



PHOTOS BY PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**GREEN HOUSE:** Dorothy Anson, a seasonal visitor from Delmar, N.Y., walks past The Village Florist in Cauley Square. Cauley Square was built in 1903 by pioneer farmer William H. Cauley.

# A Village of Charms

THE HISTORIC CAULEY SQUARE IS AN OASIS OF OLD FLORIDA OFF U.S. 1

BY HOWARD COHEN

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Magic, to coin Webster's, is "an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source." It doesn't exist here at Cauley Square in the traditional notion of Houdini escaping from his shackles or a Copperfield making the Statue of Liberty disappear on TV.

But it comes up in the way some people describe the charms of Cauley Square, a historic railroad village in Goulds built in 1903 by pioneer farmer William H. Cauley.

Ultimately, Cauley's venture has turned into a quaint collection of about 25 Old Florida cottages, shops, restaurants, gardens and galleries. All

of this natural beauty is set on 10 lush acres and tucked off a particularly charmless concrete corner of U.S. 1 in far South Miami-Dade.



Miami Herald.com/neighbors

Check out the Cauley Square photo gallery.

the best-kept secret in Miami," said Sherry Reinker Miller, a fan-turned-publicist.

Last Sunday, an antique car show of 1950s Cadillacs and 1960s Mustangs and Corvairs did its best to reveal this secret and lure the public onto its

tree-lined grounds.

The sight of a few hundred visitors — and their parked cars — caught the attention of Miami teens Jonathan Saavedra and Katya Morales, who strolled hand-in-hand.

"It's actually nice," said Jonathan, 15. "A good place to hang out."

Perhaps magic also makes Cauley Square seem so resilient. Hurricanes Andrew, Wilma and Katrina, to name three wicked siblings of recent vintage, couldn't decimate Cauley Square but, oh, how they tried.

Owner Frances Varela, 58, a native of Honduras and construction company *grande dame*, bought the property in 2001 from the family of the late

preservationist Mary Ann Ballard. She poured millions into refurbishing the grounds. After 2005's Katrina, she managed with muscle, a crane and a team of 10 to prop up all the trees that had fallen — in less than 24 hours.

"If you do it quickly, you can save the trees," she said, tapping her hand on the lace tablecloth in the Tea Room, the centerpiece destination for many who visit.

The Tea Room, which Ballard opened in 1979, beckons with Victorian parlor-era lace curtains and individualized rooms. Each space is festooned with cabinets of curios, teapots, china sets, stained glass lamps, an ancient stove and, in one corner, a piano.



**CAFES AND SHOPS:** Cauley Square was the host of a Classic and Antique Car Show recently, above. Dimitry Roux, manager of the Tea Room, sets a table as Arianna Leon enjoys lunch, below. A restored bridge is a popular spot used in telenovelas.



This is Miller's favorite spot, especially come Christmas season when freshly made fruitcakes and cookies take her back to another era.

"It reminds me of a story. It helps bring back your family," she said. "That's the magic of

this place."

Martha Molano has been a Tea Room waitress for 20 years and says she can't imagine being anywhere else.

"I love the atmosphere," she said while ringing up an order for the Tea Room's ever popu-



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lar gooey, savory French onion soup. "I feel it's a part of my life. There's something special here."

Next, a weathered little bridge leads to a picturesque fountain in a garden outside the Tea Room's door and near the village's Bee Natural honey store. Varela found this wooden yellow bridge tossed in a heap in a tangle of debris off the main grounds, a forgotten remnant of Hurricane Andrew, which hit Cauley Square hard on Aug. 24, 1992. She restored the bridge, and Telemundo took notice. The Spanish TV network has filmed telenovela scenes from this spot.

Just across the road, The Wedding Chapel gazebo hosts about 35 outdoor weddings a



**DESTRUCTION:** A resident survived Hurricane Andrew in Cauley

year, Varela estimated.

Some also call Cauley Square home.

