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# Eunice Watson Liberty Home

1709 N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace

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Designation Report



Historic and Environmental Preservation Board



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI  
PRESERVATION OFFICER  
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE  
EUNICE WATSON LIBERTY HOME  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

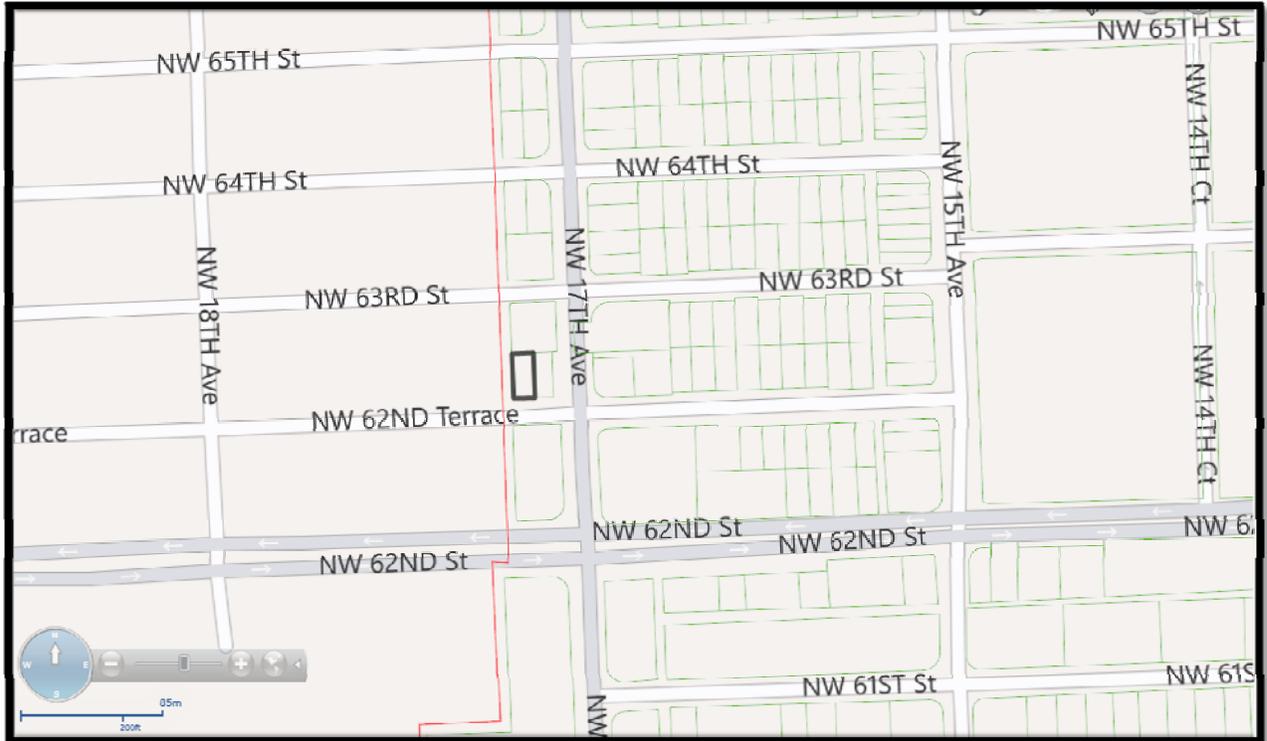
Prepared by:

Marina Novaes

Date:

11/30/2011

# Location and Site Map:



# Contents

- I. General Information
- II. Preliminary Statement of Significance
- III. Description
- IV. Application of Criteria
- V. Bibliography
- VI. Photographs

## I - General Information

Historic Name:

Eunice Watson Liberty Home

Current Name:

Eunice Watson Liberty Home

Date of Construction:

1950

Location:

1709 NW 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace

Miami, FL 33133

Present Owner:

Edward & Ayasha Scott

Present use:

Residential

Zoning:

T4-L: General Urban Zone

Folio No.:

01-3115-005-3020

Boundary (Legal Description):

Liberty City, Lot 24 BLK 11 PB 7-79 Lot size 40.000 X 90 COC 23434-0076 05  
2005 1 or 27 302-1456 0510 11

Setting:

The duplex and adjacent lot is located in the northwest corner of N.W. 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Reverend Dr. George) and N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace, in the Liberty City neighborhood historically known for housing the black community in the segregation era. The two lots occupy an area of approximately 8,200 SQ FT.

