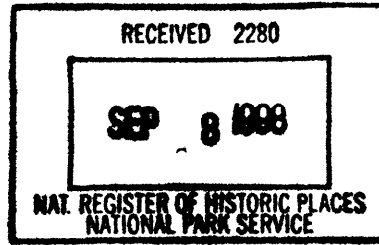


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1230

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 500 Block of Clematis Street N/A  not for publication

city or town West Palm Beach N/A  vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Palm Beach code 099 zip code 33401

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*George W. Ruff* 9/1/98  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

*Edson R. Beall* 10/8/98  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- buildings, district, site, structure, object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, total.

Name of related multiple property listings

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/Grocery Store, COMMERCE/Specialty Store, COMMERCE/Department Store, DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling, DOMESTIC/Hotel

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/Specialty Store, COMMERCE/Business Office, DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

- NO STYLE/Masonry Vernacular, LATE 19 & EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL, STYLES/Mediterranean Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Concrete, walls Stucco, Brick, roof Tar & Grvel, other Concrete: Decorative Details

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1918-1929

Significant Dates

1918

1929

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Archs: Harvey and Clarke

Blders: Newlon and Stephens

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of Repository

#

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
Name of Property

Palm Beach Co., FL  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** Less than one

**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	5	9	3	8	8	0	2	9	5	4	8	4	0
	Zone		Easting						Northing						
2															

3															
	Zone		Easting						Northing						
4															

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Amy Groover, Preservation Planner, Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date August 1998

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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**SUMMARY**

The Clematis Street Historic Commercial District comprises approximately .7 of an acre and encompasses most of both sides of the 500 block of Clematis Street, which is located in the western part of the downtown commercial core of the city of West Palm Beach, Florida. The district comprises thirteen buildings, all of which were constructed between 1918 and 1929. Twelve of the buildings contribute to the historic character of the district. The building at 528A Clematis Street, built in 1923, has been severely altered and is the district's sole noncontributing resource. The buildings range in height from one to three stories and present an unbroken series of facades on both the north and south sides of Clematis Street, except for 540, which is separated from 528-530 by a vacant lot. The majority of the structures are two-story masonry vernacular buildings. There are also three buildings that exhibit characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival style.

**SETTING**

The 500 block of Clematis Street (Photo 1) is found in the western portion of downtown West Palm Beach, a city with a population of approximately 77,000 located in south Florida about 70 miles north of Miami. West Palm Beach lies on the west shore of that part of the Intracoastal Waterway called Lake Worth, across from the resort city of Palm Beach. Modes of travel to the city are provided by U.S. Highway I-95, Palm Beach International Airport, and the Port of Palm Beach. It is the commercial center for Everglades cattle, and citrus, and other farm products. The district is immediately bounded on the north and south by the alleys found at the rear of the buildings overlooking Clematis Street. The west boundary is Rosemary Avenue and the vacant lots separating 535 Clematis Street from Rosemary Avenue. The east boundary is defined by the alley separating 513 Clematis from a large parking area and by the party wall separating 512 Clematis Street from the noncontributing buildings at 506-510 Clematis Street. Surrounding the district are parking lots and noncontributing commercial, governmental, and industrial buildings. Lying immediately east of the district is the Florida East Coast Railway line that parallels Quadrille Boulevard. The 500 block of Clematis Street contains the largest contiguous concentration of historic commercial buildings in downtown West Palm Beach. The setbacks are uniform throughout the district, being approximately eight feet from the edge of the sidewalks. Concrete pavers, planters, and landscaping were recently added to the street.

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Section number 7 Page 2

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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**DESCRIPTION**

The district is made up primarily of one and two-story commercial structures sited on single or double lots. Most of the buildings are constructed of hollow clay tile and finished on the exterior with stucco. There are six examples of stuccoed masonry vernacular buildings in the district. These are the St. James Rooming House at 513-515, erected c. 1921 (Photo 2); 517-519, erected 1929 (Photo 3), the Campbell Building at 525, erected in 1918 (Photo 4); Sewell Hardware at 528-530, erected 1928 (Photo 5); the W.E Pope Building at 531, erected 1921 (Photo 6); and 540 Clematis Street, erected c. 1928 (Photo 7). There are two examples of brick vernacular buildings: The Ketchum Dry Goods store at 522, erected c. 1919 (Photo 8) and Suther's Market at 526, erected 1922 (Photo 9). The brick walls of the exterior have been painted. Characteristics shared by most of the buildings in the district include flat roofs, large storefront windows, transom and clerestory windows, kick plates, recessed main entry doors, and double-hung sash windows on the second floor.

