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# Prince Edward Court Apartments

402 and 412 NW 12 Avenue

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Final Designation Report



Historic and Environmental Preservation Board



City of Miami

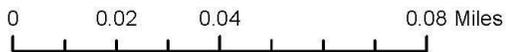
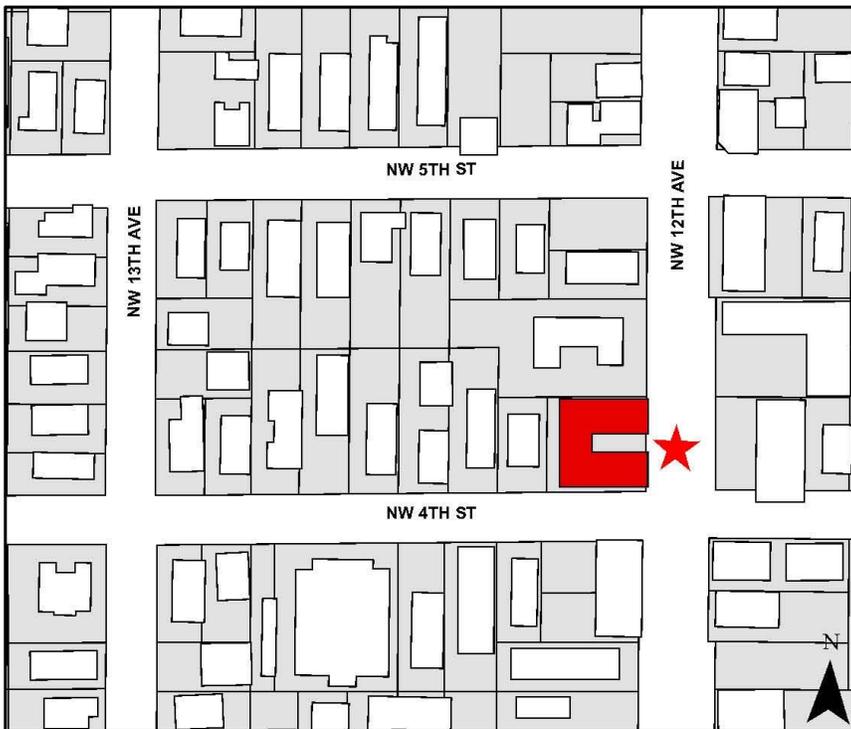
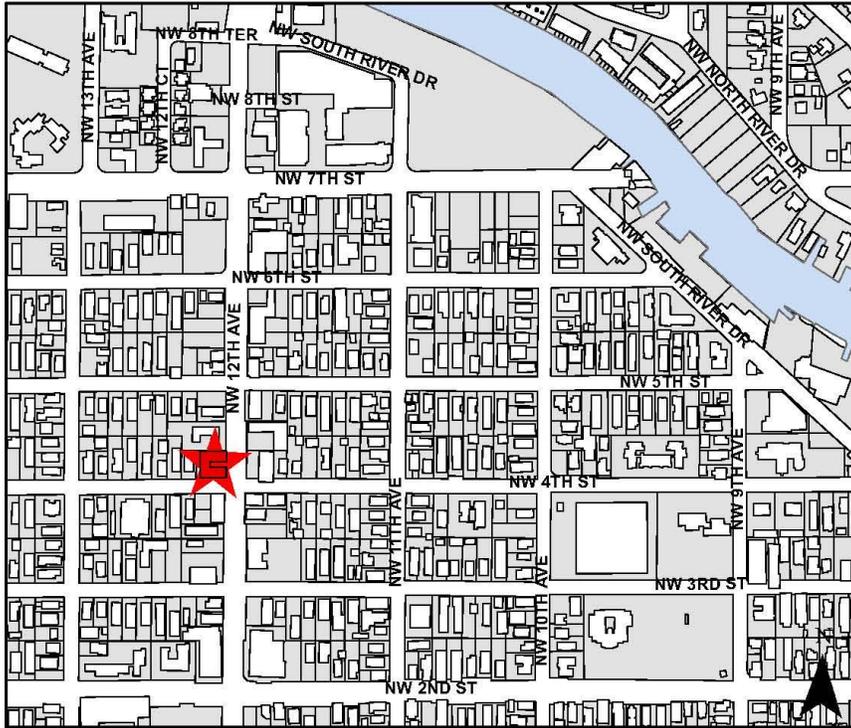
REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI  
PRESERVATION OFFICER  
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE  
PRINCE EDWARD COURT APARTMENTS  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Passed and Adopted On: April 7, 2015

