

376 South County Road



DESIGNATION REPORT

April 19, 2023

Landmark Preservation Commission

Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT

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Table of Contents

I.	GENERAL INFORMATION	2
II.	LOCATION MAP	3
III.	ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION	4
IV.	HISTORICAL INFORMATION	8
V.	ARCHITECT'S BIOGRAPHY	11
VI.	STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	12
VII.	CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION	12
VIII.	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	14

Report produced by Murphy Stillings, LLC

I. General Information

Location: 376 South County Road
Palm Beach, Florida

Date of Construction: 1936

First Owner: Mr. and Mrs. John F. Dana

Architect: John Volk

Builder/Contractor: Charles J. Trevail

Present Owner: Church of Bethesda by the Sea

Present Use: Commercial

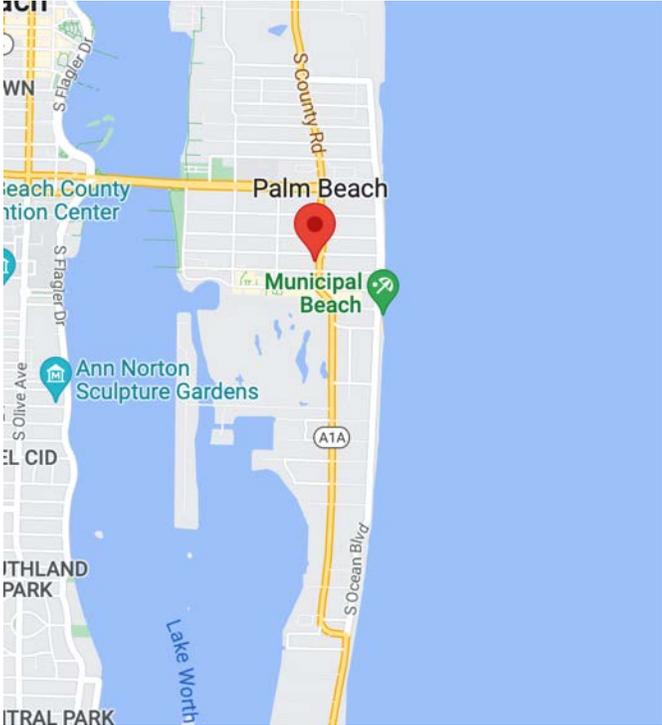
Present Zoning: CTS

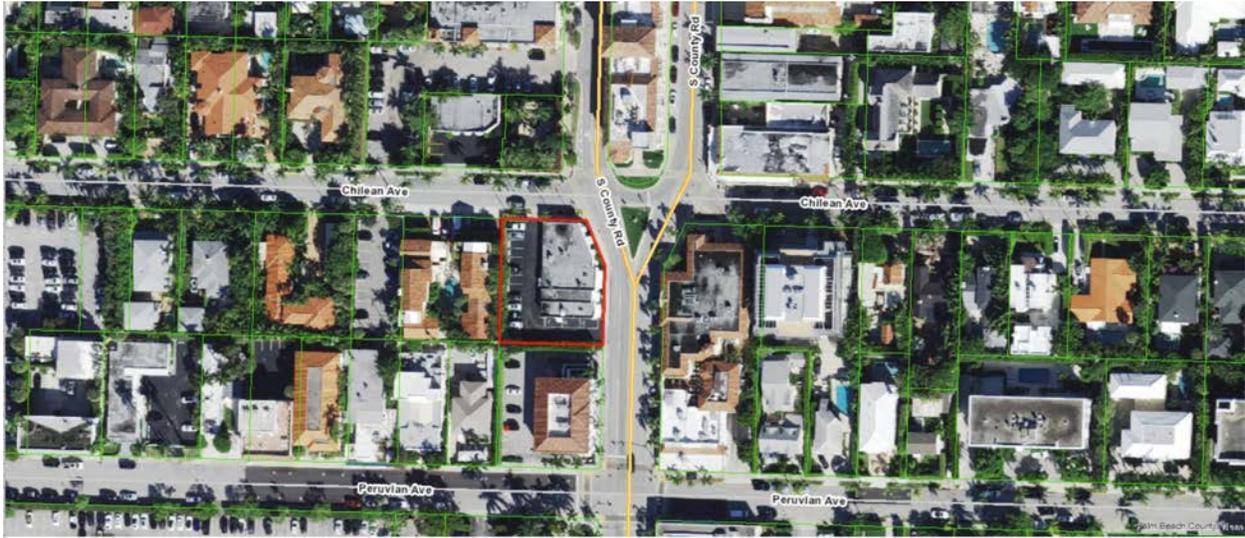
Palm Beach County
Tax Folio Number: 50-43-43-23-05-010-0240

Current Legal Description: Lots 24, 25, 26 and 27, Block 10, Royal Park Addition to the Town of Palm Beach, according to the Plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 4, Page 1 of the Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida.