Three of the Boom era buildings on the block exhibit at least some features of variations in the Mediterranean Revival style, which become almost synonymous with Florida during the 1920s. These are the Old Hotel Clematis at 512, erected 1922 (Photos 10 and 11), the Jennings Building at 518-520, erected 1924 (Photo 12), and the Sirkin Building at 533-535, erected 1925 (Photo 13). Of these, the Jennings and Sirkin buildings are the most elaborate and probably qualify for individual listing in the National Register.

**Hotel Clematis, 512 Clematis Street (1922)**

The Old Hotel Clematis at 512 (Photos 10-11) Clematis Street is a two-story, stuccoed building, constructed in 1922. It is divided into three major bays on the first story and four bays on the second. The ground story has been significantly altered, having aluminum framed glass display windows and a modern entrance door framed by the building's original, square pilasters. Separating the first and second stories is a frieze area surmounted by a molded stringcourse that extends the width of the facade. Above the stringcourse, the second story is divided into four bays of paired windows that have been fitted with louvered shutters. The roof parapet is topped by a decorative pent roof surfaced with barrel tiles. The pent roof is framed by the high end walls of the facade that forms the remainder of the parapet surrounding the building. The "Mediterranean Revival" features of the building are minimal, making it unlikely that resource would meet National Register criteria for individual listing in the area of architectural significance.

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Section number 7 Page 3

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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**Jennings Building, 518-520 Clematis Street (1924)**

The situation is quite different for the Spanish Colonial Revival style Jennings Building at 518-520 Clematis Street (Photo 12), which was constructed in 1924. The three-bay facade on the ground story has a central entranceway leading to the second floor that is surmounted by an arched fanlight. The doorway is surrounded by a frontispiece of dark stone, with wide pilasters that shoulder radiating arch voussoirs, capped by a flat-headed keystone in the center of which is a clock. Flanking the central entrance are two storefronts, each with a single display window and a side entrance. Sheltering each storefront is an awning, above which is a clerestory window composed of glass bricks that extend the width of the storefront. Separating the first and second stories is a plain frieze area, above which are the three major window bays of the second story. The central bay features two small, 1/1-light arched windows linked by a continuous sill resting on three brackets.

The two windows are separated by a small, classical column that visually supports the inner shoulders of the window arches. In the frieze area above the paired windows is a cartouche, executed in high relief. The side bays of the second story each feature three 1/1-light double hung sash windows united by a single sill. The two outer windows in each of the bays are paired, being separated by a narrow mullion. The inner window in each bay is positioned along the sight line of the main entrance on the first story, reinforcing the vertical emphasis of the facade. Just below the stepped parapet of the street facade is a cornice, forming a scrolled arch topped with an urn motif extending the width of the center bay, flanked by a flat cornice over the side bays that terminates at the wall pilasters at the side of the building.

Although no architect has been definitely associated with this small, elegant building, its builders were William O. Newlon and Thomas H. Stephens who were listed as contractors in the West Palm Beach city directory from 1920 to 1928. They also were responsible for the construction in 1920 of Gruner's Department Store at 516 Clematis Street.

**Sirkin Building, 533-535 Clematis Street (1925)**

The most architecturally significant building in the historic district is certainly the three-story, Renaissance Revival style Sirkin Building at 533-535 Clematis Street (Photo 13) which was constructed in 1925. Designed by the local architectural firm of Harvey and Clarke, this building makes use of a clever interplay of projecting and receding elements to lend a sense of

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Section number 7 Page 4

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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monumentality to what is really a rather small structure. The first story is divided into three bays: two storefronts and an entranceway, located at the southeast corner of the main (south) facade, that leads to the upper floors. The two storefronts are of equal width and are separated by a wide pilaster having a rusticated stone face and classical capital. There is an identical pilaster at the southwest corner of the facade. The theme is repeated in the corner entranceway which is flanked by rusticated pilasters and surmounted by a flat arch with radiating voussoirs. Each of the storefronts has its own suspended canopy that separates the street level from the clerestory windows.

The pilasters on the first story visually support a plain entablature that rises to the base of the three cantilevered balconies found on the second story. The wall surface of the upper stories is covered with smooth stucco, painted white. The second story of the main facade is symmetrically balanced, the center bay being slightly wider and taller than the ones flanking it. The center bay contains three sets of French doors that lead out onto the balcony that is bordered with a wrought iron balustrade. Above each of the French doors, immediately beneath the cantilevered balcony on the third story, is a narrow, horizontal clerestory window. Both of the flanking bays on the second story have a single, centrally placed French door with fixed sidelights. The sidelights near the southwestern corner of the building have been enclosed to allow the installation of a window air conditioning unit. The spaces between the French doors, sidelights, and outer wall surface are defined by narrow classical pilasters that support a simple entablature and cornice.