Resolution Number: HEPB-R-15-026

# Prince Edward Court Apartments, 402 NW 12 Ave



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## I- General Information

Historic Name:

Prince Edward Court Apartments  
402 & 412 NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Lawrence Avenue)

Current Name:

402 NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Date of Construction:

1923

Architect:

unknown

Contractor/Builder:

unknown

Location:

402 NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Miami, FL 33128 – 0172

Present Owner:

EBM Construction, LLC  
634 Eagle Rock Avenue #505  
West Orange, NJ 07052

Present Use:

Multi-family residential apartment building

Zoning:

T6-8 O

Folio Number:

01-4102-005-6630

Legal Description:

2 54 41 PB 2-46  
Lawrence Estates Land Cos Subdivision  
E100 FT, Lots 18 and 19 of Block 41  
Lot Size 100 feet x 100 feet

Setting:

The courtyard apartments are built on the southeast corner of NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NW 4<sup>th</sup> Street in the Lawrence Estates subdivision, located in the East Little Havana neighborhood, in close proximity to the Miami Marlins Stadium (on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue).

## II- Statement of Significance

Specific Dates:

1923 (year built), 1925 (year purchased by employee corporation)

Statement of Significance:

This humble Mission-styled courtyard apartment is a representative example of both a typology and a style popular in the United States, particularly in Miami and west coast cities, during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The courtyard apartment is a prevailing American typology with ancient roots, historically made popular in the United States first through the Garden City movement and first introduced in Chicago by Frank Lloyd Wright. Although not sufficiently studied or documented, this typology is also a prevalent fixture in Miami's urban core during this same time period, and continued through the 1970s with stylistic permutations

The Mission Style, one of the many revivalist styles of the early twentieth century, was a very popular architectural style in Miami during the building boom of the 1920s. The style was an interpretation of Spanish colonial architecture in the US, particularly the baroque elements found in the Spanish Mission churches of Alto, California. The style was popularized and romanticized by the Panama-California Exposition of 1915, held in San Diego's Balboa Park. The Prince Edward Court Apartments is significant as a complimentary synthesis of typology (U-shaped courtyard apartment) and style (Mission revivalist).

The simple fact that so many styles from the American Southwest found architectural expression in Florida is significant given Miami's geographic location in the extreme Southeast. Despite centuries of intermittent Spanish settlement, Florida's architectural heritage boasted few extant Spanish colonial building typologies. Expressions of the Mission Style allude to architectural manifestations celebrating (a largely mythologized) Spanish colonial past found only in the Southwest and transplanted to Florida during a revivalist period.

The apartments are situated on NW 12th Avenue, which before the Chaille Plan of 1921, was named Lawrence Avenue and considered a major thoroughfare and an integral part of the Lawrence Estates Land Company Subdivision. This massive 400-acre subdivision was platted by the Tatum Brothers and originally conceived as a streetcar suburb. The Tatum Brothers were a significant land development company in Miami responsible for many important early developments, including the Riverside and Lawrence Estates neighborhoods, as well as boom-era developments. This apartment building is evocative of both time and place as a component of a streetcar suburb, reflecting the early development of Miami. Within a short walk to major streetcar arterials (located

both west and south) the Prince Edward Court Apartments would have occupied a prominent location in the growth of Miami's first urban inner ring. The building was constructed in 1923 and named the "Prince Edward Court Apartments." In 1925, at the height of the real estate boom of the 20s, the apartments were purchased for \$175,000 by a corporation established and run by the employees of the Miami National Bank and Trust Company in order to provide affordable housing for their fellow employees. Bank employees rented the apartment's twenty-six furnished "Suites" at attainable rental rates. Soon other local companies encouraged their employees to follow suit, although these initiatives were curtailed by the Depression and the Second World War.

