

Modern Miami Loses More of Its Heritage

Written by Paul George, BT Contributor
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A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



Miami lost another historic landmark recently, when Shenandoah Presbyterian Church fell victim to the wrecking ball, despite the efforts of determined citizens to save it. Located on SW 8th Street, today's Calle Ocho, in the heart of Little Havana, this grand Colonial-revival building included a towering spire visible throughout the neighborhood.

Like other historic buildings in Miami's rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods, the 70-year old structure was a victim of rapid redevelopment.

Buildings like the Shenandoah Presbyterian Church have rich histories. In 1927, as Greater Miami and other parts of Florida were mired in an economic slump following the collapse of a great real estate boom, the Rev. Daniel Iverson and his family arrived from North Carolina with the express purpose of founding a Presbyterian congregation for the rapidly growing Shenandoah and Riverside neighborhoods.

The son of missionaries, Iverson was an energetic cleric who quickly built a congregation. Not long after his arrival, 47 charter members had met for worship services, first in an open-air

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theater near the site of the future church, and later renting Trotter's Dance Hall in the same area.

Soon the congregation built its first church, a simple one-story building near the corner of SW 21st Avenue and SW 8th Street, which served members until it was destroyed by fire in 1948. The congregation, with more than 1000 members, then built the grand church seen in the accompanying photograph, designed by Robert Fitch Smith, a preeminent architect of mid-20th century Miami. Many prominent persons were drawn to the church by the inspirational sermons of Iverson and his successors. Their ranks included President Richard Nixon.

Shenandoah Presbyterian Church assisted the community in many ways, perhaps most importantly in providing for the needs of hundreds of Caribbean and Central American refugees who flocked to its doors in recent decades. Indeed, the church had become at the time of its demise a Central American congregation.

Paul George is historian at HistoryMiami Museum. To order a copy of this photo, contact HistoryMiami archives manager Ashley Trujillo at 305-375-1623, atrujillo@historymiami.org.

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