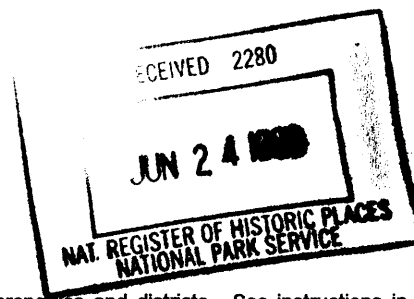


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



861

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 FERNDIX BUILDING

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 401 Fern Street N/A ☐ not for publication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.)

[Signature] 6/14/99
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) _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

7.22.99

FERNDIX BUILDING
Name of Property

Palm Beach Co., FL
County and State

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)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Business; Restaurant

DOMESTIC/Hotel; Multiple Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Business; Restaurant

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Mission

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stucco

walls Stucco

roof Tar & Gravel

other Metal; Balcony

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

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1924-1949

Significant Dates

1924

1946

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arch: Unknown

Blder: Wilcox Brothers Construction Co.

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of Repository

FERNDIX BUILDING
Name of Property

Palm Beach Co., FL
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	5	9	4	0	9	0	2	9	5	4	5	5	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 Janet G. Murphy, Consultant/Barbara Mattick, Historic Preservationist Supervisor

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 1999

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 Lawrence Corning, Central City Cluster, Inc.

street & number 518 Banyan Boulevard telephone (561) 833-1600

city or town West Palm Beach state Florida zip code 33401

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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section number 7 Page 1 FERNDIX BUILDING
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Ferndix Building is an early-twentieth century commercial building located at 321 South Dixie Highway in downtown West Palm Beach. The Ferndix Building, built 1924-1925, is a two-story, six-bay wide by four-bay deep building constructed of hollow clay tile covered with smooth stucco. It sits on a continuous concrete foundation and is topped by a flat roof. The first floor houses one restaurant and three businesses, while the second floor is multi-unit residential space. The first story of the facade is broken into four storefronts with large display windows and two recessed entryways with two doorways apiece. Each display window and entryway is bordered by decorative roped molding. Below the windows, capping the kickplate, is a molded water table, and above the windows and recessed entryways is a canvas awning which extends the length of the building. The second story of the facade contains four sets of aluminum awning windows flanked by single aluminum awning windows. Above the windows is a molded cornice topped by a Mission-style, shaped parapet. Within the shaped sections of the parapet are round, cast-concrete medallions with the faces of idyllic young children. The exterior of the Ferndix Building has not been significantly altered since its construction and retains the overall integrity of its original design and individual architectural features.

Setting

The Ferndix Building is located at 401 Fern Street in the southern portion of downtown West Palm Beach (photo 16). The building occupies the northwest corner of Fern Street and South Dixie Highway, thus its name, the "Ferndix Building. The building is one of the few remaining historic structures from the Land Boom period of the 1920s or earlier in this part of the downtown area. The recent six foot setback of the building from South Dixie Highway was originally greater; however, the roadway has been widened a since the building was constructed in 1924. The building is two blocks west of the Intracoastal Waterway and three blocks south of Clematis Street, downtown's main commercial corridor. Large parking lots exist to the east and southeast. Across South Dixie Highway to the northeast is the Professional Building, a ca. 1921 historic commercial structure, and to the southwest is the ca. 1925 Southern Bell Building. To the rear (west) of the building is a small parking lot.

When the Ferndix Building was constructed it was just one of a number of commercial buildings being constructed in downtown West Palm Beach. A September 28, 1924, Palm Beach Post article states that the Ferndix Building will "supplant an old home on lot 10, block 19, at Dixie Highway and Fern Street." The 1920 Sanborn Insurance Company Map shows a one-story, frame residence on the lot and indicates that before the Land Boom the area surrounding the Ferndix Building was mostly residential, including a number of rooming houses and small apartment buildings. Only Clematis and Datura streets had any substantial commercial development. Once the Boom started, other businesses began locating in the area, and both sides of Dixie

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FERNDIX BUILDING
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
DESCRIPTION

Highway were lined with commercial structures. Many of the buildings had characteristics similar to the Ferndix Building, including being two or three stories in height and having flat roofs, awnings over the storefront windows and Mission or Spanish Colonial Revival architectural features.

Exterior Description

The Ferndix Building is a two-story, commercial and residential building constructed in the Commercial Vernacular style with Mission-style influence. The 8200 square foot, clay tile masonry building sits on a concrete foundation and is covered with smooth stucco exterior walls. It has a flat, wood truss roof covered with built-up tar and gravel. The roof is surrounded by a shaped parapet. Distinguishing architectural features include roped molding around the first story windows and entryways, a molded cornice and water table, a small iron balcony on the second story of the south elevation, and a parapet with Mission-style shaped detailing and idyllic child portrait medallions. These medallions reflect the image of D.F. Dunkle's then four-year-old daughter, Betty.

The main (east) facade of the Ferndix Building faces South Dixie Highway. The facade is divided into six bays, including four storefronts (listed as 319, 321, 323, and 325 South Dixie Highway) and two entrance vestibules (photos 1, 6). The storefronts have large, fixed display windows surrounded by roped molding with molded leaf blocks at the upper corners (photos 1, 7). The second and fifth bays are entry vestibules, each with two smaller fixed display windows and two recessed doors providing entrance into the adjacent commercial establishments (photo 6). Transoms top all of the first story doors and windows. A molded water table is situated atop the bulkhead and a canvas awning runs the length of the building, visually separating the first and second stories (photos 1,2).

The second story of the east facade contains four sets of paired windows in the middle flanked on the far ends by single windows (photo 1). All of these windows are four part aluminum awning sash with plain masonry sills. They are currently hidden by large, wood Bermuda shutters. A molded cornice separates the second story from the shaped parapet decorated with the child portrait medallions (photos 1, 5). The facade also contains signage for the commercial establishment and "Ferndix Building" lettering in the center just below the second-story windows (photo 1).