This property has strong socio-economic significance as it signals one of the first examples of the then-innovative idea of employee-run housing corporations (a model still used today for what is now referred to as "workforce housing") in the City of Miami. The primary significance derives from a corporate structure established by the employees themselves, in direct contrast to company-owned and managed "worker housing" (a local example being the Flagler Cottages) built by and run by the employer, and then rented or sold to the employee. Economists and social historians have pointed to company housing as the ultimate form of (monopolistic) vertical integration. The innovative structure of the Miami National Bank and Trust Company's Prince Edward Court Apartments, however, benefited the employees themselves, with the Company realizing little profit. They did not house the poor, but rather housed employees from the Bank, mainly unmarried single men of the burgeoning middle class, or clerical class.

### III- Description

#### Present and Original Appearance:

In 2012, as part of “Operation Clean Sweep,” the City of Miami gave the residents of 402 NW 12 Avenue, formerly known as the Prince Edward Court Apartments, three-days to vacate the premises for health and safety reasons. The City Department of Code Enforcement placed the apartment building on the list of condemned sites (Unsafe Structures) and, for years, the building sat vacant with its openings boarded up with plywood and ominous “notices” on the doors. The current owner was able to work with Code Enforcement to rehabilitate the property. Currently, this rehabilitation project is underway.

The Prince Edward Court Apartments were constructed in 1923 as 26 units with slightly over 14,000 sq. ft. The building was constructed out of concrete block with a stuccoed exterior. The present building maintains its original U-shaped configuration with a small garden courtyard area—characteristic of the type (courtyard apartment). The building has not suffered any unsympathetic additions or alterations in its massing and is still two stories. The original flat roof remains, as do the original row of Spanish tiles sloping slightly forward on the edge of the parapet. The original scuppers—small circular shaped openings used for drainage on flat roofs—also remain. The rhythm and dimensions of the openings remain unaltered, despite having lost their original fenestration.

The principal elevation is broken up into two articulated entrances both facing east onto NW 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue (402 and 412) and a balcony at the center of the U behind the courtyard, towards the rear of the property (west). Both entrances – 402 and 412—retain many of the original elements, as is evidenced from a tax card photograph circa 1936. The second floor balconies maintain the original shape of their distinctive curved recesses. These balconies protrude outward slightly towards the avenue and are supported by their original concrete cornices with bracketing, despite the original balustrades having been covered over with stucco. The entrances to 402 and 412 are both covered entrances created by the balcony protrusions. The historic photo depicts what look like a set of double screen doors, providing these covered entrances—and the interior of the building—with light and air in its corridors. The modestly articulated doors today still feature the original paired set of cast concrete are the original cast concrete signs above each doorway that read “Prince Edward Court.”

The southernmost entrance on NW 12<sup>th</sup> Ave (402) has lost its original “Mission” curved parapet design. While the northernmost entrance (412) maintains its original curved parapet, it has lost its original finial decoration and its original

cast concrete crest application adorning the center of the parapet has been stuccoed over.

The tax card photos depict a courtyard balcony with slim columns on the second floor and a small arched colonnade below on the ground floor. This balcony and colonnade remain and will be restored to their original condition.

The southern elevation (facing NW 4 Street) retains all its original openings and the second floor balconies supported by the original large concrete brackets, as well as their squared concrete balcony posts remain. Some of the brackets have suffered damage over the years. The current rehabilitation will restore them all to their original shape. The wooden balustrades on these balconies have been changed for a simple wrought iron design. It is unlikely that the north elevation would have had balconies, as these would have faced an adjacent property's lot and not a street or avenue.

A cursory evaluation of integrity would indicate that although the property has undergone some alterations, many of the character defining features are present and are in need of restoration—and in some rare instances reconstruction. The present dilapidated state of the property is not necessarily indicative of a loss of its historic integrity.

A typology is defined as a taxonomic classification of physical characteristics found in buildings. This physicality is often expressed in terms of either form or function where use and configuration of shapes and architectural massing are paramount considerations. Style has often been described as the "slip cover" that is draped over type.

The courtyard apartment is a medium density housing type comprised of apartment units wrapped around a decorative non-recreational, small-scale courtyard. Courtyard apartments are an evolution of the courtyard house; in its earliest forms dating back to the Roman house. The domus of antiquity was an edifice that wrapped around one or two central interior courts 1) the atrium, which wrapped around a central pool (impluvium) that caught and harvested rainwater and 2) the peristylum that had a central garden watered by the rain and open to the elements. This peristylum (peristyle in English) functioned as the garden of the house and was surrounded by columns that supported the roof. These houses were sometimes called atrium-peristyle houses.

