

The Spanish River Papers

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Spanish Art

in Boca Raton homes. adds a special charm to these dwellings in a land of tropical beauty where the softness of the South makes life easy.



Boca Raton's Spanish Village

By

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Historical
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PREFACE

The history of the Spanish Village subdivision, originally developed by the Mizner Development Corporation, is told using a variety of sources including newspapers, oral histories, and photos to show the chronological history of Spanish Village from its development in the 1920s to the present day.

Author Bio

Michael Wright is currently a senior at Florida Atlantic University. Michael became engaged in the history of Spanish Village while completing his internship at the Boca Raton Historical Society and Museum during the Fall semester of 2012. Michael is the recipient of the 2012 Elaine Neefus Scholarship, awarded local students pursuing a career in history.

"Boca Ratone" was established as a farming community in the 1890s by Thomas Moore Rickards. Since Boca's farming days the city has grown into a paradise on the Florida east coast. Boca was able to grow from its small farming roots to a bustling city because of Addison Mizner.

By the 1920s Addison Mizner was a well-known "Society Architect," who created the "Palm Beach" style. In 1925 Mizner dove into the Florida land boom. Mizner discovered the small farming community of Boca Ratone and decided Boca was the place to design his dream resort town named Boca Raton. Mizner had grand dreams for Boca Raton, as stated in an advertisement, "...the world's new social capital. World Leaders in Finance, Society, and the Arts Establish International Resort on Florida East Coast".¹ Sadly for Mizner and the Mizner Development Corporation (MDC), in 1926 the economy was collapsing and Mizner went broke, but Mizner's dream would not die. Mizner's influence on Boca still survives in Boca's architecture and lifestyle. Mizner's original projects can still be seen in the Boca Raton Resort and Club, Old Floresta, the Administration Buildings, and Spanish Village.

The New York builder Harry Vought constructed a series of bungalows for the MDC just west of Dixie Highway and north of Palmetto Park Road now known as Spanish Village starting in 1925. Spanish Village houses were built in the Mediterranean Revival style to house the families of contractors for MDC, according to pioneer Nancy Gugenheim Turner.² Spanish Village was originally supposed to be a development of at least one hundred homes. As of 1925

¹ "World's New Social Capital," BRHSM (MDC Scrapbook) N653.

² James Knott, *Palm Beach Revisited II: Historical Vignettes of Palm Beach County* (Palm Beach: 1988), 68.

the first unit of fifty houses was being built. The homes were built to appease the high demand of homes along the east coast of Florida and cost between \$7-10,000.³ Only 22 houses were completed out of the 100 planned.⁴ It is known that people were living in the completed homes by 1926 and they were rental properties.⁵ According to a MDC ad from the time, “these houses represent happy living conditions for the man who looks for comfort and convenience, coupled with a price that is not prohibitive.”⁶

Spanish Village was inspired and overseen by the MDC; however it is uncertain that Mizner designed the homes. Most of Mizner’s drawings are in the Historical Society of Palm Beach County collections. Although there are drawings for the MDC development we know as Floresta, no plans exist for Spanish Village in the collection.⁷ The Harry Vought Company was among the best known New York builders in Palm Beach. Vought was known for the Acre of Gardens, an ultra-exclusive apartment house in New York, and Via Parigi in Palm Beach.⁸

The Spanish Village homes were masonry (clay tile) with stucco finish. An article located in Karl Riddle’s journal states, “this modest home will have a 13 by 21 foot living room with a lofty beamed ceiling of the peak type finished in attractive antique effect. The exterior treatments of the home will give a pleasing variance of Spanish and Italian effect”.⁹ They featured ‘large’ living rooms with high ceilings with cypress details, two bedrooms with closets, kitchens, ‘breakfast room’ and bath on 45-by-100-foot lots.¹⁰ 256 Northwest 7th Street is today (2012)

³ The Karl Riddle Collection. November 24, 1925. Diary entry. BRHSM (2012.56.1); *New York Sun* January 2, 1926 (MDC Scrapbook).

⁴ “Beautiful Homes at Boca Raton,” *Palm Beach Post*, December 6, 1925. BRHSM (MDC scrapbook).

⁵ Mizner Development Corp. to Town of Boca Raton, November 1, 1926, BRHSM (48000.3).

⁶ “Small Homes”, BRHSM (Subject collections: Spanish Village).

⁷ Donald W. Curl, interview by Susan Gillis, curator, BRHSM ca. 2002.

