



The Spanish River Papers

FALL/WINTER 1984/85



OLD CITY HALL, HOME OF BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of

Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 1113 • Boca Raton, Florida 33432

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FALL/WINTER 1984/1985

VOL. XIII. NO. 1, 2

BOCA RATON TOWN HALL

The Boca Raton Historical Society, only a little more than a decade old, has in the last two and a half years raised over a half million dollars for the restoration of the 1926 original town hall. Moreover, society members not only organized and administered the capital fund drive, they also organized and supervised the actual restoration which began in the early summer of 1983 and officially ended with a November 1984 ribbon-cutting ceremony. The time, dedication, and talent donated may well even over-balance the \$500,000 raised.

Town Hall, restored to the simple elegance of the original Addison Mizner design, has become the centerpiece to the revival of the old downtown. It is open for visitors daily with society volunteer guides available to explain the restoration, or answer questions about Boca Raton and south Florida history. A gift shop, built around "Old Betsy" the town's original 1926 LaFrance fire engine, sells books and handmade gifts for the support of the building.

The restored facilities are also available for meetings and social events. While a small charge is made for business and personal use, non-profit groups are encouraged to meet in Town Hall without a fee.

The Council Chamber with its pecky cypress ceiling and handsome wood-framed and fanlighted windows will accommodate ninety for meetings, receptions, and lectures. Smaller groups may meet in the library with its large collection of south Florida history and other artifacts carefully secured in newly built bookshelves with glass doors. Thus the building itself has become a living museum, a gift of the Boca Raton Historical Society to the Citizens of Boca Raton.

Donald W. Curl,
Editor



RESTORING TOWN HALL

MARY LEW REDD

Even today there are only a few people who could tell you of Resolution #5875, City of Boca Raton. And if the resolution was simply intended as a courteous gesture in the national preparation for our country's Bicentennial, those precious few who were listening immediately began their long range plan to carry that resolution forward to reality. There would be no doubts from that moment on.

And so, it was not a surprise when in the spring of 1983, upon the completion of the newest building for the City of Boca Raton, the Boca Raton Historical Society was standing on the doorstep at 71 North Federal Highway, helping the last of the City employees into the trucks and out of the original 1927 Town Hall. All of the homework had been done and the Historical Society that for so long had been ready and waiting, was now quite simply ready. While fund-raising was and would be a continuum, the Society had concentrated throughout the winter to be ready for that momentous spring day.

RESOLUTION NO. 58-75

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF BOCA RATON
DESIGNATING THE OLD CITY HALL AS AN HIS-
TORICAL SITE AND DECLARING ITS FUTURE
USE AS AN HISTORICAL MUSEUM BY 1976

WHEREAS, the United States Bicentennial Commission has de-
clared March, 1975 to July, 1976 as the official period to celebrate
the Two Hundredth Birthday of these United States of America; and

WHEREAS, a Boca Raton Bicentennial Committee has been formed
to plan and coordinate the activities of the City of Boca Raton for
this historic occasion; and

WHEREAS, the Boca Raton Bicentennial Committee has recom-
mended to the City Council the preservation of the Old City Hall as
an appropriate and meaningful way of preserving the cultural heritage
not only of the City of Boca Raton but of our national heritage as
well; now therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BOCA
RATON:

Section 1. That the City Council of the City of Boca Raton
hereby designates the Old City Hall as an historical site of the City.

Section 2. That the City Council further declares that the
Old City Hall shall be made available as a museum for the protection
and exhibition of historical items related to the City's heritage.

Section 3. That the Old City Hall shall be available as a
museum site by July, 1976, or as soon thereafter as may be practicable.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Council of the City of Boca
Raton this 6th day of May, 1975.

CITY OF BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

The earliest decision was perhaps the
single most important decision that would be
made. We were agreed that only the best
would be considered suitable. We were deter-
mined to reveal the beautiful proportions of
Addison Mizner's design without further em-
bellishment. The building was what we in-
tended to display and it would therefore be
itself of "museum quality."

We had compiled a selective list of
distinguished restoration architects. Being
mindful of the extensive work that Mr.
William Cox had done at the Boca Raton Hotel
and Club and with the knowledge that he had
been raised in Boca Raton, we called on him
to discuss the project. That his offices
were in south Florida seemed to us to be an
important consideration. Mr. Cox's apparent
affection for the Town Hall and his clear
recollection of an earlier time exceeded our
own. Once again there was to be no doubt,
the decision was made. His single require-
ment regarding his participation was that
there would be no fee for his own time.

