

THEME: COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE WARS (1919-1941)



Commercial buildings in Palm Springs, c. 1925. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

In the years following World War I, Palm Springs was transformed from a health resort for respiratory patients into an exclusive winter resort for the wealthy. Several resort hotels were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s, cementing Palm Springs' reputation as a first-class resort community. Commercial development during this period included facilities that catered to the tourist and seasonal community, along with a growing number of commercial establishments to serve the permanent residents. Throughout the inter-war years Palm Canyon Drive (until 1930, Main Avenue) remained the primary commercial thoroughfare in Palm Springs, growing north and, to a lesser degree, south from the village's historic center at Tahquitz Canyon Way (formerly Spring Street).

In an era when architecture was dominated by traditional styles, certain styles were considered appropriate for specific uses: Gothic, for example, was for churches, Beaux Arts and Classical was commonly used for business and civic buildings. In the desert environment of Palm Springs a simplified, rustic interpretation of the popular Spanish Colonial Revival style and traditional southwestern adobe, hacienda, and wood ranch vernacular types were believed to be the best styles and types, both for residences and commercial buildings. Palm Springs'

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Desert Inn was an example of this, and later the larger El Mirador Hotel reflected an even more elaborate use of Spanish-derived styles.

Broad development patterns in the inter-wars period include the continued emphasis on tourism and tourist-related resources. The most prominent examples of hotels and resorts from the pre-World War II period – the Desert Inn, Oasis, and El Mirador - had a significant impact on the overall commercial development in Palm Springs and the continued investment in the city. This resulted in the construction of a number of hotels and apartment hotels within the city's commercial center, along with retail, office, and entertainment-related development (represented by a variety of commercial property types), and resources that represent the growing influence of the automobile.

Sub-Theme: Hotel and Resort Development 1919-1941

In 1918 Nellie Coffman and her sons, George Roberson and Earl Coffman, began expanding and reconstructing the Desert Inn into a first-class resort hotel. They purchased more land until the hotel grounds consisted of a “vast grassy haven”²⁷⁶ of 35 acres, occupying the entire block on the west side of Palm Canyon Drive between Andreas Road and Tahquitz Canyon Way, extending north behind the storefronts above Andreas Road and west into the foothills of Mount San Jacinto. The old tent cabins were gradually replaced with reinforced concrete buildings designed by William Charles Vanner in a simplified Spanish Colonial Revival style, including 29 bungalows and a luxurious main building with a lounge and dining room.²⁷⁷ The lushly landscaped grounds included tennis courts and the village's first swimming pool. Square plastered piers on Palm Canyon Drive framed the main entrance, and a boutique on the grounds housed a branch of Bullock's department store.²⁷⁸

The Desert Inn quickly became one of the most famous hotels in the country, transforming the “hot little hamlet from obscurity to world fame” and earning Nellie Coffman the title

²⁷⁶ Ernie Pyle, “Never Undignified,” *Daily Boston Globe*, March 30, 1942, 11, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed September 25, 2012).

²⁷⁷ Frank S. Nugent, “It's No Mirage, It's Palm Springs,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1947, SM36, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed September 25, 2012). Sanborn maps and archival photographs indicate that the original frame bungalow remained at the corner of Palm Canyon Drive and Tahquitz Canyon Way until after World War II.

²⁷⁸ Niemann, 63, and Starr, 26.

“Mother of Palm Springs.”²⁷⁹ As she upgraded, Coffman relocated the Desert Inn’s original bungalows to a large parcel immediately south of the Oasis Hotel. There she operated the Village Inn, a more economical alternative to the posh Desert Inn, until the mid-1940s when the site was sold and cleared for construction of Bullock’s department store.²⁸⁰



Desert Inn, photographed c. 1930 (demolished). Source: Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

²⁷⁹ Ed Ainsworth, “Desert Misses ‘Mother’ of Gay Palm Springs,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1950, A5, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed September 25, 2012).

²⁸⁰ Palmer, 20, and 1929 Sanborn fire insurance map.

The success of the Desert Inn inspired the development of two equally remarkable hotels in the 1920s and cemented the town's growing reputation as one of the country's premier luxury winter resorts. The first of these was the Oasis Hotel (HSPB-10), opened in 1925 on the site of the McCallum family homestead.²⁸¹ Pearl McCallum had in 1914 married Pasadena real estate mogul Austin G. McManus; as Palm Springs grew McManus encouraged and guided his wife as she evolved into an astute businesswoman, developing or subdividing the McCallum acreage piece by piece.²⁸² But Pearl kept the McCallum homestead, and in 1923 the McManuses became the first patrons of Modern architecture in Palm Springs when they hired Lloyd Wright to design a 20-room hotel on the property and incorporate the family's adobe into the complex as a memorial to Pearl's father.²⁸³



Oasis Hotel (1924, Lloyd Wright; tower HSPB-10). Photographed in 1927. Source: Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

²⁸¹ Bowart et al., "The McCallum Centennial." Portions of the Oasis were demolished in 1953 to make way for the construction of the Oasis office building designed by Williams, Williams and Williams.

²⁸² Bowart et al., "The McCallum Centennial."

²⁸³ Bowart et al., "The McCallum Centennial."



Oasis Hotel Tower (HSPB-10),
photographed c. 1937. Source: Los Angeles
Public Library.

Wright, who had previously experimented with concrete techniques while working on his father's textile block houses in Los Angeles, used a novel "slip-form" construction technique for the Oasis: twelve-inch courses of concrete were poured between wood forms and, when the concrete had set, the forms were "slipped" up and the next course poured, until the full height of the wall was completed. Pearl McManus later remembered that "It took a year to complete and was so beautiful that many people offered to buy it or lease it before it was finished."²⁸⁴ The Oasis opened in early 1925.²⁸⁵ Its plan and design responded to the desert climate, with one- to three-story wings clustered around landscaped courtyards, and concrete walls to insulate the interiors from the desert heat. Windows were screened with wooden grilles reminiscent of Spanish ironwork.

The entrance to the hotel's main building was marked with a four-story tower topped with stepped corner piers, decorated with abstract patterns cast into the concrete and supporting a pyramidal roof that echoed the profile of Mt. San Jacinto beyond. The glass-walled dining room was built around two pre-existing cottonwood trees, which grew through openings in the roof; the adjacent McCallum adobe served as the hotel's lounge, with comfortable chairs clustered around the hearth.²⁸⁶ The hotel grounds featured a lush lawn with a large brazier, surrounded by lounge chairs, where bonfires were lit each night;²⁸⁷ and a "Persian" swimming pool set amidst the surviving fruit trees of the McCallum orchard.²⁸⁸ The Oasis Hotel was the first of many innovative Modern concrete buildings in Palm Springs and is an original and significant example of Modern architecture in the United States. Author and

²⁸⁴ Alan Weintraub, *Lloyd Wright: The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr.* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 239.

²⁸⁵ "Resort Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1925, G12. <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed October 6, 2012).

²⁸⁶ "Resort Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1927, F10. <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed October 6, 2012).

²⁸⁷ "Resort Notes," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1926, G12. <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed October 6, 2012).

²⁸⁸ "Resort Notes," November 1, 1925, G12.

historian Alan Hess has called the Oasis “one of the great neglected buildings of California architecture” and “one of the first defining statements about a Modern architecture in the desert,”²⁸⁹ but its radical modern aesthetic would not be repeated in Palm Springs for a decade.

The city’s third major resort of the 1920s, the grand Hotel El Mirador, was built in sumptuous Spanish Revival style by local developer Prescott Thresher Stevens, who spent the then-astronomical amount of \$1 million on the resort.²⁹⁰ Designed by the Los Angeles firm of Walker & Eisen, who also designed the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, the pink-walled El Mirador was set in lush gardens a mile north of the center of town on Indian Canyon Drive (then Indian Avenue) at Tachevah Drive. It featured an eye-catching bell tower (reconstructed; HSPB-1) topped with Moorish tiles, two hundred luxurious guest rooms filled with hand-carved furniture, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a tennis court, stables, and private golf course.²⁹¹



El Mirador Hotel, photographed in 1953.
Source: Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

²⁸⁹ Alan Hess and Andrew Danish, *Palm Springs Weekend* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 28-29.

²⁹⁰ Dennis McDougal and Mike Meenan, “It’s Check-Out Time for Palm Springs’ El Mirador,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1977, P120, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed July 29, 2012).

²⁹¹ Jenifer Warren and Scott Harris, “Fire Destroys Palm Springs’ El Mirador Hotel,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1989, http://www.articles.latimes.com/print/1989-07-27/news/mn-184_1_el-mirador (accessed July 29, 2012).

El Mirador was launched with an extravagant party on New Year's Eve, 1927, and officially opened for business the next day.²⁹² Less than two years later the stock market crashed, throwing the country into the Great Depression and wiping out many of the Midwestern and Northeastern industrialists who were the hotel's targeted clientele. El Mirador teetered on the brink of bankruptcy but was ultimately saved by its popularity as the favorite retreat of Hollywood film stars, who had discovered the joys of winter in Palm Springs and made the hotel "one of the most prosperous, orgiastic symbols of extravagance in the midst of national poverty."²⁹³ In 1929 El Mirador opened a garage (HSPB-12) at the southeast corner of Palm Canyon Drive and Tachevah Drive to provide automotive service and chauffeurs' quarters for hotel guests.

