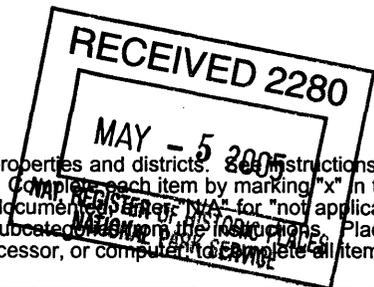


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



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 Coco Plum Woman's Club

other names/site number Coco Plum Thimble Club; Woman's Club of Larkins/ DA 00189

2. Location

street & number 1375 Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street) N/A not for publication

city or town Coral Gables N/A vicinity

state Florida code FL county Miami-Dade code 025 zip code 33143

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.)
Barbara C. Mattick, DSHPO for Survey & Registration 5/3/05
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Florida Department of State, Bureau of Historic Preservation
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 H. Beall Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 6/17/05

Coco Plum Woman's Club
Name of Property

Miami-Dade, Florida
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 | 0 | buildings |
| 0 | 0 | sites |
| 0 | 0 | structures |
| 0 | 0 | objects |
| 1 | 0 | total |

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

CLUBHOUSES OF FLORIDA'S WOMAN'S CLUBS

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

- SOCIAL/Clubhouse
- EDUCATION/Kindergarten
- COMMERCE/TRADE/Thrift Shop
- DEFENSE/Casualty Station
- EDUCATION/Library
-
-
-

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

- SOCIAL/Clubhouse
-
-
-
-
-
-

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

- LATE 19th & 20th CENTURY REVIVALS/
- Mediterranean Revival/Spanish Colonial
-

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Concrete
- walls Stucco
- roof Barrel Tile
- other
-

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.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
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.
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)

Architecture

Social History

Period of Significance

1926-1955

Significant Dates

1926

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Howard and Early

Knight Construction Company

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of Repository

#

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 1

**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Coco Plum Woman's Club is a one and two story masonry building that reflects the hallmarks of the Mediterranean Revival style adopted as the theme for the City of Coral Gables from its inception in 1921. The plan shape is rectangular, with a central open-air courtyard that can be accessed thorough any of the building's wings. Although there were two alterations made in 1948 and 1954, to enclose two previously open spaces in the building, the sensitivity of the architects in designing that space resulted in no detrimental effect to the building's overall design. The building was constructed of concrete block and finished in stucco.

Originally within the boundaries of the "Town of Larkins," the building is located in the Riviera Section of Coral Gables, close to its westernmost boundary at SW 57th Avenue (Red Road). While the building possesses a Sunset Drive address, the architects designed the building so that its main elevation faced westward. While originally there was no through street on this side, later the Coral Gables Corporation added the north-south through street called Nervia. The four lots that encompass the property are bounded by Sunset Drive on the south, Nervia Street on the west, San Ignacio Avenue on the north, and a grassy lawn area on the east.

The building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under "Clubhouses of Florida's Woman's Clubs," Multiple Property Cover under Property Type F.1 "Spanish Colonial" Architectural Style.

SETTING

Coco Plum Woman's Club is located within the boundaries of the City of Coral Gables, at its westernmost border. A few blocks further west is the City of South Miami. The City of Coral Gables was incorporated in 1925 and is a city of some 45,000 residents. The clubhouse occupies an area of less than one acre that is bounded on the North by San Ignacio Avenue; on the South by Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street); on the east by a lawn area (immediately east of the lawn is the surface parking lot for Riviera Presbyterian Church); and on the west by Nervia Street.

The land on which the first clubhouse was built was originally a part of the pioneer Town of Larkins. Only later, after its purchase by the Coral Gables Corporation in 1925, did it become located in the City of Coral Gables. The Town of Larkins was incorporated as the City of South Miami in 1926 after the clubhouse was constructed. Because of the club's proximity to the City of South Miami, it is often erroneously thought to be in South Miami, rather than in Coral Gables.

The area immediately to the west of the Clubhouse is currently zoned for special use (a school) and for commercial uses. The area to the north and south of the clubhouse is comprised of single-family residences.

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Section number 7 2

**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

The area immediately east of the clubhouse is zoned "Special Use" and is occupied by the Riviera Presbyterian Church and its surface parking lot.

Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street) is a busy thoroughfare that is a principal connector between the City of Coral Gables and South Miami. Originally no more than a dirt path, the road was later asphalted and then widened to accommodate the traffic along this artery.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

West (Main) Elevation of Nervia Street

Although the building possesses a Sunset Drive address, it was designed to face to the west onto what was originally vacant land. The grand portal to the building is placed at the north end of this elevation in a two story, gable roofed section. The double-leafed door was contained within a round arch that was framed with a stucco band that simulates quoins (Photo #1). Above the door is a series of three rectangular windows (originally containing casement windows) that were framed with stucco banding, and separated by engaged pilasters. Today, that space is occupied by the caretaker. Immediately beyond the entrance doors is the foyer, which then leads directly into the auditorium space beyond.

