

Preliminary Designation Report

Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments Historic Site

826 NE 121 Street
Biscayne Park, Florida
Built: 1934



Arthur M. Griffing



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Regulatory and Economic Resources Department
Miami-Dade County

September 24, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. GENERAL INFORMATION	2
II. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION / SETTING	3
III. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE & CONTEXT	10
IV. ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE	15
Prominent Structural Components	17
Prominent Ornamental Features	19
V. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	20
VI. PROPERTY VULNERABILITY	21
VII. FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE	21
VIII. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION	21
IX. STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS	22
X. CONTRIBUTING FEATURES	22
XI. STAFF EVALUATION & RECOMMENDATION	23
XII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	24

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

NAME: Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments

LOCATION: 826 NE 121 STREET
Biscayne Park, FL 33161
Township: 52S
Range: 42E
Section: 30

DEVELOPER: Arthur Mertlow Griffing

CONSTRUCTION DATE: 1934

PROPERTY OWNERS: JAAN ROOTS & W DENISE
C/O LAURA BOURIVE BURLSHALTER ESQ

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: GRIFFINGS BISCAYNE PK ESTS AMD PL
OF BLKS 29-31 PB 15-53
LOTS 14 & 15 BLK 31
LOT SIZE 60.000 X 105
OR 20474-0412 06 2002 1

TAX FOLIO NUMBER: 17-2230-045-0430

SIGNIFICANCE: **History/Context:** Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments highlights a period of architectural transition in Miami-Dade, providing an example of early community planning integrating both single-family residences and multifamily dwellings.

The Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments are significant due to their association with early real estate development in Miami amidst the backdrop of agricultural expansion. The methods employed integrated setting and location as key considerations in design for planned communities. These early developments often balanced residential life and the agricultural industry. The Biscayne Park Estates development is a demonstrative example of a project in this vein, and the apartment building noted on lots 14 and 15 of the amended plat is a tangible reminder of the architectural style utilized in these early developments. As such, Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments fulfill Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(a), *associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological, and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history*

in the community, Miami-Dade County, South Florida, the State or the nation.

People: The Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments is associated with the lives of persons significant to the history of Miami-Dade County, notably Arthur Mertlow Griffing, a prominent nursery and businessman turned real estate developer. The unique combination of his horticultural and real estate businesses led Griffing to develop lush and inviting neighborhoods, including Biscayne Park. As such, the site fulfills Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(b), *be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.*

Architecture: Constructed in the Mission Revival architectural style, the design of the Griffing Biscayne Park Estates Apartments is a distinctive influence in the residential construction that was slated to define the Griffing's Biscayne Park area.

As a touchstone to a transitional period in Miami's built environment, the design of the apartment highlights a stylistic influence prevalent at the time, Mission Revival style architecture.

The structure is a demonstrative example of Mission Revival architecture, with much of its original detail remaining clearly reflecting core characteristics that distinguish the style. As such, the site fulfills Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(c), *Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of construction or work of a master; or that possess high artistic value; or that represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

IMPACTS:

The Miami-Dade County Office of Historic Preservation is required to approve any exterior changes and/or additions, demolition, or new construction to the designated resource. Most approvals are handled in-house directly by the staff of the Office of Historic Preservation. Major alterations require approval by the County Historic Preservation Board. Additional details are included in *Section VI: Standards for Certificates of Appropriateness.*

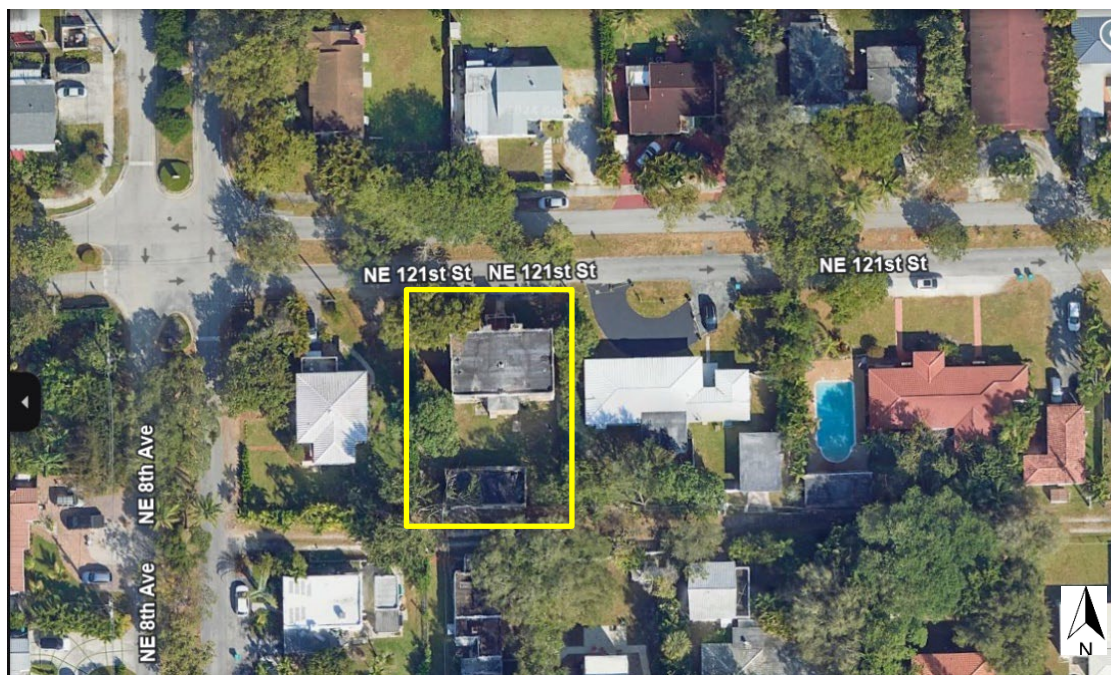
Designated resources are eligible to take part in the County's Ad Valorem Tax Exemption program.

II. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION / SETTING

The Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments building is located on the south side of NE 121st Street. This portion of NE 121st Street serves as the boundary between the Village of Biscayne Park and the City of North Miami, with properties on the south side of the street within the

boundaries of the Village and those on the north side within the boundaries of the City of North Miami. The approach street incorporates a median of green space at the center with mature trees. To the east of the proposed site is a single-story masonry vernacular structure. The neighborhood appears to be comprised primarily of single-story residential construction. Of these structures, those on the south side of NE 121st Street are multi-family duplexes and triplexes, while the properties on the north side of the street are primarily single-family residences. These surrounding residential constructions were built largely between 1941 and 1987. The proposed site is a notable exception to the single-story constructions prevalent in the area. It is a two-story multifamily construction with 4 living units. The neighboring property directly to the west, constructed in 1949, is also a two-story multifamily residential structure and is built in the Streamline Moderne architectural style.

Notably, a nearly identical apartment was built by Griffing in 1922 and is located nearby on NE 5th Avenue, just south of its intersection with NE 123rd Street. Constructed as part of the original subdivision plat for the area, that earlier structure serves as a reflective example of the Mission Revival architecture elements that were later expanded upon in the later construction in the area, including the proposed site. The 1922 structure is also a comparable example of a historically preserved structure in a similar form and use that remains in use today and further demonstrates Griffing's vision for his subdivision to include a variety of housing options, including multifamily apartment buildings.



Property Appraiser aerial street map with parcel outlined in yellow. (2025)



View looking east from the intersection of NE 121st Street and NE 8th Avenue. The subject site is visible at right with a landscaped median separating the Village of Biscayne Park (at right) from the City of North Miami (at left). (2025)



View looking eastward along NE 121st Street from the subject site (2025)

Site Landscaping

The lot of the subject parcel incorporates green space at the east and west entry façade, bracketing the entry walkway, along with a 2-car parking space area directly facing the residence on the north entry façade. At the rear of the structure, smaller trees are arranged along the side with a more open lawn. Large trees and low-cut grass, along with hedge fencing, define the entry yard landscaping for most of the parcels along this street.

The exterior site landscaping also incorporates three pavestone pathways, one at the east and west facades of the primary structure and a third pathway leading to the rear garage secondary structure.



View of Garage and rear access road to property (2025)



North Facade (main entry) with walkway and parking spaces visible (2025)



MAR • 64

View of East and North Façades (1964).



MAR • 64

View of North and West Façades (1964).



Easternmost end of the North façade with pavestone walkway at east façade visible (2025).



View of West Façade (2025).



View of South Façade of Garage, secondary structure (1964).



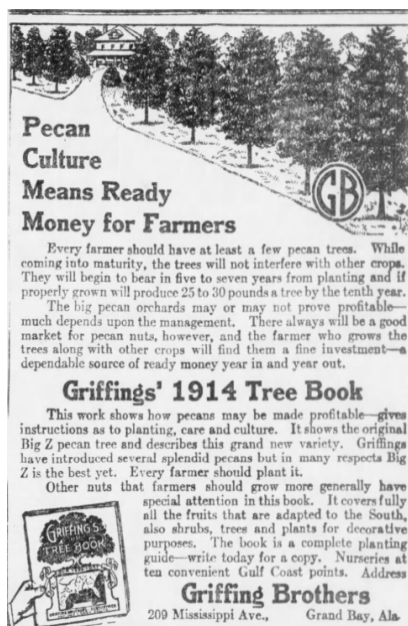
North façade, (Top Left); South Façade, (Bottom left); West Façade (Top right); East Façade (Bottom Right) of Garage (2025).

III. HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE & CONTEXT

Historically, the area where 826 NE 121st Street and the Griffing Biscayne Park development is located is the ancestral land of the Tequesta and Seminole people. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, after the forced removal of the Indigenous people, land throughout the area was in part portioned off by the United States government to various homesteaders through a series of land grants. Following the Swamp Lands Act of 1850, the subject area was included in an 1870 land survey, which officially classified the area as Swamp Land¹. As a result, no known land grants were issued for this area.² Land reclamation projects aiming to 'reclaim' the land in areas denoted as swamp lands were initiated in various ways. In large part, Miami's expansion in the years following was made possible through canal dredging, drainage, and flood control. Through these methods, communities, like Biscayne Park, took shape in previously undeveloped areas.



