

**The Smith Shops**  
**296 – 302 South County Road**



**DESIGNATION REPORT**  
**January 18, 2023**  
**Landmark Preservation Commission**  
**Palm Beach, Florida**

# **DESIGNATION REPORT**

## **The Smith Shops: 296 – 302 South County Road**

### **Table of Contents**

I.	GENERAL INFORMATION	2
II.	LOCATION MAP	3
III.	ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION	4
IV.	HISTORICAL INFORMATION	7
V.	ARCHITECTS BIOGRAPHIES	9
VI.	STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	11
VII.	CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION	12
VIII.	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	13

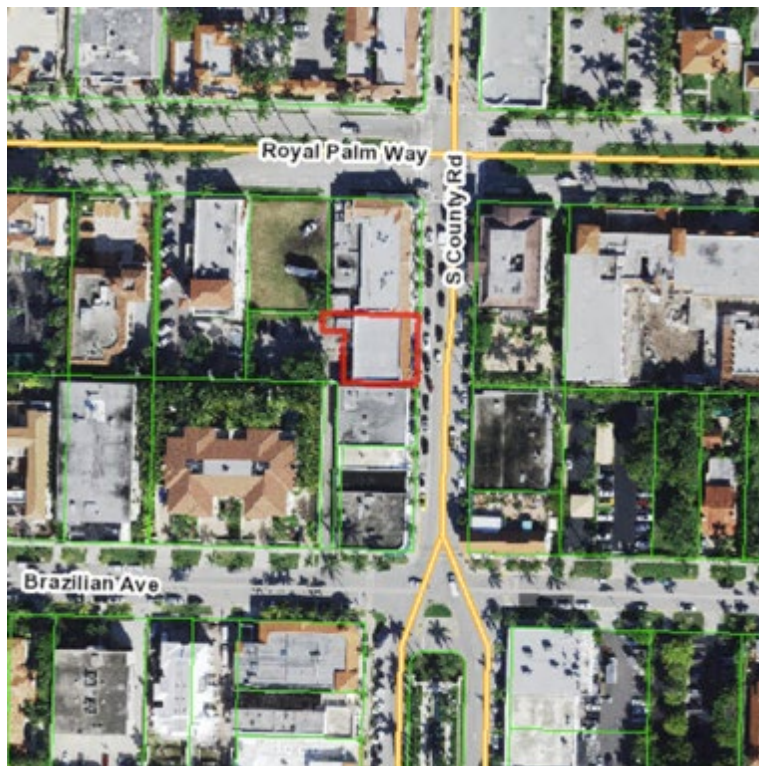
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## **I. General Information**

Location:	296 -302 South County Road Palm Beach, Florida
Date of Construction:	1931
Original Owner:	Stephen "S" Fahs Smith
Historic Name:	Smith Shops
Current Owner:	Milton Partnership, LTD
Architect:	Henry Stephen Harvey Office of Carlos Schoeppl
Builder/Contractor:	C.G. Warner
Present Use:	Commercial
Present Zoning:	C-TS Commercial Town Serving
Palm Beach County Tax Folio Number:	50-43-43-23-05-025-0352
Current Legal Description:	Royal Park Add 75' of Lot 35/Less E 5' & W 7' of South 55.88' & E 16.7' of N 19.12' S 75 of Lot 36 In DB747P387 BlkE

## II. Location Map

### The Smith Shops: 296 -302 South County Road



### III. Architectural Information

Designed by architect Henry Stephen Harvey in 1931 while working in the office of Carlos B. Schoeppl, the Smith Shops building at 296 - 302 South County Road is a one-story, four-storefront multi-retail commercial structure designed in the Mediterranean Revival style with Art Deco details along a main business thoroughfare in Palm Beach's early Royal Park subdivision. Harvey designed this building to establish the transition from his Mediterranean Revival style Palmway Building adjacent to the north with his 1929 Art Deco style building adjacent to the south.



Mediterranean Revival style architecture is an eclectic design style that was inspired by Spanish, Italian, North African and Moorish structures and became popular in Palm Beach during the 1920s and is still considered the signature style of the Island. In Palm Beach, the style was first popularized in 1919 by Addison Mizner's design for the Everglades Club and his later grand estates. The style remained a pervasive influence on building design until World War II. Art Deco is a modernistic style that became popular in mostly public buildings. *The Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925 had wide ranging influence. By the mid-1920s the new European Art Deco aesthetic was being adopted by American architects especially for commercial architecture and storefront designs where zigzags, chevrons and other stylized geometric motifs were often used. The Smith Shops building main Mediterranean Revival features include the shed roof covered with red clay barrel tiles with exposed rafter tails below, the rough stucco exterior, and the asymmetrical facade with varying roof lines. The Art Deco features of the building include the stylized geometric designed stucco panels and chevron surround that border all four of the building's storefronts creating a unique mixed-style design. It is likely that Carlos Schoeppl had



influence on this Henry Stephen Harvey design as he was an early proponent of the Art Deco style.



