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# MARIAH BROWN HOUSE

3298 Charles Avenue

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## 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 MARIAH BROWN HOUSE  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Prepared by Jane S. Day, Research Atlantica  
Consultant

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton  
Preservation Officer

Passed and  
Adopted on \_\_\_\_\_

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Mariah Brown House

Current Name:

Mariah Brown House

Location:

3298 Charles Avenue  
Miami, Florida 33133

Present Owner:

The Coconut Grove Cemetery Association  
c/o Rev. Canon Ronald Fox, President  
3464 Oak Avenue  
Miami, Florida 33133

Present Use:

Vacant

Zoning District:

R-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-4121-007-5370

Boundary Description:

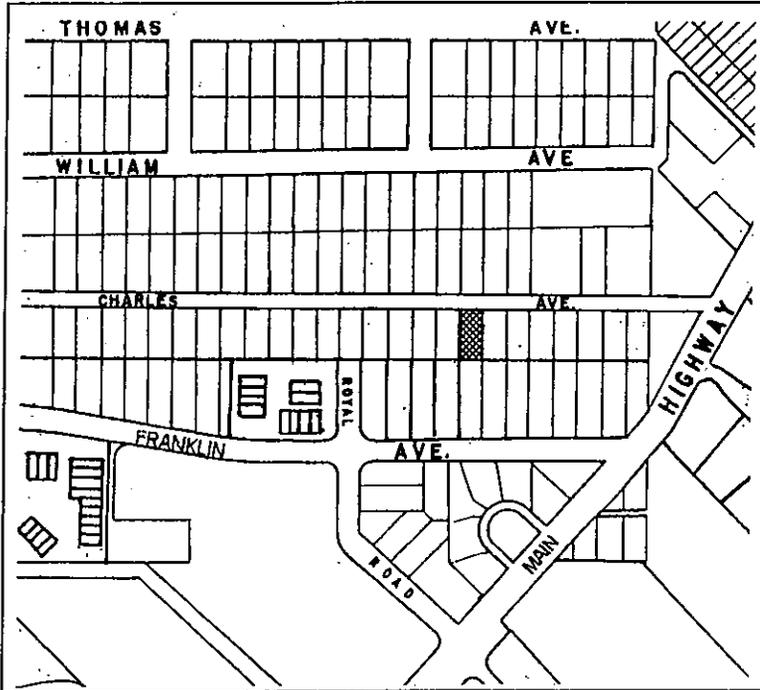
Lot 19 of Block 30 of the plat of AMENDED PLAT OF THE FROW HOMESTEAD, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 106, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

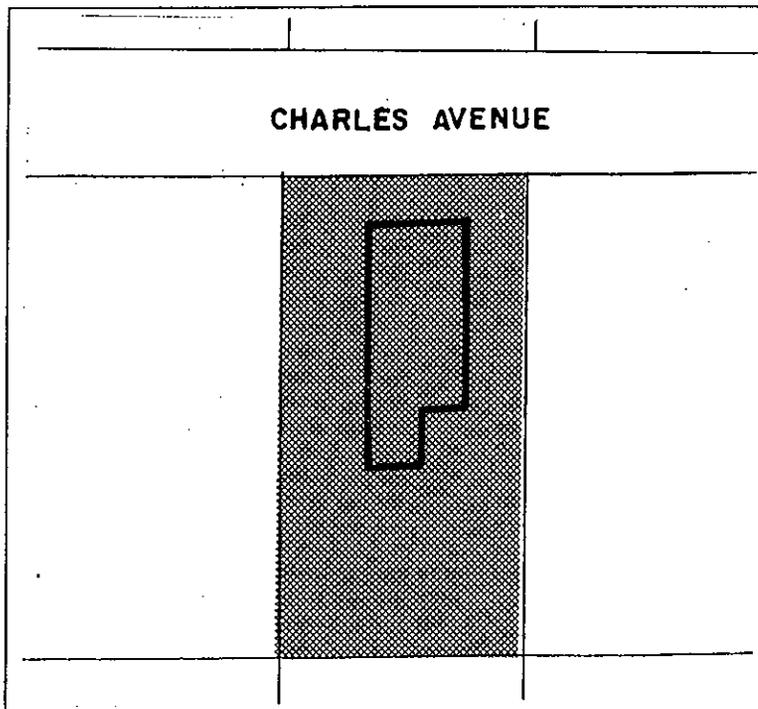
Historic Site

# MARIAH BROWN HOUSE

3298 Charles Avenue



location



site plan



## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Specific Dates:

c. 1890

### Architect:

Unknown

### Statement of Significance:

The Mariah Brown House is significant for its associations with the establishment of the first black community in Dade County. The house was constructed by one of the first African Bahamian residents in Coconut Grove and is thought to be one of the first houses owned by blacks. The Mariah Brown House is therefore one of the most important remaining sites from this early black Bahamian settlement in Coconut Grove. The house is also a good example of the type of nineteenth century frame vernacular architecture that was inspired by the houses of the Bahamas and Key West.

