

BILTMORE APARTMENTS 184 SUNSET AVENUE



DESIGNATION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1996

**Landmarks Preservation Commission
Palm Beach, Florida**



DESIGNATION REPORT

BILTMORE APARTMENTS
184 SUNSET AVENUE

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Report produced by Research Atlantica, Inc.

Report edited by Timothy M. Frank, AICP, Planner/Projects Coordinator, Town of Palm Beach.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Location: BILTMORE APARTMENTS
184 Sunset Avenue
Palm Beach, Florida

Date of Construction: 1924

Principal Architect: Bruce Kitchell

Present Owner: Wilhelm Bing

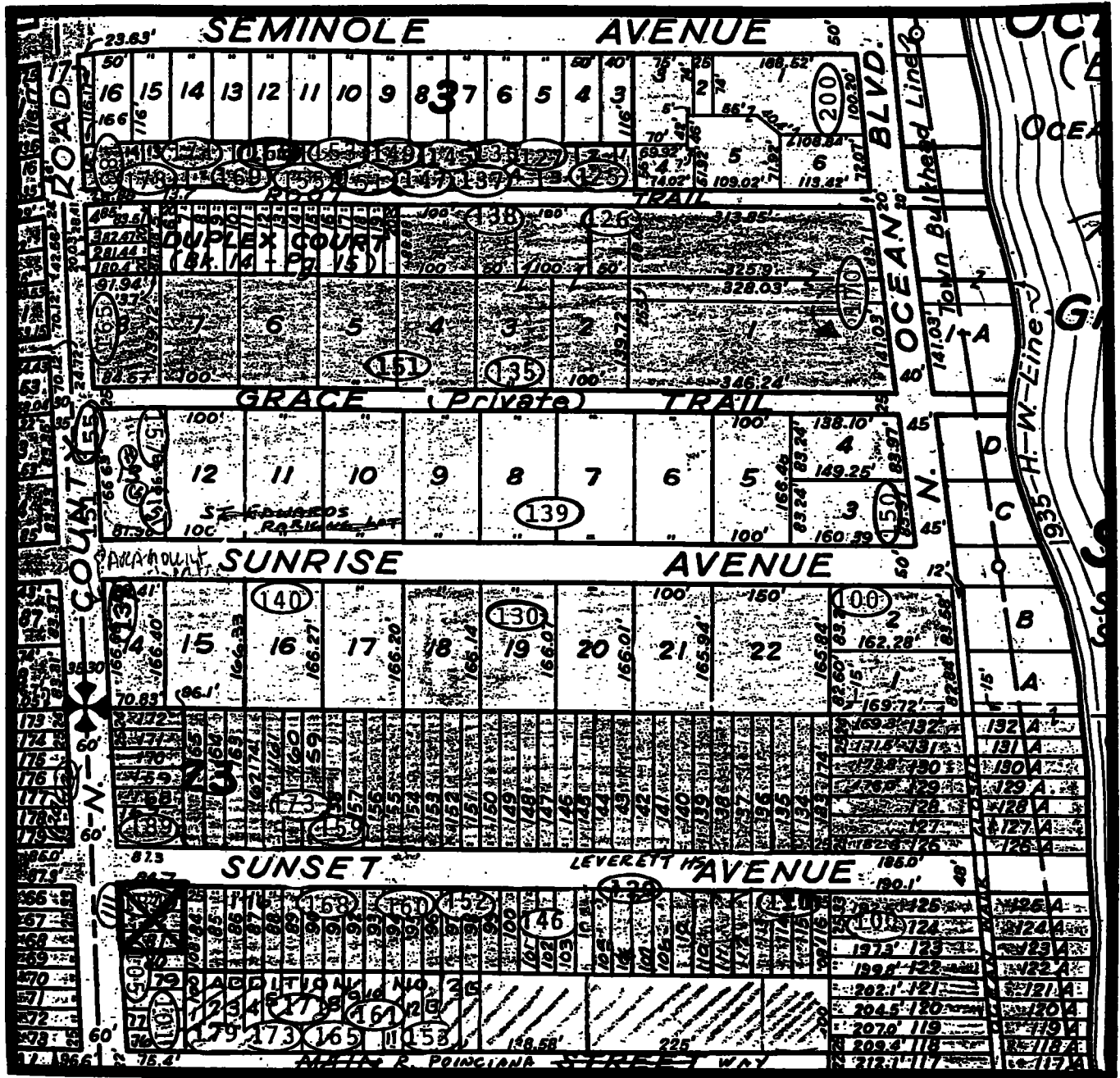
Present Use: Multifamily/Commercial

Present Zoning: CTS

**Palm Beach County
Tax Folio Number:** 50-43-43-15-11-000-0810

**Current Legal
Description:** Floral Park Lots 81 to 83 (less w 15 ft rd r/w)

Classification in the 1981 "Historic Building Survey of Palm Beach": This is a highly picturesque Mediterranean Revival apartment group from the town's great period of development. It is a completely formed composition with open stairs and galleries. It includes 4 shops at 109-117 N. County Road.



FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE
Site Inventory Form

FDAHRM 802 ==
1009 ==

Site Name Biltmore Apartments 830 == Site No. 8011 820 ==
Address of Site: 184 Sunset Ave. Palm Beach, FL 33480 905 ==
Instruction for locating SE corner of Sunset Ave and N County Rd 813 ==