⁸ The Karl Riddle Collection. November 24, 1925. Diary entry. BRHSM (2012.56.1).

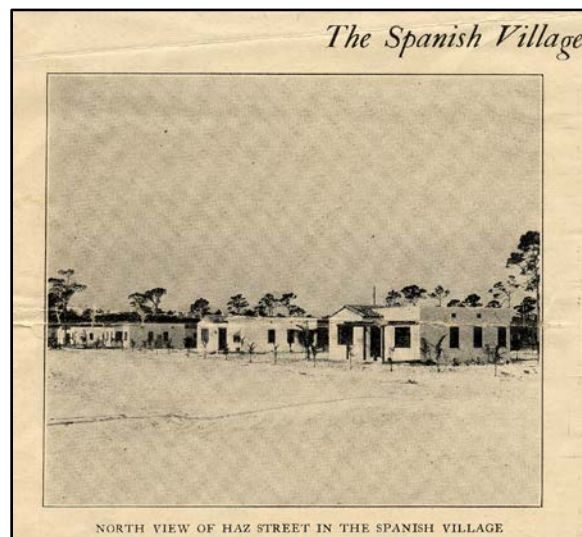
⁹ The Karl Riddle Collection. November 24, 1925. Diary entry. BRHSM (2012.56.1).

¹⁰ “Beautiful Homes at Boca Raton,” *Palm Beach Post*, December 6, 1925. BRHSM (MDC scrapbook).

closest to how the bungalows would have originally looked. From the outside the home is small and tucked away with a long brick walkway leading to the door. The roof tiles resemble the original Spanish-style tiles made by Mizner Industries. The door is pecky cypress wood. The home still has the original ceiling made of pecky cypress wood with a peak design. The wood on the roof and the door were made to look antique. The wood has markings designed purposely to make the home look like it has existed for hundreds of years. This was all a part of Mizner's design for his development.¹¹

Spanish Village was not always known by that name. In 1925 the area where Spanish Village is now was known as Mizner Plat 11. The first mention of the name Spanish Village came from a Mizner Development newspaper, the *Boca Raton Record*, which writes, "Construction of houses in the Spanish Village was begun...."¹² Officially the land was known as Mizner Plat 11, but residents casually used the name Spanish Village. In a 1950 replat it would become officially known as Spanish Village.¹³

(Right) The first mention of the homes in Plat 11 as Spanish Village. From the *Boca Raton Record*, 2/1/1927.



¹¹ 2010 Photos of 256 NW 7th St, BRHSM (Photo files: Spanish Village).

¹² "The Spanish Village." *Boca Raton Record*. Feb. 1, 1927, BRHSM.

¹³ Plat of Spanish Village, pg. 1948. Real Estate Atlas of Palm Beach County, Florida (South), BRHSM (93009.1).

Nancy Gugenheim Turner remembered the area surrounding her family's new Spanish Village home in 1926. Turner describes the landscape around the homes as just sand with cactus, periwinkle, palmetto scrubs, and huckleberries. She relates a story about picking the huckleberries for a pie, saying, "the greatest danger in picking them was to slip by mischance into a gopher hole and land one's backside squarely on a cactus leaf; this required an operation with magnifying glass and tweezers." To obtain schooling from first to fourth grade students went to where present day Boca Raton Elementary School is located. Upper level students had to go to Delray.¹⁴

Despite its rural setting, a growing social scene developed in Spanish Village. In 1926 Boca Raton witnessed the establishment of an athletic club near Spanish Village. An article was published in the *Delray Beach News*, "Devota Bender, Ivy and Myrtle Lee Raulerson, Kelly Ewing, are among the girls from Boca Raton school who will take part on the basketball team. The boys will also have a team".¹⁵ In 1927 the club had obtained bleachers with a capacity of 250 people, and the club consisted of ex-college and pro players. The athletic club hosted two games per week.¹⁶ Spanish Village was also the host to social parties that included playing bridge. The *Delray Beach News* mentions a bridge game hosted by Mrs. C.L. Stryker, "the guests were Mrs. Clint Moore, of Delray, Mrs. John Seaman, Mrs. William Gugenheim, Mrs. Albert Todd, Mrs. Ehrman, of West Palm Beach, Mrs. Tom Giles, Mrs. Crosby Tappan, Mrs. N.M Smock, Mrs. F.B. Sellers, and Mrs. H.A. Moore".¹⁷ From the building of the athletic club, the hosting of parties and those who attended it can be inferred that Boca Raton and the surrounding

¹⁴ James Knott, *Palm Beach Revisited II: Historical Vignettes of Palm Beach County* (Palm Beach: 1988), 68-69.

