

THE LINCOLN BUILDING
350 LINCOLN ROAD / 1627 WASHINGTON AVENUE, MIAMI BEACH

Miami Beach developer Carl Fisher first platted the land east of Washington Avenue between Espanola Way and 19th Street in January 1914 as “Fisher’s First” subdivision. It was originally the site of private estates, including Fisher’s own oceanfront mansion at the east end of Lincoln Road. In the 1920s, Fisher went on to develop Lincoln Road west of Washington Avenue as an elegant commercial district that was called “the Fifth Avenue of the South.”

Newton B.T. Roney (1883-1952), another pioneer developer who created the “Spanish Village” on Espanola Way and the luxurious Roney Plaza Hotel at 23rd Street, purchased Fisher’s land at the east end of Lincoln Road in 1925. After the setback of the 1926 hurricane, the area boomed again in the 1930s, but commercial zoning on Lincoln Road remained limited to the west side of Washington Avenue. In 1940, the Roney family brought a lawsuit against the City to extend commercial zoning eastward to Collins Avenue:

Roney wants to build offices and stores on the southwest corner of Lincoln Road and Collins Avenue, with a store building on the southeast corner of Lincoln Road and Washington Avenue.¹

After successful rezoning, both of these proposed buildings were constructed in 1946, the latter being the subject Lincoln Building. It occupies Lot 16 and the west half of Lot 15 in Block 46 of Fisher’s First subdivision.

The building permit was issued on March 14, 1946, for a five-story “store building” costing \$60,000 and designed by architect Albert Anis (see Biography following). Anis had designed the Mercantile Bank Building, directly across the street at 420 Lincoln Road, in 1940, and the Lincoln Building was clearly designed to complement it. Both are surfaced in natural keystone, but in contrast to the rounded contours and multiple levels of the 420 Building, the

¹ “Roneys Sue Miami Beach,” October 1940 newspaper clipping; Agnew Welsh archive, Miami Public Library.

Lincoln Building is a solid five-story mass with an angled cut corner. It has a horizontal emphasis, with virtually its only decoration being four grand ribbons of windows – a typical feature of its Postwar Modern style – that extend continuously across both facades and the angular corner. Plans for the Lincoln Building, found on Microfilm #22792 in the Miami Beach Building Department, show the windows as double-hung sash type with two-over-two horizontal panes.

While the upper floors were used for offices, accessed through a granite-walled elevator lobby at the southwest corner of the building (1627 Washington Avenue), the ground floor was devoted to retail space. These storefronts have undergone extensive alterations over the years, but a photograph from about 1950 shows the ground floor dominated by the Kitty Kelly shoe store, the earliest tenant, with its entrance at the corner and large show windows along both streetfronts. The whole façade of this store is defined by stone facing, of a darker hue than the rest of the building, that wraps around the corner. Beyond this stone facing, the keystone walls of the ground floor are decorated with raised horizontal banding. The plate-glass windows on the Lincoln Road side extend nearly to the sidewalk, while the windows on Washington Avenue are set at waist height. The dramatic corner entry is recessed under a marquee that is supported by a single, off-center round pillar.

Signage is a prominent feature in this photograph. “Kitty Kelly” is emblazoned in neon on both streetfronts, on the stone facing above the show windows. A channel-letter sign is also set atop the corner marquee. Smaller shops to the east and south of Kitty Kelly have more modest signs above their premises. Two photographs from 1953 show that Kitty Kelly had by then been replaced by the Mary Jane store for shoes and handbags, that continued to have prominent neon signs on the north and west elevations and the corner marquee. The Merrill Lynch brokerage that occupied office space upstairs had two signs of plain lettering beneath the second-story windows. The title “Lincoln Building” in copper letters still crowns the northwest corner of the parapet.

ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHY

Albert Anis (1889-1964) was born in Chicago and attended the Armour Institute of Technology there, 1908-10². He worked in Miami Beach from the mid-1930s to the mid-'50s, designing dozens of exemplary buildings in the Art Deco, Streamline, and Postwar Modern styles. He became the third most-prolific architect here, after Hohauser and Dixon. His buildings include the Mercantile Bank Building at 420 Lincoln Road, and the following hotels:

Avalon	700 Ocean Dr.
Clevelander	1020 Ocean Dr.
Leslie	1244 Ocean Dr.
Waldorf Towers	860 Ocean Dr.
Winter Haven	1400 Ocean Dr.
Abbey	300 21 st St.
Tyler	430 21 st St.
Berkeley Shore	1610 Collins Ave.
Sagamore	1671 Collins Ave.
Traymore	2445 Collins Ave.
Promenade	2469 Collins Ave.
Biltmore Terrace	8701 Collins Ave.

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher

Nov. 29, 2010

² Keith Root, Miami Beach Art Deco Guide, Miami Design Preservation League, 1987, p.32.