

# CITY OF DELRAY BEACH SURVEY OF THE FROG ALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD



## Survey Report

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# Table of Contents

General Description .....3

Archival Research .....4

Architectural Styles.....10

Methodology .....14

Historic Results and Conclusions .....16

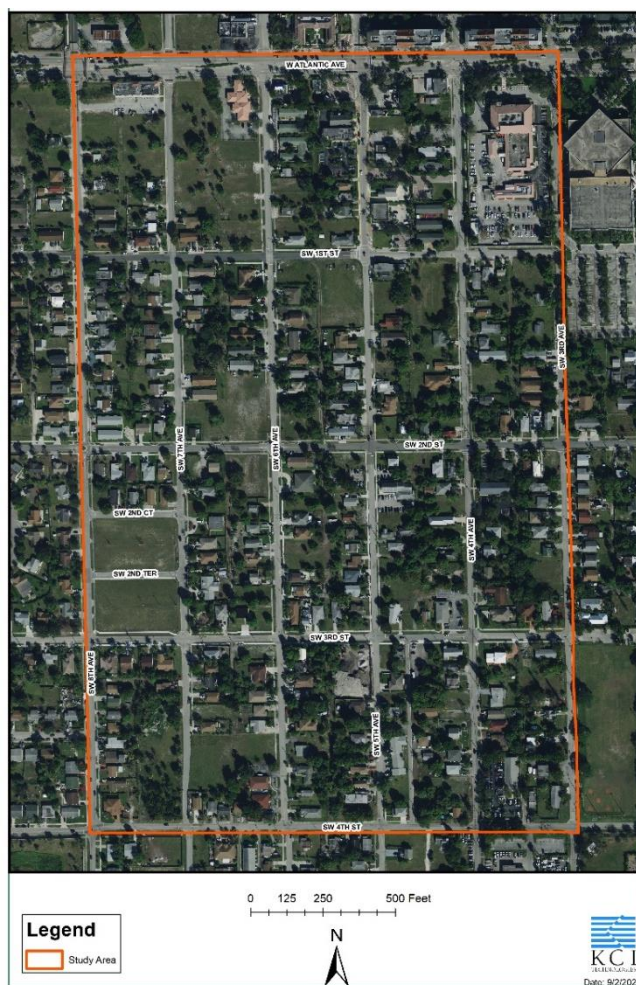
## General Description

KCI Technologies was retained by the City of Delray Beach to survey the Frog Alley neighborhood. Frog Alley is generally located with Atlantic Avenue to the north, SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to the east, SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the west, and SW 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the south.

The study area is approximately 104 acres and has seen large amounts of demolition over the years that has created a lack of cohesion amongst the remaining older structures.

The purpose of the project was to identify structures within the neighborhood that reflect the historic settlement of Bahamians in Delray Beach, and to determine opportunities for future historic, conservation, or heritage districts.

### Study Area



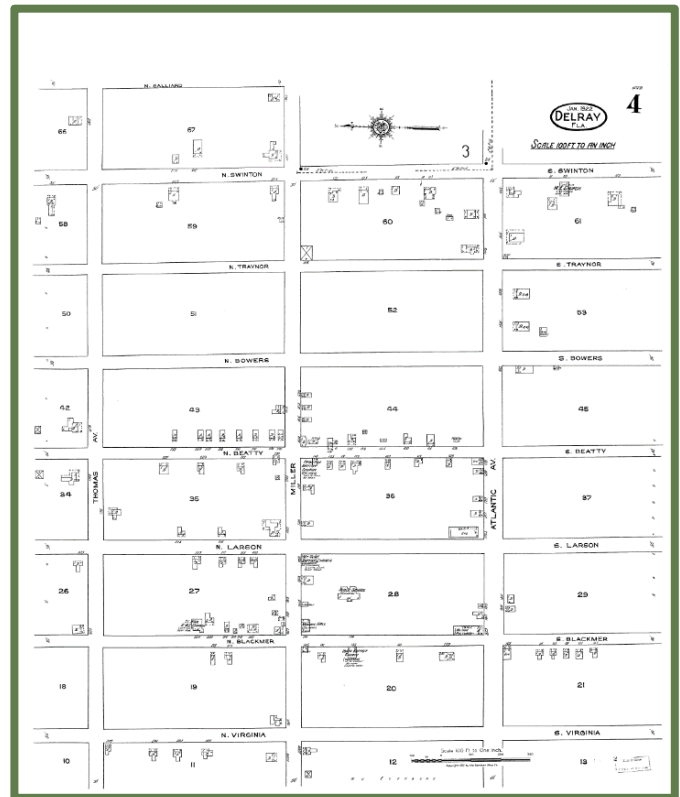
## Archival Research

### Previous Field Surveys

Previous historic resource surveys in the study area include the right-of-way of Atlantic Avenue and the commercial structure located at 404 West Atlantic Avenue.