¹⁵ *Delray Beach News*, December 17, 1926, Pg. 10.

¹⁶ *Delray Beach News*, February 18, 1927, Pg. 5. The club was coached by Professor Bache of the Junior High School.

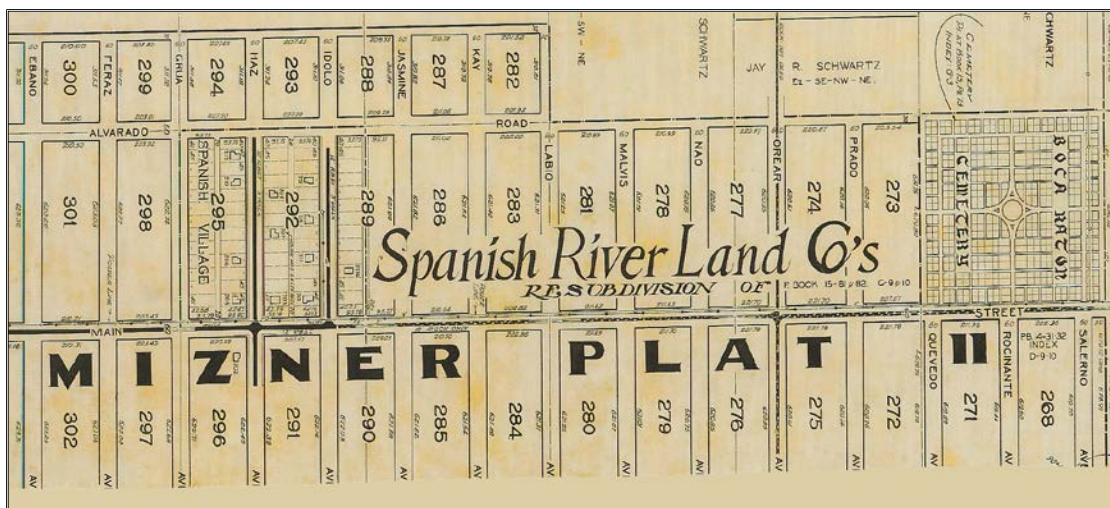
¹⁷ *Delray Beach News*, August 12, 1927, Pg. 2; H.A. Moore sometimes wrote the Boca section of the *Delray Beach News*.

communities were close and Boca Raton was beginning to gain a population great enough to start having its own community events and Spanish Village played a part in the social scene.

Mizner saw his Boca Raton projects collapse in 1926-1927. The Florida East Coast Railroad Company put an embargo on building supplies coming from the north. Visitors during the summer went back home and complained about the extreme heat and mosquitoes that infested Florida. This caused many prospective buyers to not move to Florida. Many people who did buy properties in South Florida believed they would be able to sell before the second payment of their property was due. Because of the bad publicity, economic hardship, and embargo they did not sell their land and did not make a second payment; so Mizner lost any profits he would have made on undeveloped land. Mizner went bankrupt and all his Boca Raton lands were sold off. Harry Vought retained his rights to Spanish Village. MDC assets and the Vought property were acquired by Clarence Geist, one of the original MDC backers. He called his new syndicate the Spanish River Land Company.

In 1928 the Boca Raton cemetery was moved to an area north of Spanish Village (in Plat 11) from a site just south of the Boca Raton Club (formerly the Cloister Inn) near the Intracoastal, so Mr. Geist could expand the golf course. (It was moved again in World War II to its current site.) Mr. Chesebro wrote in his journal about the move, “Mr. Karnats came up and we took up 24 bodies in old cemetery and took to new. Nothing but a few bones. Rained a little.”¹⁸ The cemetery was privately owned at this time. Chesebro’s wife Nettie was one of the first people to be buried at the cemetery. Boca Raton and Spanish Village were about to see more change as the 1920s boom came to an end and the 1930s and the depression started.

¹⁸ Frank Chesebro’s diary May 22, 1928, BRHSM Collections (2007.23).



(Above) 1938 plat map. Shows Mizner Plat 11 with Spanish Village and cemetery highlighted. Note: Spanish River Land Company's property.



(Above) Nettie Chesebro's grave at new cemetery site. Note the "natural landscaping" just north of the Spanish Village in the late 1920s.

