Marion Manley: 1918-1984
Florida's Pioneer Woman Architect

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INTRODUCTION

Marion Manley was one of that first generation of academically trained women architects whose major achievements are only beginning to receive the attention they deserve in the history of a profession that is still widely regarded as "masculine". Like so many of the women who were pioneers in the field, her work has remained largely unrecorded in part because much of it was residential, she deemed it minor and did not seek publicity for it, in part because some of her larger scale work, such as the masterplan for the University of Miami, was executed within offices whose principals were men who received much of the design credit, and in part because she herself dispensed with old drawings and records when she relocated her own independent office during the later years of her career.

While opportunities were scarce for women to apprentice in the most prominent and prolific offices of the day, Marion Manley readily found a place with one of Miami's most important architects, Walter De Garmo, soon after she came to Miami during the First World War. She was the first woman in South Florida to qualify for an architectural license, and she played an active part in the emerging local profession as one of the founders of the AIA chapter and as a member of the editorial board of its journal. Manley built in Miami steadily through the middle of the century, and although her important work for the University of Miami was published nationally during the 1940s and 50s and is documented, much of her prolific architectural output is unattributed, few examples of her copious residential work have been documented, and many of her buildings are threatened with demolition.

While her career is certainly of local interest, I also believe that it is it of significant importance within the context of the recent scholarly effort to round out the broader history of American architecture so that it can represent the work of women executed in areas beyond which earlier historians have focused. To this end, the paper will present the work of Marion Manley focusing on three distinct periods of Manley's career: early residential work (1924-1938), the building of the University of Miami (1943-1956) and late residential work (1953-1970).

THE EARLY YEARS

Marion Manley was born on April 29, 1893 on a homestead in Western Kansas. She graduated from Junction City High School in 1911 and went on to attend Kansas University. She transferred to the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1914, one of the first state universities in the country to admit women into its architectural program, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture in 1917.[1] During this period, the pursuit of an architectural degree was still a relatively new phenomenon. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was the first recognized school of architecture in the United States, established in 1868. Its curriculum was modeled on the formidable Ecole de Beaux Arts, whose ideology dominated American academic thinking and instruction from the late 19th to the middle of the 20th century. Manley's curriculum at the University of Illinois was structured on the principles of the Ecole with an extensive concentration on architectural history, drawing and design.[2] While at the university, Manley participated in numerous student organizations serving as President of the Women's League, member of the Illiola Literary Society and the Architectural Club. These early leadership roles set the foundations for a lifelong commitment of service to the profession and the community.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Soon after graduation, Manley moved to Miami at the urging of her brother Lester who had acquired an important commission to pave the main streets of Miami's fledging downtown.[3] Thus she joined the first cadre of individuals who began to transform

a pioneer town of pine rockland and hardwood hammock into one of the fifty largest cities in the U.S.

Upon her arrival to Miami, Manley interned briefly at the office of Gordon Murphy and then went on to work in the prestigious and prolific office of Walter De Garmo. De Garmo moved to Miami in 1904 quickly establishing one of the most successful architectural practices in the city. He became the city's only formidably trained architect receiving his Bachelor's degree in Architecture from Cornell in 1900 and training in the offices of prolific Beaux Arts practitioners such as John Russell Pope.[4] These qualifications led him to acquire important civic commissions early on in his career including the First Miami City Hall (1907, demolished), the adjacent first Miami Fire Station (1907, demolished) as well as Miami's first high-rise building, the Mc Allister Hotel (1916).

In 1917, Manley was hired as a junior draftsman in De Garmo's office where she earned forty dollars a week working on residential designs built predominantly of Dade County pine.[5] While working with De Garmo, Manley would have been provided a foundation in the art of building with local materials and vernacular traditions such as the wooden Cracker constructions which influenced De Garmo's early work, the finest example being that of the Barnacle built in 1891 by Commodore Monroe. Moreover, she would have been exposed to a variety of architectural languages ranging from the neoclassical to the Mediterranean Revival, the latter being extensively explored by De Garmo and ultimately becoming South Florida's primary architectural style throughout the 1920s and 30s.