The Desert Inn, Oasis, and El Mirador remained the preeminent hotels in Palm Springs through the 1930s, but as the village grew in popularity a number of smaller hostleries sprang up to accommodate visitors of various means. In about 1919 Dr. J.J. Kocher built Sunshine Court (demolished) on a parcel in the 300 block of N. Palm Canyon Drive (then Main Avenue) that ran through to Belardo Road (then Palm Avenue). It consisted of a cluster of board-and-batten cottages around a central garden area, and its location near the O'Donnell Golf Club made it popular with vacationing golfers.²⁹⁴ In 1921 the Foldesy family purchased the Ramona Hotel, on a large parcel north of the Desert Inn, and converted it into the Spanish Colonial Revival-style Palm Springs Hotel, the second hostelry to bear that name.²⁹⁵ In 1928 silent film actress Fritzi Ridgeway built the Pueblo Revival-style Del Tahquitz Hotel (demolished in 1960) at the southeast corner of South Palm Canyon Drive and Baristo Road.²⁹⁶ In 1935 Ruth Hardy, an Indiana businesswoman, purchased the Birge estate (200 W. Ramon Road; HSPB-25), built by Alvah Hicks in the 1920s for the owners of the Pierce Arrow Motor Car Company. Hardy added bungalows and converted the property, a 20-room hacienda on two acres, into the exclusive, invitation-only Ingleside Inn. In 1948 Hardy became

²⁹² Burton L. Smith, "Miracle Hotel Graces Desert," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1928, A9.

²⁹³ McDougal and Meenan, "It's Check-Out Time," P120.

²⁹⁴ Moya Henderson and the Palm Springs Historical Society, *Images of America: Palm Springs* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 73. One of Sunshine Court's bungalows later housed the Chamber of Commerce and the City's first municipal offices.

²⁹⁵ Henderson, 74.

²⁹⁶ Niemann, 248-249. See also IMDb, "Fritzi Ridgeway Biography," *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0725904/bio?ref_=nm_of_bio_sm (accessed January 26, 2015).

the first woman elected to the Palm Springs City Council, and is credited with the planting and lighting of palm trees along Palm Canyon Drive.²⁹⁷



Sunshine Court, c. 1919 (demolished). Source: *Images of America: Palm Springs*.

Many of the smaller hotels constructed in Palm Springs in the 1920s and 1930s, like Sunshine Court, took the form of the bungalow court. From about 1910 through the 1930s, the bungalow court flourished throughout Southern California. Composed of a series of individual dwelling units (bungalows) oriented around a central courtyard, the bungalow court promised much of the quiet and privacy of a single-family house with the flexibility and affordability of rental housing. Characteristics of the bungalow court include detached one-story bungalows usually symmetrically arranged around a central open space; the unified appearance of individual units; separate unit entrances with front porches; and high quality interiors, including many built-ins. Often a larger multi-unit building was situated at the end of the courtyard, creating a U-shaped configuration and providing a visual terminus to the courtyard itself. The Spanish Colonial Revival-style Orchid Tree Inn (261 S. Belardo Road; HSPB-72) constructed in 1930 is one of the best remaining examples of this property type in Palm Springs.

²⁹⁷ Niemann, 146-147.

Sub-Theme: Retail and Entertainment Development 1919-1941

In addition to new hotels and resorts, the rapid increase in tourism in Palm Springs between the World Wars fueled additional commercial development, including shops, restaurants, theaters, and office buildings, to serve the growing populations of both seasonal and permanent residents. In the 1920s, Zaddie Bunker replaced the corrugated metal shed that had originally housed her garage with a substantial Mission Revival-style building, complete with an *espadaña*, a vent in the shape of a barbed quatrefoil, and a clay tile awning over the sidewalk. The Bank of America and retail shops occupied the street frontage, while the garage itself moved to the back of the building, off of Andreas Road (then Lawn Street). By the early 1930s the building was occupied by the Village Pharmacy, whose lunch counter was a popular local gathering spot.²⁹⁸

In 1930 Bunker's daughter, Frances, married Earle Strebe, who had arrived in Palm Springs during the 1926-27 season. Strebe worked at the Desert Inn as a bellman, night clerk, and projectionist, showing movies for guests in the Inn's lobby. These screenings were soon opened to the public, and as they became more popular Strebe relocated them to the auditorium of the Frances S. Stevens School. Strebe became a businessman and developer and helped his mother-in-law manage her properties. In 1932 Strebe constructed the Village Theatre on Andreas Road, just behind the Village Pharmacy, the first of eight theaters he would ultimately own or operate.²⁹⁹

The Indianoya building (HSPB-16) at 232 N. Palm Canyon Drive is characteristic of the simplified Spanish Colonial Revival style of retail development that proliferated in downtown Palm Springs in the early 1930s. The building is composed of one- and two-story volumes framing a small entrance court, with rustic brick walls and exposed wood lintels (now partially plastered). It housed an "Indian Trading Post" specializing in tourist souvenirs crafted by the local Cahuilla.

In 1933 actors Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy built two tennis courts on a plot of land at the north end of town that they had purchased from Alvah Hicks.³⁰⁰ The courts proved so

²⁹⁸ Palmer, 59; Henderson, 79; and 1929 Sanborn Fire Insurance map.

²⁹⁹ Niemann, 138-139.

³⁰⁰ Niemann, 132.

popular with their Hollywood friends that the following year Farrell and Bellamy built additional courts, a swimming pool, dining room, and guest bungalows and offered memberships in the new Palm Springs Racquet Club (2743 N. Indian Canyon Drive; partially damaged by fire in 2014). The club's Bamboo Bar became the social center of Palm Springs.³⁰¹ Pearl McManus opened her competing Tennis Club (701 W. Baristo Road) at the south end of town in 1937 on a boulder-strewn hillside at the west end of Baristo Road. The original building, replaced in 1947 with a design by Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones, was modeled after a monastery on the Amalfi coast.³⁰² The club included an elegant oval swimming pool on a stone terrace, flanked by palm trees.

The village's most popular and most famous nightclub, the Chi Chi, opened in 1935 on Palm Canyon Drive just north of the Village Pharmacy, on land leased from Zaddie Bunker. Beginning as a waffle house, it was converted by its owner, Irwin S. Schuman, first into a restaurant called the Desert Grille, and then into a full-fledged nightclub with dining, dancing, and live entertainment. It was expanded in 1938 and again in 1950 with the addition of the 750-seat Starlight Room. The Chi Chi was the premier nightspot of the Hollywood crowd into the 1960s, and its headliners were frequently interchangeable with its clientele.³⁰³

In the early 1930s Desert Inn regular Julia Shaw Patterson Carnell began investing in Palm Springs real estate. Carnell, the widow of the co-founder of the National Cash Register Company (NRC) of Dayton, Ohio, was a prominent businesswoman and philanthropist in her home town. In 1919 she helped establish the Dayton Art Institute by donating a number of artworks and a mansion in which to house them; when the Institute outgrew its first home, Carnell donated \$2 million to build a new Renaissance Revival-style museum, completed in 1930.³⁰⁴ In 1921 Carnell, along with other members of the Patterson family, donated \$250,000 in NCR stock to endow The Dayton Foundation, a community foundation supporting non-profit organizations in the region.³⁰⁵ Turning her attention to her annual winter retreat, Carnell purchased the Community Church property at the southeast corner of N.

³⁰¹ Bob Colacello, "Palm Springs Weekends," *Vanity Fair*, June 1999, 205.

³⁰² Hess and Danish, 116-118.

³⁰³ Niemann, 255-258.

³⁰⁴ Victor J. Danilov, *Women and Museums: A Comprehensive Guide* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2005), 93.

³⁰⁵ "Founders: The Beginning of The Dayton Foundation in 1921," *The Dayton Foundation*, <http://www.daytonfoundation.org/founders.html> (accessed March 12, 2015).

Palm Canyon Drive and E. Andreas Road and commissioned Dayton architect Harry J. Williams of Schenck and Williams, who had designed the NCR headquarters building, to design a two-story mixed-use building in Spanish Colonial Revival style.³⁰⁶ The Carnell Building (HSPB-11) was constructed in 1935 and featured multiple shops on the ground floor, fronting onto Palm Canyon Drive and Andreas Road, with 13 offices and five apartments on the second floor.³⁰⁷ Carnell's purchase allowed the congregation to construct a new sanctuary, a striking concrete structure designed by William Charles Tanner, at 284 S. Cahuilla Road (HSPB-23).³⁰⁸



Carnell Building (1935, Harry J. Williams; HSPB-11). Source: Mott Studios Collection, California State Library.

Carnell also purchased from Cornelia White a three-and-one-half acre parcel that comprised most of the block bounded by S. Palm Canyon Drive, W. Tahquitz Canyon Way, S. Indian

³⁰⁶ Stuart Davietes, "E. Stewart Williams, 95, 'Desert Modern' Architect, Dies," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2005.

³⁰⁷ Palmer, 57. The Carnell Building was seriously damaged in a 2012 fire.

³⁰⁸ "Memorial Service Honoring Mrs. Carnell Held At Community Church; Tribute Paid Memory of Prominent Village Developer," *The Desert Sun*, February 18, 1944, 3. See also "Community Church of Palm Springs-283 South Cahuilla Road," Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, <http://www.pspreservationfoundation.org/community-church.html> (accessed March 12, 2015).