II. Location Map

376 South County Road





III. Architectural Information

376 South County Road is a one-story Georgian Revival style commercial building with Regency details. Located at the northwest corner of South County Road and Chilean Avenue the building sits on a prominent site in the commercial and governmental center of Palm Beach. The structure was designed by renowned Palm Beach architect John Volk in 1936, during the post-Depression/New Deal Era, as an office and shop for prolific local building contractor Charles Trevail.



Northeast Corner, Facing South County Road and Peruvian Avenue



The Georgian Revival style is one of the long-lived architectural styles in the United States. It dominated the English colonies of the 18th century and was popular throughout the country from 1880 to 1955. Based on Georgian and Adam prototypes from the northeastern states, variations on the style were popular throughout the Caribbean and were adapted in revival form in South Florida during the 1930s through the 1950s. Unlike the original Georgian style, the Georgian Revival style buildings in Palm Beach are typically multi-massed and not strictly symmetric. The Regency style of architecture in Palm Beach is a revival and interpretation of 19th century Regency architecture of England and is sometimes referred to as “Palm Beach Regency”. It drew from the Georgian architectural style, which preceded it. Regency architecture has clean lines with a sense of tradition, a simplified elegance that features stucco facades, uncluttered planes, classical moldings, decorative horizontal banding near the roofline, and bay windows that project beyond the surface of the primary wall. Regency style buildings in Palm Beach typically feature flat roofs and are often single-story.



East Façade, Facing South County Road

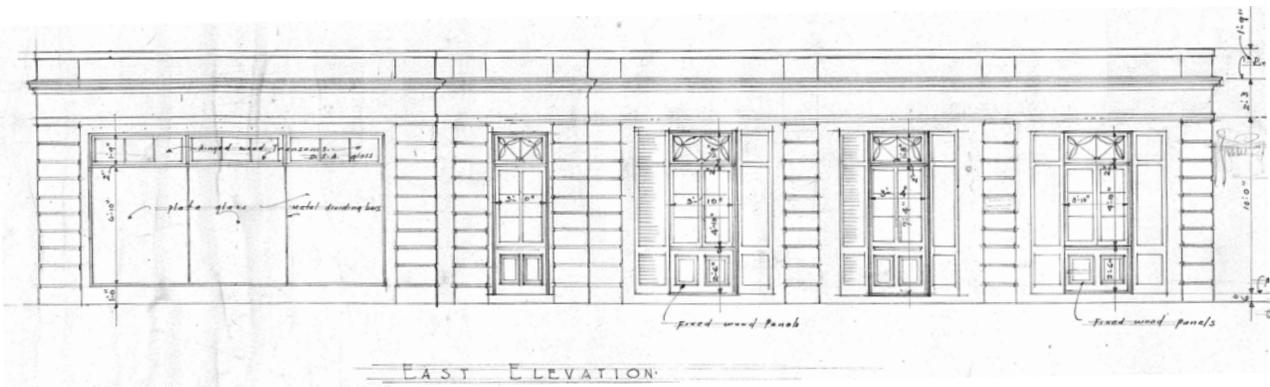
376 South County Road is a multi-massed commercial building with an irregular footprint on an angled corner lot. The building is surfaced with smooth stucco and has a flat roof with a pronounced parapet, a decorative slim stepped cornice, string course running above the window and door openings, and banding at the top of the parapet. Quoins are located at the corners and piers with quoin-like details separate the bays of the building. The fenestration consists of large single and grouped windows and glazed doors topped with transom windows. The transom windows consist of single light, divided light, and one original decorative transom

window. Canvas awnings shelter the openings along the South County Road and Chilean Avenue facades and door openings on the west and south facades. A drive and parking area wraps the west and south sides of the building.