The bay immediately south of the entrance features a two and one-half story tower that extends out beyond the plane created by the entrance bay, further exaggerating the asymmetry of the elevation. The tower, containing a staircase, is fenestrated with lancet windows, one of which features an ogee arch. The tower terminates in a series of round arches that spring from squat columns conveying a decidedly Romanesque inspiration (Photo #2). The tower terminates in a shallow pyramidal roof, and the eaves are ornamented with cast concrete brackets.

Originally the next bay south of the tower consisted of a one-story flat roofed section with a doorway that led to an open loggia. That loggia terminated in a one story, pyramidal roofed square pavilion, with frontage on both Nervia Street and Sunset Drive (Photo #3). In 1948, the loggia was filled in to create a Board Room/lounge space. The architect for this addition was Curtis Haley.¹ That enclosed section, roughly in the center of this west elevation contains a pair of doors flanked by rectangular awning windows. The roof is a steeply sloped gable covered with a clay barrel tile.

¹ Building Permit #8277 dated July 24, 1948. City of Coral Gables Building and Zoning Department.

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Section number 7 3

**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

South (Side) Elevation on Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street)

This side (perceived by many as the main elevation because of the building's Sunset Drive address,) is anchored by two, pyramidal roofed pavilions (Photo #4). Recessed between the pavilions is a long gabled roof linear corridor, one room deep, that originally contained the club room at the west end and the library on the east end. A series of windows and doorways that are evenly spaced across the façade pierce the corridor (Photo #5). Originally each of these openings contained French doors. In a later alteration, most of the doorways were filled in to become windows. The height and width of the original apertures has not changed. Although the original casement windows have been replaced with awning types, there have been no other changes to this elevation.

The pavilions are identical to one another, except for the detail around the doorways and the relief ornament above. The pavilion at the easternmost side contains a round arched, double-leafed door that is set within a simulated quoined surround that features a label mold around it. A square panel in relief at the center of the doorway at the south end depicts a coat of arms (escutcheon). In each of the quadrants there is a symbol: a pen, a cross, a torch and a book. The word "Library" is inscribed across the banner below the shield (Photo #6). The portal at the westernmost end features a compound ogee arch set within a projecting label mold. The rectangular relief panel above the center of the doorway depicts a woman flanked by children who are stepping out of an arch supported by columns (Photo #4). A decorative chimney cap pierces the roofline just east of center, venting the two back-to-back fireplaces below. The area immediately in front of the windows and doors features an uncovered, paved area. A railing with vertical pickets interspersed with rectangular bollards further defines this space.

East Elevation

This side fronts onto an unpaved, grassy lawn area that has been planted with flowering plants and shrubs. The east side continues to reflect the intricate detail that is featured on all other elevations of the building. The easternmost pavilion of the south side becomes the anchoring unit for this elevation (Photo #7). Here, the pavilion is fenestrated with a pair of narrow windows separated by an engaged pilaster and outlined with a quoined surround. These windows also possess an ogee arch, incised into the stucco. An escutcheon of cast concrete decorates the wall above the windows.

Originally, the link between the two story gable-roofed section of the building at the north end of this elevation and the pavilion at the southern end was provided by a single wall that acted as a screen. The wall was pierced by three doorway openings that contained decorative wrought iron. The courtyard was directly behind this screen wall. In 1954, the Woman's Club embarked on some improvements to the building which included the alteration of this section. This area, between the pavilion on the south and the two story section on the north, was converted to an enclosed space to house part of the library collections (Photo #8). This former linkage

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

element now has a volume to it. The alteration, executed by architect Cyrus T. Tripp, was accomplished with great attention to detail, as evidenced by the exposed rafter tails just below the eaves of the roof.²

This side terminates on the north with a two-story rectangular block. Windows are arranged symmetrically across the façade, with an entrance door in the center of the ground story flanked by rectangular windows. The door is approached by a series of risers. This door also features the incised stucco ogee motif centered above the door, and that is surmounted by another cast escutcheon. On the interior, this section contains a quadripartite groined vault.

North Elevation on San Ignacio Street

This elevation (north) is beautifully articulated as if it were intended as a principal focus. The westernmost side contains the auditorium space, and is a two story, gable roofed volume (Photo #9). An outdoor staircase provides egress from this side. This dramatic, masonry staircase steps down from the building, and then makes a right angle with a landing, and proceeds downward. The end wall for the risers is exposed, revealing a stair step pattern as it descends (Photo #10). The original wrought iron railing of the staircase is still in place. The easternmost end of the north elevation terminates in a one-story rectangular structure that is reminiscent of an apse to a church, in its relationship to the two story block of the building. Instead of windows, decorative window grilles of ornamental block ventilate the structure. The north wall of this apse-like structure contains a niche and projecting shelf, flanked by the same decorative grilles.