Canyon Drive, and W. Arenas Road.³⁰⁹ There she constructed La Plaza and the Plaza Theatre (1936; HSPB-22), an innovative, multi-use, car-oriented shopping center designed by Harry Williams. Its central drive and parking area run through the block from Palm Canyon to Indian Canyon, flanked by picturesque Spanish Revival-style buildings with irregular volumes, plaster walls, tile roofs, overhanging wood balconies, and arcaded *corredores*. Williams and his son Roger, also an architect, reportedly flew to Santa Barbara to study examples of “Spanish” design there, and engineers incorporated the latest structural technology developed after the 1933 Long Beach earthquake.³¹⁰ The development included 38 shops, 24 bungalows, eight penthouses, a market, and a 137-car garage with chauffeurs’ quarters. The Plaza Theatre, operated by Earle Strebe, featured interior walls “depicting lighted homes, [giving] one the impression of sitting in an amphitheater.”³¹¹ As Richard Longstrech has documented, Southern California developed a number of new architectural types to respond to the increasing use of the automobile. La Plaza is a sophisticated example of this, integrating retail, apartments, hotel, theater, garage, and parking areas.



La Plaza and the Plaza Theatre (1936, Harry Williams; HSPB-22). Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

³⁰⁹ Janice Kleinschmidt, “It Takes A Village,” *Palm Springs Life*, December 2011, <http://www.palmspringslife.com/Palm-Springs-Life/December-2011/It-Takes-A-Village/> (accessed March 12, 2015).

³¹⁰ Palmer, 21.

³¹¹ “Plaza Opening Set in Desert,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1936, 10.

Sub-Theme: Las Palmas Business Historic District 1919-1941

The Las Palmas Business Historic District was designated by the City in 1986.³¹² It is bounded by Alejo Road to the south, El Alameda to the north, and includes most properties fronting N. Palm Canyon and N. Indian Canyon Drives on both sides. The district boundaries are illustrated in Figure 4. Through the 1920s the commercial center of Palm Springs remained clustered along a few blocks of Palm Canyon Drive (then Main Drive) primarily between Tahquitz Canyon Way (then Spring Street) and Amado Road (then Lemon Street). The area north of Alejo Road (then North Street) remained sparsely developed and almost exclusively residential through the end of the 1920s, dotted primarily with single-family residences and one notable courtyard apartment building, the Palmaire Apartments, now the Casa Palmeras (HSPB-82), designed by Paul R. Williams and located at the southwest corner of Tamarisk Road and Indian Canyon Drive. The Sanborn map from 1929 is included in Figure 5, illustrating the sparse development in the area during this period.

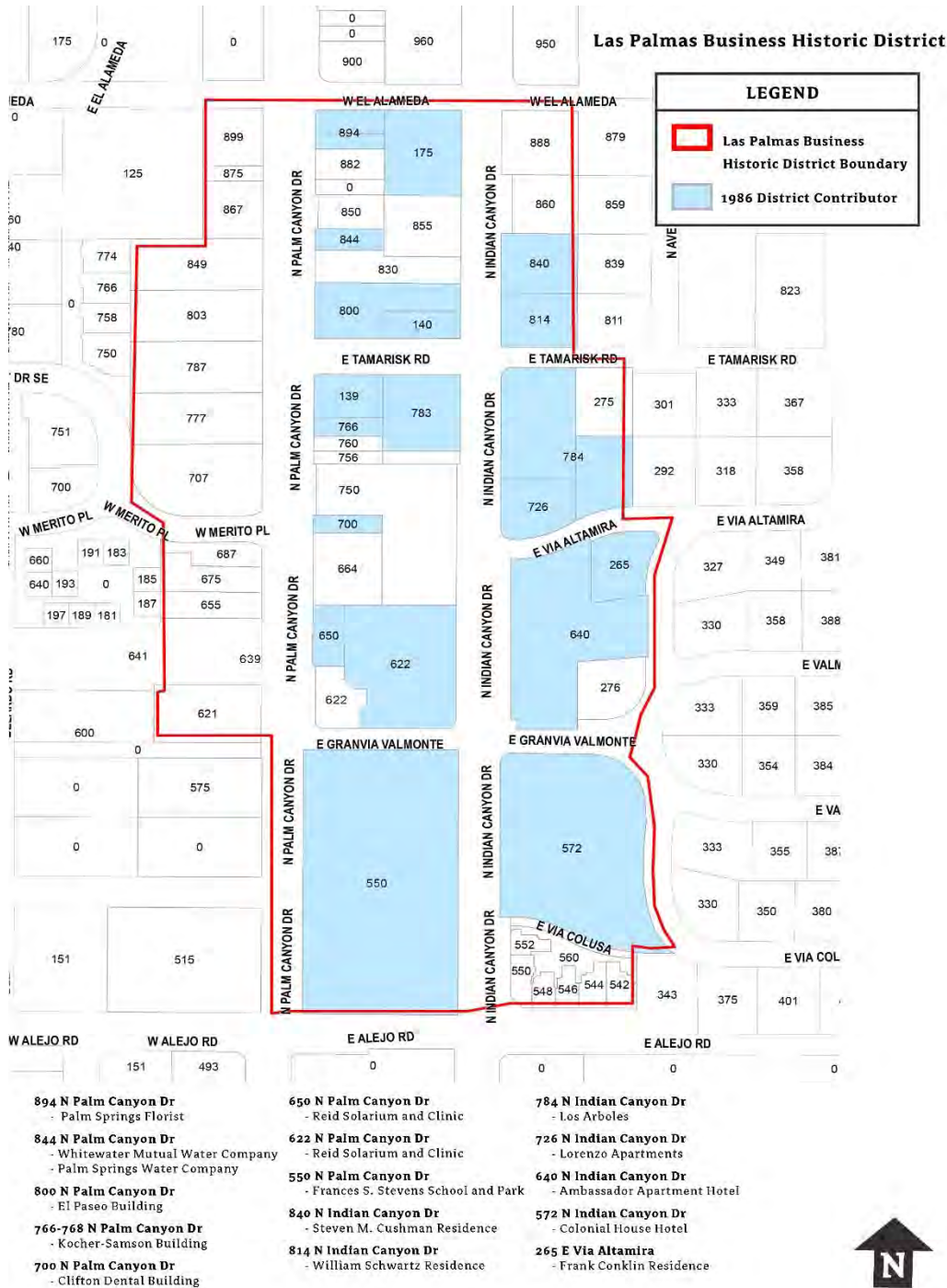


Casa Palmeras (1928, Paul R. Williams; HSPB-82). Source: California State Library.

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³¹² Although the district was designated in 1986, a historic context for the district was developed and a re-evaluation of the contributing and non-contributing buildings was undertaken as part of this project.

FIGURE 4: LAS PALMAS BUSINESS HISTORIC DISTRICT MAP (AS DESIGNATED IN 1986)



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FIGURE 5: SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP, 1929

Las Palmas Business Historic District - 1929



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The few exceptions to the scattered residential development in the north end of town in the late 1920s were the Hotel El Mirador and Garage; the Frances S. Stevens School (HSPB-7) occupying the entire block between Alejo Road and Granvia Valmonte; and the Reid Solarium and Clinic (HSPB-24) at what is now 648-650 N. Palm Canyon Drive and 645 N. Indian Canyon Drive.

Dr. Henry Squire Reid was a New York native and a 1919 graduate of the University of Colorado Medical School. By 1927, when he obtained his California medical license, he was living in Palm Springs.³¹³ Reid constructed a “Solarium and Clinic” north of Granvia Valmonte, on a large parcel that fronted on both N. Palm Canyon Drive (then Main Avenue) and N. Indian Canyon Drive (then Indian Avenue). The facility consisted of two Spanish Revival buildings, a rectangular one-story office building on Palm Canyon, and a U-shaped, two-story building on Indian Canyon containing guest rooms and apartments; between them was a third building containing “sun rooms” and dressing rooms. Before 1936 Reid expanded the office building with an addition to the north that included a two-story octagonal tower.³¹⁴ Reid was “widely known in medical circles for his research on the curative values of sunlight using his Palm Springs solarium as a winter laboratory” to measure the healthful effects of ultra-violet light.³¹⁵



The Reid Clinic and Hospital (HSPB-24). Photograph c. 1938. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

³¹³ California State Archives, Sacramento, CA, *Directory, 1933*, D-273, Ancestry.com (accessed March 13, 2015).

³¹⁴ Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1929 and 1962, and archival photographs. The office and guest buildings remain but have been altered.