The third story also features three bays. The center one projects slightly from the front wall of the building and contains three French doors surmounted by fanlights. The doors lead out onto a balcony similar to the ones on the second story. The cantilevered balcony is visually supported by four small acanthus-faced brackets. The center bay is flanked by two sets of tripartite, double hung sash windows. Each of the window units features a 6/6-light window flanked by 2/2-light double hung sashes.

The parapet of the main facade has a simple entablature composed of a narrow frieze and a strongly projecting cornice. The entablature projects strongly from the front of the building at the center bay on the third story.



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CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
DESCRIPTION

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**Alterations**

Alterations to the buildings have mainly been limited to the storefronts on the first story. These include the replacement of original display windows and entrance doors with modern, aluminum frame varieties. In some cases the kick plates have been removed and the transom and clerestory lights either removed or covered over, as is the case with the building at 516 Clematis Street (Photo 14). The original second story windows also have been replaced in some instances, but all of the contributing buildings in the district retain enough of their original features to reflect the era in which they were constructed. The sole noncontributing building, 528A Clematis Street (Photo 15), is the exception. Although constructed in 1923, hardly any of its original features are recognizable. The only other buildings along the 500 block are found east of 512 Clematis Street and have been excluded from the district, since they do not contribute to its historic character.

A number of buildings that originally stood along the 500 block of Clematis Street have been demolished over the years. All of the structures located to the east of 513 and west of 533-535 Clematis Street are gone, as is the building that once stood between 528-530 and 540 Clematis (Photo 16). Fortunately, most of the demolition activity took place at the ends of the street, allowing the cohesiveness of the district to be maintained.

**BUILDING LIST**

**Contributing Buildings**

<u>Address</u>	<u>Historic Site Name</u>	<u>Date Built</u>
512 Clematis Street	Hotel Clematis	1922
516 Clematis Street	Gruner's Department Store	1920
513-515 Clematis Street	St. James Rooming House	c. 1921
517-519 Clematis Street		1929
518-520 Clematis Street	Jennings Building	1924
522 Clematis Street	R.C. Ketcham Dry Goods	c. 1919
525 Clematis Street	Campbell Building	1918
526 Clematis Street	Suther's Marker	1922
528-530 Clematis Street	Sewell Hardware	1928

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CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
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DESCRIPTION

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**Contributing Buildings** (cont.)

531 Clematis Street	W.E. Pope Building	1921
533-535 Clematis Street	Sirkin Building	1925
540 Clematis Street		c. 1928

**Noncontributing Buildings**

528A Clematis Street		1923
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Section number 8 Page 1

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SIGNIFICANCE

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**SUMMARY**

The Clematis Street Historic Commercial District is locally significant under criteria A and C in the areas of Commerce, Community Planning and Development, and Architecture. The area was one of the earliest areas platted in downtown West Palm Beach and played an important role in the commercial development of the community. Although most of the buildings in the district are masonry vernacular structures, the district has notable individual examples of the Mission, Spanish Colonial, and Renaissance Revival styles, the latter two of which appear to meet the criteria for individual listing in the National Register. The contributing buildings were all constructed between 1918 and 1928 and reflect the rapid development of the commercial area of West Palm Beach from the beginning of the twentieth century to the collapse of the Florida Land Boom in the middle of the 1920s. The twelve buildings contributing to the district represent the largest concentration of historic commercial buildings in downtown West Palm Beach, since many of the community's early twentieth century buildings have been demolished or have been so severely altered that they no longer retain their historic character.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

At the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865, southeastern Florida was still a wilderness. The first permanent settlement by Americans of European descent was established in present-day Palm Beach County during the 1870s. Most of these early pioneers settled on the eastern shore of Lake Worth, now the site of the Town of Palm Beach. The early settlers established farms on both sides of Lake Worth and primarily cultivated pineapples. Vegetables for northern shipment quickly became more profitable and replaced pineapples as the major produce grown in the area.<sup>1</sup>

In 1892, Henry M. Flagler visited the area while seeking a route to extend his Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railroad to Miami. The beauty of the area and the warm tropical climate inspired Flagler to create an exclusive resort community on the island of Palm Beach. Flagler envisioned the resort as a paradise, an escape from the overcrowded northern cities. To accommodate commercial activity, Flagler purchased property on the west shore of the island from Captain O.S. Porter and Louis Hillhouse. On this property Flagler established the town that would serve as the business district of the city of Palm Beach.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald W. Curl, Palm Beach County: An Illustrated History, Northridge, California: Windsor Publications, 1986, pp. 13-17, 26-27; J. Wadsworth Travers, History of Beautiful Palm Beach, 1929, p.37.