The double-volume auditorium is the linking element between the east and west ends of this elevation. A series of three oversize rectangular apertures pierce the first floor, and the mezzanine level is pierced by ocular apertures that contain metal grilles. The introduction of the circle on this side provides contrast to the rectilinear motifs employed elsewhere, and is repeated on the interior of the auditorium.

Courtyard

The internal courtyard represents the quintessential element of Mediterranean Revival architecture (Photo #11). Accessed from all sides, the interior court held a vital role in the clubhouse space, and there was as much detail applied to the design at this location as in all other exterior elevations. Paired columns, interspersed at regular intervals, provide the support for the shed roof that forms the loggia (Photo #12). The capitals of these columns are at first glance rather clumsily carved. Upon closer investigation, the figures are clearly inspired by the figural type's characteristic of the Middle Ages, particularly the 12th and 13th centuries (Photo #13). The choice for the carving continues the Romanesque (the style which immediately preceded the Gothic in Europe)

² Building Permit #12985B dated December 23, 1954. City of Coral Gables Building and Zoning Department.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
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imagery that was first seen in the squat columns and whimsical capitals of the tower on the west (Nervia) side of the building.

Interior Details

The Coco Plum Woman's Club is richly detailed on the interior. The original drawings for the building by architects Howard and Early shows an elaborate schedule of details with materials that include pecky cypress, yellow pine and plaster ornament. Most of the original finishes and detailing remains.

The Nervia Street (west) side of the building contains the formal entrance. Here a foyer provides a separation from the auditorium. The flooring of the foyer is a glazed Cuban tile, while the auditorium features a glazed ceramic tile that is pastel colored with a stylized floral motif. The grand auditorium space is illuminated by windows on both the north and south sides. The stage, raised above the floor is at the east end of the auditorium (Photo #14), while the balcony is on the west end. This double volume space terminates with open truss work that has decorative gold stenciling applied to the beams. Blind, ocular windows punctuate the space on both the north and south sides of the auditorium.

A catering kitchen is located just south of the foyer, followed by the Board meeting room in the approximate center of the Nervia Street elevation. A door then leads to the wing that is perpendicular to the Nervia wing, fronting onto Sunset Drive. On the west end this wing contains the original club room space that was later used for the kindergarten. The east end of this Sunset Drive portion of the building contains the original library space. Separating the two spaces are two fireplaces. The walls of the library section are lined with built in book shelves. The mantle of the fireplace that faces west contains the inscribed words: "Dedicated to the Pioneer Women of Florida" (Photo #15).

The wing that faces east towards the grassy area originally was also used for library space. Today it houses additional meeting space and the offices for the Woman's Club. This wing terminates on the north side with a double volume quadripartite vault. The flooring consists of either Cuban ceramic tile or terrazzo.

The northernmost wing, fronting onto San Ignacio Avenue, is presently used for storage. Apart from the tile floors, there is no other decorative detailing.

ALTERATIONS

Many of the original wood casement windows were replaced with an aluminum awning type. The dimensions of the original apertures have not changed. As previously described there were two alterations accomplished during the life of the club that resulted in creating additional space for the club's activities. The alteration accomplished in 1948 enclosed a previously open loggia on the Nervia (west) side of the building.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

In 1954, the Woman's Club employed architect Cyrus Tripp to fill in the area between the pavilion of the south side of the east elevation and the two-story section located on the north. What had originally been designed as a screen wall with apertures that looked onto the courtyard was enclosed to become a part of the library space housing the collections. The alteration was accomplished with great attention to detail, as illustrated by the exposed rafter tails immediately below the eaves of the roof.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Coco Plum Woman's Club, located at 1375 Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street) in Coral Gables, is significant at the local level under Criteria 'A' and 'C' in the areas of Social History and Architecture. The membership of the Coco Plum Woman's Club has witnessed the explosive growth of this burgeoning South Florida area, from its beginnings as little more than a frontier outpost, to its transformation as a principal destination during the 1920s Real Estate Boom. They have steadfastly maintained their important role in the community through two World Wars, and remained a force well into the 1950s, the established termination for the period of significance. The present Coco Plum Clubhouse was constructed in 1926, the peak year of the Boom, with the proceeds from the sale of a portion of their property to visionary developer George E. Merrick, founder of the City of Coral Gables. The Coco Plum Woman's Club is a fine example of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture that established the theme for Coral Gables. This prominent building has been a landmark in the community since its construction some seventy-eight years ago. Over the years, the membership of the Coco Plum Woman's Club has made substantial contributions to the community, reflecting their reverence for education, patriotism, the environment and the family.

The building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under "Clubhouses of Florida's Woman's Clubs," Multiple Property Cover under Section E. II "Florida's Land Boom 1921-1926."