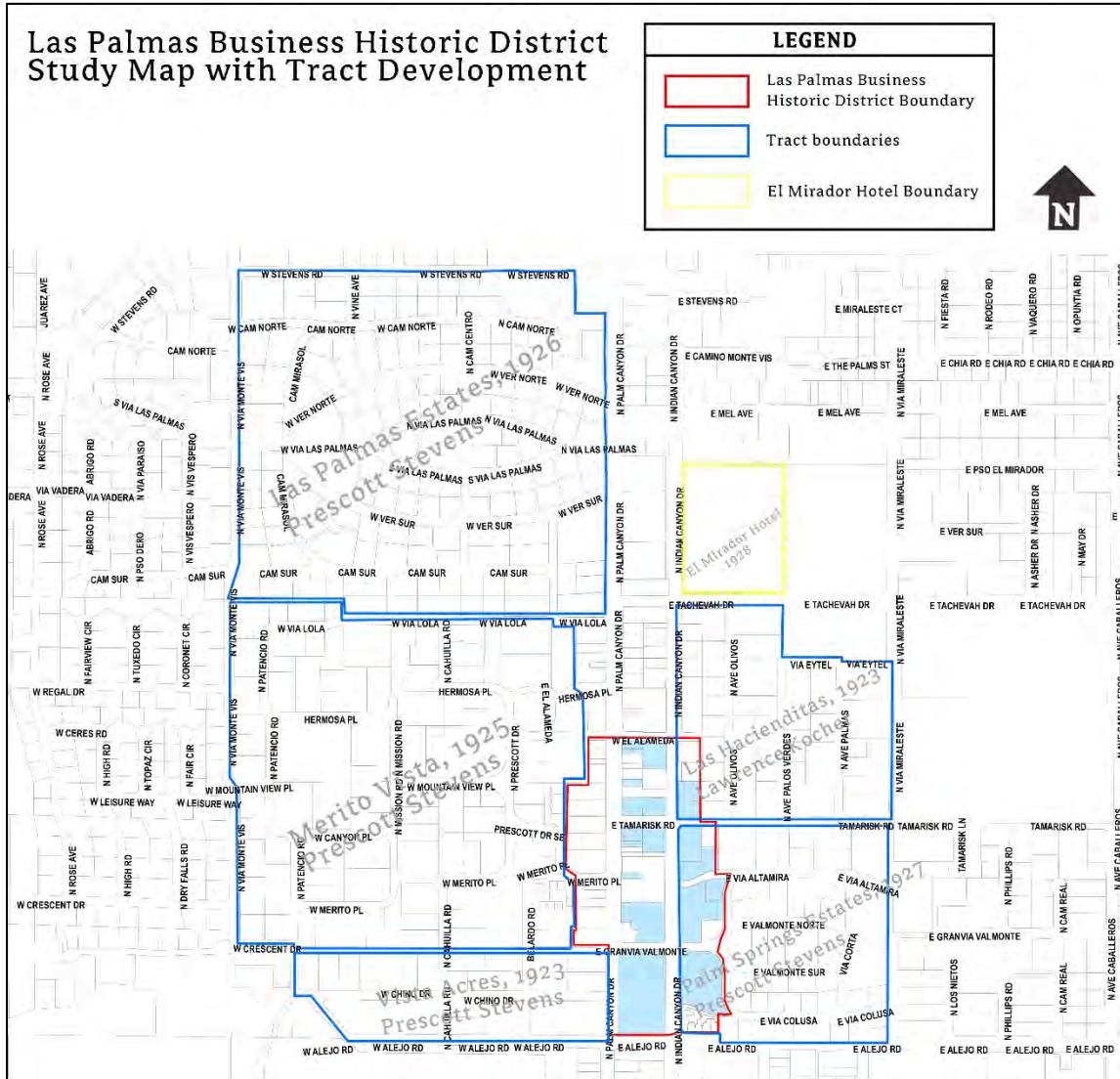
³¹⁵ “Ultra Violet Rays Measured,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1932, A5.

The uptown stretch of Palm Canyon Drive began to develop as a commercial district in the early 1930s. The popularity of Palm Springs with the Depression-proof movie industry provided more economic stability than in most other cities in the United States; as a result, there was continued commercial development during this period, and there are numerous buildings within the district constructed in the 1930s. The predominant architectural style in the district from this period is Spanish Colonial Revival; however, there are also notable Modernist examples.

Contributing buildings constructed in the 1930s represent the expansion of the city's original commercial core to the north as Palm Springs continued to grow during this period. Commercial development in the Las Palmas Business Historic District in the 1930s was partly a response to the increased pace of development in that decade in the flanking residential tracts of Vista Acres (1923, Prescott Stevens), Las Hacienditas (1923, J.J. Kocher), Merito Vista (1925, Prescott Stevens), Las Palmas Estates (1926, Prescott Stevens), and Palm Springs Estates (1927, Prescott Stevens). A map of the adjacent residential tracts is included in Figure 6. Sparsely developed through the 1920s, these neighborhoods experienced a surge of residential construction in the following decade, likely due, at least in part, to their proximity to the popular El Mirador Hotel, which officially opened on January 1, 1928.³¹⁶ Many of the businesses that concurrently sprang up along the adjacent stretch of Palm Canyon Drive – a market, a pharmacy, a movie theater, retail stores, and medical offices – catered to the growing residential neighborhoods to the east and west.

³¹⁶ Burton L. Smith, "Miracle Hotel Graces Desert," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1928, A9.

FIGURE 6: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO THE LAS PALMAS BUSINESS HISTORIC DISTRICT



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In 1930 realtor Culver Nichols built a utilitarian structure to house his offices at what is now 861 N. Palm Canyon Drive, which he expanded and altered several times over the years.³¹⁷ The El Paseo Building (HSPB-27) was designed by architect Jonathan Ring and constructed in 1930 at the northeast corner of N. Palm Canyon Drive and E. Tamarisk Road.³¹⁸ The Spanish Colonial Revival-style building surrounds a central courtyard and originally featured a columned *corredor* encompassing the sidewalk along Palm Canyon Drive and cantilevered wood balconies overlooking Tamarisk Road. Tenants included the El Paseo Market and Earle Strebe's El Paseo Theater.³¹⁹ The El Paseo Building was the first commercial building constructed to serve the residents of the Las Palmas tract.



El Paseo Building (1930, Jonathan Ring; HSPB-27). Source: Mott Studios Collection, California State Library.

³¹⁷ Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories" (undated), 38.

³¹⁸ Although several sources note 1926 as the construction date for the El Paseo Building, it is not shown in the 1929 Sanborn map. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* dates the building to 1930: "El Paseo Opens Tuesday," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1930, A10.

³¹⁹ Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories," (undated), 30. The El Paseo Building was extensively altered in the 1950s and partially rehabilitated in 2009.



Kocher-Samson Building (1934, Kocher and Frey; HSPB-79). Source: *Palm Springs Life*, Desert Treasures Gallery.

International Style modernism made its first appearance in Palm Springs in 1934, with the construction of the Kocher-Samson Building (HSPB-79) on a lot north of the Reid clinic. The two-story mixed-use building, with medical offices on the ground floor and an apartment above, was designed by New York architect A. Lawrence Kocher and his Swiss-born business partner, Albert Frey, for Kocher's brother, Dr. J.J. Kocher.³²⁰ In the late 1920s Frey worked briefly in Paris for Le Corbusier, who espoused formal, proportional compositions and declared the house "a machine for living."³²¹ Frey immigrated to the United States in 1930 and soon afterward began working with Kocher.³²² Frey designed the Kocher-Samson building in response to its desert setting as a cluster of square and rectangular forms enclosing a series of patios and small gardens. Frey traveled to Palm Springs at the end of 1934 to supervise its construction and was instantly attracted to the desert landscape. The partnership with Kocher was amicably dissolved, and in 1935 Frey formed a partnership with a young California architect, John Porter Clark, which was to last for nearly 20 years.³²³ Clark and Frey are known as two of the founders of the "Desert Modern" style of architecture.³²⁴

³²⁰ Joseph Rosa, *Albert Frey, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990), 35.

³²¹ Spiro Kostoff, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 700-701.

³²² Rosa, 26.

³²³ Rosa, *Albert Frey*, 36.

³²⁴ "Albert Frey," PS Modcom, http://psmodcom.org/?page_id=205 (accessed March 2015).



View of the Pacific Building (c. 1936) and the El Paseo Building (1930). Photograph c. 1954.
Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

A large mixed-use building, the Mediterranean Revival-style Pacific Building, was constructed in 1937 at the southeast corner of N. Palm Canyon Drive and E. Tamarisk Road, immediately north of the Kocher-Samson Building and opposite the El Paseo Building.³²⁵ It was designed by Brewster and Benedict and built by local contractor Charles Chamberlain, who also constructed the Welwood Murray Memorial Library.³²⁶ The building, with its central courtyard and four-story tiered corner tower, contained retail spaces and offices on the ground floor with apartments above. The Pacific Building is distinctive for its size and its strong Italian design elements, including wide overhanging eaves, corbeled balconies, Tuscan columns, and decorative quoins. More typical of 1930s commercial development in the area are the one- and two-story

Wilson-Sorum Building immediately north of the Reid Clinic at 664 N. Palm Canyon Drive (1937; altered), built around a central courtyard; and the modest, one-story Clifton Dental Building (c. 1937) at 700 N. Palm Canyon Drive, attributed to John Porter Clark.³²⁷ The Clifton building is a hybrid of Spanish Revival and Modern or Moderne elements, with a clay tile roof, plaster walls, and steel sash casement windows that wrap the building's corners.

³²⁵ *Palm Springs News*, April 8, 1937.

³²⁶ "Pioneer Village Builder, Charles Chamberlain Dies," *Desert Sun*, XXVII, 77, May 16, 1955, 1a.

³²⁷ Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories" (undated), 22.

A number of hotels and apartment hotels were constructed in the Las Palmas business district in the 1930s, primarily along Indian Canyon Drive. The apartments and bungalow courts were built primarily to accommodate seasonal visitors, rather than as long-term multi-family housing, and most were designed in the prevailing Spanish Colonial Revival style. The San Jacinto Hotel, now the Movie Colony Hotel, at 726 N. Indian Canyon drive (1935; altered) was an exception to the predominant Spanish theme. Its Modern design by Clark & Frey featured clusters of minimalist, plaster-clad cubist volumes that later had to be altered with the addition of covered porches and awnings to block the desert sun.³²⁸



Top: Pepper Tree Inn, previously the Reid Solarium (constructed c.1927; now the Alcazar Hotel) designed in the prevailing Spanish Colonial Revival style.
Bottom: San Jacinto Hotel (1935, Clark & Frey; now the Movie Colony Hotel) designed in a minimalist, Modern style. Source: Patrick McGrew.

³²⁸ Rosa, 36-37.