Location: Floral Park 80 - 83 868 ==
subdivision name block no. lot no.

County: Palm Beach 808 ==

Owner of Site: Name: ? Executive Realty
Address: 902 ==

Type of Ownership 848 == Recording Date 8101 832 ==

Recorder:

Name & Title: Kidney, Walter C. (Architectural Historian) 818 ==

Address: Landmarks Planning, Inc., Allegheny Square West
Pittsburgh, PA 15212 818 ==

Condition of Site: Integrity of Site: Original Use other: apartments 838 ==

Check One
☐ Excellent 863 ==
☐ Good 863 ==
☒ Fair 863 ==
☐ Deteriorated 863 ==

Check One or More
☒ Altered 858 ==
☐ Unaltered 858 ==
☒ Original Site 858 ==
☐ Restored () (Date: X) 858 ==
☐ Moved () (Date: X) 858 ==

Present Use other: apartments 850 ==
Dates: Beginning +1924 844 ==
Culture/Phase American 840 ==
Period 20th Century 845 ==

BP

NR Classification Category: Building 916 ==

Threats to Site:

Check One or More
☐ Zoning (X) 878 ==
☐ Development (X) 878 ==
☐ Deterioration (X) 878 ==
☐ Borrowing (X) 878 ==
☐ Other (See Remarks Below): 878 ==

☐ Transportation (X) 878 ==
☐ Fill (X) 878 ==
☐ Dredge (X) 878 ==

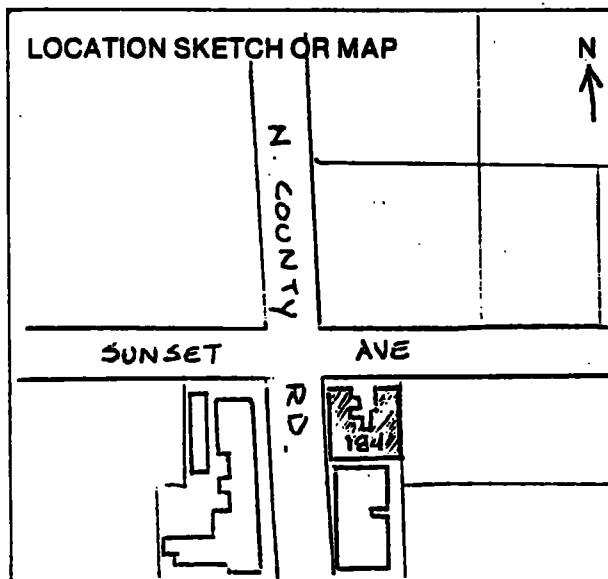
Areas of Significance: Architecture 910 ==

Significance: This is a highly picturesque Mediterranean Revival apartment group from the town's great period of development. It is a completely formed composition with open stairs and galleries. It includes 4 shops at 109-117 N. County Road.