In 1918, only one year after her arrival to Miami Manley became the first woman architect licensed in the city. Locally, she began to play an active role in several professional organizations, serving as the state treasurer of the Florida Business and Professional Women's Club. This appointment would have certainly been a result of her close affiliation with a number of important women in the community, among them the prominent writer and preservationist Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

Most likely as a result of her lack of early commissions, Manley moved to Anderson, South Carolina to work as a senior draftsman in the office of James J. Baldwin. Little is known of her experiences during this period; however, two years after her departure she returned to Miami where she remained for the duration of her life. As a result of the Florida real estate boom of the early 1920's Manley acquired a number of important local residential commissions, an impressive accomplishment for a young female architect. Her designs for the Villa Paula (1924) and Villa Scott (1925) reflect her keen understanding of the Mediterranean Revival style as well as the hand of a refined and sophisticated designer.

In 1929, Manley accepted an offer to become a senior draftsman in the office of Phineas Paist. Paist settled in Miami in 1924 and became the supervising architect for the city of Coral Gables a year later. Manley's decision to work in Paist's office was greatly influenced by the change in the real estate market caused by the Great Depression. In her autobiographical book Voice of the River, Stoneman Douglas reveals that while the depression did not greatly impact her it did affect many of her friends which were involved in real estate. She states:

> "Marion Manley, who at one point was employing eight draftsmen, was left practically without a cent. The Bust left her high and dry. I had a little extra room off my kitchen, a tiny little room not much more than a closet, where maybe you could stick a cot and a bureau. I told her if she could put up with it, she could share the house. She did."[6]

In 1930, Paist received the important commission to design the United Stated Post Office and Federal Courthouse building in downtown Miami. Manley collaborated with Paist and Harold Steward on the design of the project and appears to have been primarily responsible for the detailing of the building which was inspired by Mediterranean Revival details executed in native coquina stone. Unfortunately, she was given very little credit for her contributions, a reality which would occur throughout her life particularly when she collaborated with larger design firms which were typically run by men. It was only years later that colleagues such as Alfred Browning Parker acknowledged her critical role in the design project.

> "Ms. Manley worked during the two to three years the design process went on....She drew full size all details of the building...working at a 4 x 10 board. It was her belief that the best part of the detailing can be seen in the patio, although she did all of the details for the court rooms."[7]

EARLY RESIDENTIAL WORK

When Manley moved architectural offices towards the end of her career she dispensed with most of her early drawings. This may have been done for the very practical reasons of preserving space in her new, relatively small office; however, it appears more likely that Manley discarded much of these early drawings in order to choreograph the way in which she would be remembered. In the early 1940's Manley had become one of the leading proponents of the International Style in South Florida. During this period she disassociated herself with any references to classical precedents and openly criticized the romanticism of the Mediterranean Revival style extensively used in the designs of cities such as Coral Gables and Miami Shores. In 1946 she went so far as to resign from the Coral Gables Board of Architects because she believed that "there were too many rules left over from the Pseudo-Spanish era" and therefore there was

"no chance to produce a distinguished place"[8] utilizing a new language of Architecture.

Manley did however preserve two sets of early working drawings. The first for the Terletzky Residence designed in 1935 for Leo and Sarepta Terletzky and the second for the Fink Residence designed in 1938 for Denman and Betsy Fink. The latter would have certainly been an important commission for Manley as Denman Fink, George Merrick's uncle, was a visionary artist of Coral Gables and the chair of the University of Miami's Department of Art.

The design for these houses seems quite modest in comparison to Manley's residences of the mid 1920s and more closely recalls the architecture of Spanish farmhouses than the splendor of a mediterranean villa. Manley's title for the Fink Residence, "Finca Fink", reveals this source explicitly for "finca" in spanish means farm. The overall plan of the house is utilitarian, consisting primarily of a two storey studio/living room on the ground level and a small bedroom upstairs. The massing of the house is broken down into a number of volumes to produce a varying roofscape within an otherwise relatively simple volume. The residence extensively incorporates the use of native materials such as oolitic limestone, which is quarried throughout South Florida and can be seen in the construction of some of the earliest houses in Coral Gables. Limestone is not only used in the construction of the walls for the first floor but in much of the architectural detailing of the building. This choice of material reveals Fink's own preoccupations for the way in which the house should relate to the existing context.