Integrity:

Even though there are no historic pictures for comparison; an on-site inspection and oral interview lead to the conclusion that the duplex has gone through minor alterations since its construction in 1950; it is noticeable that the windows were replaced with new hurricane impact resistant ones and a second round window was added on the top west side of the building to aesthetically balance the existing one on the east top side, which function was to let natural light in illuminating the hallway to the second floor. The front porch was enclosed but the tile mosaic floor and the masonry planter in the main façade typical of the 1950's vernacular homes remain. The floor plan was not altered as shown on the property records issued in 1954.

## II - Preliminary Statement of Significance

Mrs. Eunice Watson Liberty was born in Kissimmee, FL in 1904; she was 97 years old when she passed away in 2001. “Mama Liberty” as she was affectionately called by the community members where she lived and was a passionate activist becoming an icon recognized by the highest authorities as the many awards and honors collected by her throughout the years of tireless work and commitment to the black community demonstrate.

Unusual for a black girl in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eunice Liberty was given the chance of getting an education, since there wasn’t any school for blacks in her municipality at that time, she was sent to Daytona Beach to start her schooling at the Mary McLeod Bethune Normal Industrial Institute for Negro Girls where she was exposed to Mrs. Bethune’s (the founder of the National Council of Negro Women) ideals and became committed to carrying on her legacy. Mrs. Liberty received a teaching certificate from Florida A&M College in 1927 and earned a master’s degree from New York City’s Columbia University in 1950.

She took a teaching job in Miami in 1930’s when she moved to the “Lemon City” neighborhood (today Liberty City), the only area where blacks were allowed to live in Miami during the segregation era. She became involved with the community needs, her teaching techniques included black history in the curriculum, and it was her personal mission to make black history part of Miami-Dade County official school program. Her focus was on the young girls, she believed that a quality education would improve the lives of black people unfairly marginalized at that time. In 1970 she founded the “Buds of Spring Cotillion” as a way to encourage young girls to stay in school. In order to participate, the young black girls needed to become involved with the community organizations and stay active through high school, by doing so they would grow up to be better citizens; the boys, “encourage the girls to stay in school and the boys will stay too” she used to say.

Mrs. Liberty was nominated “Woman of the year” by the National Council of Negro Women (N.C.N.W.) for ten consecutive years, 1967-1977; she also

served as President of its Miami Chapter (1970-1980) representing the N.C.N.W. on the Metro-Dade Commission on the “Status of Women” and was very involved in local government.

In 1935 President Roosevelt appointed Mary McLeod Bethune as his minority affairs advisor in the National Youth administration; there she formed a coalition of 27 national organizations and concerned individuals with an outreach to four million women throughout the U.S. that would be known then and now as N.C.N.W. , the National Council of Negro Women. The N.C.N.W., headed by Mrs. Bethune and joined by such organizations as The National Council of Jewish Women, The National Council of Catholic Women, Church Women United, The National Y.M.C.A., and Women in Community Services (W.I.C.S.) set a goal to maintain continuing relationships to advance mutual concerns of women in developing countries and minority populations in underdeveloped areas in the U.S.A. Based at 1318 NW Vermont Ave., Mrs. Bethune served as president from 1935-1949 when she was succeeded by other influential women, such as Mrs. Irene Straughter, Mrs. Dorothy Graham, Mrs. Cornilia Glenn, Mrs. Eunice Liberty and Mrs. Lilian D. King. <sup>1</sup>