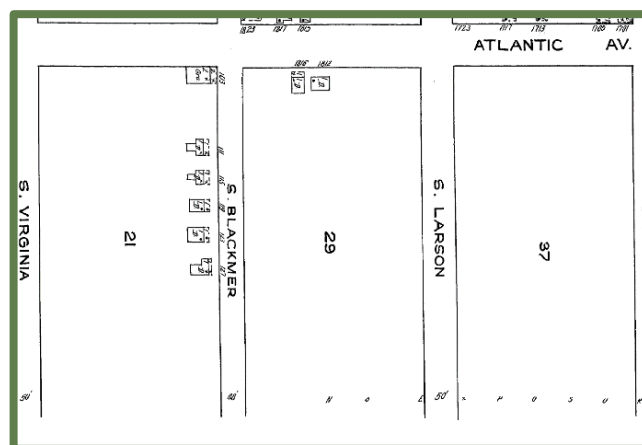
### Historic Land Pattern

The earliest documentation of the area is the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, although it is not identified as Frog Alley by Sanborn. Structures including a service garage were documented in the vicinity of South Blackmer (SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue). These structures no longer exist.



1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of City of Delray, Florida

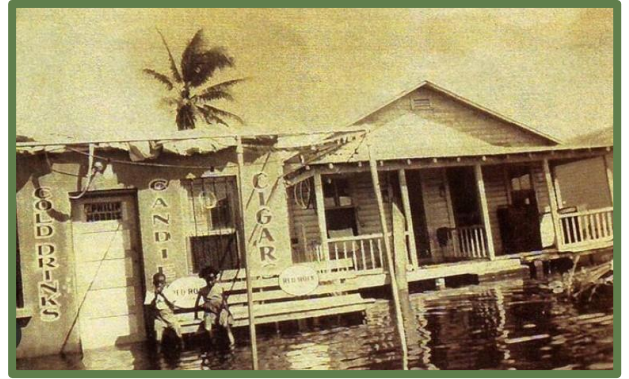
According to local lore, Frog Alley was a low-lying area on the western edge of Delray. In the early 1900s, this area was commonly referred to as the "Everglades". The name Frog Alley is said to come from the sounds of frogs during the rainy season, when many frogs became active in their mating activities and made loud croaking noises.



Frog Alley on 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of City of Delray, Florida

## Chronological History

In the early 1900's, many Caribbean-Americans, nicknamed "Nassaws", settled in the area from the Bahamas. Overtime, the Nassaws made Frog Alley a permanent home and built residences and business in the area surrounding SW 5th Avenue. Originally, the inhabitants of Frog Alley were migrant farm workers. Beginning in the 1920s, the residents of Frog Alley began to provide domestic labor to the white winter residents of Delray Beach. Frog Alley grew its commercial district between West Atlantic Boulevard and SW 1<sup>st</sup> Street during this time. Businesses included dry cleaners, restaurants and a hotel a little further south at SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.



Undated picture of Frog Alley business.

## Migrant Housing

In the early 1920s, homes were built for the Bahamian migrant workers. Two notable groups of housing were the Reynolds Quarters and the Simon Quarters. The Reynolds Quarters are discussed later in this report. The Simon Quarters were built by early Delray settler Abraham Simon. These small wood frame homes would rent for \$5 a week and were generally located in the 100 block of SW 5th Avenue. While not confirmed, a map created by members of the Frog Alley community shows a second location of Simon Quarters on SW 4th Avenue in the 200 block. A structure dating to 1926 still remains at 226 SW 4th Avenue and may be the only remaining Simon Quarters structure to exist. It should be noted, that local recollection is that the Simon Quarters were originally "shotgun" style homes. There is no evidence of these homes in existence at this time.