Michael Cline came here to live in one of the few residential cottages and works a variety of jobs. He's the artist who transformed the topiary outside the landmark Tea Room into a setting straight out of Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* by blending metal rods, poultry wire, sphagnum moss and creeping fig into regal, ivy-draped ladies with parasols woven from twigs. He's also the man who might bring you your burgers at the newer restaurant addition, The Village Chalet, just steps away.

"It's the history and the ambiance of the place" that brought him to live here, he said. "Through the years it has survived and taken hits and come back. I kind of like the underdog."

The hardy shops and gardens sprung up around the original two-story flat-iron building that Cauley built as a warehouse 106 years ago. In later years the Spanish-style stucco walls hid a speakeasy. A winding staircase, since removed, led to a bordello.

Today, the 106-year-old former warehouse sells antiques on the first floor and Varela's offices line the top floor.

Many of the original cottages served as homes for workers for Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway, which chugged to Key West. Cauley would use this destination to ship his tomatoes north



CHUCK FADELY/MIAMI HERALD FILE, 1992

ays the damage caused by Square on Aug. 24, 1992.

in the winter. One of the old red cabooses adorns the site to this day. Indeed, Cauley Square claims to be the last railroad village in Florida and one of the last in the country.

Honey Chalmers' Today's Collectible antiques shop also has its own place in history. She's had her shop for 27 years in a cottage that belonged to Flagler and served as one of his homes. Customers come here for mementoes like a pair of Art Deco lamps salvaged from Biscayne Boulevard's McAllister Hotel, one of Miami's oldest high-rises that opened amid New Year's Eve hoopla in 1920 and came down by a demolition blast in 1989.

On a recent visit to Chalmers' store, customer John Hudanish from Pompano Beach found "a magnificent still life" hanging on the wall.

"The price was great, too good to pass by," he said, adding that the shop is "a piece of Old Florida I didn't expect it to be. So charming."

Mary Ann Ballard, whom Chalmers called a close friend, helped rebuild the surrounding shops in 1992 after Andrew. She died in 1998 at age 82, and a few years later her children sold Cauley Square to Varela.

"Frances took over and she's kept it historic, which is wonderful," said Kathleen Ballard, wife of Mary Ann's son Art. "Mary Ann wouldn't have trimmed a bush or a leaf. Their styles are different, but I think they would have enjoyed and liked each other a lot because

## If you go

You could spend an entire day at Cauley Square. The village is closed Mondays, but the Tea Room Restaurant is open daily. The main building is at 22400 Old Dixie Hwy., Miami; call 305-258-3543. Highlights:

- The Tea Room Restaurant (305-258-0044): Soups, sandwiches, cakes, tea and lunch. New room for corporate meetings and parties.
- Today's Collectible (305-258-1449): Jewelry, Tiffany-style lamps, records, books, furniture in historic Henry Flagler house.
- Village Chalet Restaurant (305-258-8900): American food; happy hour Saturdays, live jazz on second Fridays.
- Island Color (305-258-2565): Haitian and African art.
- Indo Crafts Spices (305-257-2524): Clothes, rugs and herbs from India.
- Bee Natural (305-258-0531): Honey cellar.
- Coming events: Mother's Day Lunch special at the Tea Room and Village Chalet on May 10 and the first annual Pet Fest pet parade, talent and beauty show for dogs, cats and birds, to benefit Cat Network on June 13-14.

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both are strong and domineering creative women."

Finally, maybe it is magic that keeps Cauley Square surviving even with the sour economy.

Business is off 50 percent at Joel Guilfoyle's family-run Top Hat Aquarium. But the 62-year-old retired Miami-Dade fire chief remains upbeat. He's in paradise, after all.

"This is the way Miami was. Everyone had yards and trees and foliage. This reminds me of the airport area where I grew up," he said.

Besides, "this looks perfect," Guilfoyle added as he gazed past his brightly decorated fish tanks, out into the yard. "I can go outside and sit and relax. It's too bad we don't have more of these. There are not too many places left. Maybe in Fort Pierce."