Grade: B

911 ==

ARCHITECT _____ 872 ==
 BUILDER _____ 874 ==
 STYLE AND/OR PERIOD Mediterranean Revival 964 ==
 PLAN TYPE irregular; irregular 966 ==
 EXTERIOR FABRIC(S) stucco: textured 854 ==
 STRUCTURAL SYSTEM(S) brick # frame 856 ==
 PORCHES N/ courtyard, informal system of loggias w/open stairs, catwalks,
3 sides, 3 sts # W/ loggia over sidewalk w/3 bays (see cont. sheet) 942 ==
 FOUNDATION: _____ 942 ==
 ROOF TYPE: hip # flat: parapet 942 ==
 SECONDARY ROOF STRUCTURE(S): _____ 942 ==
 CHIMNEY LOCATION: E/ exterior 942 ==
 WINDOW TYPE: jalousie, metal # DHS. 6/6, wood 942 ==
 CHIMNEY: masonry, stuccoed 882 ==
 ROOF SURFACING: tile: barrel 882 ==
 ORNAMENT EXTERIOR: stucco # wood 882 ==
 NO. OF CHIMNEYS _____ 952 == NO. OF STORIES 3 950 ==
 NO. OF DORMERS none 954 ==
 Map Reference (incl. scale & date) USGS Palm Beach 7.5 MIN 1:24,000
1946 (photorevised 1967) 809 ==
 Latitude and Longitude: _____ 800 ==
 Site Size (Approx. Acreage of Property): _____ 833 ==



Township	Range	Section

812 ==

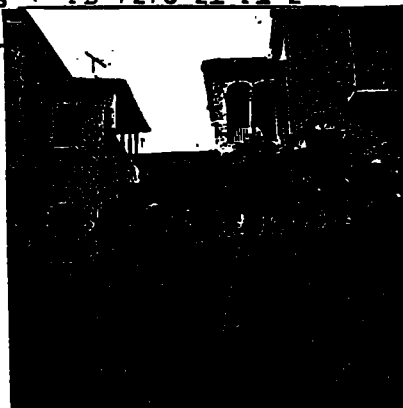
UTM Coordinates:

Zone _____ Easting _____ Northing _____
 890 ==

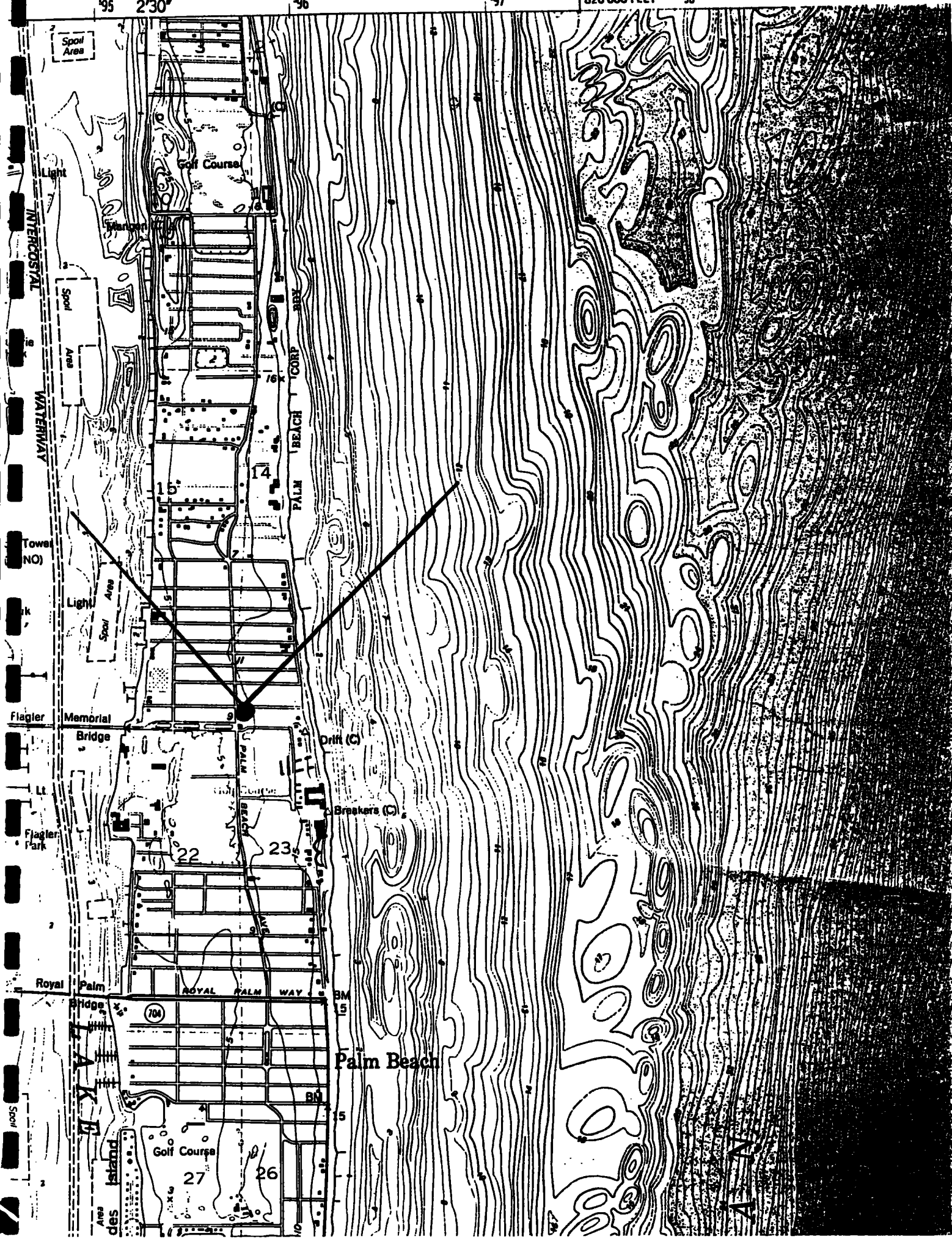
Photographic Records Numbers PB-7273-21-F1-2

860 ==

Contact Print



'95 2'30" '96 '97 820 000 FEET '98 '99



III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The Biltmore Apartments, also known as Mizner Court, is a three story Mediterranean Revival style building located at 184 Sunset Avenue. Architect Bruce Kitchell designed the hollow clay tile and frame apartment/commercial complex in 1924. The style is derived from a combination of architectural features commonly found in those countries and cultures that border the Mediterranean Sea, primarily Italy, Spain and Northern Africa.

The richly textured stucco building is U-shaped with a narrow courtyard facing Sunset Avenue. Twentythree one bedroom apartments open onto the courtyard. The courtyard's open staircases and projected balconies are highly decorative. Cypress detailing, lathe-turned wood columns, plaster covered Corinthian columns topped with acanthus leaf capitals, cast iron balustrades, and slender arched entrances are featured within the irregular shaped courtyard. While many of the balcony ceilings are of original cypress some ceilings have been replaced with plaster. Original wood sash windows have been replaced with aluminum double hung sash windows. Front entrances vary with each apartment.

