

125 Via Del Lago Casa Vera



**DESIGNATION REPORT
Wednesday, November, 16, 2011**

**Landmarks Preservation Commission
Palm Beach, Florida**

DESIGNATION REPORT

125 Via Del Lago

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Report produced by Jane S. Day, Research Atlantica, Inc.
With assistance from The Anthony K. Baker Interns, The Preservation Foundation of Palm
Beach: Lawrence V. Griffin, Heather Mashburn, and Melissa Walton.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Location:	Casa Vera 125 Via Del Lago Palm Beach, FL
Date of Construction:	1929
Principal Architect:	Marion Sims Wyeth
Present Owner:	GEH Properties, LLC
Present Use:	Residential
Present Zoning:	RA
Palm Beach County Tax Folio Number:	50-43-43-35-00-002-0040
Current Legal Description:	35-43-43, W 232.5 FT of E 482.06 FT of S 167.65 1FT of N 214.58 FT of Gov LT 2 W of Ocean Blvd.

This house is a Mediterranean Revival style built in Palm Beach during Boom times of the 1920s. It is worthy of local designation.

III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Casa Vera, originally named Casa Sañada is located 125 Via Del Lago. One street south of Via Bellaria, Via Del Lago was a new street in 1929 and locates the estate section of Palm Beach Island.¹ The 12,641 SF, originally 9,241 SF, estate is an exquisite example of Marion Sims Wyeth's work and the Mediterranean Revival Style that dominates the character of Palm Beach. The symmetrical U-shaped plan contains 6-bedrooms, 8-full and 2-half baths. The house sits at the highest point on the property and descends tri-terraced toward Lake Worth with house and patio at the zenith, garden with fountains and pool on a middle plane, and lawn that extends toward Lake Worth at the base featuring landscaping by Mario Neivera Design.



Two levels (House/Patio and Pool terrace) of the three terrace descent toward Lake Worth are visible here.²

Wyeth and Smith Architectural Group have infused extensive detailing throughout the house while preserving its original features. Most notably, the main living room contains an elaborate array of elements including a European style chimney and an intricately carved coquina mantel. The living room is crowned by an A-frame ceiling and painted beams; a stair gallery extends adjacent to the living space via a balcony from which the private quarters are located.

¹ *Social Index of Winter Residents and Visitors to Palm Beach, Miami Beach, and Other Florida Resorts 1934*, 32.

² Unknown Photographer, Sotheby's International Realty, www.sothebyshomes.com/palmbeach/sales/0074536 (link-archived), 2009.



Original Spiral stair, ironwork, and Cuban tile floor. ³



Living Room featuring original painted ceiling stencils, fireplace, mantel, and "tree of life" tapestry hung by original owners. ⁴

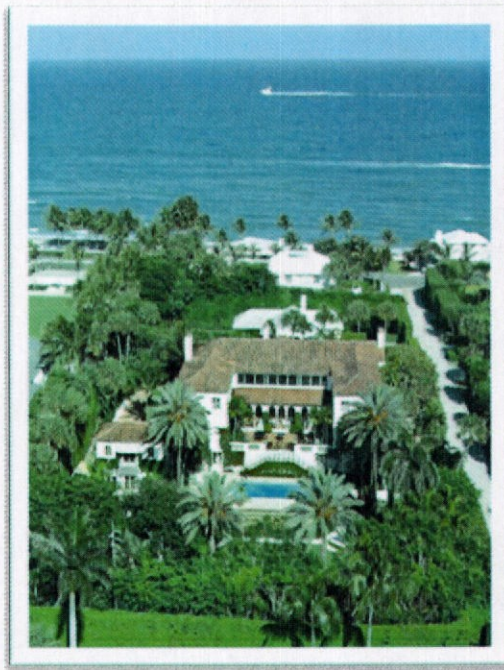
³ Unknown Photographer, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

⁴ Unknown Photographer, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

The quarry key stone entrance is topped by a blaconet with turned wood balusters. The stucco façades features quarry key stone trim around the windows and are flanked by painted wooden shutters. The low-pitched red clay barrel tiles meet a brick cornice with dentil details on the exterior facade.⁵

