

HISTORY & ANALYSIS

2740 NORTH BAY ROAD, MIAMI BEACH

The subject house occupies Lot 10 in Block 8 of the Sunset Lake Subdivision of Miami Beach, platted by developer Carl G. Fisher's Miami Beach Bay Shore Company in April, 1923. This is a waterfront lot on Sunset Lake, that Fisher dredged in order to isolate rival Stephen A. Lynch's land, which became the Sunset Islands.¹

This is one of two houses for which permits were issued on the same day, October 7, 1929 (shortly before the stock market crash), to the same owner, Valentine Duttonhofer Jr. (misspelled on the Permit Card). The other house was next door, on Lot 11, at 2760 North Bay Road. Both houses were designed in Mediterranean Revival style by architect August Geiger (see Biography following), and each cost \$30,000.

Duttonhofer himself had his winter residence on Lot 9, at 2700 (also known as 2438) North Bay Road, in a house built in 1925. He was one of the flood of northern industrialists who contributed to the Florida Boom of the 1920s. Valentine Duttonhofer Jr. (1862-1939), together with his younger brother John, in 1905 founded the Val Duttonhofer's Sons Company, well-known shoe manufacturers in Cincinnati, Ohio.² Val Jr.'s purchase of the Clyde Court Apartments in Miami for \$500,000 in the 1920s was "the largest all-cash sale in Miami up to that point."³ In later years his son Clifford owned both the Clyde Court and the Mildred Lee Apartments in Miami Beach (now demolished).⁴ Although the Florida Boom crashed after the 1926 hurricane,

¹ Kleinberg, Miami Beach: A History: Centennial Press, 1996, p. 94.

² Google Books online; Cincinnati, the Queen City, vol. 4, pp. 214-215.

³ Ballinger, Miami Millions; Franklin Press, 1936, p. 26.

⁴ V. Duttonhofer obituary, *Miami News*, April 24, 1939.

Duttenhofer still invested in building these two elegant homes in 1929. The subject house was occupied by James W. Eustis of Boston in the 1930s.⁵

August Geiger's plans for the subject house were found on Microfilm #3292 in the Miami Beach Building Department records. This is an irregularly-shaped, two-story house of reinforced concrete, with multiple gable roofs and one-story shed-roof elements. The front door, round-arched with a fan window, leads into the double-height living room, which has a north-south axis. Interior details of the living room include a fireplace and exposed roof beams. At the west end of the living room, a loggia, also with round arches, overlooks the lake. Adjoining these, the central section of the house has an east-west axis and contains a bedroom, stairway, kitchen, pantry, and the dining room facing the water. On the north side, an attached, two-car garage is set at an angle to the rest of the house. A one-story "au-pair bedroom" occupies the angle. The second floor contains three more bedrooms, plus two "maid's rooms" above the garage.

Barrel tile roofs are clearly shown on the plans. Windows appear to be six-paned casements or six-over-six double-hung sash type, with wood frames detailed on the plans. Other exterior features include decorative medallions on the roof gables; second-story balconies on front and rear, with wood spindle railings and masonry door-surrounds; and a similar wood-spindle gate into an open "entrance porch."

A \$2,500 addition to the house in 1937 is documented on the Building Permit Card, and plans were found on Microfilm #9645. It was designed by brothers John and Coulton Skinner (see Biography following) and appears to be a one-story, three-car garage that stands to the north of the main house. Its footprint, absent from the 1935 plat map, is seen in the 1952 edition. It has a

⁵ Stearns, Along Greater Miami's Sun-Sea-Ara; 1932.

small setback that yields a double gable roof of barrel tile. When this new garage was constructed, the original attached garage in the main house was converted to living space.

Later alterations to the house documented on the Building Permit Card include the installation of central air-conditioning and other interior work in 1976, and the addition of a swimming pool in 1987.

While no archival photographs have yet been found to verify that the house and garage addition were built according to plan, and while the house today is partly obscured by its lush landscaping, curbside observation of the building front shows that the property does still largely conform to the plans by Geiger and the Skinners, and most original external features remain intact.

ARCHITECTS

August Geiger (1888-1968) was from New Haven, Connecticut. Educated at Boardman's Manual Training School and by apprenticeship,⁶ he came to Miami in 1905 and became Florida's tenth registered architect.⁷ He started his own practice in 1911, and in his early career designed a number of bungalow residences, the Bulmer Apartments in Miami (demolished), the Miami City Hospital (now "the Alamo" at Jackson Memorial Hospital), and public schools at Homestead, Arch Creek, and Dania.⁸

As a master of the Mediterranean Revival style with a strong Beaux-Arts influence, he became Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher's favorite architect, and designed both of Fisher's residences there, one of which still stands at 5010 North Bay Road. Other buildings he designed for Fisher include the 1916 clubhouse for the Municipal Golf Course, now one of the oldest buildings in the City; the Lincoln Hotel (now demolished) and the Lincoln Building (now the Van Dyke) on Lincoln Road. His work also included the Allison Hospital (later St. Francis) and the La Gorce Golf Clubhouse, both now demolished. From 1935 to 1948, Geiger worked as architect for the Dade County School Board, and in this capacity worked on the Ida Fisher High School at 1410 Drexel Avenue, North Shore Elementary School at 711 41st Street, and Biscayne Bay Elementary School at 800 77th Street.⁹ His 1947 neoclassical-deco style Chase Bank Building at 1100 Lincoln Road has now been refurbished as a Banana Republic store.