Northwest Corner of the Building

The building was originally designed by John Volk and constructed by Charles Trevail as Trevail's construction company's office and workshop.¹ The building was constructed on the northern portion of the property in 1936 following the angled property line along South County Road.²



Drawing by John Volk, 1936

Courtesy of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, Volk Archives

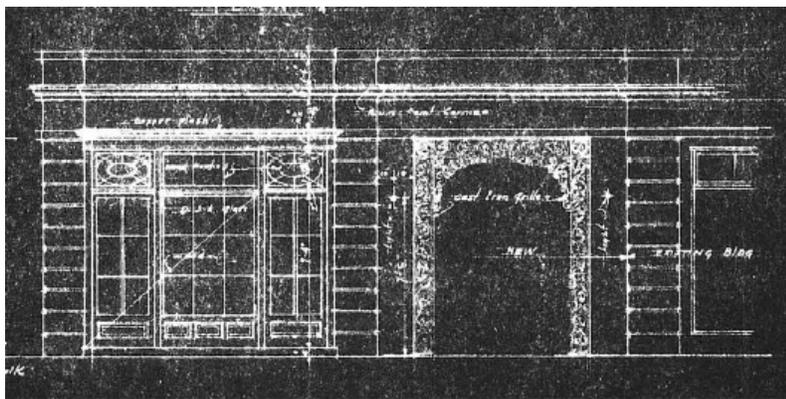
¹ The property was owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Dana.

² Building permit #8636, May 18, 1936, on file in the records of the Town of Palm Beach.



Historic Photograph, circa 1936
 Courtesy of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, Volk Archives

In 1937, the year after the building was constructed, Volk designed an addition to the south of the building for additional offices with a courtyard accessed from South County Road. This addition featured a slight bow to the massing along the east façade and a bow window. The addition’s design continued the building’s roof line and the design of the original cornice, banding, and quoins.³ In 1942, a small addition was constructed at the rear of the building.⁴

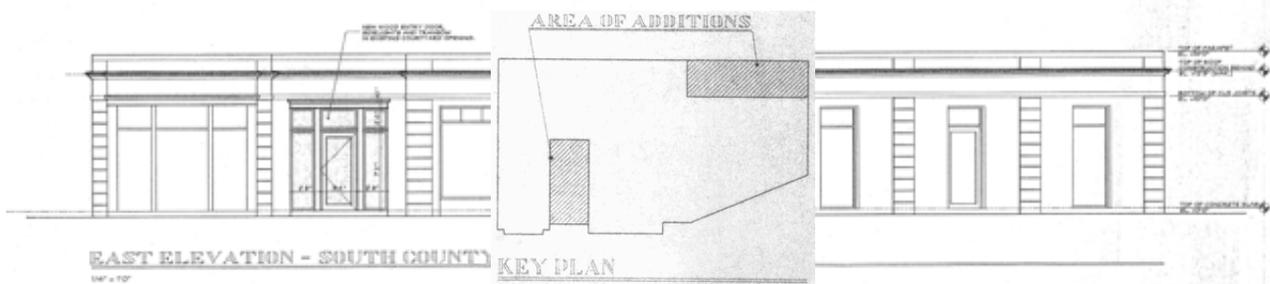


Drawing of Office & Courtyard Addition
 East Elevation, John Volk, 1937



Southeast Corner Showing
 Bowed Massing

In 1994, two additions were constructed. One enclosed the courtyard to provide additional interior space by installing a single light glass door, sidelights and transom windows in the original courtyard opening. Another addition was



constructed at the northwest corner of the building replacing an awning covered walkway that had been at the rear of the building.⁵

1994 Additions & Alterations
J.L. Thompson Architects, Inc.



Southeast Corner

Changes to storefronts are common in commercial buildings to accommodate the changing needs and uses of businesses. In addition to the changes previously mentioned, alterations to the building have included the removal of shutters and the replacement of some windows and doors.⁶ While the alterations to the building changed some details of John Volk's original design, these features could be returned in the future, if desired. In addition, the building retains some of the original windows, including an example of Volk's decorative transom window design which is located at the bow window. Despite changes over the years, the property at 376 South County Road continues to retain the essence of John Volk's architectural design and the strong sense of scale to the pedestrian environment it was originally constructed for and that continues today.