<sup>2</sup> Curl, p. 37.

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CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
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Flagler filed the original plat for the Town of West Palm Beach in November 1893. The town limits extended from Lake Worth to Clear Lake. Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad reached West Palm Beach the same year, bringing building materials, tourists, workers, and settlers. The first lots in the Town of West Palm Beach were sold in February 1894, and construction was soon underway. On November 5, 1894, the new community voted to incorporate as a town.<sup>3</sup>

The first census taken in 1895 recorded 1,192 persons living in the town and listed the property value at \$133,926. In 1896, two fires in the downtown commercial area prompted the Town Council to enact a new building code, requiring all buildings in the downtown area to be constructed of brick or stone, or have a brick or stone veneer. As a result, West Palm Beach's downtown soon had many masonry and masonry-veneered commercial buildings. By 1900, West Palm Beach had electricity, a sewer system, a water pumping station, paved streets, and telephone service.<sup>4</sup> Despite these advances, the town's population dropped to 564 residents. This decrease in population was attributed to the decline in construction activity, the freeze of 1894-1895 that destroyed the citrus industry, and a nationwide financial crisis.

In 1903, the Town Council petitioned the Florida Legislature for a city charter, which was shortly granted. Spectacular population growth along the east coast of south Florida resulted in the creation of Palm Beach County from Dade County in 1909, and the town of West Palm Beach was named the county seat.<sup>5</sup> The completion of the Palm Beach Canal in 1917, which provided access to inland farming areas, made West Palm Beach the shipping point for the county's agricultural products by both rail and water.<sup>6</sup> By 1920, the population had risen to 8,659 residents, and West Palm Beach was now well established as Palm Beach County's commercial hub, as well as a popular tourist spot for the middle class.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1920s, West Palm Beach experienced widespread development and growth due to the Florida Land Boom. Major office and commercial buildings were erected in the downtown. These included the city's first "skyscrapers," such as the Guaranty Building (1922) at 120 South Olive Avenue and the Dixie Court Hotel (1925) at 301 N. Dixie Highway [NR 1986], both seven stories in height; and the ten-story Comeau Building (1925) at 319 Clematis Street

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<sup>3</sup> Curl, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Curl, pp. 46-48.

<sup>5</sup> City of West Palm Beach Planning Department. Historic Survey Report; Curl p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Curl, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> City of West Palm Beach Planning Department.

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Section number 8 Page 3

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SIGNIFICANCE

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[NR 1996]. The Land Boom peaked in the winter of 1924-1925.<sup>8</sup> By 1927, the entire city east of Australian Avenue had been platted, although little construction had taken place north of 36th Street or south of Southern Boulevard. However, when the Harvey Building opened in 1927 it was bankrupt, indicating that the Florida Land Boom had gone bust.

Several factors contributed to the failure of Florida's real estate market. Real estate speculators pushing up land prices had a negative effect on the economy. In the spring of 1925, many investors began to cancel all Florida real estate transactions, as they became panicked by news of bogus Florida real estate ventures. By August of 1925, the Florida East Coast Railroad placed an embargo on transporting all materials except for fuel, petroleum, livestock and perishable goods, halting building construction in South Florida. The next unfortunate events were two hurricanes that struck South Florida in 1926 and 1928. The first struck the Miami area on September 17, 1926, causing widespread destruction and loss of life. On September 16, 1928, a hurricane swept right through Palm Beach County, destroying nearly 8,000 homes and hundreds of commercial buildings. When the Stock Market crashed in October 1929, the Florida real estate market was valueless.<sup>9</sup>

**Historical Significance**

In 1893, Henry Flagler bought a strip of land that extended from Lake Worth to Clear Lake. This land was acquired from Captain O.S. Porter and Louis Hillhouse for \$45,000. The land was platted, and the 48-block site became the Town of West Palm Beach. Flagler had a shell-surfaced road constructed through the middle of the still largely undeveloped town, and this traffic artery eventually evolved into Clematis Street (originally named Clematis Avenue).<sup>10</sup> By 1894, the community had been incorporated as a town, and the first building—Otto Weybrecht's Hardware Store—had been constructed on Clematis Avenue.<sup>11</sup> Over the next few years Clematis Avenue became the bustling "Main Street" of West Palm Beach. When two disastrous fires struck downtown West Palm Beach in 1896, the business district had expanded beyond Clematis Avenue to Banyan Street, Narcissus Avenue, and Olive Avenue. The commercial district, however, did not extend further than Poinsettia Avenue, which today is Dixie Highway.

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<sup>8</sup> Curl, p. 88; Palm Beach County Plats; West Palm Beach Building Permits.