The largest feature of this commercial building are the four metal and glazed storefronts. Storefronts are the front porches of commercial buildings and are

designed to be attractive, inviting, and functional in order to play an important role in defining individual businesses and commercial districts. Fortunately, by the twentieth century, the structural system virtually disappeared as part of the storefront design with the beneficiary being the display window, which grew larger because of merchandising demands and technological advances in glassmaking.<sup>1</sup> In this building, the display windows allow the individual stores to showcase merchandise directly behind the windows or simply allow a clear view into the store. When constructed, the four storefronts had large transom windows, but as fluorescent lighting and general improvements in incandescent lighting made it possible to not be dependent on natural light the transom windows were enclosed. All four storefronts feature awnings which provide sun and rain protection as well as decoration and in some instances signature franchise distinction. Signage for these individual stores vary and is personalized, though most of the main signage is located on the fascia of the building above the decorative panels and below the red clay barrel tile shed roofs.



The Art Jury, precursor to today's Architectural Review Commission (ARCOM), was established in 1928 in order to protect the beauty of Palm Beach and property owners from "unartistic building erections." Any new project required approval, and the Jury had the right to modify plans as it saw fit. The jurors that reviewed the plans of this building included architects Addison Mizner serving as chairman, Marion Sims Wyeth, Maurice Fatio, Howard Major, and John Volk. The Art Jury requested revisions to Harvey's original plans, so the final approval by this group of distinguished local architects speaks to the quality of the completed design.

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, Mike. "Storefronts on Main Street: An Architectural History." Illinois Preservation Series, Number 19. Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Storefronts are often altered to fit new business identities and changing architectural fashions. In 1944 and 1945 Belford Shoumate designed rear additions to the Palm Beach Bakery at 296 S. County Road and in 1953 builder E. T. Diaguardi took out a permit to modernize the storefronts. Later exterior alterations included mostly signage and awning changes as various tenants moved in and out.<sup>2</sup>

#### **IV. Historical Information**

In April of 1931, Contractor C. G. Warner applied for Palm Beach Building Permit #3431 to construct four commercial stores along Palm Beach Avenue in the Royal Park subdivision. Distinguished architect Henry Stephen Harvey, while working in the offices of architect Carlos B. Schoeppl, designed the building for owner Stephen “S.” Fahs Smith. Harvey had designed the two storefront commercial building adjacent to the south in 1929 as well as the prominent Mediterranean Revival style Palmway Building adjacent to the north on the southwest corner of Royal Palm Way and Palm Beach Avenue. Harvey designed the Palmway Building in 1924 when he was partner in the esteemed architectural firm Harvey & Clarke, which had also designed the striking Mediterranean Revival style Palm Beach Town Hall and Fire Station in 1925 in the center of Palm Beach Avenue in the heart of the Royal Park subdivision.

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. This subdivision, which was mostly jungle, sand, and muck, included 160 acres of land from present-day Royal Palm Way south to Worth Avenue, and from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Worth. In 1912, it was decided that the area was to be developed in its entirety at one time. A sea wall was built, areas of the land were filled in and graded, and the streets constructed. Lighting, water mains, electricity and telephone lines were installed, and a bridge was constructed to connect Royal Park to West Palm Beach at Royal Palm Way. Like much of Palm Beach, Royal Park was booming in the 1920s with both residential and commercial construction. After completion of the new Palm Beach Town Hall and Fire Station at the end of 1925, the area became the town’s new governmental center and surrounding businesses thrived.

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<sup>2</sup> In December 2018, a car crashed into 296 South County Road and the storefront had to be replaced.