Among the many accomplishments, Mrs. Liberty was the founder in “1964 by Gamma Delta Sigma Chapter – Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc”, from 1973-75 she was awarded the “Certificate of Appreciation” for valuable contribution to the community membership of “Metropolitan Dade Model City Program Administering Board” by Mayor Clark, recognized for community services by the “Sigma Alpha Chapter” in 1979, honored by Columbia University for her “valuable contribution to the community of Metro-Dade County Florida” in 1981, nominated to “Florida Women’s Hall of Fame” by Governor Graham in 1982, honored for “Outstanding Contributions to the total Growth and Development of the Community of Opa Locka” by the “Sisters of Opa Locka No. 385” in 1987, received a “Certificate of Appreciation” by Mayor Clark in 1988, granted the “Eunice Watson Liberty Day” on 12/6/1986 by Mayor Clark, and she was instrumental in establishing the “Black Archives “in Dade.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theblackarchives.org/archon/?p=collections/controlcard&id=149>

Unstoppable, Mrs. Liberty died as an elderly woman at 97 years old but still very much committed to her community; she was planning to build a community center named after Mary McLeod Bethune for children in an empty lot close by her home at 1797 NW 52<sup>nd</sup> Street that the N.C.N.W. bought for this purpose, unfortunately this last dream was never completed.

Since her arrival in Miami in the 1930s, Mrs. Liberty lived in the Liberty City area, the duplex at 1709 N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace was built by her and her husband, King Liberty, in 1950. They lived in the first floor (1709) and rented the second (1711) at least until she retired in 1969 from Miami-Dade school. Eventually, she moved to a single story house at 1797 NW 52 Street (still in the same community) in the 1970s.

Even though Mrs. Liberty received most of her community activism awards after her retirement as a teacher in 1969 and consequently after she moved from the duplex at 1709 N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace to a single story house at 1797 N.W. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, she owned both properties until she died in 2001. The duplex was always part of her community services effort as declared Mrs. Georgia J. Ayres (Mrs. Liberty's pupil and follower); Mrs. Ayres remembers that Mrs. Liberty used to lodge personalities coming to town for community events like the boxer Joe Lewis among others in the duplex at 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace. She was known for scouring local newspaper's society columns for news of visitors that she would invite to speak to her class and stay at the duplex.

It was Mrs. Liberty's desire to leave her house for the community; she actually consulted a lawyer to find a way to donate her house to charity, she said: "I want to leave my house to the community. I want there to be a center where the children can come to learn about their history and learn that no matter where we are from, we can learn to get along."

### **III - Description**

The duplex at 1709 N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace is a two-story example of South Florida masonry vernacular construction. The duplex and its adjacent vacant lot are located in the northwest corner of N.W.17th Avenue and N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace. The building is composed of two distinct residences, one on the first floor, no.1709 (where Mrs. Liberty lived) and no. 1711 on the second floor with a separated outside access and indoor stairway.

Originally on the south elevation, a front porch with a masonry planter and a tile mosaic floor would be the main feature of the duplex, today the porch has been enclosed and the main façade first floor consists on a one car garage door and the second floor door entrance under a low pitch canopy that predominates the left side of the building's front façade. On the right side, the entrance door for the first floor apartment and a three-pane window under of which the masonry planter typical of masonry vernacular architecture from 1950s is found. The second floor main façade is symmetrical and composed by two central double-pane windows and two fixed plaster framed round windows one on each outer side of the building. The round window on the left side is original and provided sunlight for the second floor stairway. The round window on the right side was later added for symmetry.

The building architecture has no historical significance. The original colors and roofing material are unknown. Small planters were added along the East side of the building under some windows by the current owner. A rear staircase was added later for fire evacuation purposes.

## **IV – Application of Criteria**

The duplex at 1709 N.W. 62<sup>nd</sup> Terrace has significance as it relates to the historic heritage of Miami and possesses integrity of setting, materials, feeling and association. The property is eligible for designation as a historic site under the criteria (1) as numbered in Sec. 23-4 (a), of Chapter 23 of the City Code.