The Coco Plum Thimble Club

There were no automobiles; the only mode of travel was mule drawn wagons or bicycles. The roads were very narrow, just wide enough for a wagon track, and very rough. The men were in love with Florida, with this wonderful climate—fishing, hunting and trapping was sport. But the homesick wives had given up comfortable homes, and left their children and friends behind in Northern cities.

They were homesick and lonesome. There were long days when the men were gone all day. They were lonely. There were three or four women who lived not too far away to visit occasionally. They would get together once a week and console one another, sew and crochet and repeat the news back home.

Mrs. E.M. Jordan, c. 1915, as quoted by Grace D. Bower and Florence Walcott, 1954 (Unpublished Manuscript, Collection Coco Plum Woman's Club)

The vast distances between homesteads, lack of passable roadways, and the absence of transportation is reflected in the sentiments of Mrs. Jordan who became the first president of the Coco Plum Thimble Club, and whose recollections were recorded in a manuscript prepared by Mrs. Rita Davant in 1963. As the pioneering

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

families of South Dade County began to set up homesteads, the lack of social interactions must have seemed unbearable at times, particularly to the ladies who had left more established cities where interaction was routine. The salvation for many of these women came from their participation in women's clubs, offering an anecdote to their isolation. The Florida Federation of Women's Clubs was an offshoot of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC.) The GFWC was founded in 1891 by Jennie Croly in New York City¹. The GFWC sought to unite a variety of women's organizations throughout the county in a common pursuit of goals that included child welfare, conservation, equitable taxation, education, beautification, health and the environment. The Florida Federation of Women's Clubs was organized in Green Cove Springs, Florida, on February 21, 1895, with five clubs participating².

The Coco Plum Woman's Club began with a small nucleus of women, many the wives of powerful early pioneers, who sought the company of other women and an outlet to express their own creative talents. The Coco Plum community during the 1890s was known as Larkin, named for postmaster W.A. Larkin who arrived in 1897. The post office (since demolished) was located in the vicinity of what is now called Cartagena Plaza, at the intersection of Sunset Drive (SW 72nd Street) and Old Cutler Road in Coral Gables.

The growth of the area was assured when in 1904, Henry Flagler extended the Florida East Coast Railway to Homestead, with the Town of Larkin a stop along the way. On Valentine's Day, February 14, 1912, a group of six women met at the home of Mrs. J.A. Van Horn, and organized themselves as the "Coco Plum Thimble Club." When the word got out, the second meeting was attended by sixteen women.

You would wonder where these women came from. The husbands were so pleased to have their wives contented, they gladly drove around through the pines and picked up little groups of women at different corners and brought them to the meetings.

Mrs. E.M. Jordan, the first president of the Coco Plum Thimble Club c. 1915, as quoted by Grace D. Bower and Florence Walcott, 1954 (Unpublished Manuscript, Collection Coco Plum Woman's Club)

The club women soon realized that they were outgrowing the confines of the private homes where they were meeting. In 1913, Mrs. Mary B. Dorn, then president of the club began to investigate possible locations for a permanent clubhouse. While riding one day, she and her husband came across a five-acre parcel of land at the intersection of what are now Sunset Drive and Nervia Street. The land was owned by FEC railroad baron Henry Flagler's subsidiary the "Model Land Company." With only \$100.00 in their treasury, Mrs. Dorn approached Mr. Fred Morse, President of the Model Land Company, and asked to purchase the property. While

¹ Meyer, Jesse Hamm. *Leading the Way: A Century of Service GWFC*, xi.

² *Ibid*, 37.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

the price had been set at \$150.00, the women finally were able to purchase the property for the \$100.00 cash-in-hand.³

The women expressed tenacity, resourcefulness and resolve in raising the money to actually build their clubhouse. They issued scrip to be paid back later, held fund raisers and enlisted the support of the entire Larkin community. In November, 1914 the new club house was dedicated. In 1915, under the leadership of President Mrs. D.J. Red, the Coco Plum Thimble Club joined the Florida Federation of Woman's Clubs. In 1916, their name changed to "The Woman's Club of Larkin." Their one-story, frame clubhouse was modeled after other pioneer houses. Its simple rectangular plan, raised on a pier foundation, with porches along the front and sides, made the most of the climate and maximized its usefulness to the members.⁴

During the First World War, the club took an active part in assisting the troops. They participated in a program of civilian war work which included Red Cross knitting and bandage making. The club also organized community sings to entertain the troops stationed at the Naval Air Station (NAS) at nearby Dinner Key (Coconut Grove.)