As the 1930s came, according to the 1930s tax records, Spanish Village homes were owned by the Spanish River Land Company.¹⁹ The *Delray Beach News* on March 28, 1941 reported, “Mr. and Mrs. L.C. Porter returned to the north on Tuesday after spending the winter in one of the Spanish Village apartments.”²⁰ The paper might have used the term apartments as a term for rental units. The Spanish River Land Company would own the homes into the 1940s when the U.S. government would take control of Mizner Plat 11 and incorporate the homes into the Army Air Field. Since the company owned the homes, it cannot be certain who lived in individual properties. The homes were most likely rented so the Spanish River Land Company could make some profit on the property.

In the 1930s a few of the homes from Spanish Village were moved. One of these houses is known to still exist on 707 SE First Street in Delray Beach.²¹ Two houses were moved to Palmetto Park Road by Thomas Giles in 1934.²² One, located near Southeast Fourth Avenue, no longer stands. Another is now located at 300 East Palmetto Park Road and houses a law office. A note in the BRHSM files recounts that a house at 163 Wavecrest Way in Por La Mar was a Spanish Village house with a major addition as of the 1980s.²³ There is no such address anymore and no visible evidence of an enlarged bungalow on that street.



(Left) This building at 300 E. Palmetto Park Road was relocated from Spanish Village in 1934. It has been added on to and is currently a commercial property.

¹⁹ Town of Boca Raton Tax Rolls, BRHSM.

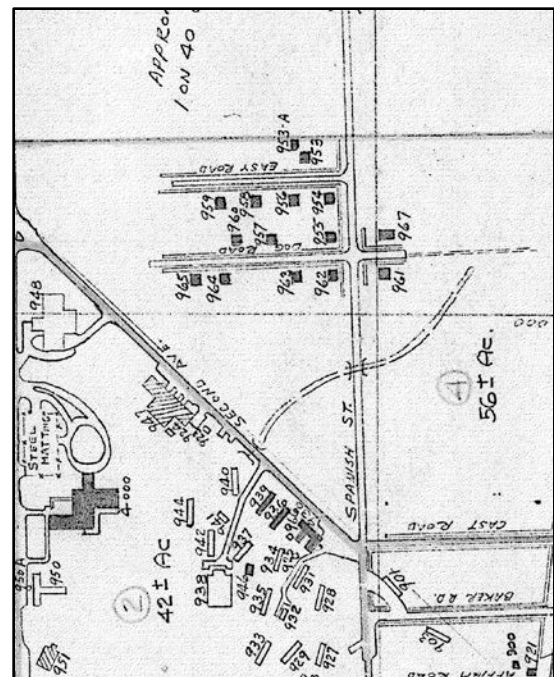
²⁰ *Delray Beach News* March 28, 1941, page 6.

²¹ Barbara Marshall, “Missing Mizner: Tale of Delray Beach’s Marina District,” Aug 22, 2009. *Palm Beach Post*; Town of Boca Raton building permits 1925-1951, BRHSM.

²² Town of Boca Raton building permits 1925-1951, BRHSM.

²³ BRHSM (Subject files: Spanish Village)

In 1942 the United States was entrenched in World War II, and the Army Air Force Technical Training Command (AAFTC) established an air base in Boca Raton. The Boca Raton Army Airfield (BRAAF) offered classes for electronics and radar officers and related specializations for enlisted men from 1942 through 1947. The field extended from Palmetto Park road on the south to north of Yamato and from the CSX tracks on the west to Dixie Highway. The Spanish Village houses and land were acquired by the government for the base as housing for non-commissioned officers. During the war 7th and 8th streets were renamed Dog and Easy Road and on the 1945 map of BRAAF and the houses were numbered 953-967 to coincide with the building schedule which lists the houses for non-commissioned officers.²⁴ There is no record of which soldiers lived in the Spanish Village houses, but it is clear that the housing was for soldiers and their families.



(Left) An aerial view of Spanish Village during World War II. (Right) A drawing of Spanish Village as part of the Army Air Corps Base. The houses are numbered "T" 953-967, and the roads labeled Dog and Easy Road. T refers to temporary and the numbers correspond to a master list, identifying them as non-commissioned officer housing.