The south elevation of the Ferndix Building faces Fern Street (photo 3). This side of the building is divided into five bays. On the first story, the two easternmost bays are large display windows with transoms bordered by roped molding above a bulkhead and a molded water table. The middle bay was originally an entryway with double wood-frame glazed doors and full-height sidelights surrounded by roped molding. The bay to the west of the in-filled entryway appears to have been a large service window bordered by roped molding atop a

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DESCRIPTION

bulkhead and molded water table. It has also been closed off. The westernmost bay is a single doorway with a corbeled masonry header surround. A decorative iron sconce lights this entryway, which is used to reach the second floor apartments. The second story has three paired windows in the center flanked on the east by a single window and on the west by a small iron balcony with a set of tall, narrow, French doors. The windows are four part aluminum awning sash with plain masonry sills. Two of the windows are obscured by large, wood Bermuda shutters. A molded cornice separates the second story from the shaped parapet with child portrait medallions (photos 3, 5).

The west (rear) elevation is divided into two sections (photo 4). The first story of the north section is used as a service entrance and is set back from the southern section. It contains two doors and three windows and is attached to a one-story, masonry storage building. This 1950s storage building has a metal, overhead door on the south elevation and a small, frame shed addition attached to the west (photo 8). It is a plain, utilitarian building not considered contributing to the Ferndix Building. The second story, north rear section of the Ferndix Building has a deck surrounded by a wooden picket fence. The deck is accessed by a modern, winding metal stair. The first story of the southern section is also used as a service entrance and contains two doors and three infilled windows. The second story has two four part aluminum awning windows with plain masonry sills. One window is obscured by a large, wood Bermuda shutter.

Only one bay of the north elevation is visible due to an attached, ca. 1966, two-story, commercial building to the north (photo 2). Attached buildings are common in the downtown area due to high land values. The small section of the Ferndix Building that is visible on the north elevation is covered with a thin layer of stucco showing evidence of the clay tile construction.

Interior Description

The interior of the Ferndix Building consists of four commercial spaces on the first floor and five apartments on the second floor. During the building's history, the interior spaces were altered to accommodate the different uses of the commercial establishments on the first floor as well as the conversion from hotel rooms to apartment units on the second floor. The current commercial spaces possess minimal historic architectural detailing, except for sections of wood flooring and tall, approximately thirteen-foot-high ceilings, and a stairway to the second floor. Access to the second floor is through the westernmost doorway on the south elevation (photo 3). At one time, there was also access through a rear staircase along the north wall as well as a rear staircase in the 321 S. Dixie Highway storefront. It appears that this storefront was used as an office and lobby for the hotel. These staircases have since been closed off.

The entrance on the south elevation has a small foyer with a red tile floor. On the west wall there is a three-

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flight stair. The first one-and-a-half flights have a metal balustrade with a wood handrail. The balustrade has alternating straight and twisted balusters (photos 9, 10). The stair leads to a second floor corridor that initially leads north and then makes a ninety-degree turn and heads east (photo 11).

Alterations

In 1946, the second floor was converted from a hotel to apartments (photos 12-13). A number of changes were made at this time, including opening up walls and adding kitchens and bathrooms. Since that time, the north corridor has been closed off, the second floor lobby has been incorporated into an apartment, two of the apartments have been consolidated into one, and the rear staircases have been closed off. The 1946 plans, which are now over fifty years old, will be used for the impending renovation work in order to re-establish the historic (1946) apartment configuration. The entryway, transoms, and one large window on the south elevation, the transoms on the east facade, and some windows on the rear elevation have been filled in. The doors at 323 and 325 South Dixie Highway have been replaced with commercial aluminum doors. The bulkhead at 325 South Dixie Highway has been replaced with an aluminum panel and shingles have been added to the vestibule at 325 South Dixie Highway, covering the transom and display window. These changes took place from the 1950s to the 1970s. Double-hung wood sash windows were replaced with four-part aluminum awning sash in 1981. Wood Bermuda shutters were also added about this same time. Interior and exterior rehabilitation is planned for this building with intentions to remove the non-historic alterations and replace them with features to match the original.

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PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

The Ferndix Building is significant at the local level under Criteria A and C in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Architecture. The building, constructed in 1924-1925, is a good example of commercial architecture built to accommodate the growing commercial and tourist activity of West Palm Beach during the Florida Land Boom period of the 1920s. The Ferndix Building is particularly significant as a product of South Florida's Land Boom because it was built by David F. Dunkle, one of West Palm Beach's early mayors (1920-1921) and largest Boom time developers (1921-1927). Among other things, David F. Dunkle organized and was president of the Guaranty Company which built and/or financed over \$10,000,000 of real estate in downtown West Palm Beach between 1922 and 1928. The Ferndix Building is architecturally significant as a Mission-style influenced Commercial Vernacular building that was constructed by the Wilcox Brothers, prominent local builders during the 1920s. They constructed a number of important historic buildings, including the Anthony Building (312 Clematis Street) and Holy Trinity Church (620 South Olive Avenue). In addition, the Ferndix Building is one of only seven historic commercial buildings that remain along Dixie Highway in the southern portion of downtown West Palm Beach between Banyan Street and Okeechobee Boulevard. The other historic buildings along this corridor were demolished for parking lots or replaced with more modern commercial buildings.

Historic Context

At the conclusion of the Civil War, southeastern Florida was mostly a wilderness area. Permanent settlers, often referred to as pioneers, arrived in what is now Palm Beach County in the 1870s. These pioneers generally settled along the shores of Lake Worth and established farms cultivating pineapples and vegetables.

In 1892, hotel and railroad developer Henry Morrison Flagler visited the Lake Worth area while investigating a route to Miami for the expansion of his Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railroad. Impressed with the area, Flagler decided to develop a resort community on Palm Beach island. In order to separate the resort community from commercial activity he purchased property from Captain O.S. Porter and Louis Hillhouse on the west side of the lake to serve as the business district for Palm Beach. Flagler selected West Palm Beach as the local terminus for his Florida East Coast Railroad, and in 1893, just before the arrival of the first train, he filed the original plat for the Town of West Palm Beach. The streets and avenues were laid out using botanical names arranged alphabetically. The first lots were sold in 1894 and the town was formally incorporated on November 5th of that same year. The first buildings constructed were generally one-and two story frame buildings, including stores, residences, hotels and a post office. Two fires in the downtown commercial area in 1896 caused the Town Council to enact a new building code which required all buildings downtown to be constructed of either brick or stone, or veneered with brick or stone. Consequently, downtown West Palm

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Beach soon had many masonry and masonry-veneered commercial buildings.