The education of the community occupied a prominent place in the agenda of Women's Clubs nationwide. Before there were lending libraries operated by local governments, there were the libraries created and operated by Women's Clubs. The library of the Coco Plum Woman's Club began with one book, *Pollyanna*, donated by former president Mary ("Mother") Dorn sometime around 1918. The library grew in substance and volume as prominent members of the community donated their personal collections. Mrs. Kirk Monroe, wife of a pioneer Coconut Grove resident and writer, donated her collection, and the club obtained all of the books held at the Dinner Key NAS after the Armistice was signed. The operation of the Coco Plum Library would continue as a focal point of the club's activities for decades to come.⁵

The membership roster of the Woman's Club of Larkin was a "who's who" of pioneer figures whose contributions to the town and the region are remembered even today. It seemed as if almost all the Greater Miami's leaders visited the Woman's Club at one time or another, and included Dr. David Fairchild, the renowned botanist; Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, who at the time was fighting suffragette battles, and later became internationally know for her work in the conservation of the environment; and William Jennings Bryan, former democratic presidential candidate, attorney, minister and orator.

The club, as well as the rest of the region, was about to experience the frenetic growth that would come as a result of the Florida Real Estate Boom. In 1921, George Edgar Merrick had begun the sale of homes in his

³ Mrs. D.J. Red, History of the Coco Plum Woman's Club, unpublished manuscript, dated January 18, 1935, Collection, Coco Plum Woman's Club, n.p.

⁴ "Coco Plum Women's (sic) Club, Village Post, February 1962, 1.

⁵ Mrs. D.J. Red, History of the Coco Plum Woman's Club, 1935, 13.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

community named "Coral Gables." Beginning with his family's original 160-acre homestead that was farmed as citrus and avocado groves, Merrick would continue to expand his real estate holdings so that they would eventually reach to over 1,600 acres by 1924⁶.

The Coco Plum Woman's Club

In 1924, Mrs. F.J. (Carrie) Ravelin became the president of the Woman's Club of Larkin, and it was under her administration that the club took the name "Coco Plum Woman's Club," named for a popular indigenous shrub. Although the real estate boom hit its high water mark by the end of 1925, the Town of Larkin was incorporated as the City of South Miami in 1926. The eastern boundary was set at Red Road (SW 57th Avenue) just a few blocks west of the Coco Plum Woman's Club Building.⁷

In the meantime, George Merrick was continuing the development of Coral Gables, and platted the Riviera Section in 1925.⁸ The Coco Plum Woman's Club's five acres were especially desirable to include in this high-end residential section of the Gables. After some negotiation, the club sold four of its five acres to the Coral Gables Corporation for the sum of \$100,000.⁹ The members collectively decided to use \$75,000 of the funds to build a grand, new clubhouse and furnish it with some of the remaining funds. Their original clubhouse was demolished to make way for the new building.

With its main elevation facing west onto Nervia Avenue, the Coco Plum Woman's Club was designed by the architectural firm of Howard and Early, and built by the Knight Construction Company. The building permit was issued the week ending on April 24, 1926 and the cornerstone was laid on May 15, 1926.¹⁰

The clubhouse was dedicated on Valentine's Day (February 14) 1927, exactly fifteen years from the date of their first meeting as the Coco Plum Thimble Club. The day was commemorated with an extensive program of music and addresses. The club's earliest presidents, including Mrs. E.M. Jordan, Mrs. Mary Dorn, and Mrs. D.J. Red recounted the history of the club. The Coral Gables Corporation provided the advertisement for the back cover of the program with a piece entitled "Higher Spiritual Values." The copy read:

Coral Gables extends to Cocoplum (sic) Woman's Club the sincere compliments upon the occasion of the dedication of this historic club's handsome home. Women of this club have contributed much to the upbuilding of Dade County and Coral Gables.

⁶ Millas, Aristides and Ellen J. Ugucconi, *Coral Gables Miami Riviera, An Architectural Guide*, 23.

⁷ Paul U. Tevis, *History of South Miami*, manuscript, n.d. [1971?], 2.

⁸ Millas and Ugucconi, *Coral Gables Miami Riviera, An Architectural Guide*, 76.

⁹ Mrs. Davant Manuscript, 1963 p22.

¹⁰ City of Coral Gables, Department of Historical Resources, Building Permit Book.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

Coral Gables feels an especial kinship with the Cocoplum (sic) Woman's Club, in that the aims of the two institutions are in essence of the same—namely to establish something in the sunshine of this tropic wonderland, that will make for higher spiritual values in American family life.¹¹

The sheer size of the club, along with its exquisite design and furnishings caused it to become a major landmark in the Riviera Section from the beginning. The irony of the situation is that this grand building opened when the economic future of Coral Gables was on a fast track to insolvency. The Coco Plum Woman's Club was up to the challenge of those years of desperate economic failing.