The Smith Shops building was developed as an investment property by businessman S. Fahs Smith who had been a winter resident of Palm Beach since 1911. S. Fahs Smith was a member of the prominent Smith family from York, Pennsylvania and was president of the turbine manufacturers S. Morgan Smith Company, based in York. In Palm Beach he resided at 147 Seabreeze Avenue and was a member of the Old Guard Society, the Bath and Tennis Club and the Everglades Club along with being involved with Bethesda-by-the-Sea. Mrs. S. Fahs Smith was very active in Palm Beach society and served as president of the Women's Guild of Bethesda-by-the-Sea, as well as the National Society of Americans of Royal Descent.<sup>3</sup>

By 1931, the Palm Beach Avenue 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 Smith Shops building was constructed to meet the commercial needs of both residents and guests at the nearby hotels and some of the earlier businesses included the Palm Beach Pastry Shop, Berlin Griffin beverages, Andover Reed and Mitchell Bassett Real Estate.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, Palm Beach was not affected by the Great Depression to the same extent that other parts of the country were, and although building large elaborate estates and luxury hotels like during the 1920s Boom Time era was not common, 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.<sup>5</sup>

In 1936, there was much debate about changing the main commercial north-south throughfare's name from Palm Beach Avenue back to the earlier name County Road. According to a March 1, 1936, Palm Beach Post article titled "Why Not County Road?" It stated,

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<sup>3</sup> During World War II, Mrs. Fahs Smith was very philanthropic and provided much wartime relief to Great Britain for which she was awarded the King's Medal by King George V.

<sup>4</sup> Current businesses include Fashionista Palm Beach at 296 S. County Road, Peterbrooke Chocolate at 298 S. County Road, Blue Provence at 300 S. County Road and Soula's Tailoring and Alterations at 302 S. County Road.

<sup>5</sup>Subsequent early owners included Burrell Smith, son of S. Fahs Smith, and George Moenert originally from Alsace, France.

“A movement in Palm Beach seeks to change the name of Palm Beach Avenue back to the old designation, County Road. Well, why not? Everyone calls it County Road still. You might change the name of Arkansas, but in the public mind it still would remain Arkansas. And so, in a smaller way, it still remains County Road to the people of the Palm Beaches. ...If the people of Palm Beach want the name of their main thoroughfare to be County Road, then County Road it should be. Palm Beach Avenue? It is a good enough name, as names go, but no more. It has no charm. It is no rugged individualist. It is only Palm Beach Avenue. But County Road? Homely, rustic, friendly County Road running through the middle of smart, modern Palm Beach, as if it had been there since the beginning of time and would remain to the end. County Road it is and County Road it will remain in the minds of the people.”

With support from many of Palm Beach’s prominent businessmen and politicians, the name was officially changed back to County Road by the Palm Beach Town Council in 1936.

From the 1920s to the present day, 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.<sup>6</sup> Included in the quaint character of the area is the Smith Shops building that has good proportions, interesting architectural design, and a strong sense of scale to the pedestrian atmosphere.

## **V. Architects Biographies**

### **Henry Stephen Harvey:**

Henry Stephen Harvey was born in Mississippi in 1889, and grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. Showing a talent for design early in life, he went to the University of Pennsylvania for architectural training. He married his wife, Claire in 1914, when he was 24-years old. During World War I he served in the Air Service branch as a second lieutenant of civil life, a position in which he planned and constructed aviation buildings at various camps throughout the United States.

Sensing a future in the tourist development of Florida, on April 1, 1921, he applied for a Florida license as an architect, and was granted registration (licensure) with Certificate AR0000179 on June 1, 1921. In Palm Beach, he partnered with his friend from the University of Pennsylvania Louis Phillips

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

Clarke (AR0000224) to form the architectural firm Harvey & Clarke. Clarke's family were one of the early Palm Beach pioneer families, and although Clarke did not receive his architectural license until almost two years later, on January 11, 1923, the partnership of their mutual talents was able to flourish. The firm was commissioned to design many of the Seaboard Coast Line Railway system's depot buildings, many which still exist and of those numerous are locally or nationally designated. Other prominent designated buildings designed by Harvey & Clarke in Palm Beach include the Palm Beach Town Hall, the Palm Beach Daily News Building, and the Palmway Building. In West Palm Beach, some of their locally or nationally designated designs include the Pine Ridge Hospital, the American National Bank Building, the Guaranty Building, Holy Trinity Church, and the Comeau Building.

Mr. Harvey was personable and popular, and served as Mayor of West Palm Beach from 1924 to 1927. His design talent was coupled with a keen interest in door and window hardware, and he patented the "HAR-VEY" top-hung sliding door roller device. The Harvey & Clarke partnership was dissolved in 1929, but he continued practicing architecture, and began an association with Miami-based architect Carlos B. Schoeppl. He also started a hardware business in Phipps Plaza, the epicenter of Palm Beach architectural firms, and later, on South County Road where he also had the town's first picture-framing shop. He co-authored a book, Taking the Mystery out of Builder's Hardware and he was a charter member of the Palm Beach Rotary Club. Harvey was a familiar sight in Palm Beach, wearing an ascot instead of a tie, leisurely strolling along County Road, going to and from his client's offices. He retired in 1983, and died in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania in 1987 at age 97.