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HISTORIC RESOURCES GROUP

SUB-THEME: DESERT GUEST RANCHES AND WESTERN-THEMED RESORT ACTIVITIES (1929-1969)

In the past ten years a new institution has developed in American recreational life: the desert guest ranch. Its clientele is no longer limited to the adventurous few who seek hardships in the back areas. The modern guest ranch lures the discriminating of all ages who seek to escape the complicated existence of city life.

Smoke Tree Ranch Brochure, undated³²⁹

During the 1920s, the prevalence of “dude ranches”— working cattle ranches transformed by “the guest business” increased across the United States. Driven by financial hardship, cattle ranchers joined forces with the railroads to promote a new kind of vacation experience. A 1928 article in the *Los Angeles Times* posed and answered the question “What is a Dude Ranch?” by defining it as “a resort where life on a ranch is offered without the frequent makeshifts for ordinary comforts...the main feature of entertainment is a stable of good horses where the able may ride to their heart’s content...”³³⁰ With its rural, agricultural roots and its continued reliance on horses for transportation well into the 20th century, Palm Springs was especially well suited to the creation of western-themed resorts and activities that showcased ranch living.

Deep Well Guest Ranch

Among the first of these resorts was the Deep Well Guest Ranch located at 1020 Highway 111 (a.k.a. Indio Road).³³¹ After unsuccessful farming efforts in the early 20th century by two previous owners, Henry Parsons (a scientist and authority on rubber) purchased the property in 1926. He drilled a well and found water close to the surface. After drilling further he found water again at 630 feet and the property became known as Deep Well Ranch.³³²

In 1928, Pearson sold the Ranch to Charles Doyle who converted an old apricot shed and ranch house to guest accommodations and called it Deep Well Guest Ranch. A 1929 ad in the

³²⁹ Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life (2007), produced by Tracy Conrad (Digital Rain Films, www.digitalrainfilms.com).

³³⁰ “Arizona Resorts Popular,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1928, A1.

³³¹ Note that several of the dude ranches discussed in this section were later converted to residential subdivisions; that history is discussed under the relevant Residential Development themes.

³³² Mabel Bennett, “Story of Deepwell,” *Palm Springs Villager*, February 1952, no page.

<http://www.ourdeepwell.com/index.php/about-deno/your-neighborhood/history/18-history/28-deno-palm-springs-villager?showall=1> (accessed January 2015).

Los Angeles Times describes the nascent resort as “A desert dude ranch 10 minutes from Palm Springs with its own 400-foot well offers a children’s paradise.” Daily and weekly rates were available, however, the resort’s unique identity as resort not a sanitarium was reinforced by the fact that “no tubercular people are accepted.”³³³ Attractions included an archery course, rifle and pistol range, trap shooting, horseback rides, and “hot and cold water and electricity.”³³⁴



Deep Well Guest Ranch Long Room. Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

In 1929, Doyle sold the property to Major and Mrs. Everet and Everet’s brother-in-law, Carol Smith. They significantly improved the property when, in 1930, they engaged architect Paul R. Williams to design hacienda-type buildings around patios.³³⁵ Major Everet died in 1929, and by fall of 1931, Frank and Melba Bennett of Beverly Hills had purchased the property along with Phillip Boyd (local banker and first mayor of Palm Springs). They operated the guest ranch for almost 20 years. In 1948-49, encroaching residential development made maintaining the rural atmosphere of Deep Well difficult and the Bennetts retired and sold the Guest Ranch and

³³³ “Display Ad no 9,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1929, 6.

³³⁴ “Resort and Hotel Notes,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1956, F12.

³³⁵ Bennett, “Story of Deepwell (sic).”

twenty acres surrounding it to experienced hotelier Yoland Markson³³⁶ of Boston and Beverly Hills.³³⁷ By 1952, Deep Well boasted 52-lodging units.³³⁸ In 1963, Deep Well Guest Ranch was sold to a Los Angeles syndicate headed by Howard Green, Harry Dodson, and Arthur Glesby who intended to make improvements to the ranch resort.³³⁹ However in 1965 demolition of the structures began in preparation for the construction of apartments on the site.³⁴⁰ In 1968, the former Guest Ranch property was sold at public auction.³⁴¹

Smoke Tree Ranch

Smoke Tree Ranch, developed by Mac Blankenhorn and his group of Pasadena-based investors, opened in January 1931. From the beginning, Smoke Tree Ranch was not your average dude ranch: “Palm Springs newest dude ranch...[was] neither a resort nor public hotel.”³⁴² Early advertisements for the guest ranch emphasized an exclusivity that continues to this day: “Designed for those wishing to escape from the turmoil of weekend resorts...introductions or satisfactory references are required.”³⁴³ The ranch featured cottages, stables, and a school for grades two through eight. Three school buildings and a playground were located along the western border of the ranch. Facilities included the Ranch Rodeo Field, stables, and the pool. The ranch house building contained two dining rooms, kitchen, lobby, and storerooms. There were 15 cottages for guests, two buildings for servant’s quarters, and a twenty-car garage. These buildings were designed by Pasadena-based architect Garrett Van Pelt, Jr. (1879-1972).³⁴⁴ The property was also home to “historic adobe ruin relics” believed to date back to the 1880s and the failed efforts to establish the city of Palmdale.³⁴⁵

Blankenhorn sold part of his investment to Charles Doyle and in 1936, Fred and Mazie Belle Markham (operating as the Mardo Corporation) bought Smoke Tree Ranch. Whereas

³³⁶ “Deep Well Ranch Leased to Noted U.S. Hotel Man,” *Desert Sun*, October 21, 1949.

³³⁷ Renee Brown, “Deep Well Guest Ranch Provided True Western Experience,” *Desert Sun*, April 11, 2015. <http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/local/palm-springs/2015/04/11/deep-guest-ranch-history/25577725/>

³³⁸ “Gala Gathering at Deep Well Ranch for Opening Event,” *Desert Sun*, December 4, 1952.

³³⁹ “Palm Springs Ranch Sold,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1963, N7.

³⁴⁰ “Deep Well Owners Lose Court Fight,” *Desert Sun*, July 14, 1965.

³⁴¹ “Display Ad 100,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1968, SF2.

³⁴² “Resort and Hotel Notes,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1930, B15.

³⁴³ “Display Ad 9,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1931, 6.

³⁴⁴ *Building and Engineering News*, July 5, 1930.

https://archive.org/stream/buildingengineer30230cont/buildingengineer30230cont_djvu.txt (accessed January 2015).

³⁴⁵ “Remember When,” *Desert Sun*, December 13, 1960; referencing an issue of the *Desert Sun* from December 13, 1930.

Blankenhorn and his syndicate of investors may have been overextended at Smoke Tree Ranch, Markham was able to bring financial stability to the venture. The Markhams also brought many improvements. In 1936, they constructed an Olympic-sized swimming pool, five new cottages and the first tennis courts.³⁴⁶ According to Smoketree Ranch Chief Executive Officer Tracy Conrad's film *Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life*, Maziebelle Markham regarded the Ranch as an expanded version of a well-run home with houseguests. Guests (and ultimately resident "Colonists") were accepted by invitation only. There was no advertising. Ranch buildings were shielded from the highway and detached guest cottages provided maximum privacy for the patrons who consisted primarily of wealthy industrialists. According to a 1977 interview with Smoke Tree's Vice President Brad Poncher, Disney's "studio set designers were responsible for the design of some of the ranch's guest cottages."³⁴⁷ Celebrities were purposefully discouraged.

Smoke Tree consisted of a working ranch with stables and a corral for instruction. Each guest (including each child) was assigned a horse upon check-in.³⁴⁸ Popular events included breakfast rides, steak dinners, periodic rodeos, and gymkhanas.³⁴⁹ Communal meals in the dining room, square dances and performances by well-known cowboy musicians such as Johnny Boyle or Cliff Campbell added to the authentic western flavor and social scene. Swimming, sunbathing, badminton, and lawn bowling were included in the non-western themed recreational activities popular at Smoke Tree. In 1945, ownership of the Guest Ranch was transferred from the Markhams to the Colonists and it continues to operate as a resort to this day.

³⁴⁶ *Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life* (2007), produced by Tracy Conrad (Digital Rain Films, www.digitalrainfilms.com).

³⁴⁷ This information also appears in the film *Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life* (2007), produced by Tracy Conrad.

³⁴⁸ *Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life* (2007), produced by Tracy Conrad (Digital Rain Films, www.digitalrainfilms.com).

³⁴⁹ Gymkhana generally refers to games or races on horseback.



Postcard of La Paz Guest Ranch.

La Paz Guest Ranch

Another Palm Springs guest ranch was the Spanish Colonial Revival-style La Paz Guest Ranch located at 1150 State Highway/Indio Road/ Highway 111. During WWII, the La Paz became an Air Force Officer's Club.³⁵⁰ The La Paz was purchased by James R. Fouch³⁵¹ in 1945 and by then the resort offered "deluxe accommodations, swimming pool, tennis and horseback riding in a secluded oasis of Western Charm and Hospitality."³⁵² The La Paz featured Sunday Ranch Suppers with Western Dancing and encouraged people to "Wear your western togs or come with a western spirit."³⁵³ Noted guests at La Paz over the years included many movie stars including academy-award winning actress Olivia De Havilland.

In 1946, the La Paz was "thoroughly redecorated inside and out" including the creation of a mural by noted Hollywood artist Paul Lutz.³⁵⁴ In 1954, the La Paz was sold to Mr. and Mrs. William Halloran of Seattle who immediately embarked on plans to enlarge the existing facilities and build additional units.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁰ "Its Patriotic to Keep Fit, Rest and Relax at A Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1943, 17.