Many of the architectural elements are original to the house. This includes but is not limited to the Cuban-tile floors, the iron banisters on the spiral staircase, the open metal work archway that enhances the threshold between the foyer and the enclosed loggia, the wood floors in the living room, and many of the previously mentioned exterior features.⁶

The house can attribute its current size to the additions in 1993 and 2000 however the Mediterranean Revival character and original design features have been remarkably preserved. The house was originally built for Thomas L. Bennett, a pioneer in anesthesia, in 1928, and has changed hands only a few times since. Jack Taylor expanded the house in 1993 and Maria and Richard Power expanded and restored the House in 2000 with the help of the Smith Architectural Group. The house was sold to GEH Properties in 2010.⁷



Lush green foliage and the estates dominant scale accentuate its importance.⁸

5 "Bennett Home Will be Fine Addition to Winter Colony", *Palm Beach Daily News*, April 21 1929.

6 Darrell Hofheinz, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

7 Heather M. Rubel, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

8 Unknown Photographer, Sotheby's International Realty, www.sothebyshomes.com/palmbeach/sales/0074536 , (link-archived) 2009.

IV. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

125 Via Del Lago, designed by Palm Beach architect Marion Sims Wyeth, was built in 1929. The year marks the beginning of the Great Depression and the conclusion of a decade known in Florida as the "Boom Times." This was due to the rapid development and population increase in the state. For example, between 1923 and 1925, approximately 300,000 people came to Florida to settle, as real estate developers bombarded the state.⁹ 125 Via Del Lago is a product of this exciting time in the growth of south Florida real estate.

Casa Sañada, as it was first called, was originally built for Dr. and Mrs. Thomas L. Bennett. Dr. Bennett, was a pioneer anesthesiologist.¹⁰ While spending their winters in Palm Beach, the Bennetts adored time on their yacht, "Hope III", and were hospitable to their guests, Mr. and Mrs. Walter F. Wyeth Jr, Mr. and Mrs. Webster Janssen, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Johnson.¹¹ They also spent much of their time at the Everglades Club as members.¹²

Throughout the twentieth century Casa Sañada had many noteworthy owners and at some point in its history the house was renamed Casa Vera. Raymond Britt purchased the house in 1972. Britt was an important supporter of private higher education and was "honored at an awards dinner sponsored by the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida" in 1978.¹³ He sponsored and endorsed the private Palm Beach Atlantic College, now Palm Beach Atlantic University, in neighboring West Palm Beach from its opening in the late 1960s. Britt and his wife often held events at their 125 Via Del Lago home. One such event, the "Designers Showcase preview cocktail party for the American Red Cross," was held on March 20, 1970 at the home.¹⁴ Mrs. Raymond Britt, like her husband, was always involved in society in some way. Because of her fondness of stage shows, she was a founder of the Palm Beach Players.¹⁵

In 1993, Jack Taylor of St. Louis, Missouri, purchased the home. Jack is better known as the founder of Enterprise Rent-A-Car. In his younger years, he was a fighter pilot on the U.S.S. Enterprise in World War II, prompting the naming of his company. He expanded the house in 1993.

In 1998, just five years later, Taylor sold Casa Vera to Richard and Maria Powers¹⁶ An article

9 Michael Gannon, ed, *The New History of Florida*, (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1996), 291.

10 Jane S. Day, Historical Structure Form, October 2, 2010, House File Folder 125 Via Del Lago, Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach Archives.

11 *Social Index of Winter Residents and Visitors to Palm Beach, Miami Beach, and Other Florida Resorts 1934*, 32.

12 Ibid, 32.

13 "Bits and People", *Palm Beach Daily News*, May 18, 1978, 17.

14 "The Social Calendar", *Palm Beach Daily News*, March 6, 1977, 3.

