

**From:** [HPB](#)  
**To:** [Fons, Monique](#); [Bueno, Lizbeth](#)  
**Cc:** [Tackett, Deborah](#)  
**Subject:** FW: 93 Palm Ave Historic Designation  
**Date:** Tuesday, January 11, 2022 7:25:37 AM  
**Attachments:** [Preserve Al Capone's house on Miami Beach Miami Herald copy.pdf](#)  
[image001.png](#)

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Good morning Monique and Lizbeth,

Please process.

Thanks,



**Jessica Gonzalez**

Clerk of Boards  
Planning Department

1700 Convention Center Drive – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Miami Beach, FL 33139  
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**From:** A. Brad Schwartz <austinbs@princeton.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 10, 2022 3:45 PM  
**To:** HPB <HPB@miamibeachfl.gov>  
**Subject:** 93 Palm Ave Historic Designation

**[ THIS MESSAGE COMES FROM AN EXTERNAL EMAIL - USE CAUTION WHEN REPLYING AND OPENING LINKS OR ATTACHMENTS ]**

To the Members of the Historic Preservation Board of the City of Miami Beach:

I write again to urge you to vote YES on the question of preparing a formal historic designation report for the former Al Capone home at 93 Palm Avenue.

In an op-ed for the *Miami Herald* last September (<https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article254103178.html>), a copy of which is attached to this email, I argued that 93 Palm Avenue meets multiple criteria for historic designation listed in the City Code of Miami Beach (Sec. 118-592). I have reviewed the Preliminary Evaluation and Recommendation Report prepared by the Planning Department, and while I am glad to see that they recognize the home's association with Al Capone meets the criteria for historic designation, I cannot understand why they would then dismiss that association to recommend the home not be designated as a historic site.

As I explained in my op-ed, Capone is a significant cultural and historical figure not just to the larger United States, but to Miami and South Florida specifically. The home at Palm Island, as it exists

today, remains an artifact of Capone's time in Miami Beach and also of the landmark case built by federal prosecutors to end his criminal reign nine decades ago. These events remain a matter of intense interest throughout the country and around the world, as evidenced by the more than 25,000 people who have signed a Change.org petition urging that the home be preserved.

I noted as well in my article for the *Miami Herald* that Chicago, the city most associated with Capone, has demolished many of the buildings connected to his criminal career, from the speakeasy where he worked as a bouncer to the courthouse where he went on trial. Since writing that article, I have learned that this process continues, with the ongoing demolition of the old Cook County Jail – where, ninety years ago, Capone spent several months following his conviction for income tax evasion.

As more and more Prohibition-era landmarks fall to the wrecking ball, the home at 93 Palm Avenue increases in historic value and in its potential to draw the interest of people around the globe. For this reason, I urge you to vote to ensure the preservation of this rare survivor from a unique and significant period of American history.

Sincerely,

A. Brad Schwartz

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A. Brad Schwartz  
PhD Candidate  
Department of History  
Princeton University

Author/Co-Author of [Broadcast Hysteria](#) (2015), [Scarface and the Untouchable](#) (2018), [Eliot Ness and the Mad Butcher](#) (2020)

# Preserving Capone's home isn't glorifying a gangster. It's saving Miami Beach history | Opinion

By A. Brad Schwartz September 09, 2021 03:28 PM



The entrance to the oceanfront mansion that belonged to gangster Al Capone in Miami Beach in 2015. Alan Diaz *AP*

Nine decades after Florida officials tried to evict Al Capone from Miami Beach, local developers might finally finish the job. Todd Michael Glaser and Nelson Gonzalez, who own Capone's former residence on Palm Island, now intend to demolish it.

Is this place — where Capone oversaw one of the most notorious mass killings in American history, partied with other criminals, and drew his last labored breaths as a 48-year-old victim of neurosyphilis — worth saving?

Glaser says no. Making Capone's home a protected historic structure, [he told the Miami Herald](#), would "glorify this guy," while turning the property into "a tourist attraction for a known felon."

This argument misses the point of preserving the house, which tourists will keep looking for even if it's torn down. Just ask Chicago. That city demolished most of the buildings associated with Capone's career — from his headquarters in the Lexington Hotel to the location of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre — in an apparent attempt, [as one official put it in 1967](#), to forget things "we'd rather not remember."

