
THE COCONUT GROVE LIBRARY

2875 MC FARLANE ROAD

Designation Report



South Elevation on McFarlane Road

May 2009

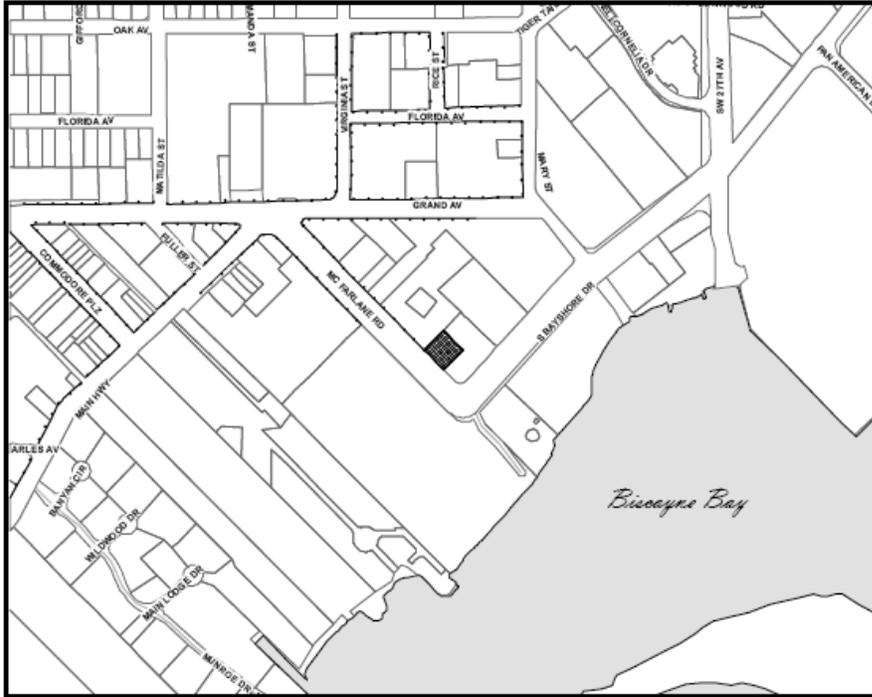
July 7, 2009

Historic and Environmental Preservation Board

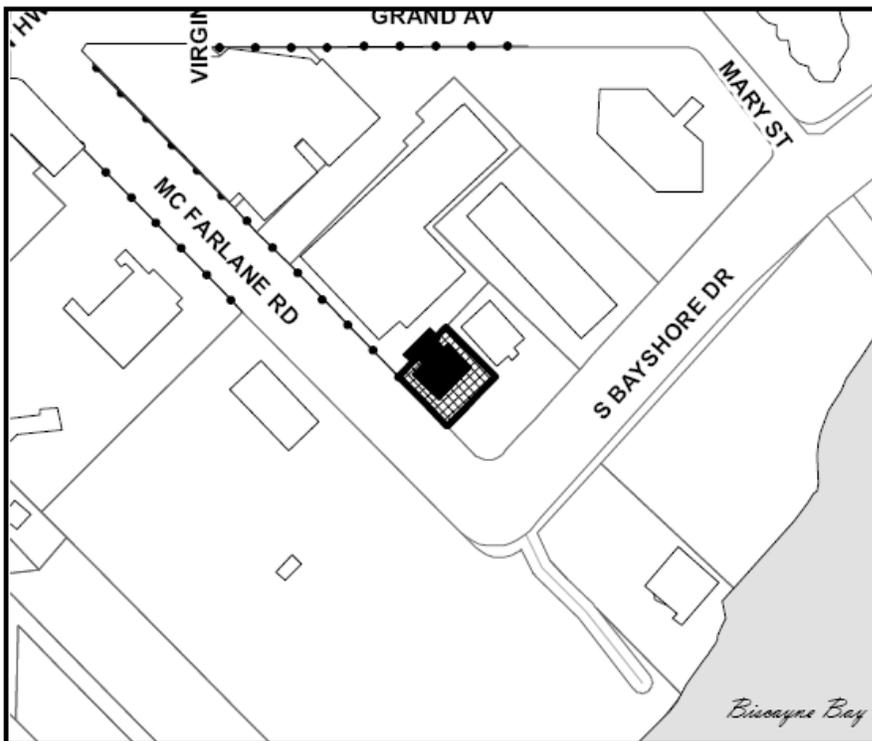


City of Miami

COCONUT GROVE LIBRARY
2875 MCFARLANE RD




Location




Site Plan

I. General Information

Historic Name:

Coconut Grove Library and
Gravesite of Eva Amelia Monroe (1858-1882)

Current Name:

Coconut Grove Branch,
Miami-Dade Public Library System

Date of Construction:

1963

Location:

2875 McFarlane Road
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

The City of Miami
c/o Asset Management
444 SW 2nd Avenue, Third Floor
Miami, Florida 33130

Present Use:

Library

Zoning

Office with an SD-17 Overlay

Boundary (Legal) Description

Monroe's Plat Subdivision Lot 4, Lots 7-9, Block 1, as recorded in Plat Book A at Page 51 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida

Setting

The library is located at the northwest corner of South Bayshore Drive and McFarlane Road. The principal elevation faces south onto McFarlane Road.

Integrity

The building has been subject to few alterations if any, and retains its original fabric.

Preliminary Statement of Significance

The Coconut Grove Library (1963) stands as testament to the tenacity and individuality of Coconut Grove's pioneering citizens, who operated their first public library even prior to the city of Miami's incorporation in 1896¹. The collection of books was housed in other locations (and was largely used by bibliophiles from an organization begun by Mrs. Kirk Monroe called "The Pine Needles Club") before a building devoted to library use was constructed in 1901.

The library was housed in a small building with funds raised by the Coconut Grove Library Association which operated the institution until 1957, when the City of Miami offered to build a new air-conditioned facility. Reluctantly the association's trustees accepted. Pioneers Kirk Munroe and Commodore Ralph Monroe (of no relation) were instrumental in establishing and building that first library. Kirk and wife Mary founded the library on land donated by the Commodore. Commodore Monroe stipulated that the grave of his wife Mrs. Eva Monroe (who died in 1882) would be maintained on the site.

T. Triplett Russell, a local architect, was commissioned by the City of Miami to build a modern facility that met the needs of the community. Russell chose a subtropical modern style that paid homage to the local building traditions of the original pioneers who settled Coconut Grove. The structure is a forward-looking modernist structure, with a decidedly rustic feel.

II. Context

A Brief History of Coconut Grove

Coconut Grove remains one of the few enclaves that is uniquely its own, and whose incorporation predated the story of the City of Miami. The land we know today as Coconut Grove was first surveyed in 1846. The United States implemented the "Homestead Act" in 1862 which granted 160 acres of land to men willing to live on the land for at least five years. That offer, seemingly one that could not be refused, was not accepted until 1868, when homesteader Edmund (Ned) Beasley was the first to file in the "Grove."² South Florida was an inhospitable place, reached only by the sea and fraught with personal hardships. The pioneer's livelihood depended on the salvage of ships which wrecked on the treacherous reefs, subsistence farming, and the production of comptie starch (arrowroot).

One of the Grove's most legendary citizens was Ralph Munroe, a Staten Island, New York resident and sailing enthusiast who first made the trip to South Florida in 1877. Returning to New York, his young wife Eva eventually bore him a daughter. Sadly, Eva contracted tuberculosis shortly after the birth, and her husband desperately seeking a

¹ Arva Moore Parks, "The Thomas Stamps House" Local Historic Designation Report. Miami: Planning Department, n.p.

² Ibid, n.p.

cure, remembered the warmth of South Florida and made the decision to return with his family.³

Eva Monroe never recovered, and died in April, 1882. Mr. Monroe returned to his native New York briefly, convincing friends Charles and Isabella Peacock to accompany him. He urged them to buy property and build a hotel as there was no lodging to be found in Miami. Charles purchased 31 acres, from the south border of what is now Peacock Park, north to Grand Avenue and Mary Street. It was here (in what is now Peacock Park) that the "Bay View House" was constructed. ⁴

The construction of lodging was essential to "selling" the Grove. Ralph Munroe continued to encourage friends to visit. "Titled noblemen, world-famous scientists, writers and preachers (including Charles Stowe, the son of Harriet Beecher Stowe) made the Grove their winter haven."⁵ Later, with the success of their business, the Peacocks added to their hotel, and the name was changed to the "Peacock Inn."