226 SW 4th Avenue, 1925



## Commercial District

As the north side of West Atlantic Avenue grew as the center of the City's African American community, Frog Alley also saw more commercial structures. According to local architect Roy Simon, "West Fifth Avenue at one time was a very busy street with good retail stores and restaurants on the north side of Atlantic and dry cleaners, stores, and offices on the south side". The post- Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows Pressing establishment at the southeast corner of SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and W1 Street. That structure is no longer standing. Additionally, the 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows a dry cleaner at 82 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The current building at the site dates to 1933 and could have been this early business establishment.



82 SW 5th Avenue, circa 1933

In the 1940s and 1950s more modest concrete structures were built along SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. These structures contrast greatly with the structures that were built elsewhere in the City at the time. Examples of these structures include 25 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 37 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 51-53 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



25 SW 5th Avenue, circa 1952



37 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 51-53 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, circa 1952

Outside of the SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue commercial district, the Princess Hotel, 410 SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, was built in 1950. The Princess Hotel was one of two local hotels that allowed for Black guests. The structure is now a part of the adjacent church but retains its unique bris-de-soliel architectural block staircase and balcony.



Princess Hotel 410 SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, circa 1950



## **1935 Negro Settlement**

The City Council established a “Negro Settlement”. The east boundary of this settlement encompassed SW 3 Avenue. Per Resolution 146, dated June 24, 1935, ‘this was “for the best interest of the people of the negro race and the people of the white race’.

The resolution further states: *‘no buildings or building permits shall be issued or allowed for the erection of any buildings within the area designated as the “White Settlement or White Area” which shall be owned, used, or occupied by any member of the Negro race, nor shall any building or building permit be issued or allowed for building to be located within the Negro Settlement or Negro Area, which shall be used or occupied by a member of the White Race’.* Of interesting note, the resolution does not contemplate the ownership of buildings by the “Negro race”.

Despite this assumption that people of color would not own property nor buildings, one of the earliest known property owners in Frog Alley was Emma Reynolds, widow of Joe Reynolds and daughter to Bahamian Mary Cohen.

Mrs. Reynolds was born in Florida, and with her husband, they invested in a large parcel of land between SW 3rd Street and SW 4th Street in Frog Alley. Widowed by 1910, Mrs. Reynolds built several rental homes for migrant workers and her land holdings were known as “Reynolds’ Quarters”.

Some of the structures shown on the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map along Blackmer Street (SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue) have been identified by community members as “Reynolds’ Quarters”. These structures no longer exist. Mrs. Reynolds’ home was identified as being south of SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Street on SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which is now an empty lot.

## **1960s**

During the 1960s a collection of single-family homes were built along SW 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue between SW 1<sup>st</sup> Street and SW 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. These homes all contain similar architectural elements and are typical of modest masonry homes being built throughout south Florida during this time period. 118 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, circa 1963







137 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, circa 1963

There have been minimal alterations to these structures and they architecturally point to a shift within Frog Alley from its beginning as a transient rental area to a more stable working-class neighborhood.

Significant architectural features include long carports reflecting the car style of the time, sun block decoration on the columns of the carports, and low gable roofs to naturally cool the homes. Some of the structures retain scored concrete decoration on the carport columns and decorative painted brick patterns.



321 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, circa 1963

## **1995**

On July 18, 1995, the Delray Beach City Council recognized the boundaries of Frog Alley as “bounded on the east by SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, on the south by SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, on the west by SW 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and on the north by Atlantic Avenue. This boundary was described in a proclamation recognizing and commending the “Frog Alleyians”.

## Architectural Styles

The Delray Beach Historic Preservation Design Guidelines outline the architectural styles found in the City. This document primarily addresses structures in designated historic districts. The structures in Frog Alley are more modest than those found in other areas of the city and tend to lack some of the architectural ornamentation presented in the Design Guidelines.

### Vernacular (Frame)

Time Period: Early 1920s – 1940s



#### General Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical, frequently “L”
- Building material: frame; locally-available materials
- Exterior surface treatment: wood siding
- Roof type: gable or hip
- Height: one or two stories
- Window type: sash
- Foundation: elevated, raised pier
- Other:
  - Shed roof porch across front elevation
  - Ornamentation: rafter tails, cornerboards, vents in the gable ends, and shutters

- Often a freestanding garage that may reflect details that exist on the main residence

#### Frog Alley Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical, frequently square with a shed attachment, usually kitchen and other indoor plumbing
- Building material: frame; locally-available materials
- Exterior surface treatment: wood siding
- Roof type: gable or hip
- Height: one story
- Window type: sash
- Foundation: elevated, raised pier
- Other:
  - Shed roof porch across front elevation
  - Lacks decorative ornamentation. Vents in gable ends are functional without detail.