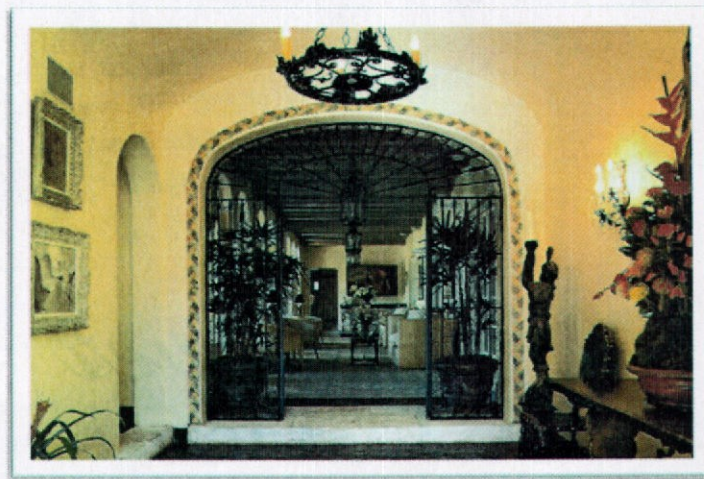
15 "Palm Beach Players to Hold Try-Outs for Neil Simon Play", *Palm Beach Daily News*, July 13, 1978, 16.

16 Darrell Hofheinz, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

dated October 26, 2010 claimed that the Power's completed an "extensive restoration and expansion of the home a decade ago," (approximately 2000) with Jeffrey Smith of Palm Beach's Smith Architectural Group as the architect.¹⁷ In 1998, while Worth Builders worked on Casa Vera's roof, "the tar pot became engulfed in flames," causing approximately \$25,000 in damages to the side of the house and minor indoor smoke damage.¹⁸ Even after the restorations, much of the original home remains, such as the "iron banister on the curved staircase and an open-metalwork arch that divides the foyer from the enclosed loggia".¹⁹

The Powers and their Via Del Lago home were featured in *Palm Beach Illustrated* in February 2000 with the headline "With an extensive restoration a Palm Beach family transforms its residence into a...Power House".²⁰ The article boasts the integrity of the preservation process. Maria Power states in the article, "We salvaged as much of the home as possible...What we couldn't keep, we completely copied so that it looks the same way as it did originally."²¹

In 2010, the Power's sold Casa Vera to GEH Properties LLC for \$9.285 million.²² 125 Via del Lago, Casa Vera, is associated with Marion Sims Wyeth and is symbolic of the "Boom Times" and Wyeth's work.



Original Ironwork visible between Foyer and loggia stamped by Marion Sims Wyeth.²³

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Renovation equipment overheats, burns house", November 4, 1998.

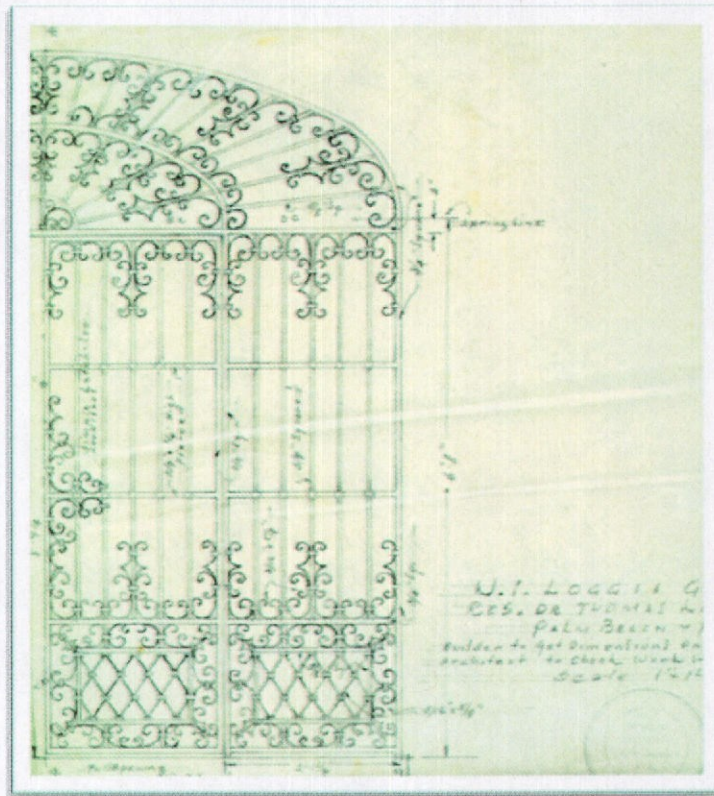
¹⁹ Darrell Hofheinz, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

²⁰ Heather M. Rubel, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

²¹ Ibid, 93.