<sup>9</sup> Curl, pp. 93-94; files of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

<sup>10</sup> "Origin of Clematis St." Palm Beach Post, May 18, 1962.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 4

CLEMATIS STREET HISTORIC COMMERCIAL DISTRICT  
PALM BEACH COUNTY  
SIGNIFICANCE

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Soon after the fires, new “fireproof” masonry structures were beginning to line the streets of the business district, and by 1900, “you could buy all the modern conveniences in West Palm Beach.”<sup>12</sup> During the first decade of the 1900s, the eastern portion of Clematis Avenue grew rapidly, as did much of the rest of the town. In 1904, the West Palm Beach newspaper Tropical Sun chronicled the changes occurring along Clematis Avenue.

A resolution was presented by the street committee to the effect that as Clematis Avenue is now being paved from curb to curb, Engineer Sheen be instructed to remove all trees between Narcissus and Poinsettia streets. Also, that he be instructed to remove all poisonous trees now on the city streets....A motion was presented by Aldermen Grier and Sirkin, that Clematis Avenue be paved from curb to curb from Narcissus Street to Poinsettia and a uniform width from Poinsettia to Sapodilla. The motion carried.<sup>13</sup>

As more residents and businesses moved into the West Palm Beach area, the lush, tropical wilderness of the land soon gave way to more civilized amenities such as roads, sidewalks, and landscaped lawns. By 1916, Clematis Avenue was being lauded as a “credit to the city.”<sup>14</sup> With progress appearing on all sides, West Palm Beach was considered to be a very progressive city, possessing “a business street that will vie with any in the state.”<sup>15</sup> By this time, the business district had grown, crossing over the railroad tracks to the western portion of Clematis between Railroad Way (Quadrille Boulevard) and Rosemary Street. The 1916 West Palm Beach City Directory indicates that the 500 block of Clematis Avenue was a central location for mercantile and grocery establishments.<sup>16</sup> Several residential addresses were also given in the directory at this time.

Seeing the potential of south Florida, Thomas J. Campbell came to West Palm Beach in the late 1890s. Campbell was a prominent citizen who was very active in efforts to improve the community. In the early 1900s, he became president of the Association of Commerce and county tax collector. On January 16, 1918, a full-page layout in The Palm Beach Post announced the completion of the Campbell Building at 535 Clematis Avenue<sup>17</sup> The building was a monumental

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> “Down with the Rubber Trees,” Tropical Sun, December 10, 1904.

<sup>14</sup> “Clematis Avenue is a Credit to the City,” Tropical Sun, January 13, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> West Palm Beach City Directory, (Asheville, NC: Florida-Piedmont Co., 1916).

<sup>17</sup> “Campbell Building The City’s Newest Pride. A Notable Addition To the Clematis Avenue Business District,” Palm Beach Post, January 16, 1918.

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commercial block, erected on the north side of Clematis, with five modern store units on the first floor and small residential apartments on the second floor. Campbell predicted that the rapid growth of residential areas in the southwestern part of the city would make the Campbell Building "a hub of commercial activity."<sup>18</sup> The building was quickly occupied by businesses such as the Dixie Pharmacy, Halpern's Department Store, The Hat Box, and the Economy Furniture Store.

In November 1918, the Fashion Store opened at 502 Clematis Avenue, just west of the railroad line.<sup>19</sup> Offin P. Gruner, a prominent West Palm Beach businessman, was the sole proprietor of the store and owned several other parcels of property in the 500 block of Clematis Avenue. By mid-1919, the beginnings of the Florida Land Boom were already apparent in the western portion of downtown West Palm Beach. In June of that year, F.A. Glidden began planning construction of his own building on the north side of Clematis Avenue.<sup>20</sup> Also, buoyed by the success of his first building enterprise, T.J. Campbell planned to build an apartment house across the street from the Campbell Building.<sup>21</sup> One of the earliest local architects, O.J. Williams, was hired by Campbell to design the building, which would have commercial stores on the first floor and residential apartments on the second floor.

Throughout 1919, construction in the commercial district proceeded at a rapid pace, despite a shortage of materials and skilled labor.<sup>22</sup> Articles in the Palm Beach Post continued to document the increasing real estate speculation going on in the 500 block of Clematis Avenue, exclaiming that prices for property were soaring.<sup>23</sup> The newspaper also reported that a Northern investor had offered \$35,000 for 77 feet of Clematis frontage, but the owner, L.U. Todd, had refused to sell because he felt that within two years the property would go for more than \$50,000.<sup>24</sup> On December 27, 1919, the paper stated that local investors were hurriedly closing real estate deals before the tourists and winter visitors arrived, driving up the prices.<sup>25</sup> By the end of 1919, Raymond C. Ketcham had erected a building on the south side of Clematis Street, next

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Fashion Store Opens Tomorrow," Palm Beach Post, November 21, 1918.

