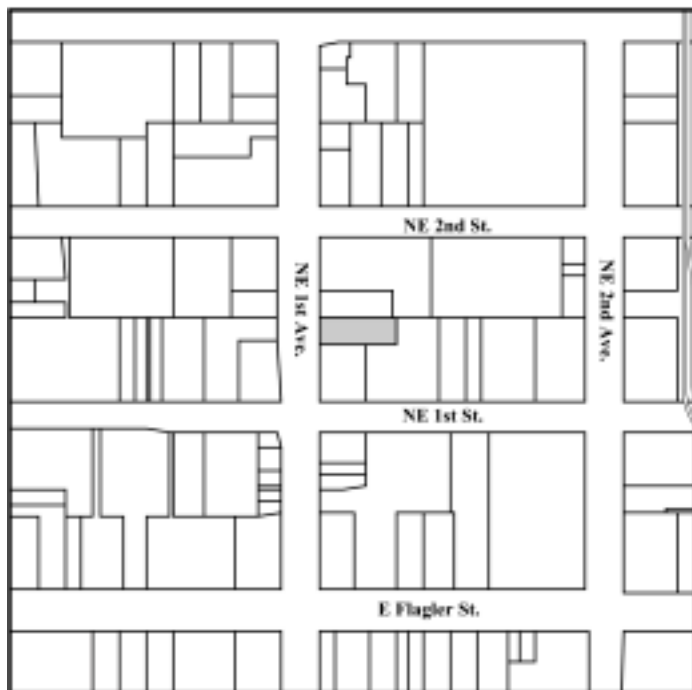
Historic Site

SECURITY BUILDING

117 NE 1ST AVENUE




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1926

Architect:

Robert Greenfield, New York and Miami

Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

Statement of Significance:

The Security Building is an impressive example of a commercial building designed to fit the confines of a narrow lot. At the time of its construction, the 16-story building, now dwarfed by contemporary skyscrapers, was a soaring, artfully designed building that featured a wealth of detail and expensive cladding materials. The Security Building was completed in 1926 for the Dade County Security Company and reflects the high aspirations of a Miami caught up in the midst of a burgeoning economy during the Boom years of the early 1920s.

First organized in 1901, the Dade County Security Company was one of the most important financial institutions in the County by 1920, and was the largest building and loan society in Florida. The company moved to its NE 1st Avenue location in 1923, retrofitting an existing building to meet its needs. At that time, Miami was poised on the real estate explosion that occurred when millions of dollars were invested in the Miami area almost overnight. Building activity was frenetic, and sales seemed to exceed even the speculators' highest expectation. In 1923, the Dade County Security Company financed the construction of nearly 1,000 homes in the Miami area.

The Dade County Security Company was in a bull market, and finding its existing building too small, embarked on the construction of a new building, which was completed in 1926. The high-style design, with its expensive materials and proliferation of ornament, is a testament to the unbridled enthusiasm of Florida's real estate investors during the Boom.

The Security Building is particularly noteworthy in that it features a copper-clad mansard roof, an atypical choice in sub-tropical Miami. In general, the building is strikingly designed with a three-story, classically-inspired base that carries the fourth through fourteenth stories. The detailing of the main building block is geometrically perfect, with windows arranged across the façade that are slightly

inset to create a dramatic play of shadow in the recesses. Of all the remaining 1920s "skyscrapers," the Security Building conveys a new dimension in architectural design for the City of Miami.

While the mansard roof form is a signature element of the Second Empire style, that portion of the building between the three-story base and the roof owes its design characteristics to the Chicago School. The Chicago School is directly tied to the technological advances that enabled the construction of high-rise buildings in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The characteristics of the Chicago School include the use of a terminating cornice, minimal ornamentation, and great expanses of glass with windows filling a large proportion of the wall mass. Emphasis is placed on the geometry of the composition with a strong vertical emphasis.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Security 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 Security Building reflects the historical development and economic trends of Miami through its historical associations with the Dade County Security Company and with the commercial development of Miami during the 1920s Boom years.