By 1900, West Palm Beach had electricity, a sewer system, a pumping station, paved streets and telephone service. In 1903, the town was issued a city charter and in 1909 it was named the county seat of the newly created Palm Beach County. In 1917, the Palm Beach Canal was completed, providing access to inland farming and making West Palm Beach the shipping point for the county's agricultural products. The city continued to witness exceptional commercial and residential growth, and at the same time became a tourist destination. The downtown thrived with commercial development, including the city's first skyscrapers.

The Florida Land Boom began to collapse in late 1925. Dishonest Florida real estate ventures were widely publicized in northern newspapers beginning in the spring of 1925, causing many investors to cancel real estate transactions and speculative deals. In August of that year, the Florida East Coast Railroad announced an embargo on freight shipments to south Florida, making many building materials unavailable. Statewide bank deposits also began to decline in 1925, large withdrawals followed in early 1926, and many Florida Banks collapsed. Hurricanes hit southeast Florida in 1926 and 1928, causing devastating property damage and high death tolls. Real estate prices fell abruptly, and when the stock market crashed in 1929, the Florida real estate market was left almost valueless.

Historic Significance

The Ferndix Building was built in 1924-1925, a time when West Palm Beach was experiencing rapid commercial and residential growth as well as a flourishing tourist industry. When the building opened in 1925, the businesses that leased the commercial space included a laundry press, an office of the Palm Beach Everglades Farm Company and two real estate offices, all reflecting the surrounding commercial and residential development. The second floor housed the Ferndix Hotel, an establishment catering to the tourist industry along Dixie Highway. Though the uses of the commercial space changed over time, they continued to reflect the development trends of downtown West Palm Beach, and especially those along Dixie Highway.

The creation of Dixie Highway can largely be credited to developer Carl Fisher, perhaps the single greatest promoter of automobile travel in the early twentieth century. Fisher launched campaigns that encouraged auto travelers to 'See America First' and strengthened the growing fascination with the automobile by bisecting the country twice with continuous, all-weather roadways.¹ His first major roadway was the Lincoln Highway connecting the East and West coasts. His second was the Dixie Highway, the Midwest's-East Coast's first north-south highway connecting Michigan to Miami. It was completed at the onset of the Florida real estate

¹ Hap Hatton, Tropical Splendor: An Architectural History of South Florida (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 175.

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boom and brought Northerners streaming to the state. Those directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry, such as hoteliers and restaurateurs, chose to locate on Dixie Highway to take advantage of the tourist traffic. During many of the early years, the commercial establishments in the Ferndix Building catered to both downtown businessmen and tourists traveling the Dixie Highway. Some of these included a restaurant, hotel, Western Union office, and several real estate offices.

The Ferndix Building's association with the development of commercial real estate in West Palm Beach during the Florida Land Boom period is particularly important due to its original owner, David F. Dunkle, one of the city's most important early developers. David Forest Dunkle was born in Union County, Pennsylvania, in 1888. He attended college at Bucknell University and later attended Stetson University in DeLand, Florida, where he earned a law degree in 1914. Following graduation from Stetson University, he moved to West Palm Beach and opened a law office with W.I. Metcalf.² During the war he served overseas, and shortly after returning, he married Frederika Brelsford, the daughter of Col. E.M. Brelsford, a Palm Beach County pioneer and Palm Beach's first Postmaster.³

In 1919, Dunkle was elected to the West Palm Beach City Commission, and from 1920-1921 he served as mayor of the city. Important work during his administration included the acceptance of the city manager plan of government, a revamped charter for the city, extended city limits, and municipal park projects.⁴ It was while mayor that he conceived the idea of a finance company to aid in the growth of West Palm Beach. The Guaranty Company was the result. According to Dunkle, "in 1920 there were no apartments here and no money to finance buildings so I interested thirty prominent businessmen to put up \$5000 each, organizing the Palm Beach Guaranty Company. J.C. Stowers, then owner of the Palms Hotel and an old resident, was the President, I, the active Vice President and manager, and Willard Bragg the Secretary."⁵ The Lake Court Apartments, the first large modern building in the city, was their first venture. At the same time they opened a bank and mortgage office, making connections with insurance companies and selling to individuals. In 1921, the same group organized the American National Bank and erected the Classical- and Egyptian-Revival style building at 114 S. Olive Avenue. In 1922, the Guaranty Company erected the Guaranty Building at 120 S. Olive Avenue, which stands today as one of the best examples of early high-rise commercial architecture in West Palm Beach.

² Biographical information in the "David F. Dunkle" file at the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, Florida.

³ According to Donald W. Curl in Palm Beach County, An Illustrated History, p. 23, Edmund Munger Brelsford and his brother John H. Brelsford came to Palm Beach in 1881 from Xenia, Ohio. They purchased land from Frank Dimick and bought a schooner which they used to bring settlers to the community and supplies for their store which they established in 1884. In 1887, President Cleveland appointed E.M. Brelsford Postmaster of Palm City. Later that year the name changed to Palm Beach because another Palm City already existed in Florida. The Brelsforbs built a white, columned house just south of White Hall in 1901.

⁴ "Local Men of Affairs, Palm Beach Times, 16 June 1925.