The Depression Years

When the Florida Real Estate Boom began its collapse in late 1926, South Florida entered an economic depression long before the rest of the country. The Woman's Club was affected as well, with little in their treasury and members unable to make their dues. To earn money, the club held dinners and special events. In 1930 Mrs. Olliver Sollitt became the president, and successfully thwarted an effort to combine Coco Plum with the Coral Gables Woman's Club.¹² Instead, the members worked even harder to raise money to keep their club financially solvent.

When Mrs. Sollitt turned the Club over to her successor, Mrs. V.E. Eisfeller at the March 7, 1934 meeting, she left the club with \$24.30 in the treasury, and all bills paid.¹³ Mrs. Eisfeller reinstated the Jr. Woman's Club which was originally formed in 1927, but had since disbanded. During her term additional revenues were gathered by renting space in the club to the South Miami Presbyterian congregation while they were building their own facilities (just to the east of the club), and to the Civic Theatre Group who used the auditorium.¹⁴

Mrs. Sollitt returned as president in 1937. The club still needed costly repairs, and it had been suggested that the club sell their building. Once again, the women rose to the challenge and stepped up their fundraising activities until there were sufficient funds to make the repairs.

Mrs. Sollitt was succeeded by Mary Dorn, one of the original founders and former president of the club. In 1939 the club had 45 members and had reached its 27th birthday. The library collection had grown to house over 2,000 volumes. The clubwomen continued in their role as civic activists, educators and innovators. By 1940 the club was sound financially and able to assist others. Coco Plum established a welfare fund that helped secure medical help for some, provided layettes for the needy, and Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets for families in need. By 1940, the United States was once again perched on the precipice of World War.

¹¹ Coco Plum Woman's Club Dedication Program, Collection: Coco Plum Woman's Club.

¹² Mrs. R.J. Red in Coco Plum History, 29.

¹³ Ibid, 29.

¹⁴ Ibid, 31.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
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World War II to the Present

In 1942, the Coco Plum Woman's Club again turned their attention to aiding the war effort. The club was turned into a casualty station, and all branches of the Red Cross operated from within. Coco Plum Woman's Club was also designated as an air raid shelter. During this period the library was closed to accommodate the needs of the Red Cross.

South Florida was turned into a huge training camp for soldiers and the Miami/Coral Gables community found itself in the midst of it. The former Miami-Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables was converted into a vast Army-Air Force Regional Hospital, and hundreds of injured soldiers recuperated in this unparalleled environment. The Coco Plum Woman's Club was honored for their work, and was ranked third in "war work" among other clubs in the state.¹⁵

Beginning in 1945 the clubhouse also housed a kindergarten. Former clubrooms in the section of the building fronting onto Sunset Road were used for the children. The library was reopened and the club women once again put the needs of their community at the forefront of their efforts. There are untold numbers of fundraisers conducted by the club to raise money for schools, for the less fortunate and for scholarships.

By 1947 the library had a paid librarian and an assistant. The club paid the salaries, which was somewhat defrayed by the contribution of \$10.00 a month through the Town Club of South Miami. By this time the collection had grown to over 7,000 volumes. Even with this great a resource for the community, the Coco Plum Woman's Club members went the extra measure. They created a "Book Mobile" service that would bring the library to the people, particularly in more rural communities. The "Book Mobile" was greatly successful, and the club was honored by Radio Station WQAM for an "outstanding community service" award.¹⁶

As the world entered the Cold War and fears and anxieties were high, the Coco Plum Woman's Club continued on as a source of friendship, solidarity and purpose for its members. The list of charities the club funded is seemingly endless, and includes relief to Ecuadorian flood survivors, the American Cancer Society, the National Polio Foundation, March of Dimes, Tuberculosis Fund, and the American Red Cross and locally to the veterans confined at Pratt General Hospital (the former Miami-Biltmore Hotel) Children's Variety Hospital, the Community Chest and to many local school programs.

By 1951 the library had a collection of over 18,000 volumes for circulation, and the "Book Mobile" continued its mission to serve the larger community. As the world continued to change, so did the club. By 1969, Miami-

¹⁵ Mrs. D.J. Red, History of Coco Plum, 47.

¹⁶ Ibid, 57.

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Dade County had its own lending libraries open to the public, and the Coco Plum Library was closed. In 1970, the kindergarten programs were discontinued. The former kindergarten space was then used for a thrift shop.

For decade after decade the Coco Plum Woman's Club served as a magnet for the selfless and tireless efforts of a remarkable group of women. Through their service they have enriched the lives of many. Together they created a sense of belonging, a camaraderie that inspired them to great things and to create lifelong friendships, which held fast through both good times and bad.

Begun as an antidote to loneliness and a lack of social venues, the women of the Coco Plum Thimble Club created an institution that today still lives by the words of its founders' creed:

"Put into action your better impulses, straight forward and unafraid."¹⁷

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The Mediterranean Revival Style generally refers to a style derived from a combination of architectural elements borrowed from countries and cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, particularly Spain and Italy. This practice became popular in the late 1910s as a part of the increased national interest in historical styles and architecture. Interest in such styles was especially fostered by the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego in 1915. The style, so suitable for Florida's Mediterranean-like climate and Spanish history, became extremely popular in Florida and is closely associated with the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s.