IV. Historical Information

The commercial building at 376 South County Road was constructed in 1936 during the post-Depression/New Deal Era in Palm Beach. Located in the commercial and governmental center of Town, in Palm Beach's early Royal Park

⁵ Building permit #94-03525 on file in the records of the Town of Palm Beach

⁶ Some of the window and door changes included replacing the divided light patterns with single lights, replacing decorative transom windows with single light transoms, and the removal of wood panels below some windows and lengthening the windows to closer to the grade.

subdivision, the building was originally constructed across from Palm Beach's Town Hall as an office and workshop for one of the Town's most prolific contractors, Charles Trevail.

Cap E. N. Dimick, the first mayor of Palm Beach, and Harvey Geer, an early Palm Beach pioneer, formed the Palm Beach Improvement Company in 1908 to develop the Royal Park subdivision. The subdivision was originally 160 acres of land that contained jungle, sand and muck, and included land north of Royal Palm Way to south of Worth Avenue, from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Worth. Developed to include both residential and commercial uses, South County Road was the business district in Royal Park. Like much of Palm Beach, Royal Park was booming in the 1920s. Following the construction of the new Palm Beach Town Hall, Fire Station, and Addison Mizner's Memorial Fountain on an island in the middle of South County Road, the area became the town's new governmental center and surrounding businesses thrived.⁷

The post-Depression/New Deal Era was a period of transition in the Town of Palm Beach. The building boom of the 1920s had ended and the Island was experiencing a period of economic instability. Fortunately, Palm Beach was not affected by the Great Depression to the same extent as other parts of the country. In 1930, the Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce reported that the town was enjoying one of its largest seasons with increased bookings reported by the FEC and Seaboard Air Line Railroads, over \$3 million in building permits were issued in 1930 alone and just two years later in 1933 Palm Beach hotels were eighty percent occupied and the town boasted over 230 businesses. By the 1930s, the South County Road commercial corridor, between Royal Palm Way and Worth Avenue, had numerous buildings with a large variety of enterprises including grocers, an automobile showroom, clothing shops, restaurants, antique stores, realtors, and other town-serving businesses.

The architecture in Palm Beach was also transitioning during the 1930s and less elaborate styles of architecture were being explored. By the mid 1930s, Palm Beach started to experience a post-Depression building boom. The desire for changes in architectural design reflected the shifting economic times with owners and architects looking to classic designs with cleaner lines and greater symmetry rather than the ornate Mediterranean Revival style popular during the 1920s Land

⁷ Town Hall was designed as two buildings with a walled courtyard between. The south building housed town hall and the police station and the north building housed the fire department.

Boom. John Volk's design for the commercial structure at 376 South County Road is an example of this change in the architectural development of Palm Beach.

Mr. and Mrs. John Dana owned the property at 376 South County Road and commissioned John Volk to design a building to be used as building contractor Charles Trevail's office and workshop. John Volk has been recognized as one of Palm Beach's most important architects as he was one of an elite group of early 1920s architects that included Addison Mizner, Maurice Fatio, and Marion Sims Wyeth. Over the course of his architectural career, which spanned sixty years, Volk designed over a thousand houses, theaters, clubs, commercial, and civic buildings in varying architectural styles.

Charles Trevail was originally from Lynbrook, Long Island, New York and moved to West Palm Beach in 1919. He had served in the Army overseas during World War I and was a recipient of the Silver Star. After arriving in Palm Beach County, he established a general contracting business under the name of C.J. Trevail.⁸ He became a sought-after contractor for both residential and commercial projects in Palm Beach and the surrounding communities, and built structures designed by many of the area's most prominent architects. Trevail and Volk had worked on other projects together including Hatch's Department Store which was being constructed at the same time as 376 South County Road.⁹ Trevail's office remained in the building at 376 South County Road from its construction in 1936 until 1948 when he passed away.

Due to its location near Town Hall, the building for many years contained offices for building contractors, electrical contractors, real estate offices, and architectural offices. Later tenants included medical offices, a barber shop, a restaurant, and retail establishments. The Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea acquired the property in 1987 and it became the home of The Church Mouse. The Church Mouse is a long-time Palm Beach resale shop that has celebrated over fifty years on the island with thirty-five years at this location. The Church Mouse's proceeds help fund Bethesda's Outreach ministry.¹⁰

⁸ Charles J. Trevail Obituary, The Palm Beach Post. April 30, 1948.

⁹ Hatch's Department Store was located on the corner of Clematis Street and Olive Avenue in West Palm Beach.

¹⁰ Prior to the location at 376 South County Road, The Church Mouse had been located at 101 North County Road.