## TOP VIDEOS

Yet tour buses keep rolling past those sites, and others that have become parking lots, because Capone's place in American culture is bigger than brick and mortar. That's why his Palm Island home should remain — not because a gangster lived and died there, but because his life and legend are embedded in our history.

[The City Code of Miami Beach](#) lists eight criteria for designating a historic building, any one of which should entitle it to protection. Capone's home meets at least three.

## Prohibition era

First, the house "embod[ies] the distinctive characteristics of a historical period" — the Prohibition era that made Capone a legend and changed the landscape of this region. When Capone bought the place in 1928, Miami was trying to recover from the failed Florida land boom. The area needed investment, so Mayor John Newton Lummus, Jr., not only welcomed Capone to Miami Beach — he helped the gangster acquire the Palm Island property. The energy of the Jazz Age can still be seen in the building's Spanish stucco

styling and Art Deco details.

The house easily meets a second criterion, that of "association with events that have made a significant contribution to the history of the city, the county, state or nation." The decisions Capone made at Palm Island, at what the Miami Daily News called his "[Summer White House](#)," echoed across the country — even as he tried to distance himself from them.

Capone made sure to be in Florida on February 14, 1929, the day his hired killers machine-gunned seven men back in Chicago. This event, the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, shocked the country, proved Prohibition's failure and marked a turning point for Capone, changing his public image from jovial bootlegger to coldblooded killer. Especially after the stock market crash later that year, Americans no longer looked kindly on his wealth — or how he'd made it. And by demonstrating the brutal efficiency of new automatic weapons, the massacre helped inspire [the first federal gun control law in American history](#).

A third criterion for historic designation, that of "association with the lives of persons significant in the city's past history," also fits — even though Florida tried repeatedly to rid itself of Capone. In March 1930, Gov. Doyle E. Carlton issued an order banning him from the Sunshine State. When that failed, State Attorney Vernon Hawthorne sued to shutter the Palm Island house as a public nuisance, while local police arrested Capone on any pretext.

## American society shifts

But [when Capone contested this treatment in court](#), his position in society became clear. Plenty of elite Miamians testified that Capone hosted disreputable characters and served bootleg liquor on Palm Island. But more than a few prominent citizens had also enjoyed his hospitality. Prohibition

enabled Capone's rapid rise to wealth, giving this son of Italian immigrants a shortcut around ethnic prejudice, but his ill-gotten gains couldn't purchase his neighbors' respect. His presence on Palm Island represented a larger shift in American society, the arrival of new money increasingly challenging the authority of the old.

"I wanted a home," Capone said. "I bought one. And what happens? They tell me I'm not wanted. Yet they take my money. ... What do they want me to do? Get an airplane and live up in the clouds?"

Capone voiced these complaints to Miami publisher Fred Girton, who recorded them in *Startling Detective* magazine 90 years ago this month. The article described Girton's latest visit to Palm Island, from the expensive furnishings to the golden tableware guests used to enjoy Capone's sumptuous meals.

This conspicuous consumption, emblematic of the Roaring Twenties, seemed obscene in the Depression. The public would not stand for it. Neither would the federal government.

## Capone convicted

President Herbert Hoover, who'd spent the winter of 1929 across Biscayne Bay from Capone, made the gangster's downfall a priority. The Treasury Department documented Capone's huge expenditures — with help from Girton, who informed them of his host's "[lavish mode of living...at his Miami Beach home](#)." Such evidence led to Capone's conviction for income tax evasion in October 1931, brought down by the excess on display at Palm Island.

When he died there in 1947, the *Miami Daily News* called his life an indictment of American society: "Only because we were as we were, could Al

Capone be as Al Capone was."

That's precisely why his home deserves saving. We might be ashamed of its history, but it tells the story of a bloody, greedy era whose failures we often seem intent on repeating.

Miami Beach can't erase that history, but it can preserve and contextualize it for visitors and future generations. Or it can repeat Chicago's mistakes. Capone's legend will live on either way.

*A. Brad Schwartz is a doctoral candidate in American history at Princeton University and the co-author (with Max Allan Collins) of "Scarface and the Untouchable: Al Capone, Eliot Ness, and the Battle for Chicago."*