General design characteristics include features taken from the Mission, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Italian Renaissance styles: Moorish columns; low-pitched, clay tile, gable and hip or flat parapet roofs; stucco exteriors with terra cotta decorative features with cartouches, tile, and terra cotta insets. Highly decorated door and window surrounds are common.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The building of the Coco Plum Woman's Club was supervised by the Coral Gables Corporation who secured four of the five acres that the club owned, with a promise of building a grand clubhouse that would be in keeping with the character and charm established for Coral Gables.

Though the National Register of Historic Places uses the term Spanish Colonial to describe what is locally more frequently referred to as Mediterranean Revival, their stylistic characteristics are identical. Buildings designed in the Mediterranean Revival style depended on their fine construction and extensive wall mass with beautifully

¹⁷ Mrs. D.J. Red, History of Coco Plum, 55.

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proportioned details. Walls were frequently surfaced with tinted stucco, often rough textured so that it caught changing light and shadow. Broken planes lending visual interest were created through the use of curves, the combination of one and two story elements, and the juxtaposition of different roof pitches. While superficial ornament was avoided, detail abounded. Ventilator holes were grouped for decorative effect, ironwork graced balconies, and windows and chimneys were often embellished with raised stucco banding. Parapets were often shaped, adding curved lines to otherwise horizontal planes.¹⁸

Interior plans were adapted to take maximum advantage of the hospitable climate. Patios, verandahs, courtyards, wide living rooms and sleeping porches were all common "indoor-outdoor" amenities. For it was nature itself, in all its bountiful sub-tropical glory that became one of the basic building blocks of the architectural formula.¹⁹

Many of these details are evident in the design for the Coco Plum Woman's Club. As such, the building is a *tour de force* of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture that characterized the entire city.

¹⁸ Millás, Aristides and Ugucioni, Ellen J. in *Coral Gables Miami Riviera: An Architectural Guide*, 23.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

Verbal Boundary Description

Lots 1 through 5 and Lots 20 through 24, Block 219, Riviera Section Part 14, City of Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida, according to the plat thereof recorded in Plat Book 28 at page 32 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Boundary Justification

All resources associated with the historic Coco Plum Woman's Club are contained within the property description as given.

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**Coco Plum Woman's Club
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, Florida**

PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Coco Plum Woman's Club
2. Miami-Dade County
3. Ellen J. Uguccioni
4. October, 2004
5. Coco Plum Woman's Club
6. West elevation (Nervia Street), north end, camera facing northeast.
7. Photo #1 of 15

ITEMS 1 – 5 ARE THE SAME FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

6. West elevation, detail of tower, camera facing southeast.
7. Photo #2 of 15

6. West elevation, south end, camera facing northeast.
7. Photo #3 of 15

6. Detail, south elevation west end entrance, camera facing northeast.
7. Photo #4 of 15

6. South elevation (Sunset Drive), detail fenestration, camera facing northwest.
7. Photo #5 of 15

6. South elevation, detail east end entrance, camera facing north.
7. Photo #6 of 15

6. East elevation, south end, camera facing west.
7. Photo #7 of 15

6. East elevation, north end, camera facing west.
7. Photo #8 of 15

6. North elevation, camera facing southwest.
7. Photo #9 of 15

6. North elevation, camera facing southeast.
7. Photo #10 of 15

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- 6. Interior courtyard, camera facing northwest.
- 7. Photo #11 of 15

- 6. Interior courtyard showing loggia, camera facing northeast.
- 7. Photo #12 of 15

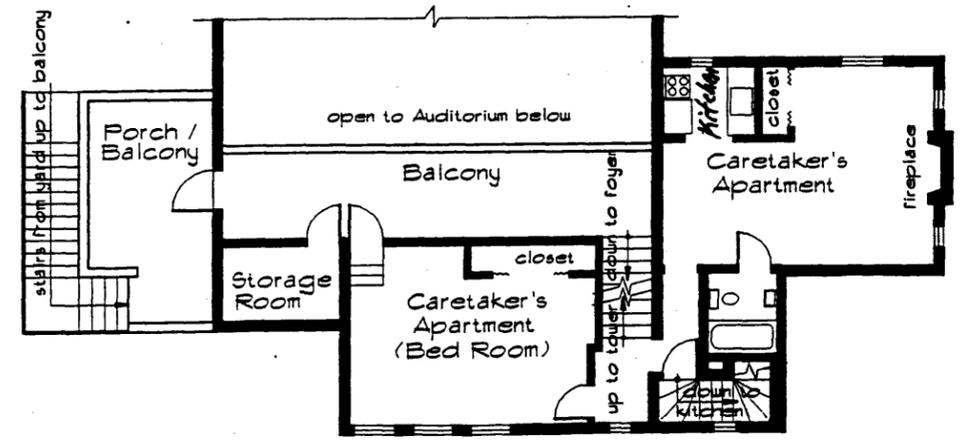
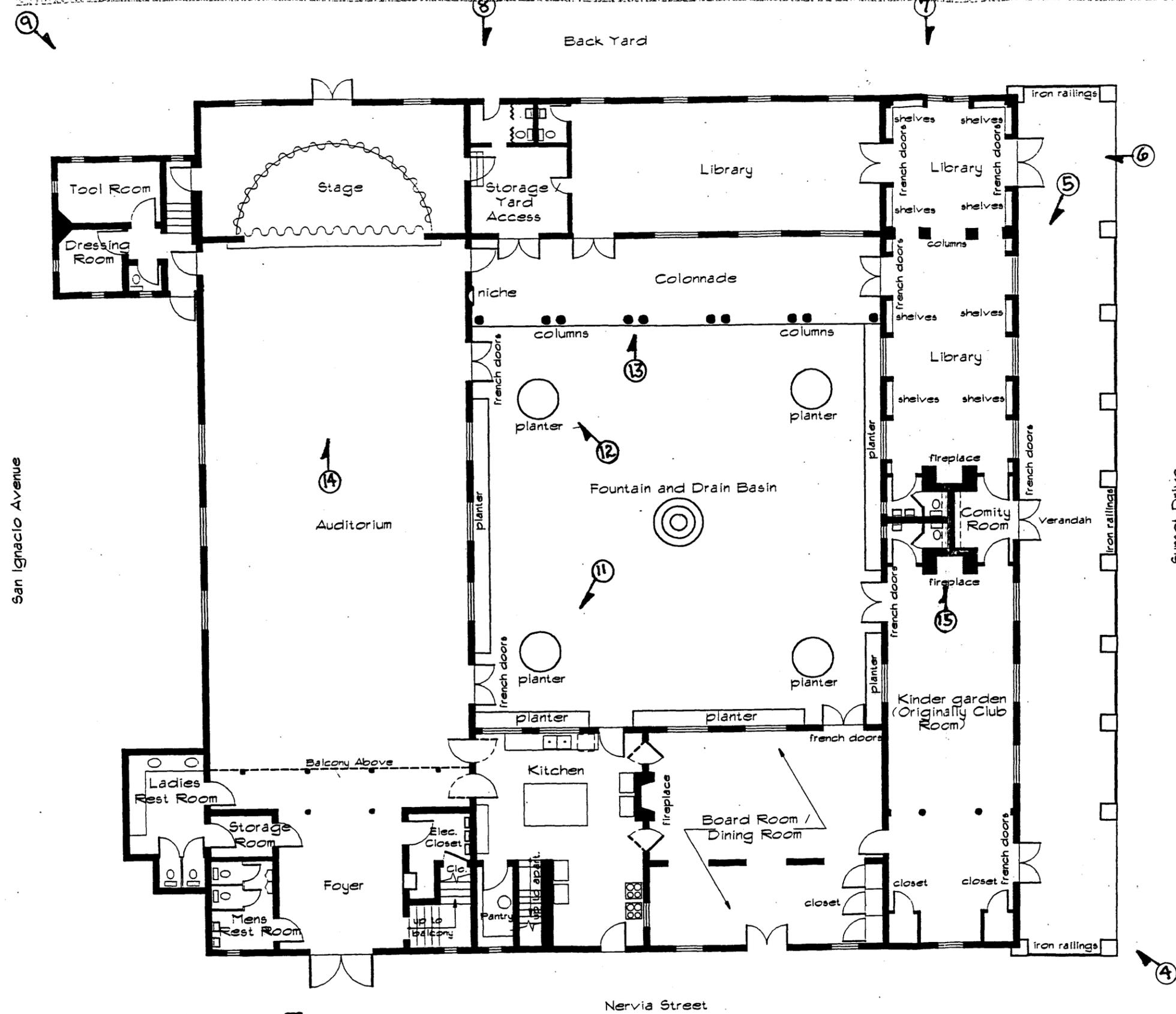
- 6. Detail of column capital in courtyard, camera facing east.
- 7. Photo #13 of 15

- 6. Auditorium, camera facing east.
- 7. Photo #14 of 15

- 6. Detail of fireplace, camera facing east.
- 7. Photo #15 of 15

COCO PLUM WOMAN'S CLUB
Coral Gables, Miami-Dade County, FL

Photo Key 



 **GROUND FLOOR** 
north

 **SECOND FLOOR**
north

The Loco Plum Woman's Club
1375 Sunset Drive
Coral Gables, Florida