Mr. Ron DeMarco paid us the enormous
compliment of coming to us. He was enthus-
iastic in offering to serve as the general
contractor. His company, DeMarco Homes,
Incorporated had been building custom homes
in Boca Raton for twenty years. More recent-
ly Mr. DeMarco had been responsible for the
renovation of several fine homes in the older
residential areas and was quickly becoming a
specialist in that particular market. His
daughter, Diane, a recent graduate of the
University of Florida, Gainesville, and a

state licensed contractor was to become our ally and constant companion. The DeMarcos were as generous in their support of our efforts as they were in making the offer. Mr. DeMarco, too, was offering to serve on a not-for-profit basis. We were twice honored.

It is appropriate here to make mention of Mr. Ralph Alsmeyer, a particular gentleman whose earlier contribution was gaining increasing importance. At the close of an open Historical Society meeting in 1982, Mr. Alsmeyer had come forward and presented us with a complete set of his father's drawings for the Town Hall, as built.*

The current restoration would have been extraordinarily difficult without his thoughtfulness. To date they remain the only set of existing drawings. All drawings for the restoration were made from this original set and we have been totally dependent upon them. We have referred to them repeatedly when making decisions.

*It was known to us that in December 1926, Addison Mizner was released by the town of Boca Raton, accounts settled, and construction on the Town Hall halted. Early in 1927, Mr. William Alsmeyer, an architect from Delray Beach was retained to revise the plans and complete the construction of the building. Mr. Alsmeyer became the architect of record, completed the work and the Town Hall was officially opened in April of 1927.



In the summer of 1983, the demolition began. Demolition made rubble, load after truckload of rubble. When the dust settled, city partitions were gone, fluorescent lamps were gone, suspended ceilings were gone and our beautiful Town Hall spaces were revealed. There were wood floors on the west side, tile floors on the east side and both were intact. All but one exterior door was available, all but two interior doors, and there was sufficient millwork to show us the way. We were ready to begin.

Our stripper, Mr. Carl Sahlberg began immediately and layer after layer of brown paint was washed from doors, trim and baseboards. Coat after coat of stripper was required until the beauty of the wood, now aged some fifty-five years, appeared. The excitement over the great ceremonial doors on the east entrance was equaled by the reappearance of the long obscured chair-rail, now once again an important architectural feature.

Mr. Sahlberg worked carefully and arranged with Mr. and Mrs. Ed Dietrich of Deerfield Builder's Supply Company to duplicate the baseboard and trim that was not complete throughout. Mr. Dietrich, a pioneer and founder of the Deerfield Beach Historical Society lent us both his support and his cypress connection. He was to be an important liaison.

And if Mr. Alsmeyer felt regret that Boca Raton was obliged to minimize the original Mizner drawing, Mr. Cox and the Historical Society were determined to complete some of those original specifications.

In November, after the copper-sheathing had been completed, the familiar dome on Federal Highway was gilded. Hundreds of tiny tissue squares floated down as the gold was transferred to the dome, and while the community was alerted by the **Boca Raton News** and due attention was brought to the gilder and his historic craft, we were to begin what we thought would be the simple search for a flagpole.

We met on Thursdays, every Thursday, and there were months when it seemed like every day. Later there would be months when in fact it would be every day. Machines were ordered and not delivered, machines were delivered and their parts had not been included. Paint samples were applied and rejected by the committee . . . , paint samples were applied, accepted by the committee . . . and rejected by the architect. Mauve turned to pink, pink turned to peach, peach turned to ivory. Wires came out and wires went in. Bids came in and contracts went out. Fundraising continued and the Historical Society worked conscientiously to maintain its annual schedule of events.

Our search for a simple pole for our very grand dome was beginning to become a full-time preoccupation. The obvious local company could not or would not consider the job and had only a single suggestion for us to pursue. On that suggestion, we had contacted the local sign company assuming their experience with wind-tolerance would qualify them as the perfect experts. It was a fresh disappointment when they, too, expressed no desire to provide a solution. We, along with the community, were beginning to feel real frustration regarding that famous pole. There was some doubt

We busied ourselves studying security and fire alarm systems, and preoccupied ourselves with the long overdue delivery of essential parts for the elaborate air conditioning system we had ordered many months before. We could no longer not notice that our officers and employees were developing chronic sinus difficulties and an acute sense of persecution . . . the chemicals, the sanding, and now the approaching heat. It was at such a moment when a young man named Jeff of A Flag and Flagpoles from Fort Lauderdale was contacted.