<sup>20</sup> "F.A. Glidden To Build Business Block on Clematis Avenue," Palm Beach Post, June 28, 1919.

<sup>21</sup> "House Planned by T.J. Campbell on Clematis Avenue," Palm Beach Post, June 29, 1919.

<sup>22</sup> "Tremendous Building Activities Continue Despite Acute Shortage of Skilled Labor," Palm Beach Post, October 24, 1919.

<sup>23</sup> "West Clematis Ave. Property Soaring," Palm Beach Post, November 23, 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "Property on West Clematis Avenue is Coming to the Front as Business Sites," Palm Beach Post, December 27, 1919.

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to the property recently purchased by T.J. Campbell.<sup>26</sup> Campbell, however, had abandoned his plan to erect a building on the site and sold the property to C.F. Wolfson, who stated his intention to erect a three-story commercial building on the property.<sup>27</sup>

Clematis Avenue was now thriving as the Florida Land Boom began to shift into high gear. Indicative of the growing market for development property, real estate offices were popping up all over downtown West Palm Beach, and front property along West Clematis Street was selling for \$400 a foot in 1920.<sup>28</sup> Palm Beach Realty Service was advertising a plot fronting 100 feet on West Clematis Avenue at \$30,000 and claimed that when improvements were completed in the area, the price would “double and even triple.”<sup>29</sup> In October 1920, the Post announced that construction costs had decreased, prompting a rapid increase in erecting buildings throughout the city.<sup>30</sup> By the end of 1920, the population of West Palm Beach had risen to 8,659, and the value of property was valued at \$13.6 million.<sup>31</sup>

By mid-1921, building construction was at a “new high level,” greatly surpassing that of the previous year.<sup>32</sup> In May, the Post reported that work had finally begun on the three-story Glidden Building on West Clematis Avenue. F.H. Glidden’s proposed \$50,000, 100 by 150 foot building was awarded the “banner permit” of the week by the Post because of its size and cost.<sup>33</sup> W.F. Pope obtained a building permit to erect a one-story building at 331 West Clematis Avenue. The Pope Building was to accommodate three stores but was constructed so additional stories could be added if the real estate market continued its strong performance. A second story was added in 1925. The city directory for 1921 shows that grocery stores were the predominant business in the 500 block of Clematis Avenue, there being no fewer than seven. There were also a department store, drug store, a hat shop, a furniture store, and other businesses.<sup>34</sup>

On October 21, 1922, the Post devoted a full page to the expanding West Clematis Avenue business district. The article also featured advertisements of 500 block businesses and emphasized the importance of this downtown area.

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<sup>26</sup> “More Buildings to be Erected,” Palm Beach Post, November 14, 1919.

<sup>27</sup> “Wolfson to Build Three Story Block on Clematis Ave.,” Palm Beach Post, December 10, 1919.

<sup>28</sup> “West Clematis Ave. Property Sells for \$400 per Front Foot,” Palm Beach Post, February 24, 1920.

<sup>29</sup> Advertisement, Palm Beach Post, January 29, 1920.

<sup>30</sup> “Building Costs Go Down, Houses Go Up,” Palm Beach Post, October 2, 1920.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Tuckwood and Eliot Kleinberg, Pioneers in Paradise (Marietta, GA: Longstreet Press, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> “Month’s Building Passes \$325,000, A New High Mark,” Palm Beach Post, May 1, 1921.

<sup>33</sup> “1921 Building Permits Pass Million Mark,” Palm Beach Post, June 12, 1921.

<sup>34</sup> R.L. Polk, Polk’s West Palm Beach City Directory, (Jacksonville: R.L. Polk Co., 1921)



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West Clematis Avenue between the railroad and Sapodilla Street is growing. *It is a pretty complete town in itself.* A few years ago, all of West Palm Beach's business district did not have many more stores...and the city's best store buildings were not as good nor the stocks of merchandise as complete. Every demand that consumers can make can be accommodated on West Clematis Avenue; clothing and dry goods stores furnish everything for wear, the grocery stores and meat markets and fruit stores furnish everything for the table, and there are dining halls and rooming houses and drug stores and all the other classes of business that make up a good town.<sup>35</sup>

West Clematis Avenue had its own lighting plant, an ice plant, and was in close proximity to the water company and gas plant. With 60-foot wide paved streets, "the widest in the city,"<sup>36</sup> paved sidewalks, and street lights, this part of town was considered to be a very desirable place to live and work. Another attractive feature was the new \$200,000 high school and athletic field that were being constructed a few blocks away, putting West Clematis Avenue in the center of many of the city's activities.<sup>37</sup>

