



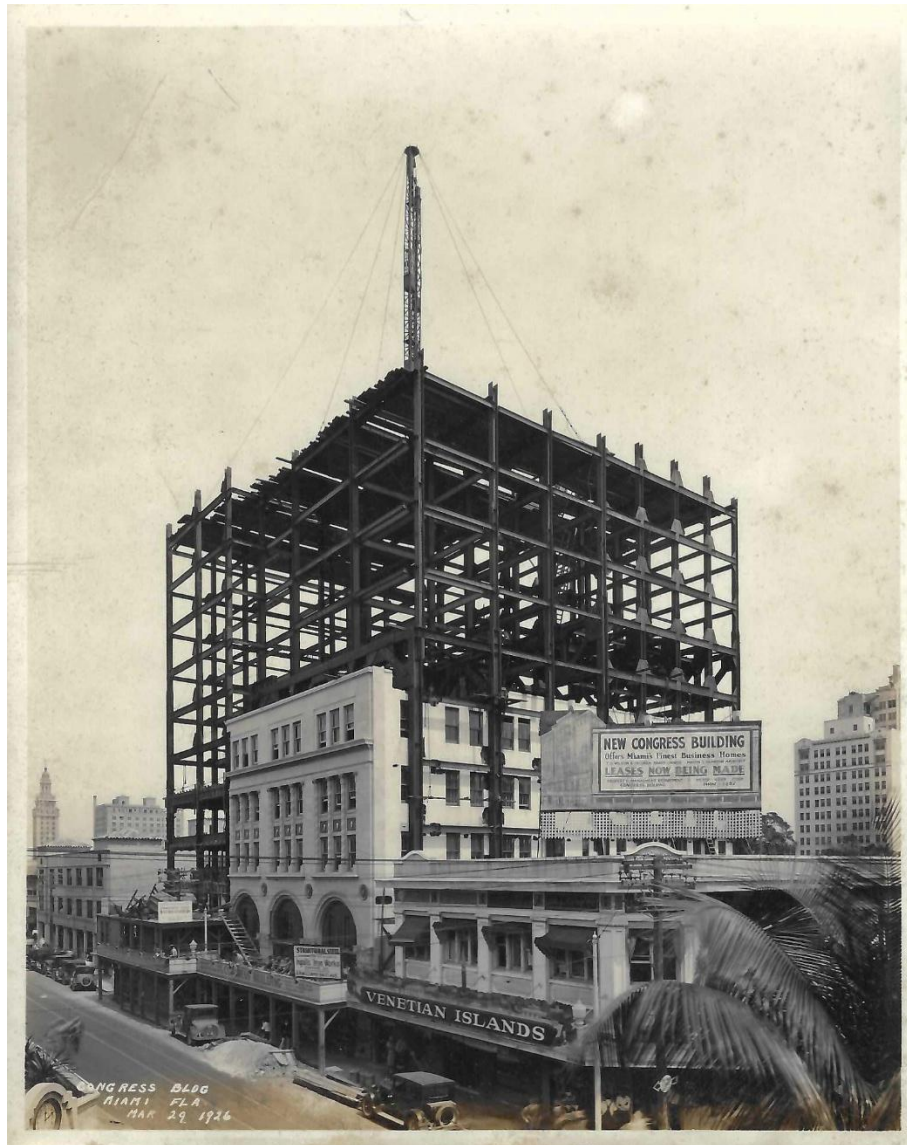
(Florida – Miami Real Estate Development) Wilson, Thomas O., **Group of Materials Related to Thomas O. Wilson, Pioneer Miami Real Estate Developer – Particularly His Development of the New Congress Building, a Historically Significant Miami Building and Woodlawn Park Cemetery, 1920 – 1971**

Archive of photographs, photo album, correspondence, documents and ephemera documenting the construction of the Congress Building, an early Miami office tower, and architectural landmark, which descended in the family of Thomas O. Wilson, pioneering Miami real estate developer in Miami's 1920s boom.

Includes construction photographs of the Congress Building, Specifications for the Congress Building's Addition, photograph Album, prospectuses, photographs of Woodlawn Park Cemetery, and related ephemeral material.