#### **Masonry Vernacular: Residential**

Time Period: 1890 – 1940





## General Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical
- Building material: concrete block; hollow clay tile; brick
- Exterior surface treatment: stucco (smooth or textured)
- Roof type: gabled; hipped; cross-gabled; flat
- Height: one or two stories
- Window type: sash; casement
- Foundation: elevated, raised pier
- Other:
  - Roofing materials: barrel tile, flat concrete tile, shingles
  - Ornament: cast concrete; scored stucco, concrete lintels and sills
  - Often, a freestanding garage that may reflect details of the main residence
  - Rusticated exterior surfaces

## Frog Alley Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical
- Building material: concrete block; hollow clay tile; brick
- Exterior surface treatment: smooth stucco
- Roof type: gabled; hipped; cross-gabled; flat
- Height: one story
- Window type: sash; casement
- Foundation: elevated, raised pier
- Other:
  - Roofing materials: shingles
  - Ornament: scored stucco, cut-outs
  - Attached open carport, later than 1960s

## Masonry Vernacular: Commercial

Time Period: 1890 – 1940



### General Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical
- Building material: concrete block, hollow clay tile
- Exterior surface treatment: stucco (smooth or textured)
- Roof type: flat
- Height: one story
- Window type: metal frame, fixed glass display windows on first floor
- Other:
  - Decorative coping on parapet

### Frog Alley Characteristics:

- Plan shape: symmetrical
- Building material: concrete block, hollow clay tile
- Exterior surface treatment: smooth stucco
- Roof type: flat
- Height: one story
- Window type: small fixed glass
- Includes Houses of Worship

## Methodology

The survey of the Frog Alley area was conducted by gathering general information relevant to the study area in the following steps:

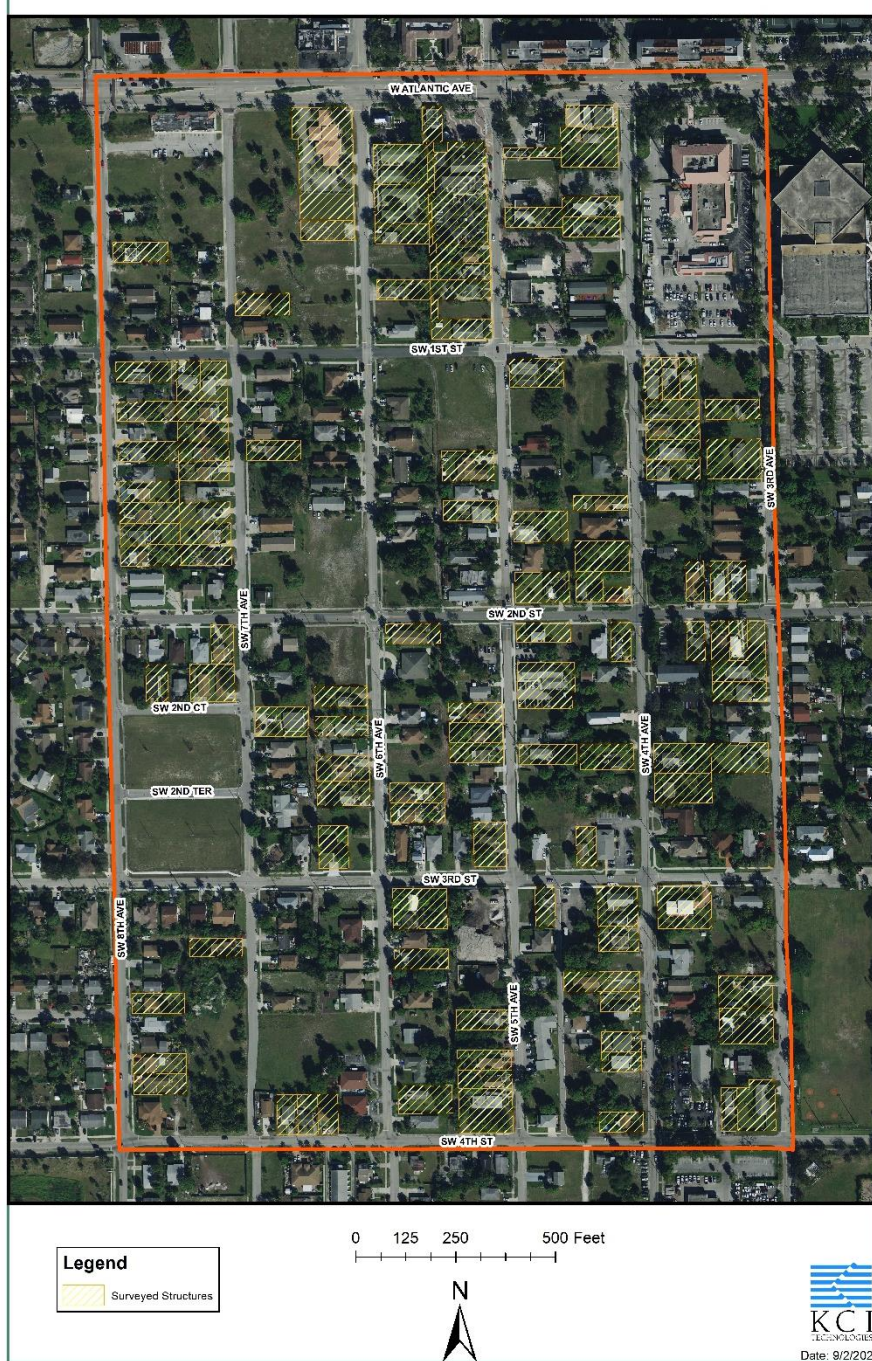
- Meet with key stakeholders from community and City staff;
- Collect, copy and review existing data on the historic district, including Florida Master Site File forms available the State's Bureau of Historic Preservation;
- Conduct preliminary research on Frog Alley general history from books, photographs, newspaper articles and magazines;
- Gather, copy and review historical maps and photographs; and
- Gather, copy and review existing City records such as Building Cards and Property Appraiser's information.

The next phase was to conduct the necessary survey and resurvey of the historic district as follows:

- Conduct field survey work to identify features to be documented on the FMSF forms;
- Photograph all sites to be included as part of the surveyed resources;
- Conduct historical research utilizing building permits, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, local newspapers, historic online research including obituaries, and other available sources;
- Prepare Florida Master Site File forms;
- Prepare location maps and USGS maps showing location for each of the sites included as part of the surveyed resources to be submitted with the completed FMSF forms to the City;
- Prepare photographic documentation in print and digital format for each of the sites identified as part of the surveyed resources to be submitted with the completed FMSF forms to the City;
- Prepare Historic District Survey Report to be submitted with completed FMSF forms for review and comments; and
- Meet with ad-hoc committee of community members and City staff.



## All Structures Surveyed



## Historic Results and Conclusions

The overall study area lacks a cohesive architectural collection. The largest collection of early wood frame structures can be found south of SW 2nd Street and north of SW 3rd Street between SW 6th Avenue and SW 4th Avenue. Significant structures in this area date from 1925 – early 1950s.

Additionally, there are a few structures along SW 5th Avenue between West Atlantic Avenue and SW 1 Street that represent the once thriving Frog Alley commercial district.

It is recommended that the City of Delray Beach create the Frog Alley Residential Historic District and the Frog Alley Commercial Historic District using the existing City Historic Preservation Ordinance.

- **Frog Alley Residential Historic District:** South of SW 2nd Street and north of SW 3rd Street between SW 6th Avenue and SW 4th Avenue.
- **Frog Alley Commercial Historic District:** Atlantic Avenue between SW 4th Avenue and SW 6th Avenue and 5th Avenue south from Atlantic Avenue to SW 1st Street.

Should the City choose not to designate Historic Districts, the City should consider the creation of the Frog Alley Heritage Conservation District via City Ordinance. Unlike other locally designated historic districts in the City in which all exterior alterations to properties in the district must be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board, the only properties that would require review by the Historic Preservation Board in the Frog Alley Heritage Conservation District would be new construction or demolition projects. This will ensure that the impact to the surround neighborhood is done in a way that is contextually sensitive.

Based on the results of this survey, there are two opportunities for Heritage Conservation Districts within Frog Alley:

- **Frog Alley Residential Heritage Conservation District:** South of SW 2nd Street and north of SW 3rd Street between SW 6th Avenue and SW 4th Avenue.
- **Frog Alley Commercial Heritage Conservation District:** Atlantic Avenue between SW 4th Avenue and SW 6th Avenue and 5th Avenue south from Atlantic Avenue to SW 1st Street.

The map on the following page delineates these two recommended Heritage Conservation Districts.



## **Recommended Heritage Conservation Districts**