The West Palm Beach city directory for 1923 shows that the 500 block of Clematis Avenue was still under rapid development. Businesses already established, such as Gruner's Dixie Cleaning and Tailoring, Broadwell's Drug Store, Ketcham Dry Goods, the Domestic Bakery, and the West End Meat Market, still remained on Clematis. New businesses were establishing themselves as well, including the Stambaugh Shoe Company at 531 Clematis and Fike's Grocery at 513. At the height of the Land Boom, 1924 to 1925, real estate prices in West Palm Beach soared. It was rumored that property on West Clematis Avenue was selling for as much as \$900 a foot, much of it being purchase for investment purposes.<sup>38</sup> In 1925, city property was valued at \$61.7 million, five times as much as it was worth in 1920.<sup>39</sup>

On May 29, 1925, the Palm Beach Times announced that local department store owner Harry Sirkin was relocating his business to West Clematis Street.<sup>40</sup> Sirkin commissioned prominent local architects Harvey and Clarke to design a \$60,000, three-story building on the

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<sup>35</sup> "Two Blocks of West Clematis Make Fine Business District," Palm Beach Post, October 31, 1922.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> "Clematis Avenue Property Rumored Sold for \$45,000," Palm Beach Post, March 19, 1924.

<sup>39</sup> an Tuckwood and Eliot Kleinberg, Pioneers in Paradise (Marietta, GA: Longstreet Press, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> The city's east and west thoroughfares were now called streets; "Three New Building Projects Announced in West Palm Beach," Palm Beach Times, May 25, 1925.

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north side of Clematis. The building at 533-535 Clematis Street was to have two spacious retail stores on the ground floor and 32 rooms on the second and third floors.<sup>41</sup> This large, Mediterranean Revival style building proved to be a commercial and architectural anchor for the whole block.

Late in 1925, West Palm Beach mayor Henry Harvey predicted that the number of buildings constructed in 1926 would far exceed those built in 1925.<sup>42</sup> Mayor Harvey's predictions, however, failed to be realized. Even before the end of 1925, the Florida Land Boom was beginning to falter. Building materials became in short supply, and real estate deals were going sour. Despite the warning signs of the impending bust, The Palm Beach Post continued its upbeat reporting of business activities along Clematis Street and in the rest of the city. On May 26, 1926, the Post announced that "business is active" and featured a photograph of West Clematis Street bustling with cars and people.<sup>43</sup> Despite the continued optimism, real estate activity began to fall off sharply by the summer of 1926. Heavy withdrawals from Florida banks, coupled with the failure of buyers of property to make mortgage payments, began to cause smaller and more recently organized banks to fail.<sup>44</sup>

Local business leaders continued to claim that the future of real estate development in West Palm Beach looked bright, even after a disastrous hurricane struck the Atlantic Coast of Florida on September 17-18, 1926. Little damage was done to the business district in West Palm Beach but other locations in south Florida had been devastated. Major damage was done to Miami Beach, and thousands of residents in the growing tourist destinations along the Atlantic coast had been left homeless. Total casualties were 392 dead, 6,281 injured, and over 17,000 families affected by losses.<sup>45</sup>

By 1927, all but two of the historic buildings now found in the district had been constructed. The new Piggly Wiggly grocery store chain opened a store at 522 Clematis Street.<sup>46</sup> The abundance of grocery stores on West Clematis Street indicated that the area was still considered a center for vending produce and meat. Several restaurants and diners also began operating along the street, serving the many residents living in the rooming houses and upstairs

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "West Palm Beach Building Total \$17,524,265 in 1925 With Wider Activity Seen," Palm Beach Times, December 27, 1925.

<sup>43</sup> "Business is Active," Palm Beach Post, May 26, 1926.

<sup>44</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, A History of Florida, (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 387.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Piggly Wiggly in South Enjoys its Tenth Year," Palm Beach Times, May 18, 1928.

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apartments found in the 500 block of Clematis Street.<sup>47</sup> In 1928, business activity continued to develop in the 500 block, with new tenants replacing old ones. In May 1928, both the Post and Times announced that another building was to be constructed on the north side of West Clematis.<sup>48</sup> Wiley R. Beach, president of the First National Bank, hired the Wilcox Brothers to build a \$15,000 commercial structure immediately west of the Glidden Building.<sup>49</sup> The hollow tile and steel building, which would house two businesses, would replace an old wood frame residence. In November of the same year, Sewell Hardware Company, which had been in business in West Palm Beach since 1895 and had been operating out of a building on West Clematis since 1925, commissioned Palm Beach architects John Volk and Gustav Maas to design a new building at 528 West Clematis Street.<sup>50</sup> Today, Sewell Hardware still operates out of the same building.