Four commercial storefronts are on the ground floor of the building's west elevation which faces North County Road. An open arcade runs the length of this elevation over the sidewalk. The arcade's numerous arched openings feature either slender columns or square pillars decorated with floral sculpted pilasters. The three wide center arches are highlighted with an ogee arch detail, giving an exotic Venetian touch to this facade. The arcade's ceiling is cypress and is framed with decorative brackets. While the original wood sills remain the storefront's original glass windows and transoms have been replaced with single paned display windows. A decorative cornice runs horizontally across the exterior of the arcade, framing all the arches and commercial windows. The cornice gives a distinct touch to the commercial portion of the building and sets it apart from the apartments.

The roof of 184 Sunset Avenue has both flat and hipped areas. The present owners have recently replaced the roof using material and tile similar to the original. The majority of the roof, specifically the area covering the outer part of the U-shape, is flat. The area over the inner portion of the building, primarily the balconies, is hipped. Barrel tile covers the hipped areas. The North County Road elevation also has barrel tile detailing and a small centrally placed tiled gable. A multi-layered decorative cornice just below the roof line extends around the entire building.

The building also features a basement which the present owners have renovated. Original interior features remain in some of the apartments. Whenever possible the present owners have retained wood floors, stuccoed walls and porcelain fixtures. Historic photographs of the building taken during the 1920s show that while current

windows differ from the originals the Biltmore has maintained the integrity of its Mediterranean Revival design. The picturesque appearance of 184 Sunset Avenue is reminiscent of the Town's Boom Time heritage.

IV. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

On May 26, 1924 architect Bruce Kitchell received a building permit from the Town of Palm Beach for the construction of an apartment and commercial complex located on the southeast corner of Sunset Avenue and County Road.¹ The original plans commissioned by New York broker Michael Schultz were for a five story building which would cost in excess of \$100,000.² The final plans for twentythree apartments and four storefronts were incorporated into a three story Mediterranean Revival style building which was hailed as having "the most up-to-date" conveniences in Palm Beach.³ The owner of record according to the building permit was the Palm Beach Realty Company. It is unknown whether Schultz was associated with this company.

In June of 1924 the Atlantic Bond and Mortgage Guaranty Company ran advertisements in the Palm Beach Post marketing "first mortgage 8% serial gold bonds" from the Palm Beach Realty Company and secured by the Biltmore Apartment and Business Block.⁴ A detailed description of the building accompanied the advertisement. Solicitations for bonds were as low as \$100.

The Biltmore Apartments were sold in May of 1925 for \$250,000.⁵ The new owners, H. Harding, Burrows McNeir and George McNeir, continued to maintain the Biltmore as "luxurious, furnished apartments for select clientele from the north and east" who wished to vacation in Palm Beach.⁶ In 1927 Harding, a local architect, remodeled the stores and arcade.⁷

¹Permit #27724 on file at the Town of Palm Beach.

²"New Buildings in Palm Beach Total \$500,000", Palm Beach Post, May 15, 1924.

³Ibid.

⁴Advertisement, page three, Palm Beach Post, June 15, 1924.

⁵"Biltmore Apartments Sell For 1/4 Million", Palm Beach Post, May 10, 1925.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Building permits #73327 and #68327 on file at the Town of Palm Beach.

The appeal of seasonal accommodations at the Biltmore Apartments remained after the real estate bust of 1926 and hurricane of 1928. Notices announcing the opening and closing dates of December 1st and May 1st continued to run in the local newspapers in 1929.⁸ Over the years there have been numerous changes of ownership at the Biltmore Apartments. The building's outstanding location in the heart of the Town has made it an integral part of Palm Beach history.

V. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Biltmore Apartments, built in 1924, are significant as an important example of one of the few remaining multi-family and commercial complexes that were constructed during the Boom Time years of Palm Beach history. It was designed by Bruce Kitchell, a well-known local architect.