He was delighted to hear from us and volunteered to drive to Boca Raton and "take a look." After a careful inspection, he could find no difficulty in designing the proper bracing to anchor a pole on the base of the dome. He would in fact have it fabricated by his engineers and do the installation himself. Overjoyed, we promptly ordered the pole, a twenty-foot stainless steel beauty.

In April the long sought flagpole was put in place. It was a beautiful, clear day with only occasional gusts of air. Jeff anchored the brace to the interior floor of the dome and like a flying Wallenda started up the scaffolding, our twenty-foot pole in hand. He had no trouble getting that far. In backing up to position the pole, a singular gust of wind caught him and for one brief moment his and our hearts stopped. He quickly and fortunately managed to regain his balance and quickly placed the pole. When the crisis passed, we questioned our wisdom. For the final irony was the arrival of the **Boca Raton News** photographer safely sheltered in the lift provided for him by the Boca Raton Fire Department, enabling him to photograph our daredevil, eye to eye.



We are deeply grateful to Jeff and we share with him the enormous pleasure of having the building once and for all topped appropriately.

We had agreed among ourselves during the great search for the famous flagpole, that the flying of a flag would be far too difficult and perhaps even impossible. But we had not counted on Richard the Rigger. There had been several phone calls from Richard, but we had stood by our early decision. An exquisitely timed phone call from Richard, and a newly expressed desire by the Society's Board of Directors, sent Richard up over the dome, to the top of the pole. We planned photographers and at least a small celebration, but Richard never notified us of his schedule. Many of us never saw him at all, but we all knew that he had been there. It was in the morning when we saw our eight-inch gold leaf ball in place at the top of that proud pole and after so many long gone years, an American flag flying from the top of Town Hall.

We recognized that we were clearly unable to be ready for the gentlemen from the State of Florida from whom we had received a generous grant and with whom we had contracted a for now impossible final inspection. And while their indulgence was, indeed, forthcoming, we were sincerely disheartened by the setback. Mr. Howard McCall, AIA, graciously offered his expert opinion, but our carpenters would not budge. We needed a gentleman in shining armor and as everyone knows, they don't drive down Federal Highway every day. Fortunately, they do exist, and ours was forthcoming in the person of T.A. Head. His immediate support provided us with

the man who provided us with the solution. It also provided us with the boost we needed and the incentive to get on with finishing the job.

And if the slow mechanics were a subject of concern, those who worked quickly, were so quickly gone that we scarcely were aware that we were moving right along. The wood floors were repaired and refinished and taped under a plain brown wrapper before we could admire them and congratulate ourselves. We were not to see them until the walls were painted and the building finished.

Late spring arrived and, with or without air conditioning, we were now faced with a deadline. The building began quite suddenly to swell to larger and larger proportions. Our painter had been prepping and sealing, sealing and prepping but, here we were at "show" time. We brought in every painter Mr. Don Gagnon could provide and added a few of our own. And paint they did, Saturdays and Sundays as well. We were going to make it with only the fire bay to go . . . when the fire bay began to go in fact. This was our lowest hour, and now there were real doubts. Legend has it that some twenty years before, the City, aware that the property was hosting termites, had fumigated the building and successfully eliminated further active deterioration. What they did not realize was that the damage done had been so extensive. Midway from east to west the beams supporting the roof and parapet, were now found to be hollow. Bracing was immediately put in place and we faced the task of restructuring the roof support and that of the ornamental parapet. No one wanted to do it. Bracing in place, the progress of the fire-bay came to a halt.



Our beautiful Baldwin hardware had come in and we could finally lock our walk-in windows. The building was secure. The light fixtures were hung and, voila, there was light. We could now see clearly what it was we were about, there were to be no more doubts. We had always known we would use the hanging globes because we were obligated to replace known fixtures with like fixtures. At the outset, the globes, original to the building, had seemed to lack promise. Once hung, they were perfect. That they were so perfect brought home to us the wisdom of the established rules adopted by preservationists when involved in restoration. Because restoration does have rules and is not a free-form exercise.

Although we have dealt herein with the restoration of the building, for those who have visited, it is well known that there are interior improvements that were included for the building's adaptive use: bookcases for the Library, a galley kitchen for the Tea-room, cabinets for the Fire Bay gift shop. The counter for the Information Center was built exactly to the specifications of the original plan. It, along with all the cabinetry in the Library and Council Chamber, was executed by Mr. Mark Noel, whose firm, Interior Woodcraft, stretched to accommodate our needs. Our interiors reflect the fine quality of his craftsmanship, that we completed the interiors reflects the fine quality of friendship extended by him to us in solving numerous small dilemmas.