In 1884, Arthur Mertlow Griffing (1875-1958) moved to Florida from Norwich, NY, along with his father and four brothers. They established a family-operated nursery in MacClenny, just west of Jacksonville. The success of the MacClenny nursery, combined with the impact of crop freezes



¹ In 1850, the Swamp Lands Acts was enacted, primarily geared toward the development of Florida's Everglades. The Act enabled States to reclaim swamp lands, essentially reverting title of identified swamp land allowing them to then be drained and transitioned into agricultural use. History of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States. <https://water.usgs.gov/nwsum/WSP2425/history.html> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

² The area is denoted as 'Swamp land' in official records as of September 30, 1873. This classification was reaffirmed on September 8, 1879. US Dept. of Interior. Bureau of Land Management. General Land Office Records. Volume 538, Pg. 157. <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/>. (last accessed 8/14/2025)

there, led them to open branch nurseries in Miami. In 1903, Arthur relocated to manage a nursery in Little River and established the Griffing Tropical Nurseries and Groves. A few years later, in 1910, the Griffing Bros. company was contracted to plant 6,000 pecan trees across a 340-acre grove in Texas by developer John W. Gates.³ By 1912, the Griffing Bros. Company was active in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Texas, and Cuba, growing a variety of trees and plants, including pecans, oranges, cedars, peaches, grapefruit, figs, grapes, and ornamental plants like roses.

In South Florida their holdings expanded to include a 25-acre grapefruit grove near West 12th street, a bay front property north of the city spanning 120 acres with orange and grapefruit trees and 640-acres in the Silver Palm neighborhood in South Dade, comprising all of Section 16 of that plat, hosting grapefruit groves and a 10-acre parcel specifically used for cultivating tropical plants adapted to South Florida weather.⁴ In 1912, Griffing also developed his first subdivision, Biscayne Heights, and in 1913, arrangements were made to shift his focus from nursery manager in Little River and North Miami to the development in the Redland area in the South.⁵

As a horticulturalist, Griffing's career included landscape design for entrepreneur Carl Fisher in Miami Beach, and his growing interest in real estate development became his central focus.⁶ As a result, Griffing began acquiring more property along South Dixie Highway, an endeavor which resulted in the sale of the Griffing Tropical Nurseries and Groves property located at Avenue G, today's NE 2nd ST., to establish a seven-acre estate for his family home between Northwest 125th Street and West Dixie Highway. The project coincided with a new development project Griffing had planned. By 1917, his brothers had transferred much of their agricultural holdings in Dade County from the Griffing Brothers' company to Arthur.⁷

The Village of Biscayne Park is part of the original Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates development, conceived by Griffing and originally platted in 1921. The block on which the subject site is located is part of an amended plat that Griffing filed in March 1925. An architectural rendering of Arthur's new home was printed in the local newspaper along with advertisements for this new venture, the Biscayne Park Estates. His holdings spanned an area of over 100 acres near the 700-acre community development.⁸

The next year, advertisements for the development showcased the architecture of its new homes and its setting, inviting prospective buyers to tour the area. Other advertisements billed Biscayne Park as the "Gateway to Miami," coupling residential property sales with promotions such as offering a free strawberry shortcake and boxes of citrus fruits to potential buyers to promote the area's nurseries and neighborhood design.⁹ The amended plat for the

³ "The Pecan Festival." Grovescofc.com, Grove Chamber of Commerce & Tourist Center, 2025, www.grovescofc.com/pecanfestival/thepecanfestival. (last accessed 8/14/2025)

⁴ Griffings' Grapefruit Trees. December 31, 1912. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/297394807/> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

⁵ 5. "Walter C. Griffing Comes to Help in Growing Business." Newspapers.com, The Miami News, 4 Jan. 1913, www.newspapers.com/image/298526289/. (last accessed 8/14/2025)

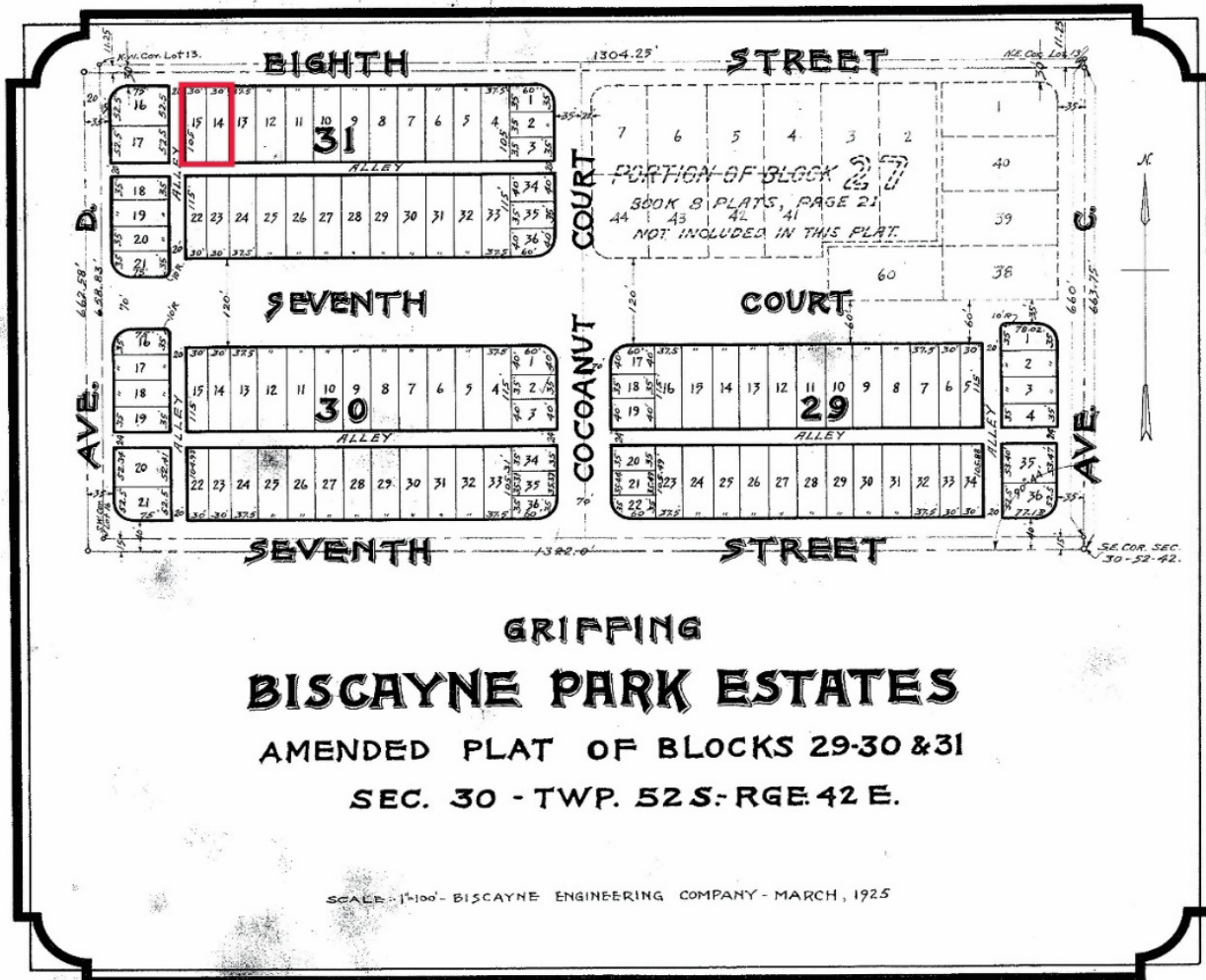
⁶ Matkov, B. R. (Ed.). (2021, May 5). Biscayne Park. Greater Miami Shores Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.miamishores.com/biscayne-park/> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