By the end of the 1920s, the onset of the years of the Great Depression was having an impact on the businesses along the 500 block of West Clematis Street. The 1929 city directory lists nine addresses in the block as vacant. Because the real estate market was in sharp decline, little news about local investments in new construction in West Palm Beach appeared in the newspapers. New construction along Clematis Street ceased altogether, and the number of vacancies continued to grow during the depression era.

Today, the visual character of the Clematis Street Historic District remains a reflection of the exuberant period of the Florida Land Boom. The boom years were integral to the formation of downtown West Palm Beach. Since it was separated from the rest of the downtown area, West Clematis Street developed a character of its own, as a mixed commercial and residential area. During its heyday, local residents and tourists patronized the variety of business along the block, obtaining many of their necessary goods and services from the merchants and other business enterprises. All of the buildings in the district were built between 1918 and 1928, and the area retains much of its architectural and contextual cohesiveness, making the 500 block distinguishable from other sections of downtown West Palm Beach.

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<sup>47</sup> Miller's West Palm Beach, Palm Beach, and Lake Worth City Directory, (Asheville, NC: Florida-Piedmont Directory Co., 1927).

<sup>48</sup> "Permit Given For Building," Palm Beach Times, May 17, 1928; "Building Permit Issued for New Duplex Store," Palm Beach Post, May 20, 1928.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "November to See \$400,000 in New Work," Palm Beach Times, November 27, 1928.

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**Architectural Significance**

The architectural significance of the district rests primarily on two buildings: the Spanish Colonial Revival style Jennings Building at 518-520 Clematis Street, erected in 1924 (Photo 12), and the Renaissance Revival style Sirkin Building at 533-535 Clematis Street, erected in 1925 (Photo 13). Although limited mainly to the main, street facades of the buildings, the stylistic and decorative details are presented with clarity and authority without being tied to specific historical references. The Sirkin Building borrows freely from the classicism of 15th and 16th century Italy in its use of columns, round arches and symmetrical composition. Though more restrained in its use of detail, the Jennings Building combines the Spanish/Mediterranean Revival for round arches, small ornamental columns, dramatically framed entrances, flowing tracery moldings, and cartouches executed in high relief. The ground story also has affinities to Art Moderne, with its simplified, low relief entrance framing that carries a "modernistic" clock in its keystone and with its glass brick filled clerestory lights over each of the storefronts.

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1919.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries of the Clematis Street Historic Commercial District are those shown on the district map.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries encompass all of the all of the contributing properties in the 500 block of Clematis Street that were constructed between 1918 and 1929.

**Legal Description**

The west 117.9 feet of Lot 1 through Lot 5, in Block 24, of the Town of West Palm Beach, Florida, according to the Plat thereof, recorded in Plat Book 1, Page 2, Sheet 2, of the Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida;

Together with:

The east 40 feet of Lot 6, all of Lots 7 and 8, and the west half of Lot 9 in Block 25 of the Town of West Palm Beach, according to the Plat thereof, recorded in Plat Book 1, Page 2 of the Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida.

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**List of Photographs**

1. 500 Block Clematis Street, Clematis Street Historic Commercial District
2. West Palm Beach (Palm Beach County), Florida
3. Amy Groover
4. March 1996
5. The Downtown Group, Inc.
6. 500 Block of Clematis Street, Looking East from 522 Clematis Street
7. Photo 1 of 16

**All of the properties are found in the Clematis Street Historic Commercial District, and sections 2 through 5 are the same for the remaining photographs.**

1. 513-515 Clematis Street
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking North
7. Photo 2 of 16

1. 517-519 Clematis Street
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking North
7. Photo 3 of 16

1. 525 Clematis Street
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking Northeast
7. Photo 4 of 16

1. 528-530 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 5 of 16

1. 531 Clematis Street
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking North
7. Photo 6 of 16

1. 540 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
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1. 522 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 8 of 16

1. 526 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 9 of 16

1. 508-516 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facades, Looking Southwest
7. Photo 10 of 16

1. 512 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking Southeast
7. Photo 11 of 16

1. 518-520 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 12 of 16

1. 533-535 Clematis Street
6. Main (South) Facade, Looking North
7. Photo 13 of 16

1. 516 Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 14 of 16

1. 528A Clematis Street
6. Main (North) Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 15 of 16

1. Vacant Lot between 528-530 and 540 Clematis Street
6. View Looking South
7. Photo 16 of 16