VI. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Section 16-38A of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance #2-84 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 criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation:

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

The Biltmore Apartments reflect the idyllic life found in the Town of Palm Beach during the Boom Time Era of the early 1920s. The apartments appealed to those wealthy seasonal visitors from the north and east who wished to visit Palm Beach during the winter. The luxuriously furnished accommodations were ideally located, convenient to the Breakers Hotel, Breakers Casino, Beach Club and other desirable Palm Beach attractions.

The building was part of a larger design that developed the heart of Palm Beach into an expensive block of business and residential buildings that ranged from ultra-modern apartments (The Biltmore Apartments) to commercial offices for prominent brokers, real estate agents and other professional businesses.

⁸Photograph and notice, Palm Beach Post, December 10, 1929.

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

The complex located at 184 Sunset Avenue was designed by Bruce Kitchell. Kitchell was one of the early architects in the Town, moving to Palm Beach in 1919 and holding one of the state's oldest professional certifications. He is credited with the design of one of the first houses in Poinciana Park.⁹ His fine sense of proportion and balance is well demonstrated at the Biltmore Apartments.

Kitchell is considered one of the more prolific architects in early Palm Beach County. While not as well-known as other Palm Beach architects, his scope of work ranged from residential to commercial designs, i.e an outstanding Venetian villa on Dunbar Road, two noteworthy commercial buildings on North County Road, movie theaters, and bank buildings.

VII. ARCHITECT'S BIOGRAPHY

Bruce Paxton Kitchell

Among local architects, few were as prolific as Bruce Kitchell. During the "Golden Age" of Palm Beach architecture, Kitchell was known for his fanciful compositions and his strong sense of proportion.

Born in New Jersey in 1879, Kitchell studied architecture at Columbia University and at the Newark Technical Institute. His design ideology, however was forged during his tenure in the Newark office of the formally trained, Jeremiah O'Rourke. After seven years in O'Rourke's office, Kitchell opened his own firm in 1906.

In 1919 Kitchell moved his office from Newark to Palm Beach, and was one of Florida's first architects to hold professional certification, #137.

Kitchell's architecture is typified by his desire to remain true to any style he worked in, his strong sense of proportion, and an excellent eye for detailed ornamentation. Kitchell's Palm Beach commissions included the Biltmore (now Mizner Court) Apartments, the Haven Store at the corner of Royal Poinciana Way and County Road, and the commercial composition from 120-132 North County road, as well as private residences for Amy Phipps, Otto Kahn, and Percy J. Williams.

Kitchell's biggest projects were the Farmer's Bank and Trust Company on Clematis

⁹"Palm Beach House Sells for \$150,000 Cash", Palm Beach Post, June 5, 1929.

Street in West Palm Beach, and "Firth". at Biltmore Forest, North Carolina, for Mrs. Mary Stuart Webb Vanderbilt. Firth is often miscredited as an Addison Mizner design. Kitchell collaborated with Mizner on the latter's design for Riverside Baptist Church in Jacksonville, and he was selected as President Roosevelt's "New Deal" architect for West Palm Beach.

Kitchell's own home was at the foot of the Southern Bridge in West Palm Beach, and later served as the headquarters of the local United Daughters of the Confederacy. It was razed to provide additional parking for the Greek Orthodox Church. Kitchell died in April, 1949.

IX. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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"New Buildings in Palm Beach Total \$500,000", Palm Beach Post, May 15, 1924.

Palm Beach Post advertisement, June 15, 1924, p. 3.
_____ photograph, December 10, 1929.

"Palm Beach House Sells for \$150,000 Cash", Palm Beach Post, June 5, 1929.

Town of Palm Beach. Building Permits #27724, #73327, #68327.