"The Congress Building is a historic twenty-one story building in downtown Miami. The building was constructed in two phases, with the first five stories in 1923 and the remaining sixteen in 1925. It features elements of both Mediterranean Revival and Chicago School architecture. The Congress Building was created amidst the 1920s Florida Land Boom, which saw the population of Miami explode and land prices skyrocket. The building itself was built and utilized by the Realty Securities Corporation, a real estate company specializing in suburban properties. Today the Congress Building has been restored and houses apartments. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been designated a Miami historic site.

In 1923, Thomas O. Wilson, President of the Realty Securities Corporation, ordered the construction of an office building on Northeast 2nd Avenue. Wilson, previously a travelling salesman in Philadelphia, created the Realty Securities Corporation in 1913, which specialized in buying and selling business properties and subdivisions. Wilson was noteworthy for developing cemeteries such as Woodlawn Park and Tampa's Myrtle Hill Cemetery. He was also a member of the Miami Realty Board, as well as the Chamber of Commerce. Wilson dubbed the new five-story building on Northeast 2nd Avenue "The New Congress Building" and used it as the Realty Securities Corporation's headquarters. In 1925, at the height of the Florida Land Boom, Miami ended its ten-story height restriction on buildings. Soon an additional sixteen stories had been added to the New Congress Building, which now began being called simply the Congress Building.



Both the original Congress Building and the additional sixteen stories were designed by Martin Luther Hampton. Hampton was a very notable architect in the Miami area. Some of his works include the old Miami Beach City Hall, many homes in Miami Springs, and the Biltmore Hotel and Country Club. He was also part of George Merrick's design team that created the community of Coral Gables. Hampton created the Congress Building in the Mediterranean Revival style, which was popular in Florida at the time, and included aspects of the Chicago School style.

The Congress Building remains as an example of commercial architecture in 1920s Florida. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 and was designated a Miami city historical site in 2003. In the late 1990s, the building underwent restoration and was converted into apartment units. The first floor also contains retail space."

"In 1911, Thomas O. Wilson, a former traveling salesman, moved from Philadelphia to Miami. In 1912, he established the Woodlawn Park Cemetery Company, creating a place of interment on SW 8th Street for some of Miami's most prominent citizens. In 1913, he organized the "Realities Security Corporation," billed as "owners and agents of city and suburban properties."

During the teens, Miami was poised for the explosive growth to come. By 1915, the City of Miami Beach had been incorporated, and new highways were constructed that linked the region with the Midwest, East and West Coasts. In 1916, Villa Vizcaya, James Deering's magnificent Mediterranean-inspired estate on Biscayne Bay was completed. The pace increased exponentially after that, and by 1921, Downtown Miami real estate was

selling at a premium. To fill the demand for additional space, skyscrapers replaced quaint low-rise buildings, many of them single-family residences.

It was in this climate that Thomas Wilson and his Realities Securities Corporation commissioned the “New Congress Building” on NE 2nd Avenue. The company made its offices in the original five-story building, and when the building was expanded to become a high-rise in 1926, continued to make the building its home. Because of its two stages of construction, the Congress Building typifies both the predominant architectural theme of the Mediterranean Revival (favored for small commercial and residential designs during the Boom) in the original building, and the sleek, architectonic quality of the Chicago School in the massive, high-rise addition. Architect Martin Luther Hampton designed both the original building and the addition. Hampton was one of the six architects (the others being H. George Fink, Walter De Garmo, Richard Kiehnel, Harold Hastings Mundy and L. D. Brumm), who composed George Merrick’s original design team in the creation of Coral Gables, Florida. Hampton was a master of design who made a significant impact in the articulation of the Mediterranean Revival style, which proliferated in the Miami area during the Boom. Before coming to work for George Merrick in Coral Gables, he worked with Addison Mizner in Palm Beach.”