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

## VII - Bibliography

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- Letter from Mrs. Georgia J. Jones. Sept. 2, 2011
- Oral Interview with Mrs. Georgia Ayres, November 21, 2011
- City of Miami Building permits
- City of Miami building records
- Miami-Dade property information files
- Letters addressed to Mrs. Eunice Liberty
- Letters sent by Mrs. Liberty

## VIII - Photographs



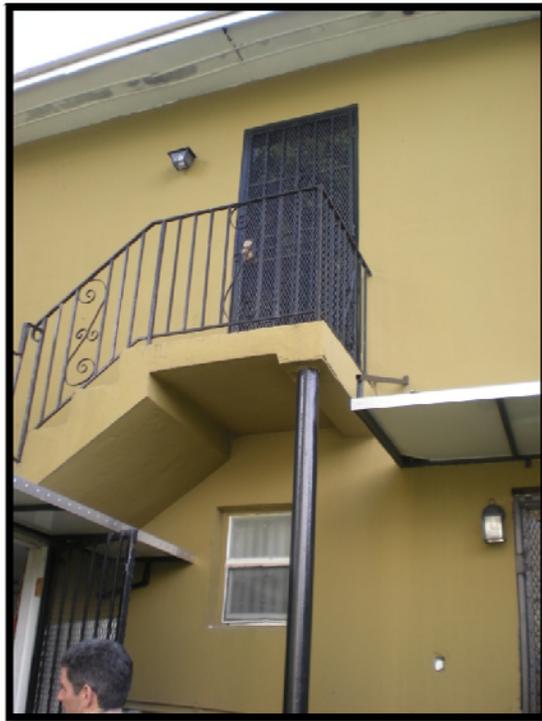
Main façade



West façade and partial front



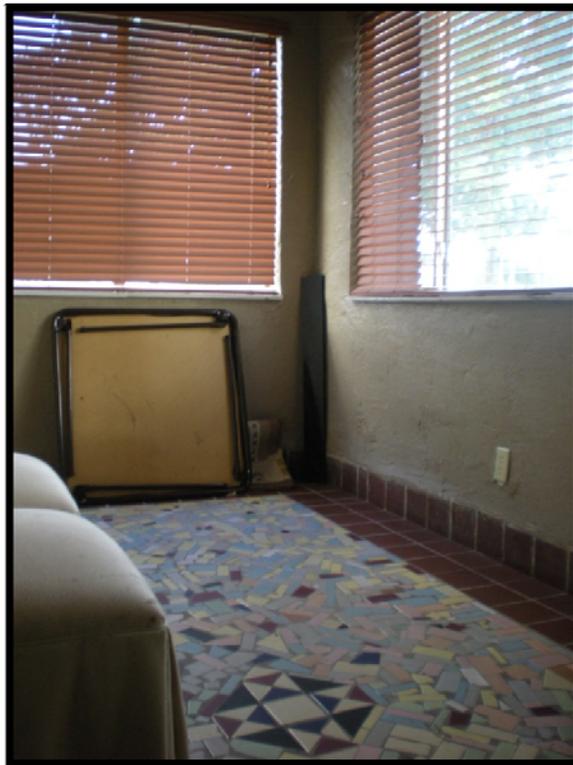
East facade



Rear



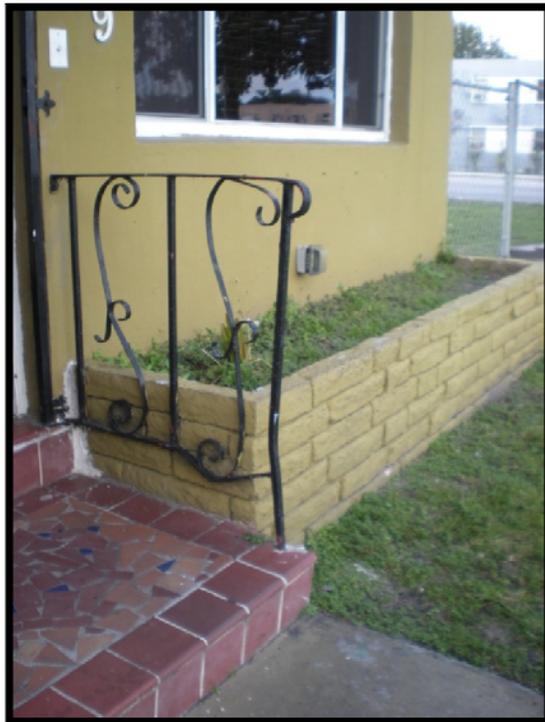
Rear



Enclosed porch mosaic floor detail



Front door step mosaic detail



Planter detail