⁷ Newspapers.com. The Miami News. January 4, 1917. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/298286219> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

⁸ "Griffing's Park Estates Advertisement, Pg. 48." Newspapers.com, The Miami Herald at Newspapers.com, 4 Mar. 1925, www.newspapers.com/image/616540347/. (last accessed 8/14/2025)

⁹ Visitors Invited. (1923, January 16). Newspapers.com; The Miami Herald. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/616088677/> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

proposed designation site in Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates was filed in 1925.¹⁰ Throughout his time in Miami, Griffing, alongside his wife, Alabama Griffing, who served as the company's office manager, acquired property in North Miami and as far south as Silver Palm and the Redland area. Griffing's plan for Biscayne Park Estates combined his interests and experience as a horticulturalist and his business pursuits as a real estate developer. Typical of this period, Griffing's advertisements for the new development project emphasized the community's landscaping, boasting velvety green lawns and beautiful parks, which were planned by Griffing to incorporate a variety of flowers, shrubs, and trees, including strawberries, roses, peas, beans, and citrus.¹¹ The first homes constructed in the new development were priced between \$4,000 and \$4,500.¹²



Griffing Biscayne Park Estates Plat, March 1925; Site of the Griffing Biscayne Park Estates Apartments is outlined in

¹⁰ The amended Plat for the Biscayne Park community was filed in 1925, reconfiguring a portion of the original Biscayne Park Estates plat. Miami-Dade County Clerk's File No. 1925 R 28007, Recording Book/Page: 15/53 (last accessed 8/14/2025)

¹¹ The Miami News. p.43 Biscayne Park "Gateway to Miami" December 30, 1923. Newspapers.com (last accessed 8/14/2025)

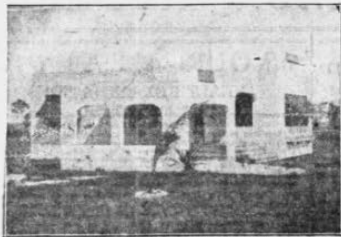
¹² Biscayne Park Heritage Month Proclamation. (2020). Village of Biscayne Park. Village of Biscayne Park.

https://www.biscayneparkfl.gov/vertical/sites/%7BD1E17BCD-1E01-4F7D-84CD-7CACF5F8DDEE%7D/uploads/Proclamation_Heritage_Month.pdf (last accessed 8/14/2025)

At the time, advertisements published by Griffing in local newspapers often highlighted a range of housing types, including both single-family homes and multifamily residences. Multifamily structures were generally depicted in Griffing's advertisements as being two-story constructions while single-family residences largely remained one story designs. Interestingly, Griffing had an apartment building constructed on NE 5th Avenue, just south of NE 123rd Street, shortly after the subdivision was platted in 1922. This apartment building was nearly identical to the subject site, with some difference noted in fenestration patterns.



Clipping from the January 21, 1925, Miami Daily News, showing the nearly identical apartment building, and indicating Arthur Griffing had just sold it to Mr. H. Lauderdale for \$28,000.



RESIDENCE OF MRS. INGLETTON, BISCAVNE PARK ESTATE

BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES

"Gateway to Miami"

Comprises over 700 acres of the choicest land adapted for homesites to be found in Florida. None better for gardens, fruits or flowers year around blooming and thriving in a soil of fertility unsurpassed by any land in the Sunshine State. A visit to these fertile grounds will convince anyone of the wonderful possibilities in home gardening or for raising flowers, chief among them are roses, this exquisite flower you see daily, fragrant and fresh, in your banks, Ponce de Leon dining room, telegraph and newspaper offices and other public institutions come from Biscayne Park Estates.