Since the 1920s, the South County Road business district has been a bustling commercial, professional and governmental center with one-, two- and three-story buildings of varied architectural styles that still recall the Town's early, pedestrian-oriented days.¹¹ Included in the quaint character of the area is the building at 376 South County Road. John Volk's design and massing of 376 South County Road reflects Palm Beach's architectural history during the mid-1930s and the small town character that began in the 1920s and continues today.

V. Architects Biography

John Volk

John Volk has been called the last of the "original" Palm Beach architects. He was one of an elite group of early 1920s architects that included Addison Mizner, Maurice Fatio, and Marion Sims Wyeth who developed the architectural style of the island that came to be known as the "Palm Beach Style".

Volk was born in Graz, Austria in 1901. He came to the United States with his parents at the age of nine and grew up in New York. He attended Columbia University School of Architecture and L'Ecole des Beaux Arts. Volk opened his office in Palm Beach in 1925.

Volk designed more than 1000 houses, theaters, clubs, shops, and other buildings and lived in Palm Beach from 1925 to his death in 1984. He designed homes for some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in America over his 58-year career in Palm Beach including Colonel Robert McCormack, William Paley, George Vanderbilt, Nicholas DuPont, Henry Ford II, Herbert Pulitzer, Matthew Mellon, George Storer, Horace Dodge II, and John S. Phipps. Included in the designs of John Volk are some of the most prominent commercial and private club buildings in the Palm Beach area including the First National Bank, the Royal Poinciana Plaza and Playhouse, the center section of the Town Hall, the Beach Club, Good Samaritan Hospital, and several shops on Worth Avenue including the Everglades Colonnade. He also extensively modified and rebuilt the Bath and Tennis Club after a major hurricane.

¹¹ Town Hall Square Historic District. March 16, 1990. Report prepared by Eric Egan, Preservation Consultant and James Edward Sved, AIA, Preservation Consultant. The proposed boundaries of the historic district were South County Road from Royal Palm Way to Worth Avenue, but the boundaries were reduced to the buildings along South County Road between Brazilian Avenue and Chilean Avenue.

Numerous other buildings are the result of Mr. Volk's labor, and it must be noted that no particular style can be exclusively associated with Mr. Volk. Unlike other talented architects who developed or refined specific styles, John Volk understood and perfected many varying architectural styles from Mediterranean Revival to Contemporary Design.

VI. Statement of Significance

376 South County Road, constructed during the post-Depression/New Deal Era in Palm Beach as the office of prominent building contractor Charles Trevail, is representative of the Town's history and architecture during the 1930s. The building is also significant as a good example of renowned Palm Beach architect John Volk's version of a commercial Georgian Revival style building featuring Regency details.

VII. Criteria For Designation

Section 54-161 of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation of a landmark or landmark site and suggests that at least one criterion must be met to justify the designation. Listed below are the criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation:

(1) "Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county or town."

Originally built as the office of one of Palm Beach's prominent contractors and for the last thirty-five years as the home of the iconic Church Mouse, the commercial building at 376 South County Road is representative of the cultural, economic, and social history of the Town of Palm Beach. Developed during a period of transition in the commercial and governmental center of the town, 376 South County Road has remained a notable building providing valuable commercial space for offices and stores since 1936. The restrained design by the prominent architect John Volk is also representative of the cultural and architectural changes occurring in Palm Beach during the 1930s. At this time, Palm Beach was experiencing a post-Depression building boom that included buildings constructed with classic and

innovative designs intended to stand the test of time. It was described as the third Palm Beach architectural era and 376 South County Road exemplifies this changing period.

(3) “Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or is a specimen inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.”

376 South County Road, designed and constructed in 1936 by John Volk, is a good representation of Volk’s interpretation of a Georgian Revival style commercial structure with Regency details in Palm Beach. Distinctive features of the building include the stucco façade, window and door symmetry, classical moldings, horizontal banding, quoins, and the bowed window. The building embodies distinctive characteristics of the style, and the addition of Regency features provides a specimen valuable for study.

(4) “Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual ability has been recognized or has influenced his age.”

376 South County Road is representative of the notable work of architect John L. Volk. John Volk has always been recognized as one of the most important architects to practice in the Town of Palm Beach. Unlike other talented architects who developed or refined specific styles, John Volk understood and perfected many varying architectural styles from Mediterranean Revival to contemporary designs. During Volk’s sixty-year architectural career he designed over 1000 commercial, residential, club and civic buildings.

VIII. Selected Bibliography

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