⁵ Handwritten notes by Dunkle in "David F. Dunkle" file, Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

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Dunkle and his partners hired the architectural firm of Harvey & Clarke and Brown & Wilcox Construction Company to design and construct both of these buildings. Harvey & Clarke became one of West Palm Beach's most prominent architectural firms during the 1920s. For reasons unknown, Brown & Wilcox split up ca. 1923, and Clarence Wilcox formed Wilcox Brothers Construction Company with his brother Ernest. Wilcox Brothers gained local prominence and during the Boom years had a thriving business. Clarence Wilcox was also a director and shareholder in the Guaranty Company.⁶

J.C. Stowers died in 1922 and from then on D.F. Dunkle served as president of the Guaranty Company. According to Dunkle, the Guaranty Company had "hearty support" from many prominent businessmen as directors and shareholders, including B.D. Cole, Bert Winters, Alfred Wagg, W.H. DaCarmara, George Hatch, Clarence Wilcox, J.W. Burguires, Jack Wilson, J.J. Reese, Harvey Grier, J.B. MacDonald, Lynn Nichols, O.H. Briedenbach, Ed Gross, L.A. Hogarth, C.A. Tousley and Claire Groover. From 1921-1928, the company financed apartments, houses, hotels, and commercial buildings totaling over \$10,000,000.

Dunkle was also involved in a number of residential development and investment companies. In 1921, Dunkle formed the Pinewood Development Company in partnership with G.W. Bingham and Orrin Randolph. The three owned 400 acres in what is now Northwood, with all lots selling out by 1925.⁷ They, along with several construction companies and architects John Volk and William Manly King, were largely responsible for the development and look of Northwood. Also in 1921, Dunkle built a home at the corner of 30th (then 28th) and Spruce streets in Northwood. He and his wife Frederika had recently had their first child, Betty, in 1920. His family continued to grow with the addition of two sons, David and John, and in 1927 he put an addition on the house.⁸ Today it is a restored bed & breakfast known as the Hibiscus House. In 1923, the Pinewood Development Company subdivided Northwood Terminals for warehousing and put it on the market with the entire plat selling out in five months. The company then developed Northwood Hills. In early 1926, the company reformed as the Northwood Development Company, with D.F. Dunkle as president. During that year the company developed Northshore Terrace and platted Northmore and Broadmoor. Dunkle also developed Brelsford Park, named for his wife's family, in the early 1920s with Alfred Wagg.

As could be expected, D.F. Dunkle did not fare well when the Land Boom ended. With most of his money

⁶ Handwritten notes by Dunkle; while still Brown & Wilcox, Wilcox constructed for Dunkle the Guaranty Building, the Lake Court Apartments (demolished), and the American National Bank Building. As Wilcox Brothers, Wilcox constructed for Dunkle, in addition to the Ferndix Building, 405 Clematis Street (demolished).

⁷ West Palm Beach Survey: Second Year Final Report, Elizabeth L. Miller, Historic Preservation Planner, City of West Palm Beach, Florida, 1990, p. 12.

⁸ "Dunkle Puts Addition on House in Northwood," Palm Beach Times, 15 October 1927; John B. Dunkle served as Palm Beach County Clerk of Circuit Court for thirty-three years (1958-1991).

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invested in real estate, D.F. Dunkle was severely impacted when the bottom fell out of the Florida real estate market in the late 1920s. In addition to losing his house and much of his money, D.F. Dunkle was arrested and charged with embezzlement of Guaranty Company funds. He was convicted in 1928, but the conviction was later overturned. The Guaranty Company declared bankruptcy in 1929. Despite all of his troubles after the Land Boom crash, when reflecting back on his development efforts in West Palm Beach, D.F. Dunkle remained positive and stated, "Of course it came to an end with the collapse of the boom and the hurricane, but the buildings are still here and help to make our city."⁹ His word appear to speak the truth, for without entrepreneurs like Dunkle who had the initiative to set up financial institutions and development companies to finance construction throughout the city, West Palm Beach today would lack much of its notable historic architecture.

Dunkle served as both owner and lessor of the Ferndix Building. Documents indicate that he signed as lessor of the building from 1925 to 1928.¹⁰ However, when the local real estate market "busted" and his mortgage companies defaulted in 1928-1929, Dunkle was unable to pay taxes or payments on numerous properties. A number of these properties were put up by the city and county for tax sales, including the Ferndix Building. F.B. Pablicke and Eola Improvement Company bought the Ferndix Building at tax sales in 1929, but the property remained under legal dispute for several years. It was eventually purchased by the Eola Improvement Company for \$14,000 in 1935.¹¹ In 1930, the building was vacant except for the Ferndix Hotel on the second floor and the Ferndix Pharmacy in the corner storefront. In 1931, the name of the hotel changed from the Ferndix Hotel to the Central Hotel, and was listed as 401 Fern Street and 321 Poinsettia Avenue (Dixie Highway). The storefront at 321 Poinsettia was likely used as the hotel office and lobby, being a more prominent location than 401 Fern Street. In 1933, the name of the hotel changed from the Central Hotel to the Southland Hotel, which it remained for the next thirteen years. During this time the Ferndix Building had a stable occupancy rate, housing various commercial establishments including a photography studio, an electrical contractor, the Ferndix Pharmacy and a clothes cleaners. These businesses would have catered to both the surrounding commercial and residential neighbors, and to the hotel guests.

In 1946, owner of the Ferndix Building, Fred Myers, hired architect Dillard Duff to redesign the second floor

⁹ Handwritten notes by Dunkle in "David F. Dunkle" file, Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

¹⁰ Abstract of Title to South 75 feet of Lot 10, in Block 19, Map of the Town of West Palm Beach (#4242), Gulf Stream Title Company, West Palm Beach, Florida, 1935. This abstract includes two lease agreements from Dunkle; a one-year lease to Western Union Telegraph Company in 1925 through the Guaranty Company, and a two-year lease to Irene Rish in 1928 for the hotel through Mortgage Investment Company.

¹¹ Abstract of Title to South 75 feet of Lot 10, in Block 19, Map of the Town of West Palm Beach (#4242), Gulf Stream Title Company, West Palm Beach, Florida, 1935.