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

The Security Building displays elements of the Second Empire style and the Chicago School, and is a unique example of commercial high-rise architecture in Miami in the 1920s.

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 Security Building possesses a wealth of extravagant ornament that includes its copper-clad mansard roof, terra cotta details and granite exterior cladding. It is also noteworthy for its scale, proportions, classical detailing and mansard roof.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Security Building faces west onto NE 1st Avenue. It is located in mid-block with buildings on either side. Those buildings are considerably shorter than the Security Building. The building maintains a zero-foot setback, and the entry doors open directly onto the sidewalk.

There are no landscape features on the property.

The building is composed of a main block parallel to the street, and a second block connected perpendicularly that extends to the east.

West Elevation:

With only a 50-foot frontage, the architect made a grand statement by creating an almost temple-like base, comprised of the first three stories. Engaged pilasters, that also frame the center bay, articulate the corners creating three distinct bays. Spandrels between the floors are bronze and feature relief ornament. The pilasters carry the entablature, with the name "Security Building" in incised letters. A dentilled molding ornaments the cornice that terminates this division of the building.

The fourth floor begins the transition to the high-rise portion of the building. Stone panels with a similar relief accent the corners and separate the bays. Above the windows of the fourth floor is another projecting element, a stringcourse that is ornamented with a guilloche pattern in relief.

Floors five through thirteen continue the three bays with window arrangements that are grouped in pairs on each of the end bays, and are grouped in three in the center bay, emphasizing the importance of the center bay to the entire composition. The windows are a metal casement type.

The fourteenth and fifteenth floors function as the base for the great mansard roof, which terminates the building. To balance the composition, the two floors are treated as if they were one by the use of a round arch at the fifteenth floor that is carried by the pilasters of the fourteenth floor, so that the two floors are visually united.

A bracketed cornice separates the building from the roof form that is so decidedly different from roof treatments in Miami during this period. A mansard roof is a double-pitched roof with a steep upper slope. The mansard roof was named for architect Francois Mansart (1598–1666). Mansart worked in the seventeenth

century and introduced the roof form that extended attic space to provide additional usable area.

The mansard roof is a character-defining feature of the Second Empire style that was named after Napoleon III, who took on major building projects in Paris during the eighteenth century.

The mansard roof of the Security Building is clad in copper and terminates in a series of antefixae. A series of arches containing windows and serving as dormers penetrate the roof. Bull's-eye windows are placed between the arched windows.

An eight-sided cupola that extends from the center of the roof is fenestrated on each side with a multi-paned arched window. The dome of the cupola also is clad in copper.

North and South (Secondary) Elevations, Main Block:

The north and south ends of the building are not ornamented. The windows are a metal casement type. The quoining on the corners of the west elevation is repeated in the north and south elevations of the building.

Perpendicular Extension:

The extension to the east is flat-roofed, and is terminated by a defined cornice. The majority of the wall surface contains windows that are either square or rectangular in shape. They contain metal casement windows.

Contributing Structures and Landscape Features:

The contributing structure within the site is the Security Building, as described above. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.



Security Building
117 NE 1st Avenue
North and west (front) façades
2002



Security Building
117 NE 1st Avenue
South and west façades
2002

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Security Building is presently vacant and in need of rehabilitation. The current owners of the building engaged the services of a preservation architect who has completed plans for the rehabilitation of the building for offices.

Unfortunately, due to market trends, the rehabilitation has been put on hold, as the owners evaluate other potential uses for the building. Presently there are some broken windows and there is a greater threat of deterioration while the building remains unoccupied.

Preservation Incentives:

The Security Building is listed in the *National Register of Historic Places*, and therefore qualifies for a 20% Investment Tax Credit against the cost of a substantial rehabilitation. The property also is eligible for Miami-Dade County's ad valorem tax abatement for any increased value in the assessment resulting from the rehabilitation effort.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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