The courtyard house evolved as a housing type throughout various regions, including Spain where the type proliferated. Spain's architectural influence on its colonies was pervasive. From both cultural and regulatory aspects, the courtyard house became a configuration that served both as oasis and external defense with the building itself wrapping around the street as a method of sheltering its inhabitants. The Spanish Missions can be seen as an evolution of

the courtyard house into a cloister area whose central garden is wrapped by two floors of rooms with verandas designed with circular arched arcades.

The courtyard apartment evolved in the United States as a multi-family housing type for middle- and lower-middle class residents. Frank Lloyd Wright's Mecca Flats (1891) was the earliest example of a court building in Chicago, following the form of a multi-entry walk-up apartment building with a court open to the street. Wright's Francisco Terrace (1895) was another early forerunner to the courtyard type in Chicago. Although never built, Wright's unrealized design for the Warren McArthur Concrete Apartment House (1906) received considerable acclaim among his peers, and was the culmination of the architect's fifteen-year exploration of the typology. In 1907, Herbert Croly's published an article in *Architectural Record* entitled "Some Apartment Houses in Chicago," which described and illustrated several early South Side Chicago courtyard apartment buildings. It is believed that this article introduced the building type to the rest of the country. By the 1920s, the courtyard apartment typology had expanded beyond the Midwest and Northeast. In Southern California, the building type was not only adapted to suit its climatological conditions, but to reflect the growing popularity of "Spanish" revivalist architecture.

The Prince Edward Court apartments is illustrative of the U-Shaped configuration.

Rarely taller than four stories, most courtyard apartments were "walk-ups" without an elevator. In the case of U-shaped variations, the building mass wraps around its lot providing a common garden (or central court) functioning as a shared public green space. Owing to the fact that the Prince Edward Court Apartments occupied a corner lot fronting both a commercial street and a residential street, the building's overall massing serves a dual function in relationship to its setting. On busy NW 12th Avenue, much of the structure retreats into the solace of its courtyard; meanwhile, the solid facade fronting residential NW 4th Street creates an urban barrier between commercial NW12th and the residential area to the west.

### Style

The Mission style derives its primary inspiration from the Spanish missions of California and Texas and the Spanish Baroque style of the Counter-Reformation as it developed in the more affluent colonies such as Mexico. Characteristics are a pronounced front elevation with a shaped parapet, often with a central quatrefoil opening; a decorated and emphasized front (central) entrance; one or more arched colonnades referencing the original U-shaped or closed cloisters found in Spanish Colonial Missions; and one or two bell towers. Architect August Geiger is credited with bringing Spanish styled architecture to Miami with the completion of The Alamo (formerly known as the Miami City Hospital) in 1915.

The Mission revivalist style became popular during the real estate boom as a less expensive alternative to the more decorative and complex Mediterranean revival style. Architectural critic Beth Dunlop states that entire neighborhoods were designed in “a kind of free-hand Mission style, the simpler of the two to execute.” A very popular style for both residential and commercial buildings, the main features are: a stuccoed exterior; a flat roof with a shaped parapet featuring sparse decoration and applied cast concrete ornamentation with simple coping or a row of Spanish tiles; scuppers for drainage; and arched porches and entrances. One of the key elements is the idea of the parapet and front elevation as a façade heralding this Spanish past. Elements found in baroque churches such as sculptural niches are also incorporated, as is the case with 402 NW 12th Avenue. This property retains many of the character-defining features of the Mission style, as it was practiced in Miami. It was one of the predominant styles of the 1920s because of its simplicity and its ability to elegantly dress simple concrete block construction. In commercial construction and larger apartment buildings, the arched openings comprise key elements in a ground floor arcade over sidewalks or colonnades, as found in 402 NW 12th Avenue.