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rooms and lobby for apartment use.¹² By 1947, the hotel had been converted to the Ferndix Apartments with Fred Myers as manager. Driven by military dollars during World War II and an influx of veterans moving south, West Palm Beach became the fourth fastest growing place in the country and housing was in high demand. This growth and demand was likely the impetus for the conversion of the hotel into apartments. During this same period, the pharmacy in the corner storefront was converted to Charlie's Corner, a confectioner/restaurant. It continued as Charlie's Corner for ten years and today remains a restaurant (photo 15). The Ferndix Apartments also remain in operation.

The Ferndix Building is an enduring representation of the tremendous building boom which occurred in West Palm Beach during the 1920s. It is locally significant for its association with the Land Boom and David F. Dunkle, former West Palm Beach mayor and president of the Guaranty Company. The second floor conversion from a hotel to apartments also reflects the tremendous population growth and ensuing housing demand following World War II.

Architectural Context

The Florida Land Boom of the 1920s was a period of unprecedented population growth, economic expansion and building construction. In 1924-1925, when the Ferndix Building was constructed, West Palm Beach was in the midst of this Boom and experiencing high demand for commercial and residential space. In accordance with stricter building codes enacted after devastating downtown fires in 1896, commercial buildings were mostly constructed of hollow clay tile, concrete block and brick covered with either stucco or brick veneer.

Building design was strongly influenced by Mission and Spanish Colonial architecture as architects and builders attempted to capitalize on Florida's Spanish heritage. The Mission Style was developed in California in the 1890s to emulate the Franciscan missions of the Spanish Colonial Period. This style incorporates stuccoed walls, tiled roofs, round arches, Spanish details, and open, spreading plans. Buildings are simple in form with little sculptural ornamentation. curvilinear parapets, its most distinctive feature, are pronounced. The Spanish Colonial Revival Style, popularized by the Panama-California Exposition in 1915, is more elaborate than the Mission Style. distinguishing features include clay tile roofs, a stucco finish, arched windows and doors, arched walkways or loggias, and round or square towers. casements and fanlight windows are common, along with the more common double hung sash. Ornamental ironwork is often used for window grilles and balconettes. Exterior colors are most often white, yellow-brown, and rose. In Florida, these influences came together in what is called the Mediterranean Revival Style. Many commercial buildings constructed in vernacular forms were embellished with Mediterranean Revival details creating eclectic designs.

¹² West Palm Beach Building Permit, Roll #2541, July 10, 1946.

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Architectural Significance

The Ferndix Building was built by the Wilcox Brothers, a prominent local construction firm, and is architecturally significant on the local level as a good example of Commercial Vernacular architecture with distinctive Mediterranean Revival Style detailing. With the real estate boom in full swing by 1924, more funds were available to provide simple vernacular buildings with architectural embellishments. In West Palm Beach, most of these embellishments were in the Mediterranean Revival Style so popular in South Florida during the Land Boom era. The Ferndix Building's Mission-influenced parapet, iron balcony and roped molding reflect this increased use of Spanish-style embellishments on vernacular buildings throughout the city. The building's design demonstrates the city's shift from the simple and functional vernacular architecture to Spanish-influenced architecture. In addition, as one of only seven remaining historic commercial buildings along Dixie Highway in West Palm Beach's downtown district, the Ferndix Building is particularly important as part of the city's architectural heritage.

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Palm Beach Post. 29 November 1925. Photograph of D.F. and Frederika Dunkle's 5 year-old child Betty.

"Records Fall as Building Soars Near \$500,000," Palm Beach Post, 28 September 1924. Front Page. This article notes the building permit for the Ferndix Building.

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FERNDIX BUILDING
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Boundary Description:

S 75 Ft of Lot 10 Block 19 Town of West Palm Beach: Commencing at the southeast corner of Lot 10 in Block 19 of the City of West Palm Beach, Florida, according to the plat thereof on file in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court in and for Palm Beach County, Florida, and run thence north 75 feet along South Dixie Highway to the south line of said lot; run thence west 90 feet on a line parallel with the line of said lot; run thence south parallel with South Dixie Highway to the south line of said lot; run thence east a distance of 90 feet to the point of beginning together with the buildings and appurtenances thereon situated or hereafter to be constructed.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Ferndix Building.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph Log

1. Ferndix Building, 401 Fern Street
2. West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida
3. Janet G. Murphy, Photographer
4. July 1998
5. 518 Banyan Boulevard, West Palm Beach, Florida
6. East facade, looking west
7. Photo 1 of 16

Items 1-5 are the same for the remaining photographs unless otherwise noted.

6. North elevation and east facade, looking southwest
7. Photo 2 of 16
6. South elevation, looking north
7. Photo 3 of 16
6. West (rear) elevation, looking east
7. Photo 4 of 16
6. Detail of shaped parapet and child portrait medallion
7. Photo 5 of 16
6. East facade, entrance vestibule, looking west
7. Photo 6 of 16
6. Detail, roped molding
7. Photo 7 of 16
6. Rear storage building, looking north (noncontributing building)
7. Photo 8 of 16
6. Interior, stairhall, looking southwest
7. Photo 9 of 16

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PHOTOGRAPHS

- 6. Interior, stairhall, looking south
- 7. Photo 10 of 16

- 6. Interior, second floor hall, looking east
- 7. Photo 11 of 16

- 6. Interior, second floor apartment, looking southwest, French doors
- 7. Photo 12 of 16