²² Darrell Hofheinz, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

²³ Heather M. Rubel, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.



Original Drawing of Ironwork between Foyer and loggia stamped by Marion Sims Wyeth.²⁴

V. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Casa Vera is a good example of one of Palm Beach's foremost architects during the Boom years of the 1920s, Marion Sims Wyeth. The Mediterranean Revival Style of this home is representative of his best designs and has been well preserved throughout its expansions and restorations. This building is an excellent illustration of Palm Beach's great architectural heritage.

VI. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Chapter 54 of the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Palm Beach (Historic Preservation Ordinance) outlines the criteria for designation of historic structures and districts, 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:

Sec. 54-161(1) Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county or town.

The building also represented a change in architectural style for Palm Beach. The wood frame

²⁴ Marion Sims Wyeth Sketch, Palm Beach Preservation Foundation, 1928

buildings of an older generation had given way to Mediterranean Revival structures designed by professionally educated and proficient architects. This construction also highlights the beginning of the estate developments that now characterize the south side of the island and was constructed at the beginning of the Great Depression.

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 craftsmen."

Casa Vera exemplifies the Mediterranean Revival style that is characteristic of Palm Beach through extensive detailing, overall form, and controlled color. Special attention has been taken by its previous owners to preserve the authenticity of the home in its overall form and detail including the façade, roof, terraces, and gardens.

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

This house at 125 Via Del Lago is a good example of the Mediterranean Revival style of Marion Sims Wyeth.

VII. ARCHITECT'S BIOGRAPHY

Marion Sims Wyeth

The architect of more than 100 Palm Beach houses since 1919, Marion Sims Wyeth established himself as one of Palm Beach's foremost architects.

Wyeth was born in New York City, and his father was a pioneer in the field of graduate education for physicians. He attended the Lawrenceville School and graduated from Princeton in 1910. From 1910 to 1914, he was a student at the American Ambassador in Rome. Between 1915 and 1917, he was associated first with the office of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and then Carrere and Hastings. He opened his Palm Beach office in 1919.

After completing the original Good Samaritan Hospital in West Palm Beach, he designed a number of houses on Golf Road, including houses for Clarence Geist and Mr. and Mrs. Edward F. Hutton. When the Hutton's decided to build Mar-A-Lago, they again asked Wyeth to be their architect. Before he had finished the plans, the Hutton's had brought in Joseph Urban to complete the detailed designs. Wyeth later designed some alterations and additions to Mar-A-Lago including the ballroom, scene of Mr. Post's famous square dances.

In 1920, Wyeth formed a partnership with Frederick Rhinelander King (1887-?) in New York City. King, a Harvard and Columbia Architecture graduate, attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts at the same time as Wyeth. William Royster Johnson joined the firm as a draftsman in 1925. In 1944, he was made a partner with the firm name changed to Wyeth, King and Johnson.

Wyeth's largest Palm Beach house was the residence for James F. Donahue, just north of Mar-A-Lago on the Ocean Blvd. Today, the estate has been subdivided as the house itself, forming five different residences. In a career that spanned over fifty years, Wyeth designed houses that can be found on almost every street in Palm Beach. Among his commissions were the rectory of Bethesda-by-the-Sea, Florida's Governor's Mansion in Tallahassee, and the Norton Gallery of Art.

Wyeth became a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1954, and in 1981, the Palm Beach Chapter of the AIA presented him an award for architecture "that stood the test of time". He retired from active practice in 1973, and died in Good Samaritan Hospital on February 7, 1982.

X. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Bennett Home Will be Fine Addition to Winter Colony", *Palm Beach Daily News*, April 21 1929.

"Bits and People", *Palm Beach Daily News*, May 18, 1978, 17.

Darrell Hofheinz, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million", *Palm Beach Daily News*, October 26, 2010.

Heather M. Rubel, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

Jane S. Day, Historical Structure Form, October 2, 2010, House File Folder 125 Via Del Lago, *Palm Beach Preservation Foundation*.

Marion Sims Wyeth Sketch, *Palm Beach Preservation Foundation*, 1928.

Michael Gannon, ed, *The New History of Florida*, (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1996), 291.

"Palm Beach Players to Hold Try-Outs for Neil Simon Play", *Palm Beach Daily News*, July 13, 1978, 16.

"Renovation equipment overheats, burns house", *Palm Beach Daily News*, November 4, 1998.

Social Index of Winter Residents and Visitors to Palm Beach, Miami Beach, and Other Florida Resorts 1934, 32.

"The Social Calendar", *Palm Beach Daily News*, March 6, 1977, 3.

Unknown author, Biography courtesy of *Palm Beach Preservation Foundation*.

Unknown Photographer, *Sotheby's International Realty*,
www.sothebyshomes.com/palmbeach/sales/0074536 (link-archived).

Unknown Photographer, "Powers sell Wyeth-designed mansion Casa Vera for \$9.285 million",
Palm Beach Daily News, October 26, 2010.

Unknown Photographer, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

VIII. LOCATION MAP



125 Via Del Lago is located on Via Del Lago, Between Via Bellaria to the North and Via Palma to the south, off of Ocean Boulevard.

EXTRA IMAGES OF CASA VERA:



Garden and Pool Terrace facilitate transition to patio and estate.²⁵



Enclosed Loggia that overlooks patio and backyard garden. Tropical themed mural.²⁶

²⁵ Unknown Photographer, Sotheby's International Realty, www.sothebyshomes.com/palmbeach/sales/0074536 (link-archived).



Photo of Living Room in 2000.²⁷

26 Unknown Photographer, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

27 Unknown Photographer, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.



Photo of Dining Room in 2000.²⁸



Original features of home retained: Quarry Key stone entrance, turned wood baluster of blaconet, Red-Barrel Tile roof, brick dentils at eaves, and stucco façade.²⁹

²⁸ Unknown Photographer, "Power House", *Palm Beach Illustrated*, 91.

²⁹ Unknown Photographer and date, House File Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach archives.



Photo of house prior to renovation shows intricate tracery on painted wood shutters.³⁰

³⁰ Unknown Photographer and date, House File Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach archives.



HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM

Electronic Version 1.1.0

Site #8 PB06833
Recorder # Jane S. Day
Field Date 9/29/2010
Form Date 10/2/2010
FormNo 201009
FormNo = Field Date (YYYYMM)

First Site Form Recorded for this Site? NO

GENERAL INFORMATION

Site Name (address if none) Richard Power, House Multiple Listing (DHR only)
Other Names >> Casa Vera
Survey or Project Name Palm Beach Historic Sites Survey, PhaseIV Survey#
National Register Category Building(s)

LOCATION & IDENTIFICATION

Address

Street No.	Direction	Street Name	Street Type	Direction Suffix
<u>125</u>		<u>Via Del Lago</u>		

Cross Streets (nearest/ between) South Ocean Blvd & Lake Worth
City / Town (within 3 miles) Town of Palm Beach In Current City Limits? YES
County Palm Beach Tax Parcel #(s) 50-43-43-35-00-002-0040
Subdivision Name Gliddon Tract Block Lot 4
Ownership Private Individual
Name of Public Tract (e.g., park)
Route to (especially if no street address) On the north side of Via Del Lago between South Ocean Blvd. and Lake Worth.