> "It is a fine art to make a new house or a new bit of construction take its place quietly and restfully in its environs. Few and far between are the places which when completed do not cry aloud of their newness. They come out at you perhaps from a lovely setting like some great new toy, fresh from its wrappings and with its price-marks still in evidence. You almost feel that were you to turn back the fresh green shutter of such a house you might find its price-tag unmolested.
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> In Coral Gables' rendering you are not going to sense this blatant newness even from the start, for in very truth it will not be new. It will simply be ages-old material taking on new forms. What you see as a house today was the same time-mellowed rock a score of centuries ago. The rock that yesterday slept in the shade of the lovely lantana today is but a restful structural foreground to the grey-green of the spreading live oak."[9]

Manley's early drawings reveal a great deal about her working methodology and the structure of her practice. The final drawings for the Terletzky and Fink Residences consist of seven to eight sheets of pencil on trace drawings which would have served as the working documents for each project. Curiously, her body of work is devoid of sketches and/or presentation drawings. She seems to have rarely produced these types of drawings for her clients. Rather her working method consisted of various meetings with the clients in order to refine the program and arrive at an understanding of their desires. Once this had been achieved, Manley systematically produced a number of drafts or variations of the scheme that were then used to compose the final drawings sets.[10] This economy of means with regards to her architectural drawing output allowed her to build steadily throughout the city despite the small size of her firm.

BUILDING THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

In 1943, Manley was hired by President Bowman Ashe to design a new masterplan for the University of Miami. She and Mr. Ashe were personal friends and Ashe retained her services on a permanent basis. Upon Manley's recommendations, Ashe invited Robert Law Weed to join the architectural team.[11] This decision may have come back to haunt her due to the fact that Weed gave her very little credit for her involvement in the designs. Marjory Stoneman Douglas reveals her own frustrations about this injustice.

> "She.....became the first architect for the University of Miami, for which she's never been given enough credit. The reason is that she brought in a big-time collaborator, Robert Law Week, who proceeded to elbow her out. To hear him talk- and he talked a great deal-you's think he was the primordial architect of the university. It wasn't true."[12]

For the design of the University, Manley and Weed were provided with virtually a clean slate upon which to design a modern educational campus for an anticipated student enrollment of 10,000. Gone were the original plans for the design of a University utilizing the vocabulary of the Mediterranean Revival style made popular in South Florida during the 20s and 30s. Instead the new vision included buildings inspired by the international style and set loosely on open greens. Manley would have certainly learned these modernist planning techniques at M.I.T. where she enrolled in a summer session in 1945.

Manley and Weed went on to collaborate on a multitude of buildings for the campus including the Memorial Classroom Building, the original administration building and post office, the Baptist Student Center, the Episcopal Church and the Veteran's Housing Project, the largest housing project for veterans to be financed through the Federal Housing Administration. These projects were a testament to the modern movement and exemplified one of the earliest instances of the use of Modernist architecture on American University campuses.

LATE RESIDENTIAL WORK

> "The modern architect enjoys the challenge of climatic difficulties, and welcomes them as a basis of design: the only practical alternative, after all, is complete air-conditioning."[13]

Parallel to her work at the University of Miami, Manley continued her residential practice. She was no longer employing the International Style as was the case for her University work, but rather was developing a body of work which she regarded as an appropriate architecture for the climate of South Florida. This eclecticism with regards to the appropriation of architectural languages was one of the pivotal reasons that she remained a lasting figure in the development of South Florida's architecture.

During the later years, her buildings employed the use of local materials, large overhangs for protection from sun and rain, windows and doors arranged to enhance cross ventilation patterns and to maximize the prevailing south easterly breezes, as well as a variety of porches, courtyards and terraces that offered respite from the intense tropical heat. The Paul Wylie House (1953), and the Sam Bell Residence (1954) became emblematic of Manley's tropical architectural style.

The Paul Wylie House, published in leading architectural journals of the day was said to be "a perfect object lesson on how to beat the Southern Florida climate."[14] Manley's desire was to create a house which was intimately connected to the ground and the surrounding landscape. The only sketch which remains of the project depicts a careful plotting of all the mature trees in order to properly site the building amidst the existing canopy and to take advantage of the south easterly breezes. The living room, arguably the most important room in the house, extends into a completely furnished porch which renders the boundaries between inside and outside negligible.

Manley articulated the plan by dividing the house into three individual buildings joined by a large screened porch. The buildings were organized by means of grouping similar functions- living, sleeping and studying which she felt would provide privacy as well as flexibility for the inhabitants of the house. This plan making strategy reflected national trends which sought to redefine the character of the modern family and the way in which they lived.

