

BRHS Preservation Update August 2011

In the rapidly changing world which is South Florida today, our very heritage is at stake as historic structures and sites—the few tangible reminders of our past—are fast disappearing. **Our historic properties give texture, livability, and character in our fast growing, rapidly developing modern city.** While the BRHS takes an active roll in the advocacy of historic preservation, please remember that as a private independent agency we have no actual legal power to designate or regulate designated properties within the city. Please let your city representatives know how important historic preservation is for the future of our community.

BOCA RATON ARMY AIRFIELD PRESERVATION UDATE

Boca Raton was home to the Army Air Corps' only war-time radar training base during WWII, the Boca Raton Army Airfield. Radar was top secret during those years, and all Army Air Force pilots, mechanics, and navigators working with the new technology had to come here to learn it. The base (initially housed at the Boca Raton Club, now the Boca Raton Resort & Club) comprised over 800 buildings; less than twenty survive today. The base was active from 1942 until 1947, when most of the structures were destroyed by a terrible hurricane in September of that year. The base extended from Dixie Highway on the east to the Seaboard RR tracks (think Amtrak tracks—approximately the route of I-95) on the west and from Palmetto Park Road on the south to north of Yamato Road.

BRAAF HEADQUARTERS 101 Pine Circle

The headquarters building for the base was located at 101 Pine Circle, on the “the hill” just off NW Fourth Avenue. Since WW II it has operated as an apartment house. This building represents one of the most historically significant structures in all of Boca Raton. Built in 1942 as the base headquarters (T-1052) it was strategically located on the highest elevation in Boca Raton as the gateway cornerstone building overlooking over 5000 acres of the air field. The building is constructed of concrete block and retains some of its original windows and many other original features; although additions have been made to it over the years. It is constructed in an “H” shaped pattern; such buildings were used

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primarily as radar training school buildings throughout the base. Several other such “H” buildings survive, particularly on or near Spanish River Boulevard. They have been renovated to become apartment houses or schools.

Today the headquarters building is for sale. The Boca Raton Historical Society hopes a buyer will also see its extraordinary value and rehabilitate it and incorporate it into a modern use so that it can continue to be a major contributor to the unique WW II legacy of Boca Raton. In addition, to recognize and protect its historical significance the property is in the process of being designated for listing on the Boca Raton Register of Historic Places. Recently, it was reviewed and recommended for designation by the Boca Raton Historic Preservation Board as a first step in that process. The next step is to seek approval of the Planning and Zoning Board. It will then go before City Council for final approval.

The Historical Society is seeking grassroots support to protect this unique historical resource from potential loss. Please contact members of the Planning and Zoning Board and City Council to approve its historic designation so that future generations will be able to share Boca Raton’s contributions to the defeat of Axis powers during WWII. Please contact the city clerk’s office at (561) 393 7743 for information about the Planning & Zoning Board.

101 Pine Circle is for sale. For information or to purchase the property please contact owner Chris Baczweski, at (561) 368-5797 or (561) 441-7401 .



HQ building now and in 1947

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T BUILDINGS AT FAU

Amongst the surviving BRAAF structures are five buildings on the campus at FAU. A cluster of four structures (T-5, 6, 10, and 11) exist on the northeastern part of campus, immediately to the west of the El Rio Canal. The university has reroofed these structures and made a commitment to their preservation and restoration. FAU in association with the Boca Raton Army Airfield Preservation Committee of the BRHS engaged the services of a preservation architect, who has completed a comprehensive assessment and plan for the existing structures and the surrounding space. The architectural plan will serve as a pivotal guide in the rehabilitation and restoration of the buildings and is a necessary document for any future grant applications. FAU has generously offered a room in T6 to the BRHS as an exhibition space, to create a “museum” about the Boca Raton Army Airfield. Although this will be a long term effort, the BRHS hopes to open a temporary exhibition there in October of this year, coinciding with the university’s celebration of its 50th anniversary. This BRAAF museum will become a reality only with your help. To assist in the efforts to preserve the surviving airbase buildings, or to donate to these efforts, contact the Boca Raton Historical Society at (561) 395 6766 X 104, or curator@bocahistory.org.



T6 and T5 at FAU

THE LUFF HOUSE 390 E Palmetto Park Road ENDANGERED

The Luff House, at 390 Palmetto Park Road, is a unique Boca Raton example of the Florida coral rock-bungalow style. It is threatened with demolition if a buyer and new site for the house are not found immediately. The Boca Raton Historical Society is seeking:

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- 1) individuals interested in relocating the house for private use OR
- 2) funds to relocate the house for community use

About The Luff House

Pioneer residents Theodore and Harriet Luff had the house at 390 E Palmetto Park Road constructed in the early 1920s. It is built in a Florida interpretation of the bungalow style, employing coral rock on the porches and chimneys. This type of bungalow, once fairly common, is now an exceedingly rare survivor in the state and is literally unique in Boca Raton today. As Palmetto Park Road grew more commercial, the structure was occupied by a number of businesses including Front Porch Antiques, the Boca Watch Shoppe, and Carousel Jewelers. The building was also home to community agencies such as the Junior Service League and was the first home of the Boca Raton Historical Society. It has been a vital part of downtown Boca Raton in historic and modern times, serving as a residence and successful retail establishment.

Today the house is in danger of demolition. The current owners would like to sell the property. They have offered the house to the Boca Raton Historical Society; however, the Society currently has no funds for the cost of the relocation of the house, a new site for the house, the necessary foundation and infrastructure for the house, nor restoration funds. Although it would be eligible for grant funds like those provided in the past by the Florida Bureau of Historic Preservation, these are limited and cannot be counted on.

What the Boca Raton Historical Society has done to save this structure:

- 1) Met with public officials and private and civic organizations to discuss the relocation, restoration, and possible future uses of the house
- 2) Researched costs for the relocation of the house

This is a community treasure; once gone, it will be gone forever. Please contact the Boca Raton Historical Society at (561) 395-6766 X 106 if you would like to support the effort to preserve this rare historic link with our community's past.

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Luff House ca. 1920s, left, and present day, right.

THE GILES HOUSE (LA VIEILLE MAISON) 770 E Palmetto Park Road SLATED FOR DEMOLITION

Thomas Giles, an engineer working for the Mizner Development Corporation, commissioned the house at 770 E. Palmetto Park Road from an unknown Palm Beach architect in ca. 1927. Giles also employed doors and other unused salvaged items from the MDC after its bankruptcy in 1927. The Giles House was later converted into apartments and then a single family home once again before becoming the well known restaurant La Vieille Maison in the 1970s. The Giles House is a venerable survivor in Boca Raton; a rare example of the Mediterranean style from the city's glamorous days as Florida's premier 1920s boom town.

This property was approved by the Boca Raton Historic Preservation for designation but failed to pass review by the Planning and Zoning Board early in 2010. The issue then went to City Council, where it was tabled until an assessment of the structure could be completed. Recently the house has been deemed unsafe by the city. The owner has notified the city of his intent to demolish the structure.



Giles House ca. 1927, left, and now, right.

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SPANISH VILLAGE (Christian Warren House 200 NW 7th Street)

Located at 200 NW 7th Street, the Christian Warren House is located on the southwest corner of NW 7th Street and NW 2nd Avenue. The home is contiguous to and acts as an entry to the small cohesive quiet residential neighborhood known as Spanish Village.

The Christian Warren House was one of the original 100 houses planned for Spanish Village (only partially completed) by builder Harry Vought and Company for the Mizner Development Corporation in 1925-26. An ad by Harry Vought in 1925 noted that the design and materials used on the Spanish bungalows in Spanish Village were approved by Addison Mizner. To entice visitors, Vought's ad suggested that it was a unique opportunity to buy in the "pre-development" period of Boca Raton when a new owner could witness the Cloister Inn (the Boca Raton Resort & Club) being completed; Camino Real being paved; lakes and canals being dredged; and golf courses laid down. "These houses represent happy living conditions for the man who looks for comfort and convenience, coupled with a price that is affordable," the ad stated; approximately \$7000—quite a sum at the time. Less than 20 houses in Spanish Village were actually completed. Today twelve of the original bungalows can be found in Spanish Village.

Recognizing its historic significance, the Boca Raton Historic Preservation Board recently recommended the Christian Warren House be listed on the Boca Raton Register of Historic Places. It will next go before the Planning and Zoning Board, and finally before the City Council for final approval. Its historic significance is noted in its association with being one of the first examples of community planning for urban development that was part of the original Mizner Development Corporation master plan for Boca Raton, its association with renowned architect Addison Mizner, and as a good representation of the the Spanish Bungalow style of Mediterranean Revival architecture. The Boca Raton Historical Society is pleased that the property owners have recognized the historic significance of this property and are willing to place it on the local register. Hopefully, others will realize the significance of their historic properties and follow suit.

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Christian Warren House 2011, left, and Spanish Village house from MDC brochure, right

BOCA RATON ROAD

After several tremendous decades of redevelopment, little of Boca's historic downtown section remains today. One of the few survivors is a section of Boca Raton Road, located just east of Sanborn Square and a block south of Mizner Park. These modest commercial buildings were begun shortly after World War II and housed the post office, department stores, and a variety of businesses over the years. Today they are amongst the few examples of the "moderne" style popular in South Florida in the 1940s and 1950s left in Boca Raton. Currently still in use and targeted by the CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency) and others for redevelopment since the 1980s, this last bit of downtown is not protected by historic designation. Recently Boca Raton Road, Southeast Second Street, Southeast First Avenue, and Palmetto Park Road have undergone beautification and traffic calming improvements dubbed "The Promenade." It is the goal of the BRHS to create awareness of the historic character of this neighborhood and advocate that the city require any proposed development projects be made with respect to the historic structures, low profile, and mid-century character of Boca Raton Road and surrounding streets.

To raise awareness of this historic area, the Boca Raton Historical Society used a depiction of Boca Raton Road ca. late 1940s as the theme of its 2007 commemorative ornament. This is one in a series of glass ornaments depicting historical themes and properties created by the BRHS as a fund raising tool each year. To purchase this ornament visit the Fire Bay Gift Shop at Town Hall or our on line gift shop on this website. For further information on plans for downtown contact the Development Services Department at the city of Boca Raton. To help save the last surviving buildings of our historic downtown, please contact your City Council member.

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Boca Raton Road looking east ca. late 1940s



BOCA RATON RESORT AND CLUB PRESERVATION UPDATE

The BRHS has been meeting for several years with the Boca Raton Resort and Club regarding the preservation of that beautiful and historic landmark, in many ways a symbol of our community. We are continuing to strive towards some sort of covenant concerning the historic sections of the hotel and site.

To facilitate this process, BRHS prepared an in-depth slide presentation featuring the surviving historic (pre-1956) portions of the hotel. The BRHS Advocacy Committee, which undertook this project, has been delighted with the finds of their extensive “scavenger hunt” of the hotel. The covered walkway on the west side of the hotel, for example, clearly dates from 1930 and appears to have the original cypress structure and probable Mizner Industries tiles. The north and west facades remain intact as well, although they have been obscured by later additions like the spa and the Mizner Center.



Covered walkway on west facade of BRR&C in ca.1930, left, and today, at right.

As a natural conclusion to our research, the BRHS has published a scholarly history of the hotel by well known architectural historian Dr. Donald Curl. *The Boca Raton Resort & Club: Mizner's Inn*, published by the History Press, was released in October of 2008.

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It is a comprehensive history of Boca's most famous landmark and features 120 black and white and color photos from the collections of the BRHS. The book retails for \$19.99 and is available at the BRHS Fire Bay Gift Shop as well as local book dealers and www.historypress.net. Proceeds from book sales benefit the programs of the BRHS.



Recently the hotel completed its renovation of the former Patio Royale, the area outside the Cathedral Dining Room. Once an open air court, this portion of the hotel has been returned to its former look by replacing the roof with a transparent canopy.



Palm Court 2008

The eastern section of the lobby, where the grand staircase is located, has been painted white and redecorated with contemporary furnishings to resemble the rest of the renovated lobby.



Grand stair lobby (Schultze and Weaver addition) after renovation 11/2008

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A new sushi bar and ice cream parlor in what were, in 1926, the original Cloister Inn Dining Room were completed three years ago. In addition, the Mizner Loggia has been redecorated, and the original cement tile floor covered with modern tile and carpet. The decorative tile wall plaque/ planters which hung there for so many years are no longer in place; instead four have been donated to BRHS while two hang at the Mizner Center.

The original Mizner Lobby, located in the east wing of the historic portion of the hotel, remains in its original configuration. The BRHS has opened a small exhibition there in cooperation with the BRR&C. Historic photos are supplemented with actual Mizner Industries furnishings and antiques used by Mizner in the original décor. Now tour patrons and guests will be able to learn about the history and significance of the hotel.



*Original Mizner lobby,
11/2009*

BRR&C has removed the historic hotel gates and given them to the BRHS; portions were in very poor condition. They are currently in storage awaiting some future display opportunity.

*Section of hotel gates
originally designed by
architects Schultze &
Weaver for the Boca
Raton Club addition to the
Cloister Inn. Now in the
collections of the BRHS.*



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MORADA BONITA 741 E Palmetto Park Road

Pioneer realtor Harley Gates constructed this Mediterranean gem on the road to the beach in the mid 1920s. It has survived little changed, through many owners over the years. In 2006 realtor David Roberts beautifully restored the charming structure to serve as the Royal Palm Properties office. For his efforts, the BRHS recognized Mr. Roberts with its 2007 Preservation Award.



Morada Bonita ca mid 1920s, left, and today, right

ROYAL PALM APARTMENTS , 375 Royal Palm Boulevard ENDANGERED

Constructed in ca. 1926 as the Donaldson Apartments, the Royal Palm Apartments are another rare survivor of Boca's boomtime past. It originally consisted of four apartments with then trendy space saving devices such as Pullman dining nooks and in-door beds. It was conveniently located near the hotel's golf course and close to the beach road. Constructed in the Mediterranean style, it is readily recognizable from an historic photo from the 1927 *Boca Raton Record*. The Royal Palm Apartments are unique in that it is the oldest surviving apartment house in town, little altered from Boca's halcyon days. Developer Penn Florida has indicated to the BRHS that this property is scheduled for demolition. Development of this site has been delayed by the real estate slow down.



Donaldson, now Royal Palm Apts, ca. 1927, left and today, right.

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION ORDINANCE REVISED!!

The city of Boca Raton's Historic Preservation Board has recently approved an updated, modern version of our city's historic preservation ordinance. The new ordinance will streamline current procedures. For example, historic designation would no longer require the approval of the Planning and Zoning Board. Instead, the HPB historic designations would be referred directly to city council for final approval. Most importantly, the technical changes to the city's preservation ordinance will assist the city in meeting the requirements for Certified Local Government, or CLG standing. This "checklist" of requirements meets regulations of the U.S. Department of Interior and the State of Florida's Bureau of Historic Preservation. A CLG status would allow owners of historically designated properties within the city of Boca Raton to take advantage of ad valorem tax incentives authorized by the Florida legislature once Boca Raton has passed its own tax abatement ordinance. This would be the first significant local economic incentive for historic property owners—a vital step for the future of historic preservation in our community. For the past four years the Boca Raton Historical Society has worked with the city HPB to ensure that the revised ordinance includes all of the features required for the CLG status. The new ordinance draft has returned from Tallahassee after review for CLG compliance. It is now in the hands of city's development services staff who will review the revisions requested by the state Bureau of Historic Preservation. Please contact Boca Raton Historic Preservation Board staff liaison, Daryl Johnson, for further information djohnson@ci.boca-raton.fl.us .



Boca Raton
Historical
Society