See our arrangement of large lots all 75 foot frontage and a depth of 200 feet, with pure filtered water, every city convenience offered you in a suburb of lawns and flowers. Building restrictions which protect your investment and our unique plan for the maintenance of all vacant lots guarantees the perpetual upkeep of the entire district.



STREET SCENE IN BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES

BEAUTIFYING

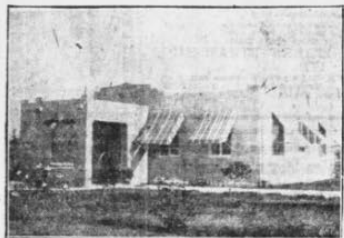
A Rich Section with all the Tropical Loveliness that appeals to the artistic sense.

The Suburb Superb



THE KIND OF A LOT YOU BUY IN BISCAVNE PARK

Proper maintenance means permanent beauty. No Rocks, No Palmettos, but we have lawns, roses, hibiscus, oleanders, and many other varieties of flowers enhancing lots now for sale at special reduced prices to home builders.



RESIDENCE OF MRS. GROVE, BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES



\$25,000.00 HOME OF MR. ARTHUR M. GRIFFING, OWNER AND DEVELOPER BISCAVNE PARK

GUARANTEED 8% INVESTMENT

To reassure those unfamiliar with the rapid growth of Miami northward, we are willing to back up our faith in Biscayne Park Estates by giving every purchaser a Guaranty Bond stating therein that we will, at the end of three years from date of payments are completed, refund full purchase price with 8% interest, if for any reason the purchaser is dissatisfied with the investment. We back this guarantee by more than One Hundred Thousand Dollars assets, over and above the present value of Biscayne Park Estates, which alone are worth many hundred thousands of dollars. Feeling and knowing as we do that values will more than treble within three years at Biscayne Park Estates, we have no hesitancy in making this sweeping guarantee. 60 FOOT STREETS EAST AND WEST; 70 FOOT STREETS NORTH AND SOUTH with ample parkways in center for shade trees, palms and shrubbery. Every block has a private park for the children's playground, a \$25,000.00 school, in fact, nothing has been overlooked to satisfy the most fastidious home seeker of the investor.

LOWERING THE COST OF LIVING

We are helping you to lower the cost of living and are selling Biscayne Park tracts at lowest possible prices consistent with the high class of service guaranteed, ample ground for poultry and kitchen gardens the year around on this rich soil means grocery bills cut in half. There is no such luxury on a crowded city lot. We are in a position to furnish you many attractive and practical house plans free of charge. You cannot duplicate a concrete home in Dade county on a 200 foot lot, tropically landscaped, built to your desire, for the astounding low prices and generous terms offered you in Biscayne Park.

All improvements in, not proposed; convenient transportation facilities, in addition to the orange bus line operating to Miami, the de luxe busses of the Florida Motor Transportation Company pass directly through our properties maintaining frequent schedules to Miami.

Seeing Is Believing

Call Our Offices For Representative

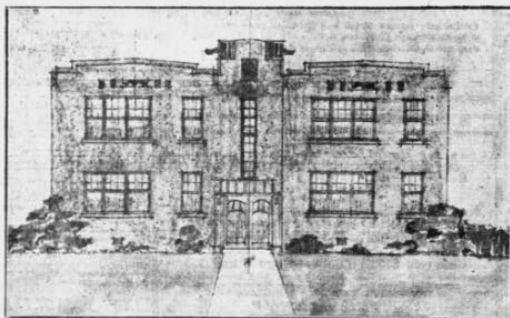
A. M. Griffing
Owner and Developer

J. A. Mahood
General Manager

R. O. Eberling
City Sales Manager

Phone 110
Main Office
In Biscayne Park Estates
"North on the Dixie"

Phone 6339
Branch Office
Lorraine Arcade
Room 229



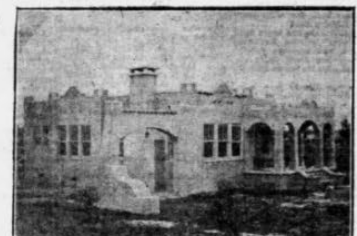
FOUR SUITE APARTMENT HOUSE OF A. M. GRIFFING, OWNER



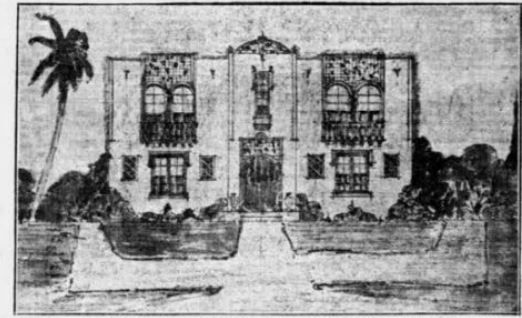
DISTRICT SCHOOL, BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES

The Biscayne District School was erected in 1918 at a cost of approximately \$30,000.00, the grounds consist of eleven acres, all of which are improved with beautiful shade trees, shrubbery, hibiscus, oleanders and many other flowers, a basketball and tennis court. Just ten minutes' walk from the center of

BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES



RESIDENCE OF J. E. MAHOUX, BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES



FOUR SUITE APARTMENT HOUSE OF A. M. GRIFFING, OWNER AND DEVELOPER OF BISCAVNE PARK ESTATES

IV. ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Most popular from 1890-1910, the Mission Revival architectural style saw a resurgence in popularity alongside similarly ornamented forms like Mediterranean and Moorish styles, which also spotlighted reinterpretations of their original forms in the 1920s and 30s. Incorporating elements present in these forms of Spanish-styled Mission Revival architecture provided a distinctive architectural imprint on Miami's built environment unified the design of planned developments through architectural detailing and aesthetics.¹³

The Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments building incorporates key Mission Revival architectural elements grounded in a rectangular orientation typical of the geometric framing of the style, with a neutral-toned rough stucco wall finish. The structure was originally a fourplex. It incorporates a projecting two-story front porch and rear lanai with an overall fenestration pattern emphasizing linear arrangement, square and rectangular shapes. The design also incorporates details like pavestone walkways, tiled porch areas as well that help to emphasize the overall Mission Revival style. Core architectural elements like the roof with crenelated parapets and shallow barrel tile accents further accentuate the style. The roof design further distinguishes the architectural form as it incorporates crenelated parapets with shallow barrel tile accents and chimneys.

The design also includes an entry porch with half walls, and a distinctive upper-level lanai that is styled with pierced lattice half walls and, at one time, with a tiled overhanging shed roof and awning. Spanish Mission architecture traditionally draws on symmetry as a core aspect how that is adapted to arrange more ornamental elements underscores the importance of the divine order in the designs, emphasizing pattern and numbers. The fenestration pattern of the structures' deep-set double-hung windows and scuppers also further emphasizes the geometric aspects of the design. A summary of key aspects of the architectural design of the primary and secondary structure follows.



Photograph of primary structure, looking towards the north façade from NE 121st

¹³ National Park Service. (2019, August 15). Mission Revival Style 1890s - 1920s. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/mission-revival-architecture.htm> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

North Facade

Entry Porch, Balcony

The North entry façade of the primary structure also features in-ground plant beds along the porch. Notable elements of the architectural design that exemplify that style include a ground-level open-air porch with its roof supporting an upper-level lanai at the north entry façade. The main entry porch, at the north façade, is detailed with half-height walls capped with concrete, with flooring of a large red square tile and an interior porch roof featuring wood panels.

Balcony

The entry porch columns support the upper-level balcony, which also incorporates half-height columns at corners with a lattice brick balustrade. Historically, the balcony roof appears to have incorporated a cantilevered canvas awning roof as well as a shed roof overhang with clay tile. Currently, the awning framing is all that remains, and the overhanging roof element has been lost.

East and West Façade

The east and west facades of the structure incorporate minimal detailing; the crenelated parapets along the roof line are visible, as well as the continuing patterned placement of scuppers just below the roof. On the east and west facades, it utilizes a layout with a center slim profile double hung window bracketed by a three-panel double hung window set on either side.



View of the North façade with partial view of East Façade with a pavestone walkway visible. (2025)



West Façade (2025)

South Facade

Lanai

The South façade's rear extension incorporates a distinctive two-story lanai. The prominent details of the lanai's architecture include its cedar shake siding, four square-shaped, wood lattice windows, and three apparent ground-level entry doors at the east, south and west ends of the lanai, each incorporates shallow concrete step access.

Courtyards and outdoor spaces are a central part of Mission-style designs, offering an opportunity to bridge the interior and exterior of the structure and create additional areas for lounging and entertaining. Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments site landscaping incorporates a variation of that element by incorporating a main entry porch at the north façade, an upper-level balcony also at the north façade, and a rear lanai, which create faux courtyard aesthetics, establishing key points where the living areas of the interior are connected to the exterior, thereby expanding the usable space.



View of South Façade with projecting two-story lanai (2025)



View of Garage from rear access road (2025)

Garage

A detached single-story secondary structure, the Garage, is also located at the rear of the main structure. The secondary structure is a single-story construction which originally incorporated details that reflected elements of the primary structure in its fenestrations and overall ornamentation, such as crenelated parapets, a flat roof, and casement windows.

Prominent Structural Components

Stucco Exterior Walls

The structure is comprised of rough stucco exterior walls. The layout incorporates a rear lanai with walls that incorporate a distinctive staggered cedar shake siding. A square terracotta colored pavestone walkway leads to the entry porch at the north façade. The ground-level porch incorporates square clay tiles and half walls surrounding which include a flat concrete ledge and a wood roof.

Roof

The roof design is a flat roof composition accented with barrel clay tile, creating a crenelated parapet roofline. Just below the roofline is a regimented row of scuppers, generally five scuppers on the east and west façade, two at the rear, and 10 across the entry, featuring 5 scuppers on the west and east bay of that façade.

It is noted that the garage structure historically incorporated a parapet design as seen in the design of the primary structure. This detail of the garage has since been altered and lost, presenting as a flat-edged roofline without the parapet detail. However, the incorporation of that ornamental detail into its architecture established a visual link between the two structures architecturally.

Windows & Doors

The original arrangement of windows has been retained. Historic photographs indicate the original windows of the main structure were deep-set double hung window styles, which are a typical feature of Mission Revival style designs, bearing resemblance to windows of Spanish missions.

