

INVINCIBLE

Thick Dade pine made Victoria Park bungalows tough even for termites.

By MAUREEN BOYCE
Special to the Sun-Sentinel

Tucked away in a shaded nook of Victoria Park is Fort Lauderdale's most recently designated historical landmark, a group of eight bungalows built around 1926.

"It's like our third historic district," said Susan Gillis, curator of collections for the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society. "It's a little bitty one, but a district nonetheless."

The houses don't technically constitute a district because they don't have their own ordinances, said Dan Hobby, director of the Historical Society and adviser to the Historic Preservation Board. But they do have their own unique personality.

"It's the first multiproperty site of its kind" to be designated historical, Hobby said. "I guess, if anything, it's similar to Brickell Avenue."

The shaded compound comprises the southern half of a city block between Northeast Seventh and Northeast Eighth streets, bordered on the west by Northeast 17th Avenue and on the east by Northeast 17th Road.

"Originally, all the houses faced inside on the courtyard," said Susan Jordan, who shares one of the homes with her husband, Pat. "So the sides you see facing the streets today are really the backs of the houses."

Their juxtaposition gave rise to unusual odd and even house numbers. On Northeast 17th Avenue, for example, 708 is next to 711 — even though the homes are on the same side of the street.

Jordan spearheaded the movement to gain historical status for the little village, based largely on its architectural significance, its connection with the city's boom times period and its unusual, hamlet-like design.

The 1½-story cottages — most with an enclosed veranda and exposed beam ceilings — are constructed of native materials by a skilled, but not master, craftsman. Bungalows usually had gabled roofs and were popularized in America during the first quarter of the century.

The Jordans' house has a fireplace, wooden brackets under its gables and unenclosed eave overhangs. The house still retains its original lead-weighted, wood-frame windows, small crystal doornobs and quaint footed bathtub, Jordan said.

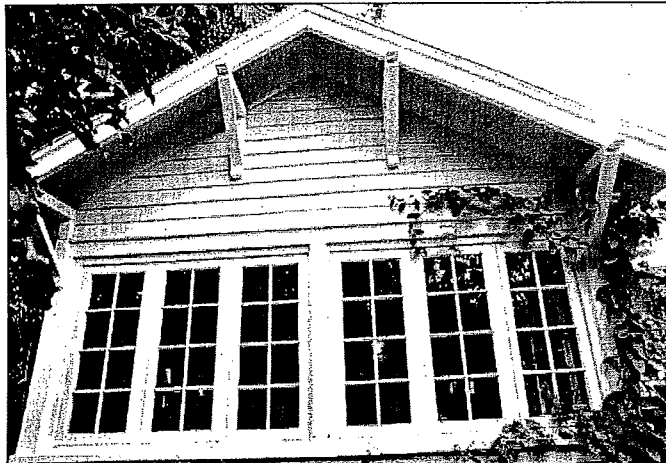
The house is constructed of thick Dade pine, still coveted for its durability.

"I broke every other nail I tried to drive [into it]. It's like concrete," Pat Jordan said. "That's why [these houses are] still standing."

Jordan laughed when he recalled finding little black marks dotting much of the wood.

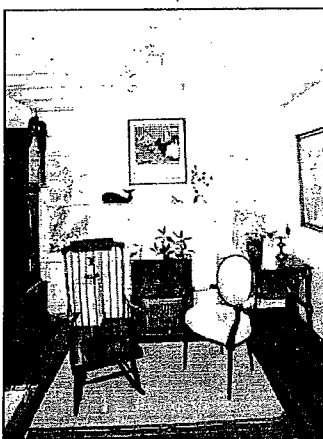
"The [building] inspector said they were where termites had tried to eat into it," he said. "But, they couldn't. That's why everyone wanted to use Dade pine back then."

Victoria Courts was the creation of Alfred Kuhn, developer of Victoria Park. Kuhn named his developments and his yacht after his daughter.



Staff photos/URSULA E. SEEMANN

The original windows and triangles under the roof, above, in the Victoria Park bungalows can be traced to construction around 1926. The living room shows exposed roof beams and fireplace, at left.



"I had heard his name before," Hobby said. "But... I hadn't paid much attention to him."

Kuhn was one of many developers active during Fort Lauderdale's boom period, a time of unprecedented growth when fortunes were quickly made and — in the wake of the devastating 1926 hurricane — just as quickly lost.

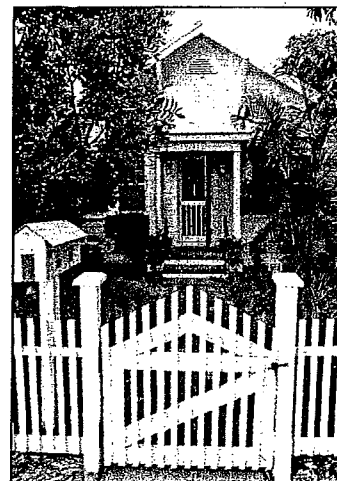
It is uncertain whether Victoria Courts was built before the great hurricane but the cottages have weathered many subsequent storms and served as home to generations of Fort Lauderdale families.

"Chris Evert grew up here, in the house just north of me," said Susan Jordan. "Everybody was very close here. They all shared the courtyard... their kids played together there... everybody knew each other."

She said much of that spirit of community still endures, nurtured by neighbors who know and care about each other, and share a reverence for the history of their little village.

The preservation board recognized that common bond, Hobby said, prompting a quick unanimous approval of their application.

"They were all in attendance," he said. "And it certainly gives the board some kind of comfort level to see all the property owners so united, so enthusiastic."



Staff photo/URSULA E. SEEMANN

PEEK INTO THE PAST

Tucked away in a shaded nook of Victoria Park is Fort Lauderdale's most recently designated historical landmark — a group of eight bungalows built around 1926. The cottages, most with an enclosed veranda and exposed beam ceilings, were constructed of native materials. Above is the front of the bungalow at 711 NE 17th