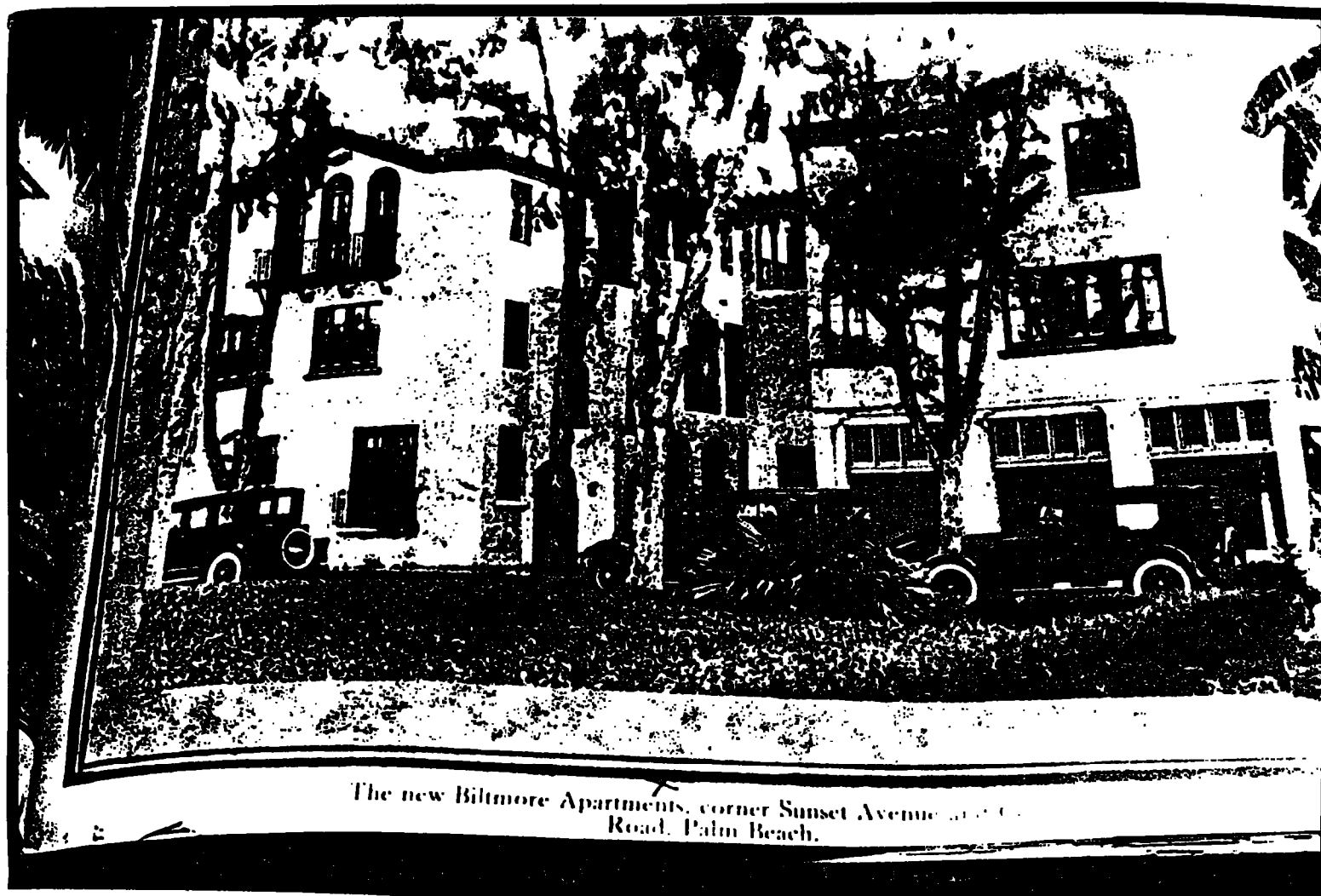
13



Interior courtyard
North facade

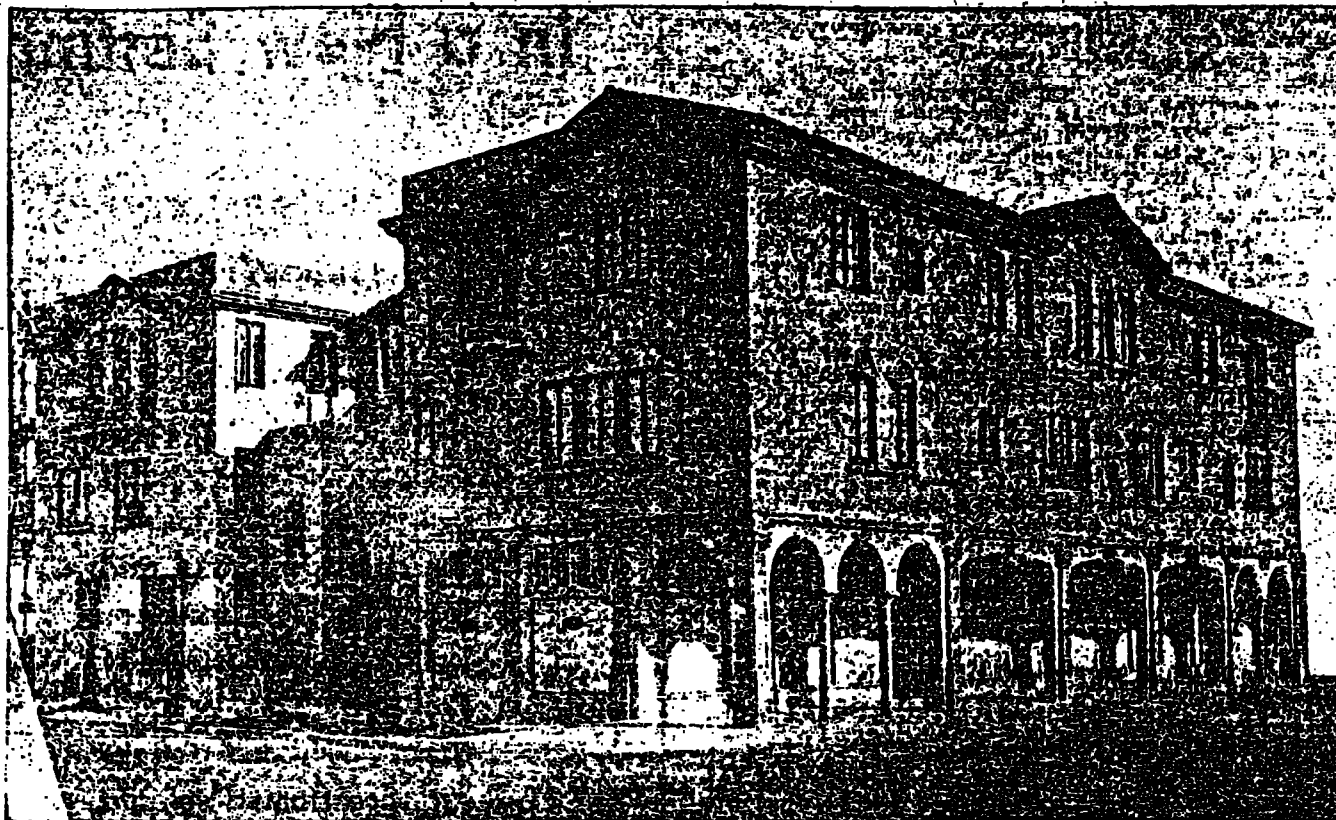


Note pilasters on ground floor windows and second story balcony
Sunset Avenue and North County Road



The new Biltmore Apartments, corner Sunset Avenue and C.
Road, Palm Beach.

Historic photograph, 1920s
unknown source
Courtesy of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County



BILTMORE APARTMENTS

SUNSET AVENUE AT PALM BEACH AVENUE NORTH
PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

OPENING DATE DEC. 1st. — CLOSING MAY 1st.

Phone 8626

Historic photograph
Palm Beach Post, December 10, 1929