In Miami, Geiger designed the Woman's Club at 1737 North Bayshore Drive; the grand neoclassical Christian Science church at 1836 Biscayne Boulevard; and, in 1925, he was one of the co-architects of the Dade County Courthouse on Flagler Street. Besides architecture, Geiger was active in many

⁶ Men of the South; Southern Biographical Assn., New Orleans, 1922, p.348.

⁷ Obituary, *Miami Herald*, March 26, 1968.

⁸ "Architectural Ideals in Miami," *Miami Metropolis*, Nov. 2, 1912.

⁹ LaGorce Golf Club Historical Evaluation Report; City of Miami Beach Planning Dept., 2001.

civic organizations, and also was the developer of the Fairgreen Subdivision in Miami Beach.

(William) Coulton Skinner (1891-1963) and his brother

John L. Skinner (1893-1972) were from Cleveland, Ohio, and both graduated in architecture from the University of Toronto. Coulton went into practice in Toronto and Detroit, while John took a master's degree at Harvard in 1920, then headed the architecture department at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. In 1925 the brothers both came to Miami to work on George Merrick's Coral Gables development, eventually designing 18 residences in the "Villages" section.¹⁰ From 1927 to 1932, John Skinner served as the first head of the architecture department at the newly-created University of Miami.¹¹

In Miami Beach, the Skinner brothers designed two Mediterranean Revival-style houses in the Palm View Historic District: 1835 Michigan Avenue (1931) and 1800 Jefferson Avenue (1936). Also in the 1930s they designed the Coulton Arms Apartments at 932 15th Street, the Barbizon Hotel at 530 Ocean Drive, and the Bentley Hotel at 500 Ocean Drive.

In 1941 the Skinners joined architect Harold D. Steward as the firm Steward & Skinner. This firm worked on a number of civic and municipal buildings in the Miami area, including the refitting of the Nautilus, Pancoast, and Biltmore Hotels as military hospitals during World War II; several new buildings at the University of Miami; the Miami Seaquarium; parts of Miami International Airport; Mercy Hospital; an addition to Jackson Hospital; the former Miami Public Library; and Dade County Auditorium.¹²

¹⁰ Univ. of Miami, Coral Gables: An American Garden City; Norma Editions, Paris, 1991, p. 205.

¹¹ Obituary, *Miami Herald*, Oct. 1, 1972.

¹² Tracy Hollingsworth, History of Dade County Fla., p. 167.

Criteria for Historic Designation:

Section 118-592 of the Land Development Regulations of the City Code requires that a property must meet at least one of eight criteria in order to qualify for historic designation. This property appears to fulfill at least the first five criteria:

1) *Association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of Miami Beach, the county, state or nation.*

This house, built on the brink of the Great Depression, is a last gasp of the Florida Boom of the 1920s, when wealthy northern industrialists flooded into Florida, building their palatial winter residences and investing in real estate speculation. Specific to Miami Beach, this house was an early component of Carl Fisher's Sunset Lake Subdivision.

2) *Association with the lives of persons significant in our past history.*

Original owner Val Duttonhofer Jr. was not only a well-known industrialist in Cincinnati, Ohio, but also became a prominent investor in properties in Miami and Miami Beach.

3) *Embody the distinctive characteristics of an historical period, architectural or design style, or method of construction.*

This house is a prime example of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture, the predominant style in Florida in the 1920s. Some of its characteristics seen here are the clay barrel-tile gable roofs, round-arched doorways, balconies, decorative medallions and door surrounds. The later garage addition was designed to blend compatibly with the original house.

4) *Possesses high artistic values.*

Valued at \$30,000 in 1929 and designed by a top-notch architect, this house was of high-quality design and construction with many fine details, and built in an upper-class neighborhood.

5) *Represent the work of a master; serve as an outstanding or representative work of a master designer, architect or builder who contributed to our historical, aesthetic or architectural heritage.*

August Geiger was one of the City's greatest architects, favored by Carl Fisher himself. He designed many prominent buildings in Miami Beach from the 1910s through the 1940s, although many have now been lost. The Skinner brothers, who designed the garage addition, were well-known for their work in Coral Gables, and later for their many civic buildings. They designed several Contributing buildings in Miami Beach's historic districts

---Carolyn Klepser, researcher
March 26, 2010