³⁵¹ Fouch was the founder of Universal Microphone Company in 1928.

³⁵² Ad, *Palm Springs City Directory*, 1946-7, 104.

³⁵³ Ad, *Desert Sun*, February 22, 1946, 3.

³⁵⁴ "La Paz Will Open for New Season on October 1 is Word," *Desert Sun*, September 27, 1946.

³⁵⁵ "Guest Ranch Sold in Palm Springs," *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 1954, F13.

Rogers Stables

With horses the focal point of activity, Rogers Stables (a.k.a. Rogers Ranch Club, Rogers Ranch Club Stables) at 1600 Chia Road near N. Sunrise Way (a.k.a. 1441 N. Sunrise Way) did not provide lodging but was a hub of western resort activity. During the day, owner Trav Rogers provided horses for trail riding. An arena held exhibitions and rodeos. At night, it became a dining venue and nightclub with square dancing. The lower floor of the two-story Pueblo Revival-style building was also home to the Mink and Manure Club with horse stalls on both sides where ladies could throw their mink coats on the long table and mingle with the locals. Hollywood stars also frequented the establishment including actors Peter Lorre and Judy Garland.³⁵⁶ By the mid-1940s, the property was purchased by Charley Morrison and renamed "The Stables."³⁵⁷



Rogers Stables. Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

³⁵⁶ "Tattletale," *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 1941, D5.

³⁵⁷ "Nothing To It," *Desert Sun*, October 1, 1946.

The popularity of the desert dude ranch phenomenon is further evidenced by the fashion of western wear promoted in Los Angeles as well as in the city of Palm Springs. A 1931 ad for Dyas Resort Clothes at 7th and Olive in Los Angeles features “Smart and Practical Clothes for Desert Dude Ranches.” Western shirts, hats, riding pants, and skirts are shown to be “for lazy happy hours out of the saddle.” The ad even features a line of clothing specifically for “Smoke Tree Ranch...Dude Ranch Sports Clothes and whatever you like best to wear in the evening.”³⁵⁸ In Palm Springs itself, popular sources for western wear included Marge Riley’s Westerns at 227 S. Palm Canyon Drive, Spaulding’s at 278 N. Palm Canyon Drive, Rasmussen’s Frontier Shop at 1995 Highway 111 (a.k.a., Rogers’ Frontier Shop at Rogers Stables) and later Rasmussen’s Saddlery & Western Wear at 1151 N. Indian Avenue.



Rasmussen’s Western Wear float in the Desert Circus. Source: Palm Springs Historical Society and *Palm Springs Life* Archives.

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³⁵⁸ “Display Ad 30,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1931, B6.

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HISTORIC RESOURCES GROUP

Dyas

SEVENTH AT OLIVE

Resort Clothes

Bound for Tropical Playgrounds

Don't let yourself get bored with things—Go places. Enjoy a Cruise somewhere. Ships are going out and fares are not high. Get out on the Desert and let your soul breathe the limpid air of eternal summertime. Dress up in Sports Togs and let your imagination run wild. You'll be better for it—happier too. Here are brand new things that spell spring itself—See them at once and get an unexpected thrill out of the holiday season.

Palm Springs
The "Palm Springs" style and atmosphere...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

Caliente
Northern Santa Catalina...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

Hawaii
Hawaii...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

Havana
Havana...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

Death Valley
Death Valley...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

Smoke Tree Ranch
Smoke Tree Ranch...
...the most and prettiest in the West.

C—Wool dress in Paris...
...\$39.50

Smart and Practical Clothes for Desert Dude Ranches

Riding clothes of various...
...\$2.95

Breeches in Bedford...
...\$10.00

Corduroy breeches...
...\$5.00

Woolen...
...\$13.50

For last season...
...\$12.95

Good...
...\$7.95

Leather...
...\$1

Wool...
...\$10.50

...\$49.50

...\$35.00

...\$25.00

...\$19.50

...\$35.00

...\$49.50

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1931 ad for Dyas Resort Clothes at 7th and Olive in Los Angeles features "Smart and Practical Clothes for Desert Dude Ranches." Source: *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1931.

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The Desert Circus, a western-themed parade, began in 1936 and was the biggest event of the season every year until it was discontinued in 1983.³⁵⁹ By 1946, some 30,000 people lined the street for the event.³⁶⁰ The parade included dozens of floats, bands, and equestrian units. It quickly grew into a week's worth of social activities including a "Kangaroo Court" during which anyone found not wearing western wear was "hauled into court" and be made to pay a fine or to entertain.³⁶¹ Other activities included ranch dinners, dances, a fashion show, the Village Insanities, and the Big Top Ball. Another popular event was the "hat parade" for which Melba Bennett, co-owner of the Deep Well Guest Ranch contributed to the local fashion scene with the creation of the "palm springs hat" (a cowboy hat decorated with ribbons and flowers).



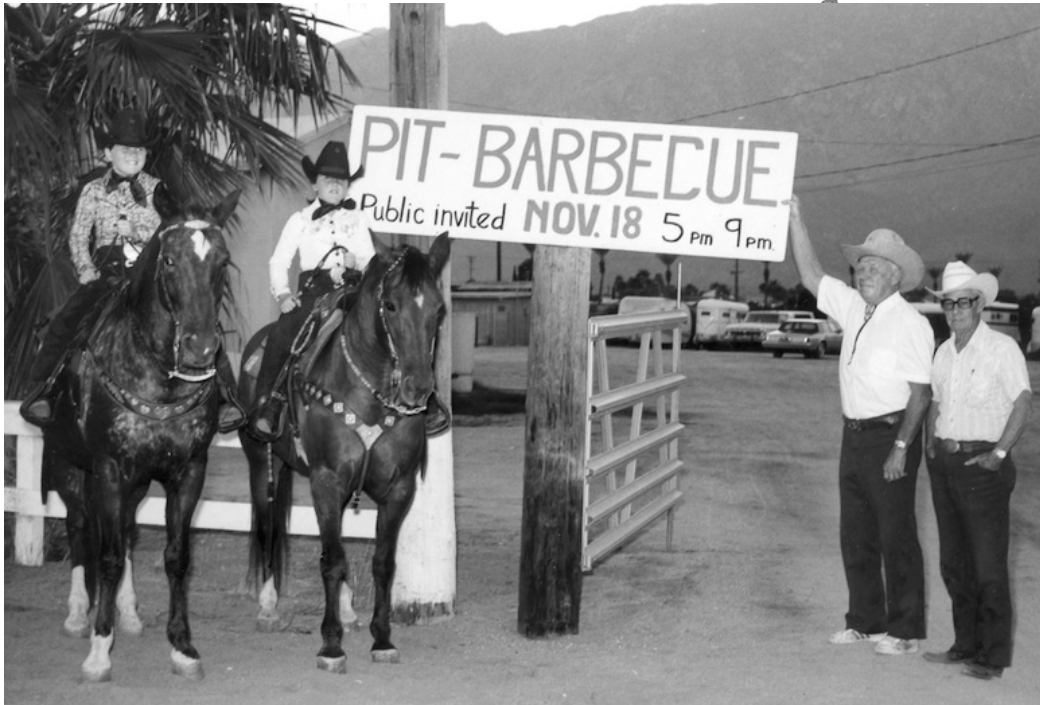
Palm Springs Desert Circus, 1940. Source: *Desert Sun*.

³⁵⁹ It was briefly and unsuccessfully revived in 1985.

³⁶⁰ "Thousands Cheer Biggest Circus Parade," *Desert Sun*, April 12, 1946.

³⁶¹ Moya Henderson and the Palm Springs Historical Society, Palm Springs (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 112.

Another annual western-themed event was Western Week begun in 1941 by Los Compadres riding club. The event featured a parade down Palm Canyon Drive, a rodeo, a carnival street dance and a deep pit barbecue.³⁶² Tourists and villagers alike sported western clothing during the week-long celebration which was held every October and marked the beginning of the season. Western Week attracted the participation of riding clubs from all over Southern California. Local stables from the pre-World War II period include Arol's Buckskin Stables at 1680 Ramon Road; Cowboy Stables on Arenas Road; McDonald Stables at 1205 E. Ramon Road; and the Araby-Palm Springs Stables at 190 Avenue de Los Caballeros.



Barbeque at Los Compadres. Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

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³⁶² "Explore Palm Springs: Western Week," *Palm Springs Life*, October 2014.

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Los Compadres originally began as the Palm Springs Riding Club in the late 1930s with about 40 members. The club would often stage breakfast rides, moonlight rides and weekend campouts accompanied by a chuck wagon.³⁶³ After World War II, the club purchased land at 1849 S. El Cielo Road and built Los Compadres Ranch complete with stables and a clubhouse. In 1952, the clubhouse was damaged by fire. In 1968, club members began an annual deep pit barbecue event at the Ranch.³⁶⁴

Other prominent Palm Springs riding clubs included the Desert Riders (formed in 1931) that counted the elite of Palm Springs society as members. Pearl McManus, Charles Farrell and celebrities including Olivia de Havilland, Robert Taylor, William Holden, Don Ameche, Dennis Day, Hugh O'Brien, Clark Gable, Henry Fonda and Gary Grant were members.³⁶⁵ Rides into such areas as Andreas Canyon, Deep Canyon and even to visit more urban locations such as the Mission Hills Golf and Country Club³⁶⁶ were commonplace in the postwar period. The Desert Riders' Oasis, a place for cookouts for that riding club, was located off Bogert Trail.