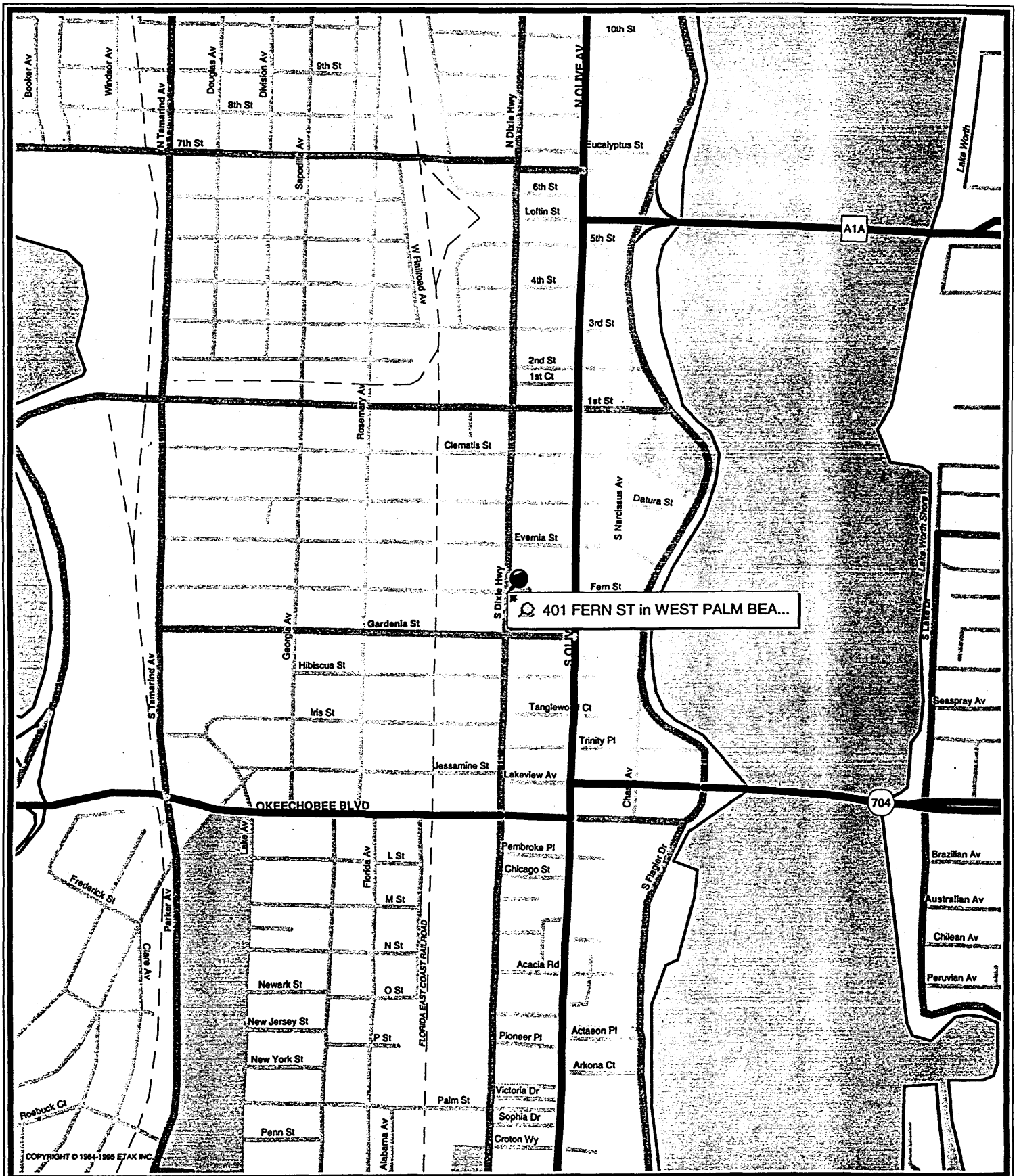
- 6. Interior, second floor apartment, looking northeast
- 7. Photo 13 of 16

- 6. Interior, second floor hall, chandelier
- 7. Photo 14 of 16

- 6. Interior, first floor restaurant, looking west
- 7. Photo 15 of 16

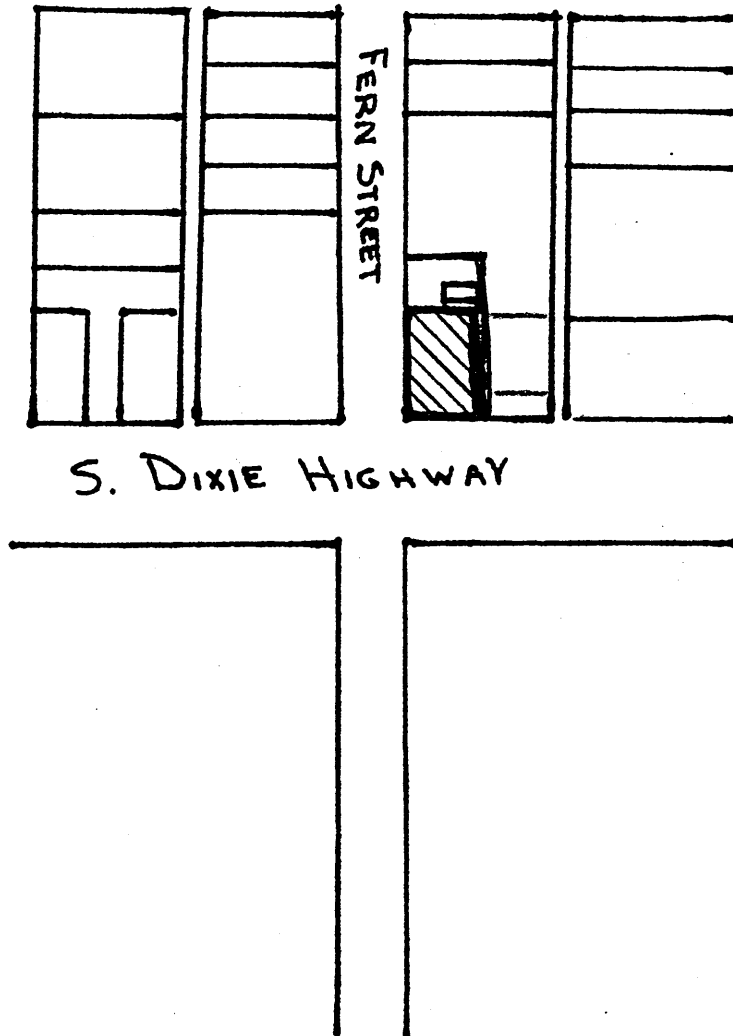
- 6. Streetscape, looking northeast from Fern Street & South Dixie Highway
- 7. Photo 16 of 16