#### Historical Information:

The property forms part of the Lawrence Estates Land Company subdivision, platted in 1912 by the Tatum Brothers as a massive 400-acre development originally conceived as a streetcar suburb. Before the Chaille Plan of 1921, which renumbered the City's streets and avenues, 12th Avenue was known as Lawrence Avenue. The Tatum brothers purchased the land from General Samuel E. Lawrence and aptly named the subdivision in his honor. The Tatums—H.H. Tatum, John R. Tatum, Smiley Tatum—arrived to Miami from Georgia in the 1890s, by most accounts. They were land developers; they owned an abstract company, and many other projects.

The Tatum brothers built Miami's first railway in 1906—the Miami Electric Railway. Train lines ran on Flagler Street (then 12<sup>th</sup> Street). In 1907, the company closed for reparations and did not open again. In 1914, the Tatums secured the right to open another railway company, the Miami Traction Company, and began laying tracks. The trolley line ran from Flagler to 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue terminating at a depot on the site of former Tatum Field on the northernmost end of what is now the Marlins Stadium. The 1912 plat map depicts the main arterials of Lawrence Estates as Flagler Street and Lawrence Avenue (currently 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue) both thoroughfares were wide and prominent. The Tatums were also boom-time era developers and constituted George Merrick's most important competitors.

The Prince Edward Estates was constructed in 1923 at the beginnings of the real estate boom. In 1925, at the height of the real estate boom of the 20s, the apartments were purchased for \$175,000 by a corporation established and run

by the employees of the Miami National Bank and Trust Company in order to provide affordable housing for their fellow employees. Bank employees at affordable rates rented the apartment's twenty-six furnished "Suites," and other companies apparently encouraged their employees to follow suit. As prices increased at frantic rates during the boom, affordable housing for those who lived and worked in the City became scarcer.

The corporation was established at the suggestion of W.D. Manley, a banker from Atlanta, Georgia, and one of the Miami National Bank's largest shareholders. Mr. Manley outlined the plan he developed, by which the bank would agree to finance the company formed by the employees. An article in the Miami News in 1925 tells that the corporation was formed and was highly successful. They own and manage the Prince Edward Court. The article also mentions that other corporations around the City are looking at also providing housing for their employees that are priced out of a competitive market.

## IV- Application of Criteria for Designation

3) Exemplify the political, economical, or social trends of the community;

As potentially one of the first examples of workforce housing in Miami, the property acquires special significance as an illustrative example of new housing strategies to compensate for the boom-time market realities of the 1920s and offers a historical perspective into the burgeoning economic and housing trends.

4) Portray the environment in an era of history characterized by one or more distinctive architectural styles;

As a multifamily property located in a streetcar suburb, this property demonstrates the evolution of Miami's first neighborhoods from pre to post boom eras. Miami's older neighborhoods are now, and always were, an eclectic mix of styles and ranged from low to medium densities providing many living options for their residents. On major thoroughfares such as this one, a mix of residential and retail would have afforded the residents an integral, walkable neighborhood with access to transit.

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

The Prince Edward Court Apartments typify the American courtyard apartment model on a modest scale. The property exemplifies the simplicity and the type of ornamentation and detail common to the Mission Revival style, prevalent in Miami during the 1920s. Most of the Mission-styled apartments share common features such as distinctive parapets, cast concrete ornamentation, and a stuccoed exterior—to name the most common—although they differ slightly in choice of ornamentation and elaboration of details. The Prince Edward Court apartments are illustrative of the characteristic U-Shaped typological configuration for courtyard apartments. The property in question is a textbook example of this Mission / Courtyard mix and illustrates an example of architecture appropriate and adapted to the regional climate in its use of ventilation strategies, porches, fenestration, and balconies.

## **V- Application of Criteria for Designation**

There exists presently an insufficient understanding of the development of this apartment typology in Miami. Other cities across the US—like Los Angeles, CA and Portland, OR—have not only made efforts to understand the typology, but they have made efforts to reincorporate this typology as an effective medium density housing solution. Too many of these types of buildings have unnecessarily fallen prey to unsympathetic alterations, lack of maintenance, and neglect or demolition.

## VI- Bibliography

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## VII- Photographs



Historic Tax Card Photo, City of Miami (circa 1936) depicting 402-412 NW 12 Avenue



412 NW 12 Avenue: Original parapet with decorative crest stuccoed over



*Original courtyard balcony and colonnade*



*Southern Elevation*



*Northern Elevation*

