
MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HOUSE

3744-3754 STEWART AVENUE

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HOUSE
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Historic Preservation Planner

Designated by the
Miami City Commission on 06/22/89
Ordinance No. 10598

Amended and
Adopted by the Historic
And Environmental
Preservation Board on 09/19/95

Resolution No. 1995-40

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Marjory Stoneman Douglas House

Current Name:

Marjory Stoneman Douglas House

Location:

3744-3754 Stewart Avenue
Miami, Florida 33133

Present Owner:

TIITF/Non Profit Organization
Douglas Residence
c/o DEP Douglas Building
Tallahassee, FL 32399

The Land Trust of Dade County, Inc.
c/o Thomas J. Matkov, Esq.
4000 Southeast Financial Center
Miami, FL 33131

Present Use:

Residential, vacant.

Zoning District:

R-1

Tax Folio Number:

01-4129-000-0480
01-4129-000-0490

Boundary Description:

An unplatted parcel of land located in Section 29, Township 54, Range 41, of Dade County, Florida, more particularly described as follows: Beginning 418 feet north and 175 feet west of the SE corner of the NE 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of said Section 29; thence running north 165.9 feet; thence running west along the southerly right-of-way line of Stewart Avenue for 100 feet, more or less; thence running south 165 feet; thence running east 100 feet to the Point of Beginning.

Classification:

Historic Site

MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS HOUSE

3744-3754 Stewart Avenue



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1924-1926

Architect:

George Hyde

Statement of Significance:

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas House is significant for its association with Marjory Stoneman Douglas, well-known Florida author, historian, conservationist, and civic activist. The building is also a fine example of Masonry Vernacular architecture in Dade County in the 1920's. The house is particularly noteworthy for its roof type, half-timber details, and use of materials. Mrs. Douglas has lived and worked in the house for approximately 70 years. She has written all her major novels and short stories at this house and has organized her conservation efforts there.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas is best known for her role in promoting the protection of Florida's critical environments, particularly the Everglades. The publication of her book *The Everglades: River of Grass* in 1947 focused national attention on this unique resource, and she became the guiding force behind the creation of Everglades National Park. She formed Friends of the Everglades several decades later to continue to restore and maintain the area's natural state.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas was born in 1890 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her parents separated when she was very young, and she was raised in Taunton, Massachusetts by her maternal grandmother. In 1912, the year Mrs. Douglas graduated from Wellesley College, her mother, who had a history of mental illness, died.

After a brief marriage, Mrs. Douglas joined her father, Judge Frank B. Stoneman, in Miami in 1915. Her father had recently founded the *Miami Herald*, and Mrs. Douglas joined the staff as society columnist. She left the paper in 1918 to join the Navy in World War I. She lived overseas and worked with the Red Cross. Upon her return to Miami, she rejoined the *Herald* and worked as associate editor. After leaving the *Herald* on the advice of her physician due to nervous fatigue, she began her career as a short story writer and novelist.

Mrs. Douglas always loved Coconut Grove because of its unique character, half garden, half community. The people she liked best seemed to gravitate there, people who "enjoyed their neighbors but didn't want to live too close to them." When she mentioned to Frank Schulz that she might like to live in Coconut Grove, he offered her a lot on his property, which was referred to as "The Patch." He

offered the lot immediately west of hers to her good friends, Franklin and Alice Harris. The lot next to that went to Natalie Newell, who ran a bookstore in Coconut Grove. This created a community that gave Mrs. Douglas the financial, intellectual, and emotional support that she greatly needed at that time in her life.

In 1924, Mrs. Douglas began the construction of her house, which was designed by her friend George Hyde, who mostly designed factories. Mrs. Douglas felt this was fortunate, because she hoped her "little house would be as stout and as sparse as a factory." It must have been because it "held up like a factory" during the 1926 hurricane. Mrs. Douglas has referred to the house as "the house that Saturday Evening Post built," because every Saturday she would tell the builder whether to go ahead or wait for the next bit of money to come in from a short story or article.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas has lived and worked in her Stewart Avenue home for approximately 70 years. During this time she has written several books of regional and national importance, including: *The Everglades: River of Grass*, *Voice of the River* (her autobiography), *Alligator Crossing*, *Florida: The Long Frontier*, *Road to the Sun*, and *Hurricane*; a play, "The Gallows;" and many short stories and articles.

When her career as a free lance writer began, Mrs. Douglas was in a weak financial position and in a frail mental state. Mr. and Mrs. Harris, who had begun the construction of their own house next door to Mrs. Douglas at approximately the same time, were a stabilizing factor in both areas. The Harrises were also involved in shaping important parts of the Dade County community. Franklin Harris supported Dr. Bowman Ashe while he rescued the University of Miami. Mrs. Douglas helped Alice Harris in starting the French Department at the University of Miami.

Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. Harris also played a significant role in the creation of a botanical garden for South Florida, now known as Fairchild Tropical Gardens. Mrs. Douglas wrote the case for a botanical garden and served as the correspondent for much of their effort. So close was Mrs. Douglas' friendship with the Harrises that Mrs. Douglas inherited the Harris property upon Mrs. Harris' death in 1955. In 1957 Mrs. Douglas sold the Harris property to her Wellesley roommate Carolyn Cole, widow of opera performer Kelly Cole. After Mrs. Cole died in 1972, Mrs. Douglas was given a life estate in Mrs. Cole's house.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas House was purchased by the Florida Department of Natural Resources in 1992, and Mrs. Douglas has a life estate in the property. She continues to live there. The property is managed by the Land Trust of Dade County, which purchased the former Harris property next door in 1994.

At age 105 Mrs. Douglas is still active in conservation efforts and has been nationally recognized for them. She has been named a "Great Floridian" by the Florida Cabinet and received the Medal of Freedom from President Clinton in 1993.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas house has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City, state, and nation; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas house has been the primary residence for Mrs. Douglas for approximately 70 years. She is a nationally recognized conservationist and author.

2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas House is a fine example of Masonry Vernacular architecture in Dade County in the 1920's. It is noteworthy for its roof type, use of materials, and half-timber details.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas House is a one-story, irregular-shaped structure of wood frame construction. This Masonry Vernacular structure is eclectic in design and contains elements of both Tudor revival and Medieval Revival styles. The primary facades of the building are faced with stucco with wood half-timber details, while the remainder is board and batten. The house is topped with a hipped roof, with a rear gable roof, both of which are covered with composition shingles. The wide, rounded eaves of the roof and the half timbering are reminiscent of English country houses.

The main entrance to the house is located on the northwest corner and is offset from the north (front) facade. The entrance features a wood pouch door with plain stucco and vertical beam surrounds. A masonry fireplace is located on the north (front) facade.

A small addition housing a kitchen and storage room was constructed on the west facade in 1948.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas House is located just west of S.W. 37th Avenue in Coconut Grove. The house faces north and is recessed on a narrow, long lot.

On the lot immediately to the west is a two story CBS house designed in the Mediterranean Revival style. Located much closer to the street, this house was severely damaged by Hurricane Andrew and lost its roof, windows and portions of the walls and second story.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The subject structure and the adjacent house are contributing structures. Contributing landscape features include all specimen trees on the property.



IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas house has been occupied by Mrs. Douglas since its construction in 1924-1926. The house is located in a quiet, stable residential neighborhood in south Coconut Grove and is in good condition. The adjacent house was severely damaged by Hurricane Andrew and was recently taken before the Unsafe Structures Board. The Board granted the owner an extension of time until December 1, 1995 to complete working drawings and apply for and receive a building permit for rehabilitation.

Preservation Incentives:

The Florida Department of Natural Resources purchased the Marjory Stoneman Douglas House in 1992, and the Land Trust of Dade County purchased the adjacent property originally in 1994. The Land Trust manages both properties. After Mrs. Douglas' death, the properties will be combined to function as a unified parcel. The intended use is a house museum, offices for the Land Trust of Dade County and Friends of the Everglades, and a research center for the study and education of the Everglades, open by appointment only.

Several actions will have to be taken in order to institute the proposed new use. First, this proposed amendment to the designation must be approved by the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board. The intent of the amendment is to include the adjacent property, which is related historically to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas House, within the designated historic site.

The property owner would then need to apply for an HP zoning overlay district, which permits zoning incentives, including certain conditional uses, for historic properties. The Community Planning and Revitalization Department is prepared to support such an overlay district.

If the overlay district is approved, the owner would need to develop a site plan to accommodate a parking area on the property. To separate the compound from the adjacent residences, a thick hedge would need to be planted both to maintain the ambiance of the Douglas House and reduce whatever the visitor impact may be on surrounding houses.

V. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Dade County, Florida. Community and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division. Dade County Historic Survey, Site Inventory File for 3744 Stewart Avenue, Coconut Grove, Miami, Florida.

Douglas, Marjory Stoneman and John Rothchild. Marjory Stoneman Douglas: Voice of the River. Englewood, Florida: Pineapple Press, 1987.

Harwood, Kitty, et al. "Marjory Stoneman Douglas: A List of Her Achievements and Honors."