Current Map



FERNDIX BUILDING

SITE PLAN



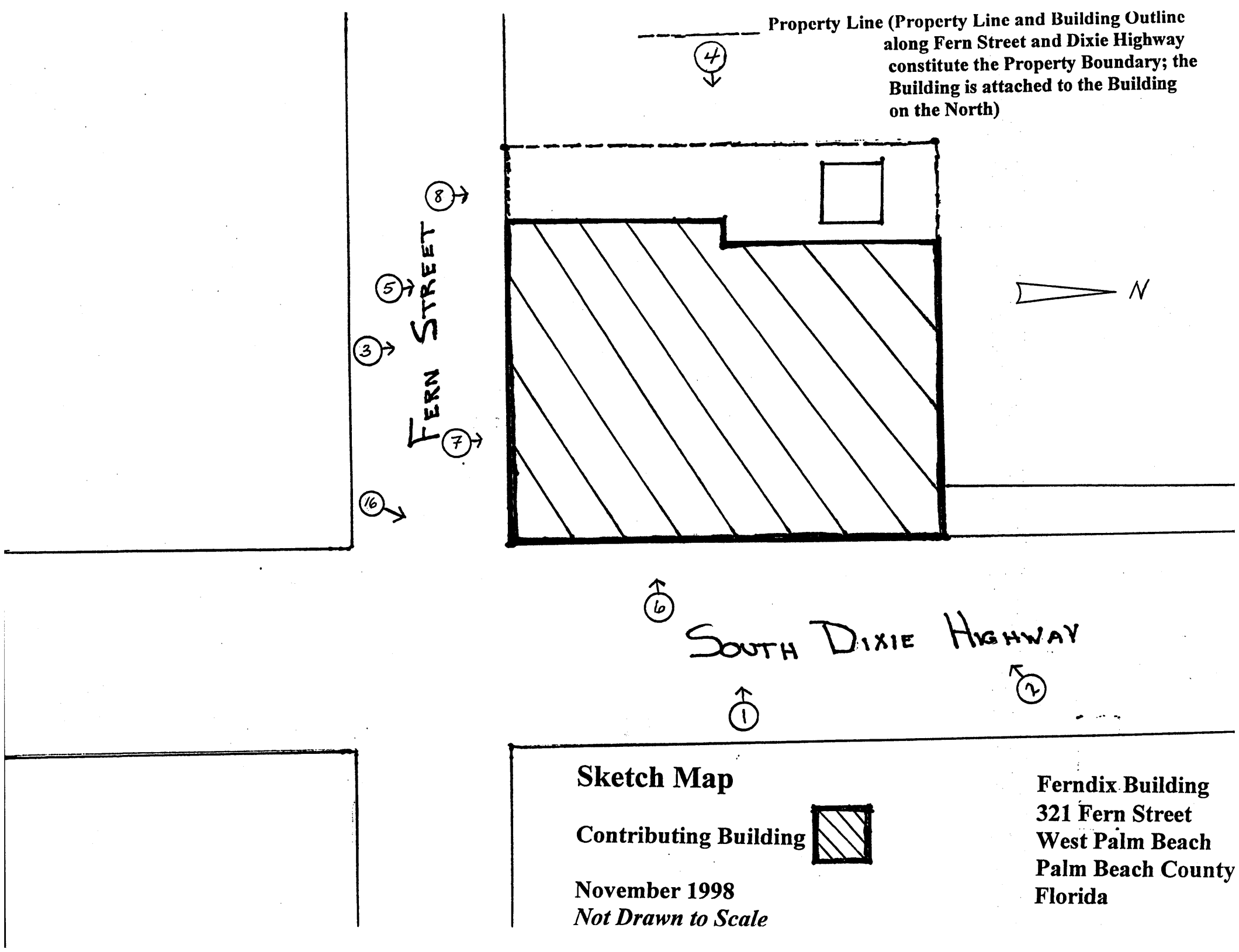
Property Line

Contributing Building

November 1998

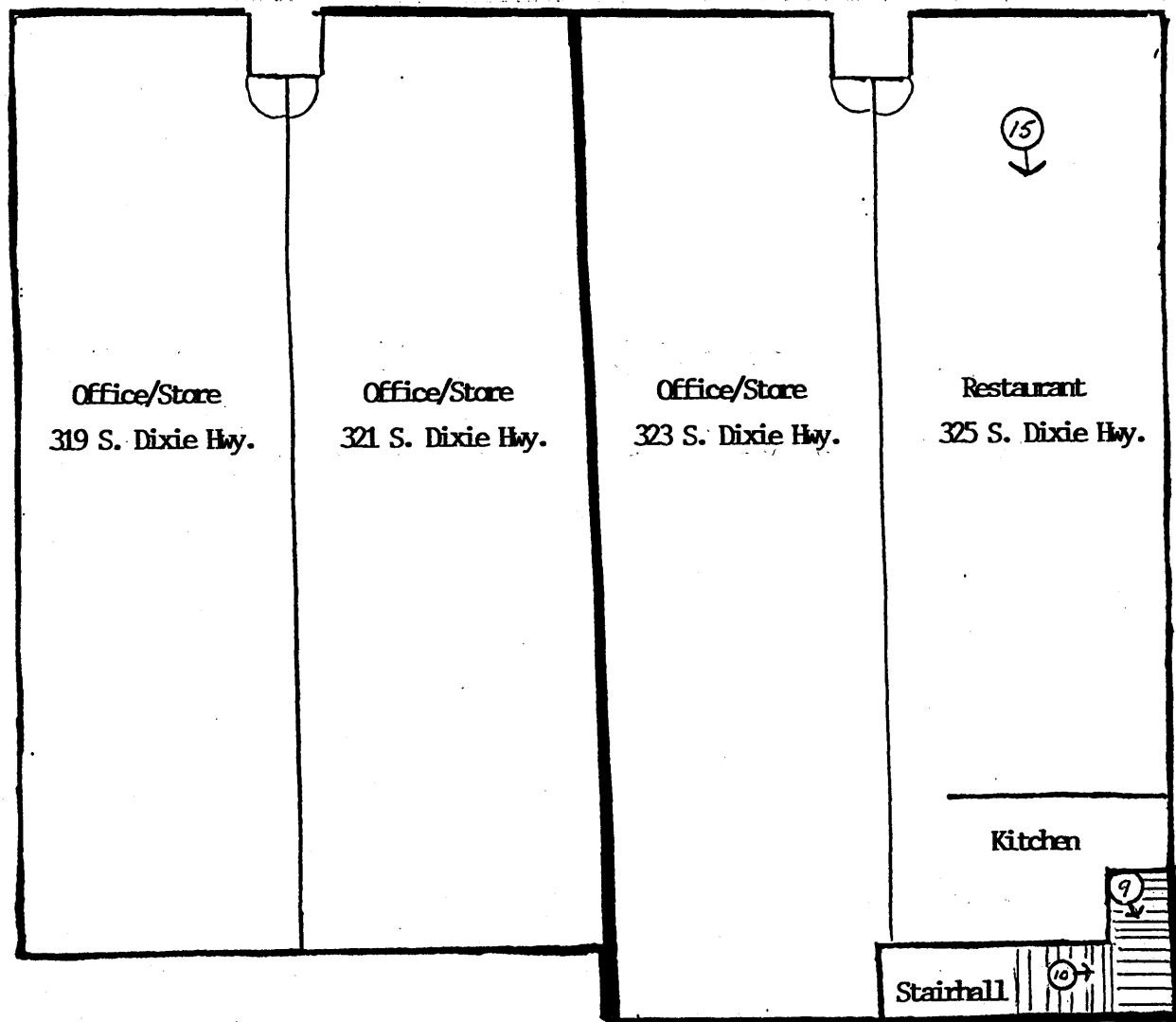
Not Drawn to Scale

321 S. Dixie Highway
West Palm Beach
Palm Beach County
Florida



Ferndix Building

First Floor - Floor Plan