A distinctive aspect of the window arrangement in the primary structure is the use of repeated patterns and window styles. The repeated sequence of windows and their shape emphasize a key design element for Mission Revival architecture, for horizontal lines and linear arrangements. The balanced arrangement of windows seemingly creates the illusion of a band of windows that rings the structure.

The structure originally had wood double-hung windows with a one-over-one light pattern. They are documented in historic period photographs and appear to be deeply set with the east and west facades utilizing a mirrored window arrangement. A photograph of the front façade taken in 1980 indicates that at least some of the front façade windows had been replaced with five-light awning windows. Windows on the rear lanai were characterized by their square proportions and diamond-pattern lattice wood screens. The auxiliary structure originally had three-light casement windows on the central portion of the south wall, between the large square garage door openings.

The window and door arrangement at the north façade comprises the ground-floor entry porch entrance and upper-level balcony central entry doors flanked by windows.

Notably, the window arrangement for the south, rear façade differs in window style and shape. The lanai located at differs significantly. Here, the fenestration incorporates distinct window styles, which add a hint of craftsmanship to the overall appearance that is expected for Mission Revival-style designs.

While today the windows of both structures are covered to secure the structure, making the current window style unidentifiable, the original fenestration pattern remains.



South façade Lanai featuring cedar shake siding and lattice wood screened windows. (2025)

Square Towers

The design of the main structure incorporates two distinctive square towers at the entry façade with elevated caps, inset windows with lattice brick concrete screening, and vertical rectangular openings, arrow loops on the sides, which directly correlate to readily identifiable elements of the Mission Revival architectural style.

The fenestration pattern of the towers emphasizes the geometric detailing typical of the style, with squared and rectangular openings and geometric patterned screening. More specifically, an ornamental pierced/perforated lattice brick screening is integrated into the north-facing windows of the towers, while at the sides, the design incorporates vertical slits known as arrow loops.¹⁴ While bell towers were an element traditionally seen in Mission Revival architecture, the tower styles here were typically seen more in medieval architecture as part of a fortress or castle's defensive fortifications.¹⁵

Prominent Ornamental Features

The exterior elements of the building design are considered contributing features of the architecture. In addition, the following extant features and architectural details are also considered contributing features:

- Two exterior light sconces at the North façade, porch entry
- Square paver tiled entry walkway and porch
- Stepped up porch walls with a concrete ledge
- Ribbon seal/medallion at the northeast of the roof line near the upper-level balcony
- Pierced lattice brick walls of upper-level balcony
- Pierced lattice mesh screen of towers
- Side arrow loop openings in towers
- Diamond-patterned wood lanai window screens
- Cantilevered balcony awning roof



¹⁴ Cartwright, M. (2018, June 15). An Illustrated Glossary of Castle Architecture. World History Encyclopedia. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1233/an-illustrated-glossary-of-castle-architecture/> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

¹⁵ Jeffrey, R. B. (2014, May 20). Spanish Colonial Missions Architecture and Preservation - Spanish Missions/Misiones Españolas (U.S. National Park Service). National Park Service. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/travelspanishmissions/architecture-and-preservation.htm> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

As noted, and verified with available records, some original elements have been lost, damaged, or altered over time. These records provide reference points for future rehabilitation and restoration of missing architectural elements in the future.

V. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed designation site was originally a four-unit multi-family residential structure. It operated in that capacity and is currently zoned for such use. The current property owner has expressed interest in rehabilitating the structure and once again using it for residential purposes, in accordance with the requirements and allowances as provided for in the Village of Biscayne Park planning and zoning codes.

Sec. 16A-10(4) of the County Code requires that, to the extent applicable, designation reports shall address the following:

- any projected, proposed, or existing public improvements and developmental or renewal plans;
- any private plans for development or redevelopment of the property or area under consideration, including any new architecture or features proposed for the same location;
- any applicable neighborhood or community revitalization goals, plans, or objectives, including any existing policies in the local government's comprehensive plan or other planning initiatives pertaining to, among other things, economic development, transportation, and housing;
- any impacts on the availability of affordable or workforce housing in the community due to historic designation or proposed redevelopment of the property or area under consideration; and
- the possible adaptive use of the property after designation, based on applicable local government zoning regulations and other building code requirements.

The property was cited as an unsafe structure by the Village of Biscayne Park and the case was referred to the Miami-Dade County Unsafe Structures Board (USB). On December 11, 2024, the USB held a public hearing regarding the unsafe structure case and issued an order to demolish or repair the structure. The property owners were provided with a required compliance timeline, which included eight months to obtain permits and an additional nine months to carry out the repairs. During this period, the property owner must satisfy specific elements of concern to abate a demolition order and instead move forward to fully rehabilitate the structure for future occupation. Issues raised and that must be addressed include:

- Conversion of structure from four-unit multifamily to either a two-unit multifamily or a single-family residence
- Structural Repairs
- Code compliance

VI. PROPERTY VULNERABILITY

As Miami-Dade County works to address the impending challenges of increased flooding, sea level rise, and more frequent severe weather events, it becomes increasingly important to assess the vulnerability of historic and cultural resources to these threats. Utilizing the matrix developed in association with the County's Historic Site Vulnerability Assessment, historic properties can be evaluated for their level of vulnerability. Factors related to a property's flood zone, elevation, storm surge, sea level rise, king tides, and proximity to water are a sampling of the environmental factors that are included in determining a site's vulnerability. Property use is also included.