> "It was Aalto who made many of us more conscious of the strongly differentiated character of the modern family. His charming sketches suggested recognition of the private lives of the individuals as well as their membership in the group."[15]

The Sam Bell Residence merged the universal typology of the patio house with modernist planning techniques which included the separation of structure and skin as well as the implementation of pilotis to elevate the house above the ground plane. Manley's primary decision to elevate the house was to protect the residence from water damage due to impending hurricanes. An early section drawing of the house depicts the floor of the second level set above the "high-water" line of the 1945 hurricane in order to ensure that the important rooms of the house would not flood.[16]

Like the Wylie House, Manley strove to intimately relate the house to the existing landscape. The ground plan is organized by means of the repetitive grid of concrete columns used to define the carport and the large, enclosed, lounge. The ceiling, slab, columns and stairs are entirely of concrete with chimneys and plumbing stack enclosures built of brick. The only expendable structure at ground level is the light screen walls that define an enclosure for the lounge. Essentially the lounge acts as a giant covered porch with virtually uninterrupted views of the surrounding garden. The double storey court, contained within the lounge, extends the garden vertically through the house and deposits the visitor at the most important room in the residence: the living/dining room.

Manley's efforts to develop an architecture suitable to South Florida earned her multiple residential commissions throughout the later years of her career as well as the respect of many of her peers. Her colleague, H. George Fink, described Manley's work as "a sincere effort to preserve the philosophy of this tropical area and introduce a fresh and warm feeling in use of material and details. The human quality of her work is so expressed in the solution of the many problems and is worthy of recognition."[17]

CONCLUSION

The accomplishments of South Florida's early practitioners, men and women so far from the centers of architectural publication, were little known north of the peninsula during their day. Manley's career spans the periods when regional architects worked first to bring academic models derived from classical precedent to many parts of the country, to create local vernacular, and at mid-century to adapt International Style modes of building to a variety of extreme American climates. Florida's little known interpretations of all these phases of architectural history deserve wider attention which should include the contributions of this gifted woman whose work was fundamental to the building boom on the Florida frontier of the early twentieth century.

NOTES

[1] Paine, Judith. *"Pioneer Women Architects."* Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective. New York, Whitney Library of Design, pg. 54. 1977.

[2] University of Illinois. Annual Register 1914-1915. Illinois. University of Illinois Press, pg.159-160. 1914.

[3] Perry, Emily Adams. *"Marion Isadore Manley: Pioneer Woman Architect."* Florida Pathfinders. Florida. Saint Leo College Press, pg. 22.

[4] Hollingsworth, Tracy. History of Dade County Florida. Florida. Parker Art Printing Association. 1949.

[5] House, William. *"Marion Manley. Exponent of Personality."* Florida Living. January 25. 1953.

[6] Stoneman-Douglas, Marjory. The Voice of the River. Florida, Pineapple Press, Inc. 1987.

[7] Letter to Engineer, US Post Office from Alfred Browning Parker, F.A.I.A. September 11, 1973. Marion Manley Collection, Historical Museum of South Florida.

[8] "Synopsis of Marion I. Manley from latest edition of Who's Who in America." Marion Manley Collection, Historical Association of South Florida. n.p.

[9] Fink, Denman. "Castles in Spain made real". Coral Gables-Miami's Master Suburb. Miami, The Hefty Press, pg. 15.

[10] Dorothy Mc Kenna interview by Carie Penabad and Catherine Lynn, March 2003.

[11] Tebeau, Charlton. The University of Miami:1926-1976. Florida. University of Miami Press. 1973. pg. 117.

[12] Stoneman-Douglas, Marjory. The Voice of the River. Florida. Pineapple Press. Inc.1987. pg. 174.

[13] ed. Mock, Elizabeth. "Built in USA since 1932." Built in USA 1932-1944. New York. The Museum of Modern Art, 1944. pg. 21.

[14] "Textbook House." Architectural Forum, February 1951. 132.

[15] ed. Mock, Elizabeth. "Built in USA since 1932." Built in USA 1932-1944. New York. The Museum of Modern Art, 1944. pg. 20.

[16] "Second Story on Stilts," House and Home, August 1953, 86-91.

[17] Nomination for Fellowship, April 28, 1953. "Marion Manley Collection, AIA Archive of Women in Architecture, Washington, D.C. (RG 803. Box 272, Folder 15).