²⁴ BRAAF 1945 map and 1945 building schedule, BRHSM (89010.20 and 2010.35.1)

In the 1950s Spanish Village would expand from its original two streets, see new homes built and new families arrive. Spanish Village was replatted in the 1950 to incorporate 10th street, 2nd Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 4th Diagonal, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th street.²⁵ The new homes being built were being developed by the Pine Ridge Company.²⁶ By the 1950s homes in Spanish Village were still being rented, but people were starting to buy the homes. A mix of young families and retirees were moving into Spanish Village, as seen in the *Boca Raton News*. The *News* reported, “Mr. and Mrs. L.C. Bragg have moved into their home in Spanish Village from the Garden Apts. The Braggs have a new daughter.... She is the fourth child for the Braggs”.²⁷ This is an example of a family upgrading from an apartment to a nice family home in Spanish Village. The *Boca Raton News* also reported, “Mrs. Kathryn Shattuck, 82, of Spanish Village received a certificate of completion of a home course in journalism given by the Institute of America in New York City. Mrs. Shattuck has lived in Boca Raton for the past three and half years. She was born in Hartford, Connecticut”.²⁸ These articles give insight into the people that were moving into Spanish Village. Other examples of Spanish Village residents include Edward Borchardt who was an FPL line man and Vincent Mays, a maintenance man at Linville Mays Delray Beach.²⁹ Spanish Village was an area where young workers, retirees, and small business owners could live for a moderate price. In addition the *Boca Raton News* ran an advertisement for a masonry company in Spanish Village on 8th Street.³⁰

²⁵ Palm Beach County Property Appraiser Website; “Plat of Spanish Village” pg 1948 Real Estate Atlas of Palm Beach County, Florida (South), BRHSM (93009.1).

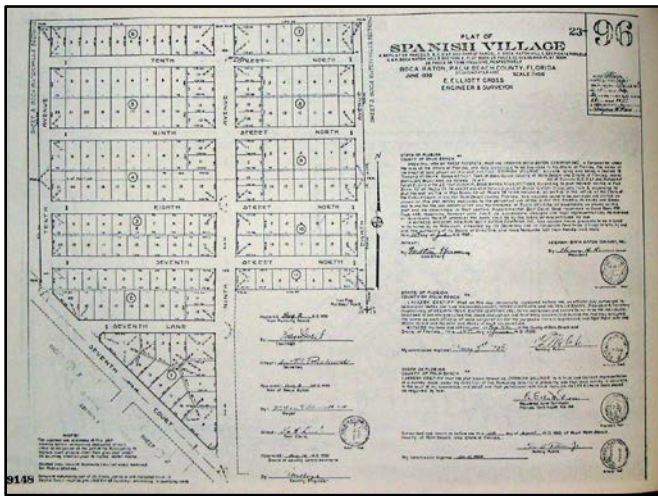
²⁶ Town of Boca Raton tax rolls 1950s, BRHSM.

²⁷ *Boca Raton News*, May 11, 1956, pg. 5.

²⁸ *Boca Raton News*, May 18, 1956 pg. 8.

²⁹ Boca Raton City Directories, BRHSM.

³⁰ Borchardt’s occupation can be found in the city directories and the Masonry ad is in the *Boca Raton News* February 3, 1956 page 9.



(Left) The plat of Spanish Village in 1950.

From the 1950s to the present day (2012), Spanish Village would grow much like Boca Raton. Spanish Village would see an influx of residents, a growing community and new homes around the area. Boca Raton would become a fast growing city with the additions of an IBM plant and Florida Atlantic University. In the 1980s the city was rapidly expanding. The 1964 city hall was extensively remodeled and enlarged and a new police headquarters built both down the street just a few blocks south of Spanish Village. Northwest Second Avenue, in 1986, was expanded from two lanes to four lanes, and in 1987, renamed Boca Raton Boulevard. Spanish Village likewise experienced an increase in population and a dramatic rise in property values.



(Left) Boca Raton Blvd looking south in the Spanish Village neighborhood 1991. Boca Raton News 6.21.1991.

Eleven of the original Spanish Village structures remain, and only one is currently on the Boca Raton historic register. The Christopher Warren house at 200 Northwest Seventh Street received historic designation in 2012. Almost all have been renovated and many have additions,

but the core bungalows survive. A new main library under construction and the Library Commons development occupy the former Causeway Lumber property on the east side of Boca Raton Boulevard and south of Seventh Street. In addition a number of smaller, older homes in the neighborhood have been demolished to make way for much larger houses with abbreviated setbacks. The MDC Spanish Village houses are in danger without the protection of landmark status. Hopefully other owners will join Mr. Warren in historic designation ensuring that these tangible reminders of our historic past are preserved for future generations.

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