The subject property is in an AE FEMA Flood Zone and has a base flood elevation of 7 ft. Projections indicate the property may experience a 1.5-3 ft. inundation in the event of a Category 5 level storm, with no predicted storm surge inundation for Categories 1-4. Projections through 2070 do not indicate an anticipated impact from Sea Level Rise, and there is also no anticipated impact projected from King Tide Flooding.¹⁶

VII. FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE

The proposed site was previously identified as part of a Resource Group through documentation provided for Florida Master Site Form DA 811615 filed in 2009. The site was also subsequently identified as part of the Miami-Dade County 2023 Heritage at Risk survey, which identified historic resources at risk for loss due to environmental and planning-related challenges. An update to the associated Resource Group Florida Master Site file was submitted at that time.

If designated, an individual structure Florida Master Site file form will be submitted to the Florida Division of Historical Resources to more thoroughly document the site.

VIII. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments is significant under the following criteria, as outlined in Section 16A-10 of the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Ordinance:

- **Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(a)**, is associated with distinctive elements of the cultural, social, political, economic, scientific, religious, prehistoric, paleontological, and architectural history that have contributed to the pattern of history in the community, Miami-Dade County, South Florida, the State, or the nation.
- **Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(b)**, Be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- **Criteria Sec. 16A-10(1)(c)**, Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, style, or method of construction or work of a master; or that possess high artistic value; or that represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

¹⁶ Miami-Dade County. (2025a). Flooding Vulnerability Viewer. [miamidade.gov](https://gisweb.miamidade.gov/vulnerabilityviewer); ArcGIS Application. <https://gisweb.miamidade.gov/vulnerabilityviewer> (last accessed 8/14/2025)

IX. STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS

Proposed for designation is the entire parcel defined by the legal description associated with folio number 17-2230-045-0470. The site also includes several individual features that, collectively, define the character of the site. As such, any physical improvements to the exterior of the structures and/or to the site will require the submission of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA).

Standards for Certificates of Appropriateness will follow the general guidelines as recommended for historic sites, as detailed in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, as developed in 1992 and codified as 36CFR Part 68 in the July 12, 1995, Federal Register (Vol. 60, No. 133). In addition to The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, COAs will also be reviewed against, Resilient Rehab, the Miami-Dade County Design Guidelines adopted by the Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners on February 1, 2022. Ordinary maintenance and minor repairs/alterations will not be subject to review.

X. CONTRIBUTING FEATURES

Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments retains its historic character and integrity, despite the currently deteriorated condition and alterations that have been carried out over time. As such, all exterior elements of the main and auxiliary structure are contributing resources. The overall architectural design, scale, massing, and spatial organization and relationships contribute to the character of Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments.

Contributing features include the following:

- Neutral paint scheme
- Roof
- Scuppers
- Walls
- Chimneys
- Crenelated Parapets and
- Square towers with inset perforated brick lattice and arrow loops
- Perforated brick half-walled balcony
- Barrel-tiled shed roof overhang at entry façade
- Double-hung Windows (Primary)
- Casement Windows (Garage)
- Double-hung Windows (Primary)
- Doors
- Lattice detailed window screens at Lanai
- Two-floor Cedar shake Lanai
- Entry Porch with wood paneled ceiling
- Pavestone walkways
- Tiled entry porch
- Metal Balcony roof Awning
- Garage secondary structure with parapet detailing.

Please note that the above is not a comprehensive list of all elements requiring COA review but rather is provided as a guide for future improvements and as a reference for OHP and the HPB for future COA reviews. The interior spaces of the Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments have not been evaluated for purposes of this designation. As such, alterations to these interior spaces would not require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

XI. STAFF EVALUATION & RECOMMENDATION

Staff has performed a site visit to document Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments, as well as research into the historic context of the site. Staff has determined that the subject site, located at 826 NE 121 Street, Biscayne Park, FL, meets three objective criteria for designation. The site is a physical representation of a Mission Revival style residential site platted as part of the Biscayne Park Estates subdivision in the 1920s and illustrates the pattern of history and development in this area of the County. It is closely associated with Arthur Mertlow Griffing, locally significant as a nurseryman and businessman turned real estate developer in the 1920s. The main and auxiliary structures stand as representative examples of the Mission Revival style architecture that was popular during this period. Despite deteriorated condition and alterations to window types over time, the site retains its historic character and integrity.

Due to the Unsafe Structures Board determination and timeline to repair the structures, the property owner, contemporaneous with the request for designation, plans to submit an application for a Special Certificate of Appropriateness that would allow for the repair and rehabilitation of the structures. OHP Staff has worked in close coordination with the Property Owner to propose the property for designation concurrently with a Special Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for its full rehabilitation. If the HPB initiates designation procedures, the final designation hearing will be followed by the Special COA hearing.

Based on its historic context, the application of objective criteria for designation, and the property owner's ongoing work to comply with the USB order, Staff recommends that proceedings be initiated to consider the Griffing's Biscayne Park Estates Apartments for designation as a Miami-Dade County Historic Site. It is further recommended that if the site is ultimately designated as a Miami-Dade County Historic Site, OHP Staff will continue to coordinate with the Property Owner and confirm that they have complied with the related USB order. If the Property Owner fails to satisfactorily comply, and the anticipated rehabilitation of the structures is not carried out, Staff may initiate proceedings to bring the matter before the board for reconsideration, including but not limited to rescinding the approved designation or amending the designation as deemed necessary.

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