### **Carlos B. Schoeppl:**

Carlos B. Schoeppl, a highly respected architect, born in 1898, studied architecture at UCLA, and worked in San Antonio and Houston, Texas before moving to Jacksonville in 1926 at the height of the Florida land boom.<sup>7</sup> He established an architectural practice in both Jacksonville and St. Augustine from 1927-1929. While in Jacksonville, Schoeppl designed some of the earliest Art Deco buildings in the city.<sup>8</sup> Already a well-established architect, in 1929, Schoeppl left Jacksonville for Miami where "Shep" became well known for his luxurious mansions, many in the Mediterranean Revival style and built for

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<sup>7</sup> One of his most prestigious early houses is the Johnelle Bryan house, a 1925 Italian Renaissance style house at 15 Courtland Place in the Houston Courtland Place National Register Historic District.

<sup>8</sup> Some of these buildings included the downtown Chevrolet Building at 1100 North Main Street (1928-1929), the Grace the Florist Building at 1612 Cherry Street in Riverside (1928) and the Thomas M. Palmer residence at 3790 Ortega Boulevard (1927).

wealthy clients along the “Gold Coast.” The story goes that he had a grand outgoing personality, a great interest in aviation and was friends with Howard Hughes and Eddie Rickenbacker. In 1932, he partnered with Arnold Southwell and during their partnership, Schoeppl and Southwell produced “A Florida Brochure” highlighting their numerous commissions in the South Florida area.<sup>9</sup>

During World War II, Schoeppl did his part for the war effort by designing military hospitals for North Africa and the Pacific Theater. In the 1940s he also established the Craftsmen’s Village, an artisans’ commune located in the Brownsville community near Miami International Airport. There he engaged wood carvers and old-world craftsmen to produce beautiful custom-made furniture and ironwork.

After the war, Schoeppl created the “American Plan Service,” to mass-market “modern” homes employing the latest technologies and design theories-- many of these were constructed in Miami and Fort Lauderdale. He did a booming business in South Florida constructing commercial buildings in the then popular Art Moderne style. By 1955, Schoeppl and Associates had offices in Miami, New York, Dallas, and Los Angeles. The firm became known for its hotel and “motor lodge” designs throughout the United States. Schoeppl also became associated with the style now termed “Post War Modern” or “Mid Century Modern.” Carlos Schoeppl continued his career into the 1980s and passed away in April of 1990. He was a prolific architect whose work helped shape the “look” of South Florida in the twentieth century.

## **VI. Statement of Significance**

The Smith Shops building at 296-302 South County Road was designed by Henry Stephens Harvey in the Mediterranean Revival style with Art Deco details to wed the Harvey designed buildings to the north and south. It was commissioned by Palm Beach and York, Pennsylvania businessman S. Fahs Smith as an investment property to meet both the needs of local residents, town and business staff as well as tourists at the nearby hotels.

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<sup>9</sup> Many of Carlos Schoeppl designed homes were built along the ocean, though many have since been replaced by high-rise buildings. However, throughout Miami Beach and along the bay front many of his homes still exist.

## **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.”**

The Smith Shops commercial building at 296-302 South County Road reflects the broad cultural, political, and economic history of the town of Palm Beach. Despite being built in 1931 during the country’s Great Depression, the wealthy resort town of Palm Beach was a thriving community with the need for additional retail space. The South County Road business district had become a bustling and important commercial area to support the growing town and particularly the residents of the Royal Park neighborhood, Town Hall and Memorial Park staff and visitors and nearby hotel guests. The developer S. Fahs Smith was an early Palm Beach winter resident who had the means to invest in commercial real estate despite the country’s severe economic downturn.

**(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.”**

The Henry Stephen Harvey designed Smith Shops building at 296-302 South County Road is a good representation of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture with Art Deco details. The main Mediterranean Revival features of this multiple retail structure include the red barrel tile shed roof, the rough stucco exterior and the asymmetrical facade and varying roof lines while the Art Deco features include the stylized geometric designed stucco panels with a chevron surround that border all four of the building’s storefronts creating a unique mixed-style design. Henry Stephen Harvey was an accomplished architect who skillfully designed this building to form an architectural link to his Mediterranean Revival style Palmway Building adjacent to the north and his Art Deco building adjacent to the south. While designing this building, Harvey was working in the office of architect Carl Schoeppl and this likely influenced his addition of the Art Deco detailing.



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