
LABORERS' UNION LOCAL 478 BUILDING

799 NW 62ND STREET

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
LABORERS' UNION LOCAL 478 BUILDING
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Consultant

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Passed and
Adopted on _____

Resolution No. _____

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Laborers' Union Local 478 Building

Current Name:

Laborers' Union Local 478 Building

Location:

799 NW 62nd Street
Miami, FL

Present Owner:

Laborers' Union Local 478 Holding Corporation Inc.
799 NW 62nd Street
Miami, FL 33150

Present Use:

Union Labor Hall

Zoning District:

SD-1 - Martin Luther King Boulevard Commercial District

Tax Folio Numbers:

01-3114-036-0090
01-3114-036-0100

Boundary Description:

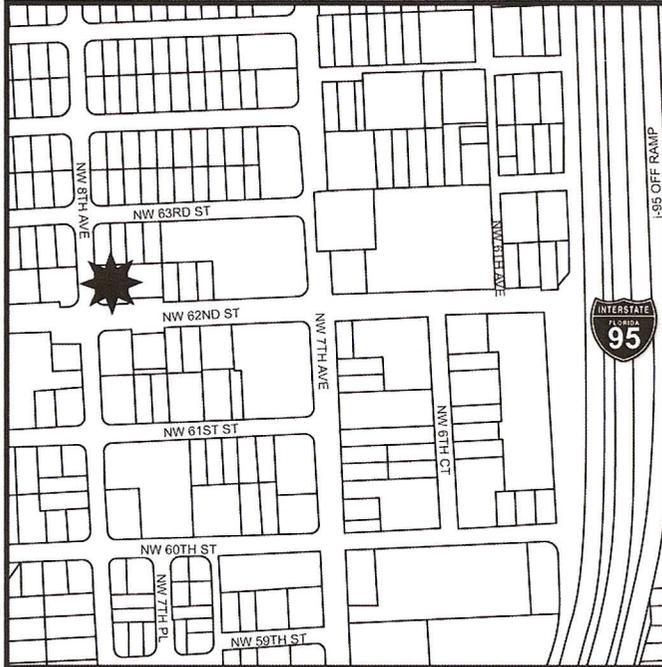
Lots 15, 16, 17 and 18, less the southerly 15 feet, of Block 1, of the plat of SEVENTH AVENUE PARK, as recorded in Plat Book 17 at Page 17, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

Historic Site

LABORERS' UNION LOCAL 478 BUILDING

799 NW 62ND STREET




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Date:

1953

Architect:

Unknown

Builder/Contractor:

Unknown

Statement of Significance:

The Laborers' Union Local 478 Building is significant for its role in the social history of Miami's African-American community and as a good example of Art Moderne style architecture.

Northwest Miami has historically been an area that has seen a demographic shift from once all white communities to predominantly African-American neighborhoods. While this area had been sporadically settled as a farming community in the early twentieth century, the greatest round of home building occurred in the 1920s, designed as moderately priced housing for the white middle-class. The area known as Liberty City (an area city planners now call "Model City") was a community that witnessed this demographic shift.

The influx of the African-American population to Liberty City occurred during the 1940s, following the construction of the Liberty Square Housing Project, which opened in the late 1930s. Liberty City provided relief to the extremely crowded conditions of Overtown, where most of Miami's African-Americans had settled at the beginning of the twentieth century. The 1930 census counted 25,116 residents living in Overtown's 343 acres. Housing conditions for many were dismal, and accounts from the period claimed "...there are from three to fifteen shacks on a city lot of 50'x 150'. These conditions, along with the white population's resistance to the expansion of the Black population to areas west or north of Overtown, led to the emergence of Liberty City as an important new residential area.)

The present Laborers' Local Union 478 Building is located in Liberty City, and the building was constructed in 1953. When it was first opened the building housed the offices of "Federal Finance Inc.", "All State Loan" and "Insured Rentals, Inc.," an automobile rental agency. The city directory lists the officers of the Federal Finance company as Harold Gradsky, President, and Gilbert Hass, Vice President.

The directories list the Federal Finance company as an occupant of the building until 1962, when its name is omitted. At that time the building was occupied by Insured Rentals, Inc, and the Inter-State Acceptance Corporation. The Laborer's Local No. 478 is first listed in the 1967 edition of Polk's City Directory. The organization has continued to occupy the building since that time.

The Laborers' International Union was founded in 1903 as the "International Hod Carriers and Building Laborers' Union." The Union was founded to combat dangerous working conditions and poor wages that plagued the industry at the turn of the century. By 1907 the union had 11,000 members many of whom were immigrants arriving from European countries.

By 1920 with a membership of 96,000, the union backed efforts by African-Americans to win equal treatment in all United States Unions, and denied petitions from local unions in Kansas City and Cincinnati to create segregated local chapters.

During its long history, the Laborers' International Union has maintained a policy of non-discrimination for all ethnicities. The organization's mission is implemented through the formation of nine regions, fifty-five district councils, and more than five hundred local unions.

The Laborers' Union Local 478 Building also possesses architectural significance as a good example of Art Moderne style architecture. The building is particularly noteworthy for its curved corner entrance bay. Although there have been some minor alterations which include the closing of window apertures and the facing of some portions with brick veneer, this building continues to maintain integrity and convey its unique character.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Laborers' Local Union 478 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, economic, or social trends of the community.

The Laborers' Local Union 478 represents the shift in the demographics of the Liberty City neighborhood, from a once almost exclusively white enclave to a community where the majority of residents are African-American. Since locating at 799 NW 62nd Avenue in 1967, the Laborers' Union has acted on behalf of the community and its residents who are employed in the construction industry.

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

The Laborers' Local Union 478 Building hugs the northeast corner of NW 62nd Street and NW 8th Avenue. The building curves around the corner, avoiding a right angle, and then extends both north along NW 62nd Street and east along NW 8th Avenue. Although there have been some minor alterations which include the closing of window apertures and the facing of some portions with brick veneer, the building can most closely be stylistically classified as Art Moderne or Streamline Moderne.

III. DESCRIPTION

The Laborers' Local Union 478 Building is representative of a style known as Art Moderne. The style was introduced in the 1930s but remained popular well into the 1960s. Art Moderne is a modern style, in that it rejects any reference to the past. Above all it emphasizes the horizontality of the building's form through the use of curved surfaces—curved end walls, curved corners, and curved bays. There is virtually no ornament on the building's surface, and the roofs are usually flat and parapeted.

The Laborers' Local Union 478 Building is characterized by its curved corner entrance bay, its proximity to the street (zero foot lot line,) the extension of the wings of the building to the north and east, and its brick veneer.

The rear (or east) side of the building creates a sharp edge, and consists of one long wall interrupted by a doorway in the approximate center. The union owns the two lots to the east which contains a surface parking lot. The parking lot has been included in the boundaries of the designation.

The original entry at the corner of the building facing south has been in-filled, and a newer entrance made on the east side of the building. Original plate glass windows have been sealed.

Despite these alterations, the building is deemed to have retained a significant amount of detail from its original design, and therefore maintains its physical integrity.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

Contributing structures within the site include the Laborers' Union Local 478 Building itself. There are no contributing landscape features.



Laborers' Local Union 478 Building
South and West Elevations
December 2004
Janus Research



Laborers' Local Union 478 Building
Corner Detail
December 2004
Janus Research



Laborers' Union Local 478 Building
South and East Elevations
December 2004
Janus Research

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The building at 799 NW 62nd Street has been in continuous use since its construction in 1953, and occupied by the Laborers' Union Local 478 since 1967. The neighborhood has witnessed dramatic changes in the last fifty years, but the Laborers' Union Local Building has maintained its original use for almost forty years.

Preservation Incentives:

The building, though only a single story, creates a dramatic presence along the street. The local historic designation of the building will protect it for the future. If the building were rehabilitated and improvements made that would increase its assessed value, the owner would be eligible for an ad valorem tax incentive through Miami-Dade County.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dunn, Marvin. *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida) 1997

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