³⁶³ "Explore Palm Springs: Los Compadres Deep Pit Barbecue," *Palm Springs Life*, October 2013.

³⁶⁴ "Explore Palm Springs: Los Compadres Deep Pit Barbecue," *Palm Springs Life*, October 2013.

³⁶⁵ "Desert Riders, Early Palm Springs," *Palm Springs Life*, March 1995.

³⁶⁶ "Pause For Lunch," *Desert Sun*, April 23, 1971.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE WARS (1919-1941): ELIGIBILITY**Property Types: Commercial Building, Commercial Block, Historic District**

Examples of commercial buildings from this period may include hotels, motels, theaters, retail stores, banks, restaurants, commercial storefront buildings, and automobile-related resources including auto dealerships, gas stations, and drive-ins. Examples of commercial properties in Palm Springs associated with this period include the remains of the Oasis Hotel, now wrapped by later development (1925); La Plaza (1936; HSPB-22), the town's first shopping center and an early example of automobile-oriented, multi-use retail development in Southern California; and a number of other office and retail buildings such as El Paseo (1930; HSPB-27) and the Pacific building (1937). There are also several small hotels and motor court hotels such as the Colonial House Hotel (1936; now the Colony Palms), the Ambassador Hotel (Spanish Inn, Triada Hotel), and the Orchid Tree Inn (HSPB-72).

Applicable Eligibility Criteria

A commercial property from this period may be eligible for historic designation under one or more of the following criteria:

CRITERIA	REASON
A/1/3 (Pattern of Development/Period) ³⁶⁷	As an early or excellent example of commercial development in Palm Springs. Commercial buildings may be eligible as remaining examples of the original commercial core; as an example of a particular trend in commercial development or growth during this period; or for a direct association with the tourism industry in Palm Springs (including hotels and related tourist amenities, along with dude ranch properties). Commercial buildings eligible under this criterion must represent a trend or pattern of development, they cannot simply have been constructed during the pre-World War II era.

³⁶⁷ Note that eligibility criteria are listed in the standard format National Register/California Register/Local. Note that National Register/California Register Criterion A/1 can be applied to a single event important in history, or to an overall trend or pattern of development. The City of Palm Springs local ordinance distinguishes these into separate criteria – Criterion 1 applies to properties that are associated with a singular event; Criterion 3 applies to properties that “reflect or exemplify a particular period” in history.

CRITERIA	REASON
A/1/6 (District)	A collection of commercial buildings that are linked geographically may be eligible as a historic district. A potential commercial district in Palm Springs will likely span several periods of development.

Integrity Considerations

Each type of property depends on certain aspects of integrity to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects is most important to a particular property type requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The rarity of the property type should also be considered when assessing its physical integrity. In order to be eligible for listing at the federal, state, or local levels, properties and districts must retain sufficient integrity to convey their historic significance under this theme.

CRITERIA	REQUIRED ASPECTS OF INTEGRITY
A/1/3 (Pattern of Development/Period)	A property that is significant for its historic association is eligible if it retains the essential physical features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with the important event, historical pattern, or person(s). ³⁶⁸ A commercial property from this period eligible under Criteria A/1/3 should retain integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, and feeling in order to reflect the important association with the city's commercial development during this period. A property that has lost some historic materials or details can be eligible if it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its style in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials, and ornamentation. The property is not eligible, however, if it retains some basic features conveying massing but has lost the majority of the features that once characterized its style. ³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ *National Register Bulletin 15.*

³⁶⁹ *National Register Bulletin 15.*

CRITERIA	REQUIRED ASPECTS OF INTEGRITY
C/3/4,5 (Architecture)	<p>A property important for illustrating a particular property type, architectural style or construction technique; or that represents the work of a master must retain most of the physical features that constitute that type, style, or technique.³⁷⁰ A commercial property significant under Criterion C/3/4,5 (Architecture) should retain integrity of design, workmanship, materials, and feeling, at a minimum, in order to be eligible for its architectural merit. A property that has lost some historic materials or details can be eligible if it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its style in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials, and ornamentation. The property is not eligible, however, if it retains some basic features conveying massing but has lost the majority of the features that once characterized its style. Replacement of original storefronts is a common and acceptable alteration.</p>
A/1/6 (District)	<p>In order for a historic district to be eligible for designation, the majority of the components that add to the district's historic character must possess integrity, as must the district as a whole. A contributing property must retain integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association to adequately convey the significance of the historic district. Some alteration to individual buildings, such as replacement of storefronts is acceptable. Eligible historic districts may span several periods of development.</p>

³⁷⁰ *National Register Bulletin 15.*

Commercial Development between the Wars (1919-1941): Registration Requirements

To be eligible under this theme, a property must:

- date from the period of significance; and
- represent important patterns and trends in commercial development from this period, including representing the original commercial core, early automobile-related development, dude ranch development, or a direct association with tourism; or
- represent a unique or rare commercial property type; or
- represent an excellent or rare example of an architectural style, property type, or method of construction; or be associated with a significant architect or designer; and
- display most of the character-defining features of the property type or style; and
- retain the essential aspects of integrity.

To be eligible under this theme, a historic district must:

- retain a majority of the contributors dating from the period of significance; and
- display the original planning features of a commercial enclave or corridor; and
- retain the essential aspects of integrity.

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THEME: CIVIC & INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE WARS (1919-1941)

This theme explores the development of public services and infrastructure, schools, libraries, churches, and other local institutions in Palm Springs in the 1920s and 1930s. As the village grew in popularity and population, the ad hoc provision of services could not meet the increased needs of residents and visitors, leading in the late 1930s to a push for incorporation.

Prior to Palm Springs' incorporation in 1938, the village's services were managed by the volunteers of the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, originally founded in 1918 as the Board of Trade. The Board's founding president was Dr. J.J. Kocher, and the organization's offices occupied one of the bungalows of Kocher's Sunshine Court on North Palm Canyon Drive (then Main Drive).³⁷¹ Next door, at 365 North Palm Canyon, was the California Water and Telephone Company (HSPB-26), a reinforced concrete building constructed in 1935.³⁷² The two-story, Spanish Colonial Revival building was finished with plaster walls, a clay barrel tile roof, and a second story balcony. Just to the north another Spanish-style building was constructed in 1936 to house the village's fire station and police department. The all-volunteer Palm Springs Fire District had been formed in 1931 after a fire destroyed a local grocery store.³⁷³

One of the most prominent institutional developments prior to Palm Springs' incorporation was the Frances S. Stevens School (HSPB-7) occupying the entire block between Alejo Road and Granvia Valmonte, in what is now the Las Palmas Business Historic District. Prescott T. Stevens, developer of the El Mirador Hotel, donated the site and the funds to build the school, in memory of his wife and her interest in education.³⁷⁴ The first two rooms were completed in 1927. Katherine Finchy, who arrived in Palm Springs in 1922, became the school's first administrator. Palm Springs' first bond issue provided additional classrooms, a library, indoor plumbing, a cafeteria, an apartment for the principal, and a large auditorium. The Spanish Colonial Revival-style complex features a traditional layout with rooms arranged around an open courtyard. In the late 1920s local resident Earle Strebe began showing movies in the auditorium which was eventually converted into the village's first theater.

³⁷¹ Palmer, 71.

³⁷² Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

³⁷³ City of Palm Springs, "Fire Department History," <http://www.ci.palm-springs.ca.us/government/departments/fire-department/history> (accessed June 19, 2015).

³⁷⁴ Site history from the HSPB plaque.



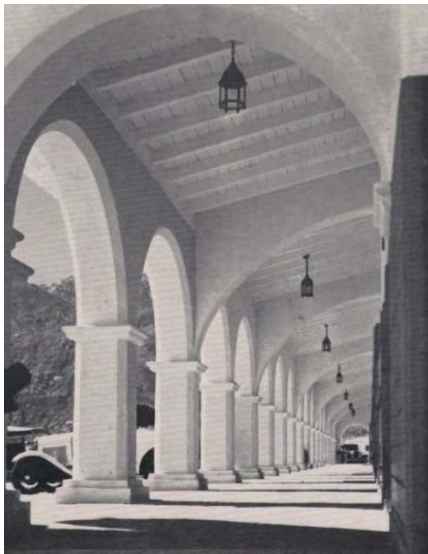
Frances S. Stevens
School (HSPB-7).
Source: City of Palm
Springs.

Until 1930 the Community Church remained the sole church in the village. The only other house of worship in the area was the little adobe chapel of St. Florian, built out on the Agua Caliente reservation in 1912.³⁷⁵ In 1926 Father Philip LaVies, who traveled weekly to Palm Springs from the mission school in Banning, began planning a permanent Catholic sanctuary in the village. In 1928 LaVies, with the assistance of P.T. Stevens, obtained from the Southern Pacific Railroad a parcel at the southeast corner of Alejo and Belardo Roads and engaged Los Angeles architect Albert C. Martin to design a church inspired by the California missions. The church, Our Lady of Solitude (HSPB-15) was constructed by Alvah Hicks and completed in 1930.³⁷⁶ In 1935 the Community Church, having outgrown its little white frame chapel at the corner of North Palm Canyon Drive and Andreas Road, sold the property to Julia Carnell for construction of the Carnell Building. The Church used the proceeds to purchase from Pearl and Austin McManus three parcels at the northeast corner of Cahuilla and Baristo Roads. A new sanctuary (HSPB-23), designed by William Charles Tanner in a pared-down English Gothic Revival style, was completed in 1936.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Renee Brown, "Catholics flocked to Palm Springs' St. Florian's," *Desert Sun*, August 21, 2014, <http://www.desertsun.com/story/life/2014/08/21/catholics-palm-springs-church/14424193/> (accessed June 19, 2015). The site on North Calle El Segundo is now occupied by Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church.