We here have shared with you some of the highs and lows in playing the preservation game. In all, the excitement and the pleasure of restoring the simple clarity of design and the elegance of Mr. Mizner's intended plan have been our reward. When the tiny,

newly incorporated Town of Boca Raton had reached out to the renowned visiting architect, Addison Mizner, it had reached out to the best.* If ill-fortune had prevented the total completion of the plan, the integrity of what had been completed was protected.

To the casual eye, through the intervening years, that original plan may have been obscured and long forgotten, but it had never been destroyed. It was compromised by the aluminum jalousie windows, it was "modernized" with "fake" wood panelling and wall-to-wall carpeting, it was utilized every day for fifty-five odd years. It is appropriate for us to recognize here that whether through knowledge or intuition, obvious respect was paid to the building through each step of the way.

And just as our original Town Fathers had, so too did we reach out for the best. Mr. Cox told us how it had been, how it could be, and how it should be. We accepted that early standard established in 1926, and we continued reaching out for the best. We believe we have succeeded. Our pride is apparent.

*Originally incorporated as the Town of Boca Raton in 1925, problems arose in those initial few years that resulted in the re-incorporation in 1929, of the City of Boca Raton.



THE CAPITAL FUND DRIVE

Anne Merrill

The Boca Raton Historical Society's Capital Fund Drive began November 1982 and ended July 1984. During that two-year period \$508,000 was raised for the restoration of Town Hall.

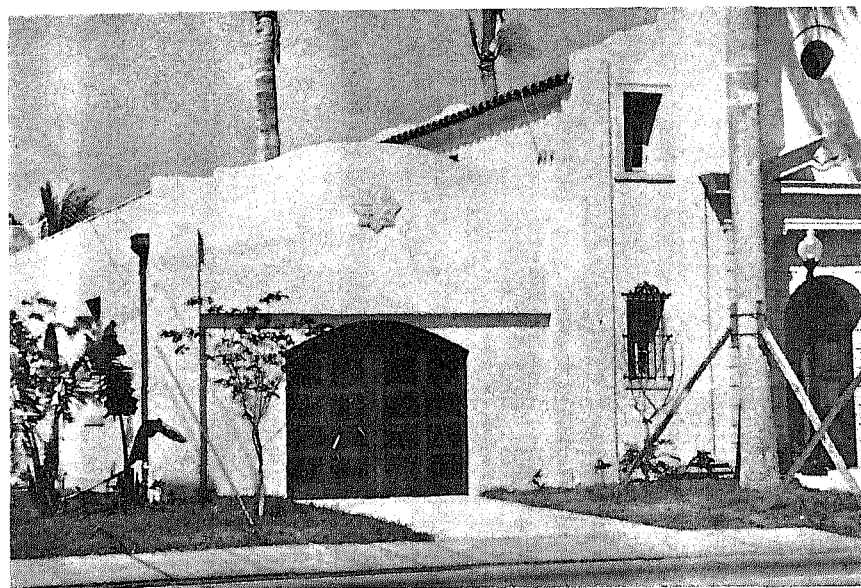
The monies came primarily from the private sector--134 individuals and 65 corporations. Two grants totaling \$61,000 came from the Palm Beach County Community Foundation and the U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, administered through Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, History and Records Management.

The Society raised funds through two benefits. "The Addison," made available by the Arvida Corporation, was a lovely tea dance reminiscent of the 1920s, celebrating the Addison project on the Cabana Club site. The following year volunteers sponsored a candlelight tour of Mizner houses in Old Floresta, followed by a dinner dance under a tent. During the day, the houses, decorated for Christmas, were toured by 800 people. An additional 250 people enjoyed the evening tour.

During stages of restoration, the Society hosted several open houses and luncheons to show the progress of the building and entice individual giving. Elegant luncheons in the Council Chambers proved quite successful.

The Society ran two full page newspaper ads during the campaign to thank those who had given and entice grass roots support. We had a good response from school children and people who wanted to be part of this community project.

Our fund raising was divided into categories. Those gifts of \$1,000 and over were commemorated on a plaque at the entrance of the building and all donors were honored at the opening of Town Hall, 15 November 1984. Their names and categories of giving follow.