MAPPING

USGS 7.5' Map Name Publication Date >> PALM BEACH; 1946
Township: Range: Section: 1/4 section: >> 43S ; 43E ; 35; UNSP
Irregular Section Name:
Landgrant
UTM: Zone Easting Northing
Plat or Other Map (map's name, location)

DESCRIPTION

Style Mediterranean Revival Other Style
Exterior Plan Irregular Other Exterior Plan
Number of Stories 2
Structural System(s) >> Hollow clay tile
Other Structural System(s)
Foundation Type(s) >> Continuous
Other Foundation Types
Foundation Material(s) >> Concrete Block
Other Foundation Material(s)
Exterior Fabric(s) >> Stucco
Other Exterior Fabric(s)
Roof Type(s) >> Gable
Other Roof Type(s) Hip
Roof Material(s) >> Spanish tile
Other Roof Material(s)
Roof Secondary Structure(s) (dormers etc) >>
Other Roof Secondary Structure(s)
Number of Chimneys 2
Chimney Material Brick
Other Chimney Material(s) stucco on exterior
Chimney Location(s) east interior, south exterior wall

HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM

8PB06833

DESCRIPTION (continued)

Window Descriptions casement, leaded glass, French doors

Main Entrance Description (stylistic details) on the south facade with cast stone surround and balcony above

Porches: #open 2 #closed #incised Location(s) raised entry - s, balcony - s

Porch Roof Types(s)

Exterior Ornament cast stone, shutters, wrought iron, brick, decorated dentils/fascia

Interior Plan Unknown

Other Interior Plan

Condition Excellent

Structure Surroundings

Commercial: NONE of this category

Residential: ALL this category

Institutional: NONE of this category

Undeveloped: NONE of this category

Ancillary Features (Number / type of outbuildings, major landscape features)

Archaeological Remains (describe): none observed

If archaeological remains are present, was an Archaeological Site Form completed?

Narrative Description (optional)

HISTORY

Construction year 1928

Architect (last name first): Wyeth, Marion Sims

Builder (last name first): unknown

Changes in Locations or Conditions

Type of Change	Year of Change	Date Change Noted	Description of Changes
>>			

>>

Structure Use History

Use Year Use Started Year Use Ended >> Private residence;1928;

Other Structure Uses

Ownership History (especially original owner, dates, profession, etc.) Originally built for Thomas L. Bennett, a pioneer in the field of anesthesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Methods >> Examine local property records

Other research methods

SURVEYOR'S EVALUATION OF SITE

Potentially Eligible for a Local Register? YES

Name of Local Register if Eligible Town of Palm Beach Landmark

Individually Eligible for National Register? INSUFF. INFO

Potential Contributor to NR District? INSUFF. INFO

Area(s) of historical significance >> Community planning & development

Other Historical Associations

Explanation of Evaluation (required) This house is an excellent example of the Mediterranean Revival style built in Palm Beach during the Boom times of the 1920s. It is worthy of local designation.

HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM

8PB06833

DOCUMENTATION (Photos, Plans, etc.)

Photographic Negatives or Other Collections Not Filed with FMSF, Including Field Notes, Plans, other Important Documents.

Document type: _____

Maintaining Organization: _____

File or Accession #: _____

Descriptive Information: _____

>> _____

RECORDER INFORMATION

Recorder Name (Last, First) Day, Jane S.

Recorder Address / Phone 728 Granada Drive, Boca Raton, Fl. 33432 561-362-4473

Recorder Affiliation Research Atlantica Other Affiliation Town of Palm Beach

Is a Text-Only Supplement File Attached (Surveyor Only)? _____

***** MASTER SITE FILE USE ONLY *****

Cultural Resource Type:

Electronic Form Used:

Form Type Code:

Form Quality Ranking:

Form Status Code:

Supplement Information Status:

Supplement File Status:

Form Comments: _____

SHPO's Evaluation of Resource

_____ Date _____

FMSF Staffer:

Computer Entry Date:

REQUIRED PAPER ATTACHMENTS

- (1) USGS 7.5" MAP WITH STRUCTURE PINPOINTED IN RED
- (2) LARGE SCALE STREET OR PLAT MAP
- (3) PHOTO OF MAIN FACADE, B&W, AT LEAST 3"X5"