It's not surprising that the peninsula of Florida would attract sailors and men of the sea. The Biscayne Bay Yacht Club was established in 1887 by Ralph Monroe and Kirk Monroe. Kirk Monroe, a popular reporter and novelist from the Northeast, was an avid sailor. After marrying Mary Barr in 1883, the couple took a cruise to Florida. Ultimately, in 1896, Kirk and Mary Barr Monroe made Coconut Grove their home, and made such lasting contributions that their names are revered in South Florida history.

In 1891, Flora McFarlane had established the "Housekeepers Club" for the women in the community. Their headquarters building (constructed in 1921), is directly adjacent to the Coconut Grove Library. In 1895 Mary Barr Munroe organized the "Pine Needles Club" for the younger girls. The Pine Needles established the first library with temporary quarters in a donated room in Charles Peacock and Son's store.⁶

Eventually, in 1901, Commodore (of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club) Ralph Monroe donated the land on which a new library was built. It was a rustic, one story building, built of the native Miami oolite. The roof, with its clipped gables on both the main roof and the roof sheltering the entrance, are reminiscent of England's Cotswold Cottages.

Coconut Grove prospered as did the region, and was incorporated as its own city from 1919 until 1925, when it was annexed (along with Lemon City) to the City of Miami. The original library building served its purpose well for many years. Once the City of Miami took over library operations, construction began on the new facility.

³ Arva Moore Parks, *The New Miami: The Magic City* (Miami: Community Media) 2008,57

⁴ Ibid, 57, 63

⁵ Ibid, 68

⁶ Ibid, 68

A New Facility With Respect For Its Progenitor

In 1963, the firm of T. Triplett Russell and Associates was selected to design the 6,400 square foot building. Mr. Russell was the principal architect, whose daunting task was to remember the long history of the former building on the site, while providing residents with a state-of-the-art facility with all of its modern conveniences.

Mr. Russell designed his building so that the westernmost wing pays homage to the 1901 structure. In this major point of entry Russell built a structure with a remarkable resemblance to the original library. He used the random coursed oolitic limestone for the building material; repeated the clipped gables of the entrance shelter and main roof, and used wooden rafters and posts for the entrance "porch."

In a brilliant division between this tribute and his own design, Russell extended a wall from the westernmost bay with a side facing gable and then connected with the prominent and larger scale of the new building. The result is that it appears that the one-story piece, emulating the old library, is actually separate from the adjacent structure. By making the "simulation" of the old library the point of entry, Mr. Russell has deemphasized the importance of the new structure.

The 1963 library is a *tour de force* of modern method combined with a vernacular twist. The two story building is largely taken up by the roof structure, which assumes a steep hipped shape. Below it are metal vertical supports that enframe the horizontal metal slats. Behind the slats on the interior is a wide, un-air conditioned veranda space that has built in seating. The glass walls of the library are in the core of the building.

T. Triplett Russell, FAIA is a common name in South Florida and elsewhere. While Mr. Russell died in 2000, his firm The Russell Partnership is still a leading architectural firm in the area. Mr. Russell was formerly associated with these firms: Polevitsky and Russell (1936-1941) and Weed, Russell, Johnson Associates Architects and Engineers (1946-1957).

Initial Determination

In our opinion, the property merits further study for its designation as a City of Miami Local Historic Landmark, based on the quality and character of its architecture; its social and historical associations with Coconut Grove, and its representation of a work of a master, T. Triplett Russell.

Criteria Exceptions

Ordinarily, properties must have achieved a fifty year bench mark in order to be considered for historic designation. Section 23-4 (b) of the City Code states in part:

Ordinarily...properties that have achieved significance within the past fifty (50) years shall not be considered eligible for listing in the Miami Register of Historic Places. However, such properties will be considered eligible for designation if... *it is exceptionally significant* (emphasis added).

The Coconut Grove Library completed in 1963 is just shy of three years to attain the threshold of a half-century. The significance of the building is so overwhelming that in our opinion, the attainment of fifty years is not relevant as the library is of exceptional significance.

Findings

That a complete designation report be prepared for the Coconut Grove Library, located at 2875 McFarlane Road, because it appears to meet these criteria contained in Chapter 23 of the City Code.

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

(6) Are an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

(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]*.

Report prepared by:

Ellen J. Uguccione
Preservation Officer
May 2009

REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph of original Coconut Grove library (ca. 1901)



Partial View of Main (south) elevation

Photo: May 2009



Detail, east elevation

Photo: May 2009



South and east elevations as seen from McFarlane Road Photo: May 2009



Detail of veranda space with seating

Photo: May 2009