The importance of the contributions made by African Bahamians to the development of Coconut Grove and the City of Miami has long been overlooked. Although recent studies show that by 1920 West Indian blacks made up over 16 percent of Miami's population, information about their community and life-style has been basically undocumented.

Mariah Brown was born in the Upper Bogue, Eleuthera, Bahamas in 1851. She immigrated to the United States in 1880. Listed in the 1885 Florida Census, Mrs. Brown was living with her three daughters on Emma Street in Key West and working as a washer woman before coming to Coconut Grove. Sometime between the Florida Census and 1890, Charles Peacock hired Mrs. Brown to come to Coconut Grove and work in his hotel, the Peacock Inn, which had become the center of the Coconut Grove community. It is interesting to note, that Peacock's wife and her sister Euphemia Frow were from the same district in the Bahamas that Mariah Brown called home.

After arriving in Coconut Grove, Mariah Brown and her family lived and worked at the Peacock Inn. There they formed the beginnings of the Miami Bahamian community. In about 1890, on land purchased from Joseph Frow for \$50.00, Mariah Brown built a home of her own on Evangelist Street, which was within walking distance of the Peacock Inn. Evangelist Street, known today as Charles Avenue, became the heart of the Bahamian settlement in Coconut Grove. The wood frame vernacular residence Mrs. Brown built was typical of the style of architecture

being built in Key West and the Bahamas at the end of the nineteenth century.

Little is known about Mariah Brown's husband, Ernest Brown. He was born in the Bahamas in 1856, and the couple was married in 1892. The 1900 U.S. Census says that he was a cook but was blind at the time of the listing. Mariah Brown died on January 10, 1910.

The Mariah Brown House is presently listed in the Florida Black Heritage Trail under a section called "The Charles Avenue Historic District."

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Mariah Brown House 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. Exemplify the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

The Mariah Brown House was built c. 1890 by the first African Bahamian woman in Coconut Grove and represents the beginnings of the African Bahamian community in the City of Miami. This important segment of the community was one of the earliest immigrant groups to arrive in South Florida, bringing its own culture, life-style, and traditions:

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

The Mariah Brown House is a good example of frame vernacular architecture in South Florida. It is important because of its age and its relationship to Bahamian architecture of the same period.

### III. DESCRIPTION

#### Present and Original Appearance:

The Mariah Brown House is a one-and-one-half story wood frame vernacular building. Vernacular architecture is ordinary architecture. It does not adhere to any academic style and uses the builder's experience and available materials to create useful and practical buildings. This example of the style is typical of others throughout South Florida.

The front facade of the house is symmetrical in fenestration with a central door flanked by two double hung sash windows in a 1/1 pattern. A front porch faces north. The roof is a side facing gable punctuated with a front facing dormer. At the present time the roof is covered with tar paper. Exposed rafters on the porch are visible from the front of the property.