PRESERVATIONISTS

William Cox
DeMarco Homes, Inc.
Myrtle Butts Fleming
Ernest C. Pagel

United States Department of Interior,
National Park Service, administered
through Florida Department of State,
Division of Archives, History and
Records Management.

FOUNDERS

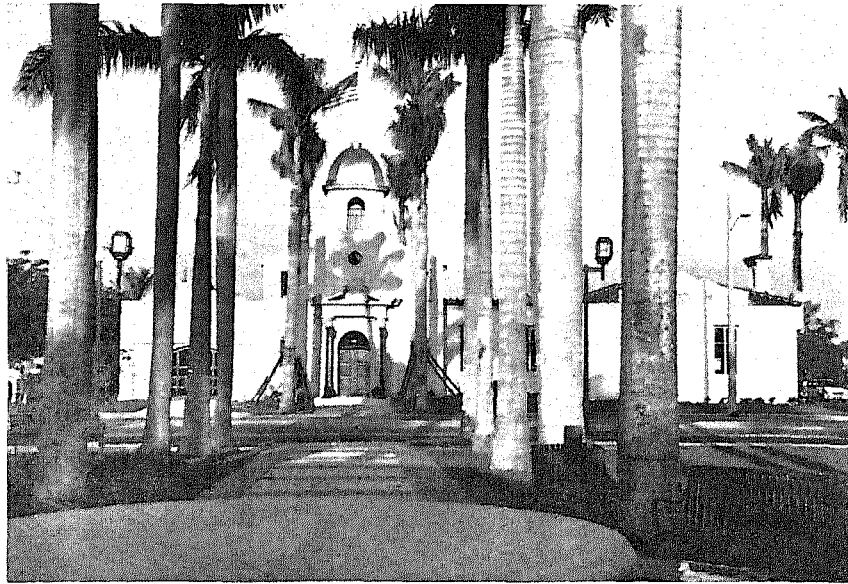
Arvida Corporation
F. Lucille Barton
Dania Jai-Alai
Rotary Club of Boca Raton

DONORS

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International Business Machines Corporation
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St. Andrews Country Club, Boca Raton
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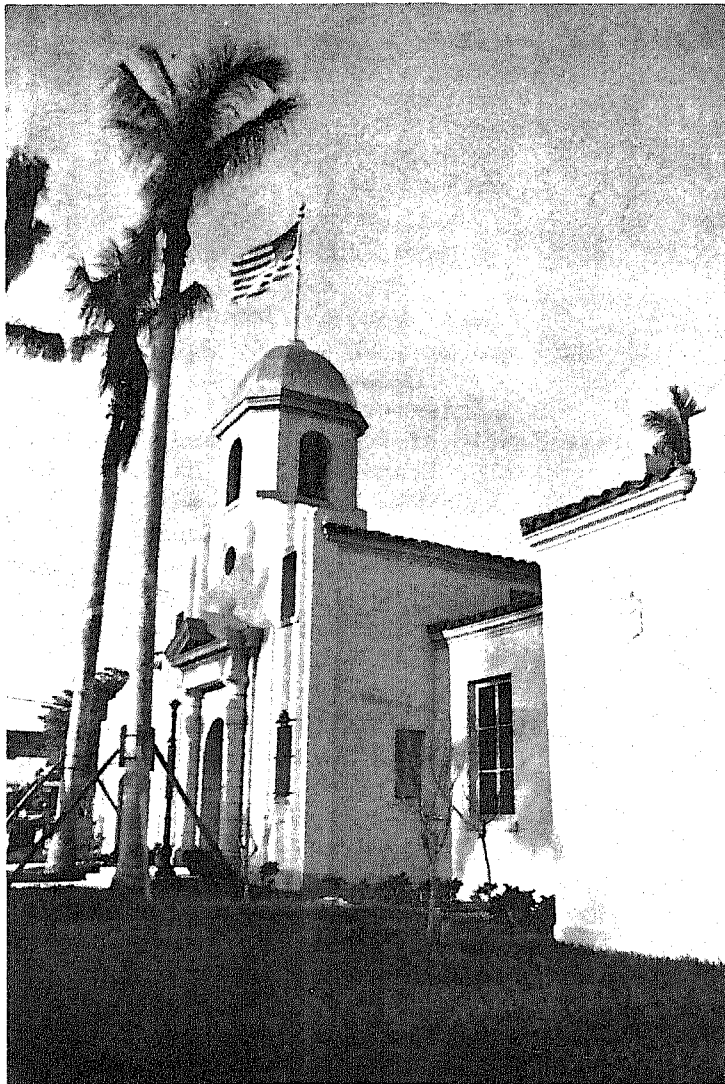
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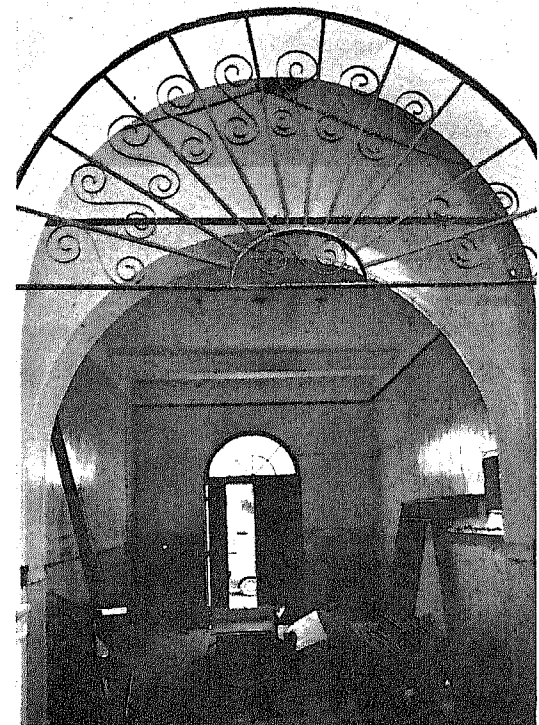
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The Sign Shop
Dorothy D. Smith



