

The mystery of the missing Great Miami Hurricane historical marker

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Miami Dade College historian Paul George discusses the effect the 1926 hurricane had on Miami. By Jenny Staletovich| C.M. Guerrero| Mario Mateo

Nearly a decade ago, the National Weather Service erected a historic marker outside its old headquarters in the stately federal post office in downtown Miami to memorialize the heroic efforts of a local meteorologist during the brutal 1926 hurricane.

Three years ago, it vanished.

No one knows where it went. Not the developer who renovated the building, the architect who oversaw the work, the nearby history museum, the building's tenant for the past three years nor the neighboring business. Not even the weather service has been able to track it down.

"It's so grim," said Rusty Pfof, who retired as the chief meteorologist of the Miami weather office in 2010 and led efforts to install the sign.

[Between 1914 and 1927](#), when weather reports relied heavily on ship reports and barometers, the weather office was located on the third floor of the building at Northeast First Street and First Avenue, with wind and rain gauges and other equipment installed on the roof. It was here that Richard Gray watched in horror as dawn broke on September 18 and people began streaming into the streets, assuming the storm was over when in fact the eye had just arrived. According to his account, Gray ran down to the street and told as many people as he could to find shelter before the second, more lethal side of the storm hit.

Those efforts, Pfof reasoned, were worth memorializing since every hurricane season meteorologists confront a complacent public often uninformed or indifferent to a hurricane's danger.

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retired National Weather Service meteorologist Rusty Pfof

"In Miami, with a population that changes so rapidly and so dramatically, we felt like no one was remembering what happened in 1926," he said. "We felt like it was a service to the community."

After applying to the state for an official marker, they got permission from developer Scott Robins, who owned the building, to install the marker at the northeast corner.

“If you have the money, you have to make an application and it has to be historically researched. So we went through the process,” Pfof said. Two years later, the marker arrived and on the 81st anniversary of the storm, the agency held a dedication ceremony.

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National Weather Service

“The marker will tell the story of what happened in the past so that we will be better prepared in the future,” Pfof said during the ceremony.

Now, it’s a lesson lost.

No one knows exactly when it went missing but it was sometime in 2012. Miami Dade College historian Paul George, who led walking tours past the sign, said he noticed one day on a tour. Pfof also heard around the same time and contacted the new chief meteorologist Pablo Santos, who tried to track it down through the city. But the staffer Pfof worked with had left and the committee that approved it no longer exists.

“This has been a mystery that despite my numerous knocks on doors have gotten me nowhere,” Santos said in an email.

Last week Rebecca Stanier-Shulman, whose husband, architect [Allan Shulman](#), oversaw the restoration, remembered the sign but said she had no idea what happened to it. It was gone by the time Shulman began work. Robins’ office said he had no clue. Cheryl Jacobs, executive vice president of the Miami chapter of the American Institute of Architects, said it was gone by the time the group moved in in December 2013.

“I asked the city [historic preservation] department as well. It was either stolen or city crews moved it to repair [the] sidewalk and it was lost,” she said in an email.

Nearby business owner Jose Goyanes, intrigued by the mystery of the missing marker, called the Miami Downtown Development Authority and the trust that manages Bayfront Park hoping to run it down. No luck.

“I don’t know if [we’ll] ever be able to figure out what happened,” Pfof said. “I fear that someone has done away with it, for whatever reason, and that when they bought the building they didn’t like it there because it reminded people of a terrible disaster.”

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