³⁷⁶ Historic Sites Preservation Board plaque, Our Lady of Solitude Catholic Church.

³⁷⁷ *Class 1: A Guide to the Designated Class 1 Historic Sites of Palm Springs* (Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, undated), <http://www.content.yudu.com/Library/Azvt3/Class1/resources/10.htm> (accessed June 19, 2015).



Palm Springs High School (1938, G. Stanley Wilson). Source: The Living New Deal, <http://livingnewdeal.org/projects/palm-springs-high-school-palm-springs-ca/>

The Depression-era domestic policies of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, popularly called the New Deal, allocated funds for the construction of public works projects across the country, created jobs for workers improving their own communities. The New Deal marshaled direct government investment to alleviate the problems of poverty, unemployment, and the disintegration of the American economy during the Great Depression. The Public Works Administration (PWA), which began in 1933 and the Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA), which began in 1935, funneled significant financial resources to communities across the United States for the construction of roads, bridges, parks, and civic and institutional buildings. In Palm Springs, the Palm Springs High School was constructed with New Deal funding. The high school was designed by G. Stanley Wilson and completed in 1938.

As Palm Springs grew, the need for infrastructure improvements, zoning restrictions, and other controls became apparent. In November 1936, a 30-member committee was formed to study the possibility of incorporation. The committee included early pioneers, developers, and other prominent citizens including Ralph Bellamy, Phillip Boyd, Earl Coffman, Alvah Hicks, Fred Markham, Austin McManus, Culver Nichols, Warren Pinney, George Roberson, and Jack Williams.³⁷⁸ Harold Hicks was selected as committee chairman. At its meeting on September 22, 1937 the committee fixed the city boundaries, divided it into seven wards, and authorized the drafting of an incorporation petition.³⁷⁹ On Election Day, April 12, 1938, voters approved incorporation by a vote of 442 to 211.³⁸⁰ Council members were elected to represent each of

³⁷⁸ "Incorporation Committee to Meet Dec. 1," *Desert Sun*, Volume X, Number 17, November 27, 1936, 1.

³⁷⁹ "Incorporation Plans Now Underway," *Desert Sun*, Volume XI, Number 8, September 24, 1937.

³⁸⁰ "Incorporation Wins," *Desert Sun*, Volume XI, Number 36, April 12, 1938.

the seven wards; included in that first Palm Springs City Council were pioneers Alvah Hicks and Austin G. McManus. Philip L. Boyd was appointed the city's first mayor.³⁸¹ The city's permanent population in 1938 was 5,336, with a seasonal jump to 8,000, and the city's incorporated area covered 20 square miles.³⁸²



Postcard of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library (1938-41, John Porter Clark).

One of the first civic buildings constructed in the new city was the Welwood Murray Memorial Library (HSPB-3), constructed in 1941 at the southeast corner of S. Palm Canyon Drive and E. Tahquitz Canyon Way. It was named in honor of pioneer hotelier Welwood Murray. Concerned about the lack of reading material in the village, Murray had constructed a small adobe building at the rear of his hotel to house his private library, and loaned out his own books. In 1938, when the city was incorporated, Murray's son George Welwood Murray donated land for the construction of a public library in memory of his father.³⁸³ Albert Frey

³⁸¹ Niemann, 144.

³⁸² "Your City Hall," commemorative brochure published for the dedication of Palm Springs City Hall, November 8, 1957 (Palm Springs Public Library).

³⁸³ Niemann, 46. The historic site marker on the building today notes that an "additional strip of property on the eastern end of the site" was donated by Miss Cornelia White.

submitted a Modern design but the library board, led by Nellie Coffman, preferred a more traditional Mediterranean Revival design by John Porter Clark.³⁸⁴ The Welwood Murray Memorial Library served as the city's main public library until the completion of the new Palm Springs Library Center (300 S. Sunrise Way; William Cody) in 1975.

Several important cultural and social institutions were founded during this period as well. The Palm Springs Desert Museum (now the Palm Springs Art Museum) was founded in 1938 and was originally located in one of the buildings of La Plaza. The Museum at that time focused on Native American artifacts, the natural sciences, and the environment of the surrounding Coachella Valley.³⁸⁵ The museum's programming included exhibits, lectures, and hiking excursions.³⁸⁶

Mrs. Warren Pinney, wife of Palm Springs' city clerk and manager of the El Mirador Hotel, invited sixty women to attend a luncheon on December 10, 1938, to discuss the formation of a women's club.³⁸⁷ At the luncheon, a nominating committee was named to develop by-laws and a list of officers for the next meeting, two days later. On December 12, 1938, Nellie Coffman invited the potential women's club to lunch at the Desert Inn. Seventy-three women signed as charter members of the Palm Springs Women's Club at this lunch, and their first official meeting was held on December 19, 1938. The Women's Club completed its incorporation in 1939, affiliated with the Federated Women's Clubs, but chose to become an independent organization in 1953.

Land for the clubhouse at 314 S. Cahuilla Road was donated by Pearl McManus, and John Porter Clark donated his services to design the building. The plans were accepted at the March 20, 1939 meeting.³⁸⁸ \$12,000 was raised for construction, and contractors Wilson and Sorum won the bid to build the clubhouse.³⁸⁹ Construction commenced in mid-April, and was

³⁸⁴ Roger C. Palmer, PhD, *Then & Now: Palm Springs* (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Historical Society, 2011), 15.

³⁸⁵ Palm Springs Art Museum, "About Us," *Palm Springs Art Museum*, www.psmuseum.org/about-us/ (accessed August 16, 2015).

³⁸⁶ Steven Biller, "Art of the City," *Palm Springs Life*, December 2013, www.palmspringslife.com/Palm-Springs-Life/December-2013/Art-of-the-City/ (accessed August 16, 2015).

³⁸⁷ Palm Springs Women's Club History largely adapted from Jenny McLean and Judy Sumich, "History: The Beginning," Palm Springs Women's Club, 2011, <http://www.pswomansclub.org/#!history> (accessed August 2015).

³⁸⁸ "Woman's Club House To Be Reality," *Desert Sun*, March 24, 1939.

³⁸⁹ "Woman's Club To be Ready In October," *Desert Sun*, September 1, 1939.

completed on November 17, 1939.³⁹⁰ The building consists of an auditorium with a stage, a large walled patio, sun lounge, entrance hall, dressing rooms, and kitchen.³⁹¹ Landscape architect Katherine Bashford designed a “far-reaching plan for planting,” which was executed by landscape gardener Millard Wright.³⁹²



Women's Club (1939, John Porter Clark; landscape architect Katherine Bashford). Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

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³⁹⁰ “Woman's Club Moves Into New \$12,000 Home,” *Desert Sun*, November 17, 1939.

³⁹¹ “Woman's Club House To Be Reality.”

³⁹² Margaret Cree, “Landscaping Grounds Occupies Attention Of Woman's Club,” *Desert Sun*, November 10, 1939; “Woman's Club Moves Into New \$12,000 Home.”

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City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings

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CIVIC & INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE WARS (1919-1941): ELIGIBILITY**Property Types: Civic or institutional building, Civic improvement**

Civic property types include city halls or other offices for public agencies, post offices, fire and police stations, schools, and libraries. Infrastructural improvements and other civic amenities may also be eligible under this theme, including significant roadways, bridges, and other improvements. Non-governmental institutional property types include churches, meeting halls, and buildings associated with social organizations. Civic and institutional buildings constructed in the 1930s may have an association with New Deal funding programs including the WPA or PWA. Important works of public art were also funded by New Deal-era programs.

Institutional properties associated with this theme include the Frances B. Stevens School (1927, now the Palm Canyon Theater; HSPB-7) at 538 N. Palm Canyon Drive; Our Lady of Solitude Catholic Church (1930) at 151 W. Alejo Road; the California Telephone & Water Building (1934); the Community Church of Palm Springs (1936, Charles Tanner; north addition by Harry Williams) at 284 S. Cahuilla Road; the Welwood Murray Memorial Library (1938-41, John Porter Clark; HSPB-3) at 100 S. Palm Canyon Drive; Palm Springs Women's Club (1939, John Porter Clark) at 314 S. Cahuilla Road; and Palm Springs High School (1938, G. Stanley Wilson; later additions in 1957/1958) at 2248 E. Ramon Road.

Applicable Eligibility Criteria

A civic or institutional property or civic improvement from this period may be eligible for historic designation under one or more of the following criteria:

CRITERIA	REASON
A/1/3 (Pattern of Development/Period) ³⁹³	As an early example of civic or institutional development from this period, representing some of the earliest institutional buildings in Palm Springs and reflecting the area's growth in the pre-World War II era. Civic buildings from this period represent the first government buildings constructed following the incorporation of

³⁹³ Note that eligibility criteria are listed in the standard format National Register/California Register/Local. Note that National Register/California Register Criterion A/1 can be applied to a single event important in history, or to an overall trend or pattern of development. The City of Palm Springs local ordinance distinguishes these into separate criteria – Criterion 1 applies to properties that are associated with a singular event; Criterion 3 applies to properties that “reflect or exemplify a particular period” in history.

CRITERIA	REASON
	<p>Palm Springs in 1938. