

## 1425-1427 WASHINGTON AVENUE, MIAMI BEACH

In 1920, when Miami Beach's first public school was built on the west side of Washington Avenue (then called Miami Avenue) at 14<sup>th</sup> Street, the opposite side of the Avenue was vacant. This is Block 26 of the Ocean Beach Addition 2 Subdivision, platted in 1913 as one of the oldest sections of the city, and now in both the National Register and locally-designated historic districts.

There are eight building lots running along the east side of Washington Avenue between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and what was 14<sup>th</sup> Lane (now obliterated), numbered from south to north as Lots 10 through 17. The first building to appear here, in 1921, was a hip-roofed CBS bungalow at the rear of Lot 15. It still survives behind the storefront built in 1931 at 1421 Washington Avenue. Both the bungalow and the store were owned and designed by architect Robert A. Taylor, who designed all the Mediterranean-style buildings on nearby Espanola Way in 1925. The 1928 City Directory lists this bungalow as Taylor's residence.

The subject store building at 1425-1427 Washington Avenue was the next structure to go up in this block, built in 1925 on Lot 16, on the north side of the bungalow. A similar store was built that same year at 1417-19 Washington Avenue, on Lot 14. Both of these one-story Mission-style stores were built by William T. Burbridge (1882-1965), a prominent figure in Miami Beach history. He was from Jacksonville, where his father was mayor and where the imposing Hotel Burbridge opened in 1911.<sup>1</sup> He came to Miami Beach in 1923 as a realtor and became a major developer here in the 1920s. In the summer of 1924 alone he built 22 store buildings in the city, at least two of which were on Lincoln Road.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the 1926 hurricane his Miami Beach properties were valued at \$1 million; they were heavily damaged by the storm and were uninsured, but Burbridge promptly recovered.<sup>3</sup> He served on the Miami Beach city council from 1932 to 1953 except for two years.<sup>4</sup>

The Building Permit Card lists “owner” as the architect of the subject building, but Burbridge was not an architect; this probably means that the owner hired someone else to design the building. Records for other Burbridge store buildings rarely identify an architect by name.

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1 Jacksonville FL archival postcards online.

2 “Lincoln Road at Miami Beach has become the Fifth Avenue of the South;” *Miami Herald*, Jan. 1, 1925, p. 13-D

3 “Damage Repaired,” *Miami Herald*, Oct. 10, 1926.

4 Obituary, *Miami Herald*, April 9, 1965, p. 13-D.

There is, however, one sheet of plans for the subject building on microfilm #1480 in the Miami Beach Building Department, showing the front elevation and floor plan. The name plate is barely legible, but *most likely* says “W. P. Shappell, Architect ...Lincoln Road, Miami Beach Florida.”

William P. Shappell, born in Pennsylvania circa 1901, is listed in the 1925 Polk's Miami City Directory as an architect living in Biscayne Park. The 1930 U.S. Census, when he was living in Massachusetts, indicates he was married to wife Irene in 1924 and their two sons were born in Florida in the late 1920s. Shappell's known buildings in Miami Beach include a “quonset hut” addition to the Roman Pools Garage at 2000 Collins Avenue in 1927 (now demolished) and a single-family home at 510 31<sup>st</sup> Street in 1928, later remodeled as Art Deco. It does not appear that Shappell had an office on Miami Beach, but in 1925 William Burbridge's realty office was at 921 Lincoln Road. After the subject building was completed, Burbridge moved his own office there, listed at 1427-29 Washington Avenue in the 1926 and 1927 directories. (The plan shows three storefronts in the building, and the Permit Card gives their official addresses as 1425, 1427 and 1427- A Washington Avenue, but these numbers fluctuate somewhat in city directories.)

As for the structure itself, there are many unanswered questions. The only archival photograph of the building found so far is from 1989, in the Miami Beach Planning Department database, and it bears little resemblance to the 1925 plan. Both show strips of Mission tile along the parapet, but the plan shows a short, tower-like peaked roof at the north end, with a decorative medallion on the front, that may or may not have been built as drawn. (Or it is possible that this was one of Burbridge's buildings damaged in the 1926 hurricane.)

The plans show the three storefronts, each having a graceful archway enclosing a transom window, a multi-paned door beside plate glass, and a knee wall. The center storefront is larger than the other two, and has two doors flanking the plate glass. The only feature that is seen in both the plans and the photo and that still remains on the building today is the large center archway, but its transom has been filled in. Arched windows of this type, probably influenced by the Art Nouveau style, were very common in Miami Beach commercial buildings from the 1920s and are seen in archival photographs of other buildings, including several built by Burbridge (see footnote 2). Examples can still be seen on the east elevation of the Clay Hotel on Espanola Way, and in the restored Bastian Building at 835 Lincoln Road.

In the subject building, the parapet above the center archway is stepped up, with a small scroll, and on the front wall is a decorative cartouche of a rearing lion in bas-relief. These features are seen in the 1989 photo, but not on the plans. On the interior, there are no longer any partitions between storefronts, but the ceiling of pecky cypress is most likely original.

Tenants in the building evolved over the years, and at various times it seems to have had two, three, or four storefronts. In 1928, the city directory lists a beauty parlor at 1427 and a dressmaker at 1429. (Next door, another store building for Burbridge was built on Lot 17 in 1927, and is listed as 1431-33 Washington Avenue. It was remodeled and a second story added in 1941.) In 1932, there was a dry cleaner at 1425, a fish market at 1427, and a pastry shop at 1429 (which may have been in the building next door). There were many rear additions to this building, starting in 1929, and many remodels of the storefronts. The 1948 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows the building footprint at that time, and four storefronts on Washington Avenue labeled 1425, 1425A, 1427, and 1427A, with a restaurant occupying 1425. The Permit Card documents that the “open storefront” at 1427 was enclosed in 1949. In 1963, two storefronts were merged into one and sliding glass doors installed. The building underwent repairs in 1987 for its 40-year recertification.

----Carolyn Klepser, researcher

June 2, 2017

Wash. Ave.  
Stores  
1926.

Matlack  
#9840  
(HMSF)