Although Hampton designed the addition to the Congress Building, he depended on structural engineer E. A. Sturman of Miami to create the structural framework that would make the addition possible. The “first” Congress Building consisted of five stories characterized by five bays created by the monumental two-story arches of the entry bays. The addition was constructed by “straddling” the original building with two additional bays of 17 stories that were constructed as a north wing. The truss system that supports the addition is placed through the sixth and seventh floors and is connected to a column system attached to the original building. No other buildings in Miami are known to be constructed in this manner. The Congress Building literally portrays the evolution of architectural fashion in the City of Miami. The design for the original building relies heavily on Neo-Classical, 18th-century Italian prototypes, but the use of polychromed glazed terra cotta for the roundels between the arches and the spandrels that decorate the space between the fourth and fifth stories belongs to the Mediterranean Revival interpretations so popular throughout the Boom in Florida. The turned pilasters of the fourth and fifth stories are also a product of the Mediterranean Revival phenomenon and its liberal interpretation of Moorish motifs. For the 1926 addition, Hampton was much closer in spirit to the Chicago School designers of the late nineteenth century. Those designers include Daniel Burnham, John Welborn Root, William Holabird, Louis Sullivan and Sullivan’s partner, Dankmar Adler. The Chicago School architects were the front runners in the development of early sky-scrapers and the characteristics associated with the school include: a rectangular plan with a flat roof and terminating cornice; minimal ornamentation, the expression of the structural skeleton of the building by the emphasis on the grid of intersection piers and horizontal spandrels; large expanses of non-load bearing glass, and windows that filled a great proportion of the wall mass. The “Chicago window” type originates from these early high-rises and is defined as a large fixed central window that is flanked by two narrow casement windows that are operable.

The Congress Building addition reflects the Chicago School style in its flat roof and terminating cornice, the proliferation of windows that occupy a bulk of the wall mass, and the expression of form and verticality through the geometry of the window placement.”



VIEW OVER BISCAYNE BAY FROM
MIAMI BEACH





MIAMI BEACH END OF CAUSEWAY
NEW AQUARIUM IN CENTER OF PICTURE.



THE HEART OF MIAMI LOOKING WEST
ON ELEVENTH STREET.



Collection Inventory

19 black and white photographs documenting the construction of the addition to The New Congress Building, March – May 1926. Silver prints measuring 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches, linen backed, taken by "W. A. Fishbaugh, Commercial Photographer" Miami.

Specifications for Addition to Congress Building N.E. Second Ave. Miami, Florida for Mr. T. O. Wilson Miami, Florida. Martin L. Hampton Associates Architects Congress Bldg. Miami, Florida.

Circa 1925, quarto, 63 pages, stapled into plain paper wrappers, T. O. Wilson's copy.

Congress Building, Miami, Florida

Octavo, folding promotional prospectus, illustrated with plans and a map of the area, circa 1926, (2 copies).

The Miami Realtor May 24, 1926

One of the articles, "*Building a Building Over a Building The Most Interesting Building Project in Southern Florida*", concerns the Congress Building

Correspondence concerning Congress Building, 2 letters, 1926, 1 typescript sheet headed "Cost of Building", showing the costs, of construction, fees and indebtedness. 1 page

File of correspondence and documents pertaining to the Congress Building, circa 1928, five items

File of newspaper clippings, primarily 1920s concerning the Congress building and its construction, seven items.

42 photographs of Woodlawn Park Cemetery, Miami, Florida, circa 1920s – 1930s, includes silver prints, and real photo postcards (some duplication).

18 copies of chromo-postcards of Woodlawn Park Cemetery

10 cancelled stock certificates for the Woodlawn Park Cemetery Company, and two letters concerning them.

Lease Between James R. Blackwood and T. O. Wilson, Charles S. Ewing, F. L. Felix, and W. H. George July 1st 1925 to June 30th, 2024.

[1925] octavo, 32 pages, original printed wrappers.

Photograph Album – **“Aerial Views of Miami, Fla. Also World War Photographs”**

Album includes 73 aerial photographs of Miami and immediate surroundings, downtown, waterfront, mansions along Miami Beach, and other views of the city, and images of the early biplanes that took the pictures, dated 1920-1921. With 17 photographs of WW1.

Images mounted on black paper leaves, identified in white pencil captions under image.

1 scrapbook, 19302-1950s, with clippings and ephemera pertaining to T. O. Wilson's children, and their families, 107 pages.

Florida Poets Being an Anthology of Poems published in the Miami Daily News

Miami: 1933, 1 copy, one of the contributors was Beatrice M. Wilson.

\$ 1,250.00

<https://www.historicpreservationmiami.com/pdfs/congress%20bldg.pdf>

<https://theclio.com/entry/41356>