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Women's Fellowship of the Boca Raton
Moravian Church



A CHRONOLOGY OF RESTORATION EVENTS

May 1972 Organization of Boca Raton
 Historical Society.

April 1975 Bicentennial Committee
 requests that old City Hall
 be made available for a
 museum.

May 1975 Resolution No. 58-75
 designating the Old City
 Hall as an Historical Site
 and declaring its future
 use as an historical
 museum.

April 1976 Historical Society moves
 into office on second
 floor of City Hall.

November 1980 Old City Hall officially
 listed on the National
 Register of Historic
 Places.

April 1982 Old City Hall study com-
 mittee appointed by Mayor
 Konrad.

September 1982 Resolution No. 1146-82
 authorizing the mayor and
 city clerk to execute an
 agreement with the Boca
 Raton Historical Society,
 Inc. for the purpose of
 leasing and restoring
 old City Hall.

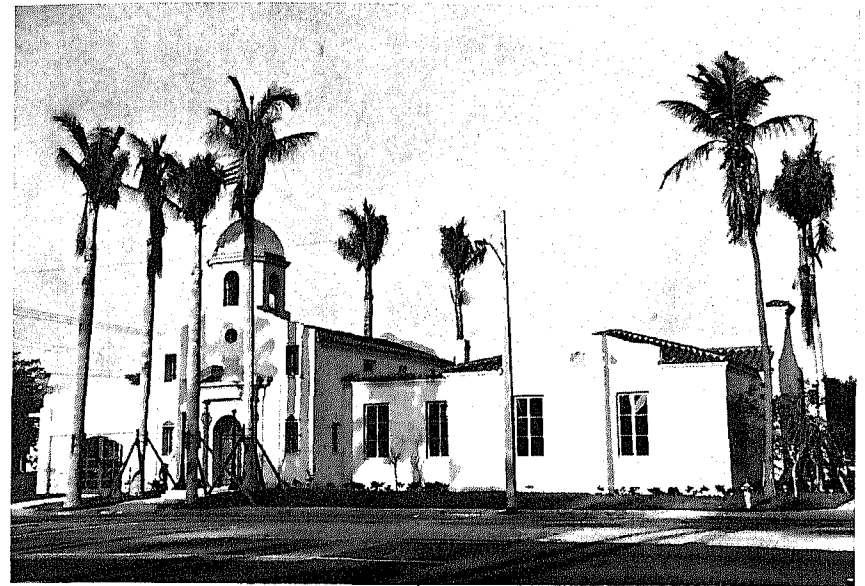
September 1982 Lease is signed.

November 1982 Capital Fund Drive is an-
 nounced the Boca Raton
 Historical Society.

June 1983 City offices are moved
 from old City Hall and
 restoration begins by the
 society.

July 1984 Capital Fund Drives attains
 goal of \$500,000.

November 1984 Ribbon Cutting ceremony
 officially opens the re-
 stored "Town Hall" on the
 15th.



BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
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