August 1998

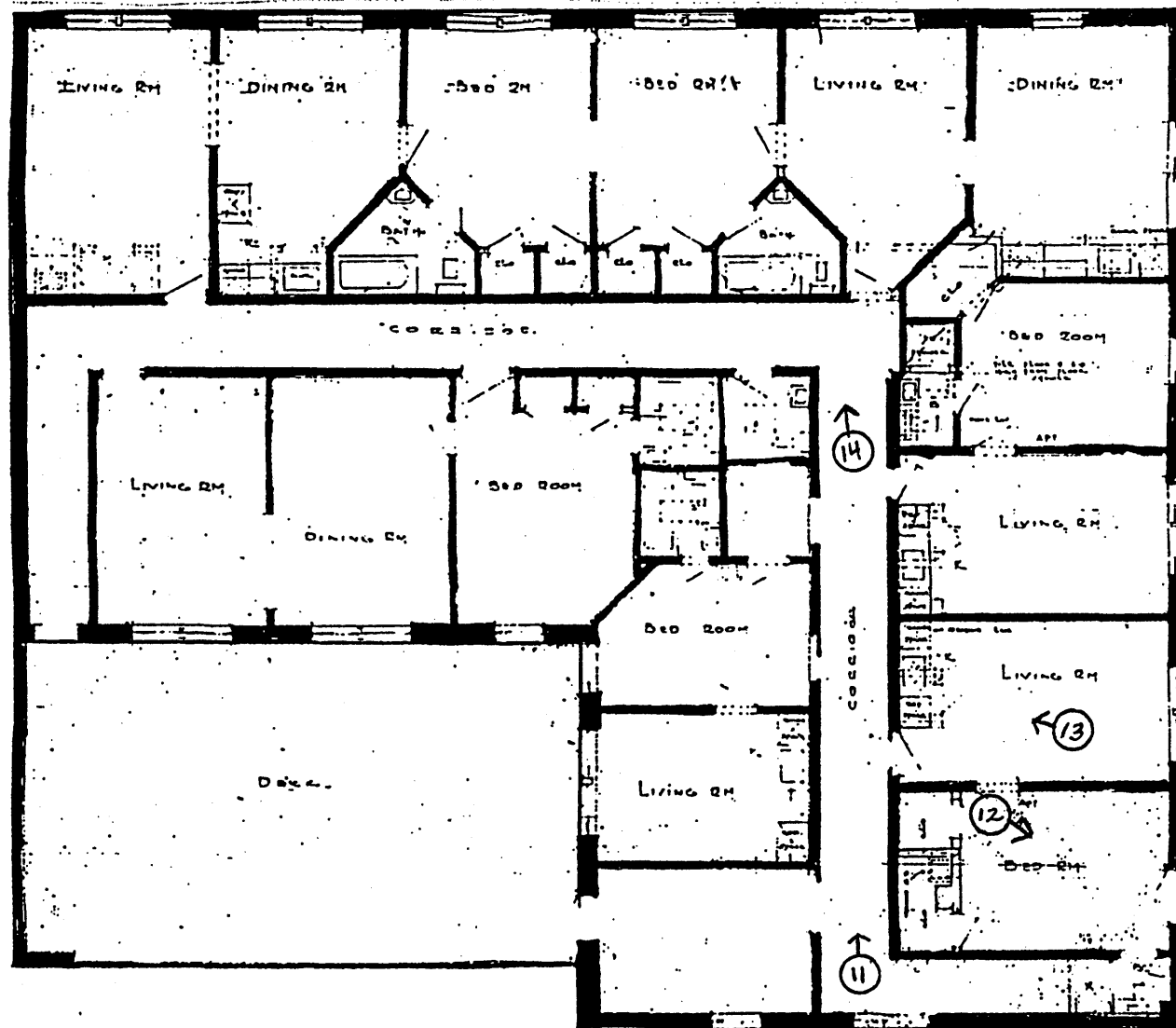
Not Drawn to Scale

321 South Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida



Ferndix Building

Second Floor - Floor Plan



August 1998

Not Drawn to Scale

321 South Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida