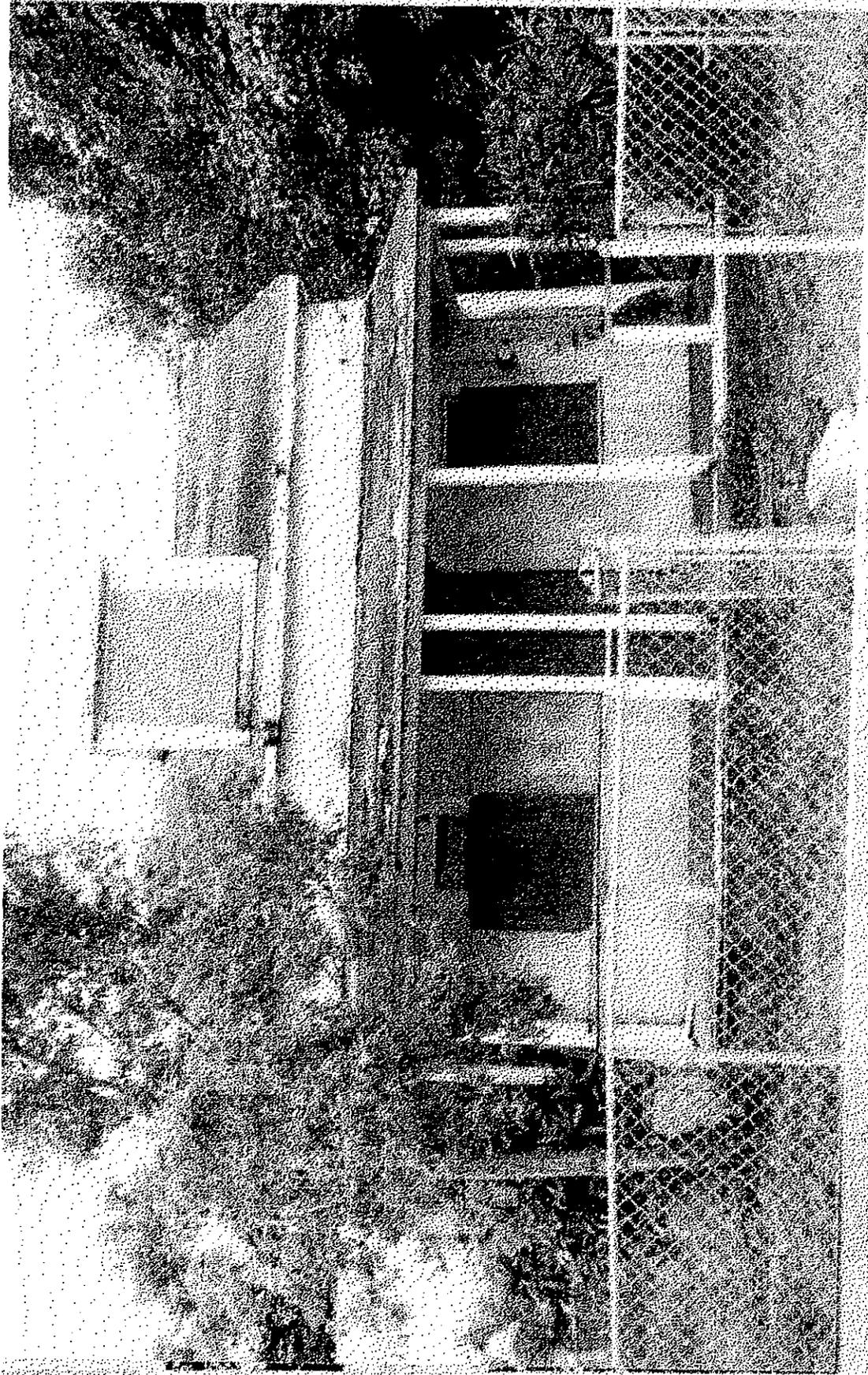
The oldest section of the house is balloon frame on a block foundation and features a half story above the main living quarters. This was typical of Bahamian housing from the nineteenth century. The house is built of Dade County pine, and the lumber is noticeably wider on the front than that used on the rest of the property. At the present time the original wood on the north and west facades is covered with chicken wire and stucco.

Two additions were added to the property over the course of its one hundred and five year history. The first was built during the early 1920's and appears in the footprint shown on the early Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the area. The rear addition was added in the 1950's by the family of the last owner, Alfonso Gardner. Both of these addition are wood frame.

The Mariah Brown House is located within an established neighborhood of mixed property uses. The lot is 50' x 100' and the house has a total size of 991 sq. ft. Although badly damaged by Hurricane Andrew, the Mariah Brown House maintains its architectural integrity. It is presently stabilized and awaiting restoration.

#### Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The subject structure is a contributing structure. A concrete block utility building at the rear of the property is noncontributing to the historic integrity of the property.



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MARIAH BROWN HOUSE  
3298 Charles Avenue  
North facade , 1995

#### IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

##### Present Trends and Conditions:

The Mariah Brown House is vacant and in poor condition. It was badly damaged by Hurricane Andrew. In 1994 and again in 1995, the Coconut Grove Cemetery Association, a Florida nonprofit corporation, applied for and received grant money from Metropolitan Dade County for the purchase and restoration of the property. Since that time the group has had the property stabilized, appraised, and surveyed. The group has also performed an environmental audit and archaeological survey, and is in the process of completing working drawings for the restoration.

##### Preservation Incentives:

The goal of the Coconut Grove Cemetery Association is to convert the Mariah Brown House to a Bahamian American house museum and community center. Several actions will have to take place in order to institute the proposed new use. The approval of this designation is the first. If the designation is approved by the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board, the City of Miami will sponsor an application for an HP Historic Preservation zoning overlay district, which would permit the proposed use. A site plan for parking considerations is also being developed at this time.

It should also be noted that the Mariah Brown House was recommended for \$45,000 in funding by the State Historic Preservation Advisory Council at the recent Special Category Grant Meeting.

## V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### Interviews by Jane S. Day:

Esther Mae Armbrister, Coconut Grove, Florida  
Alfonso Gardner, Coconut Grove, Florida  
Rebecca Gibson, Coconut Grove, Florida  
Wilfred S. Hall, Sr., Coconut Grove, Florida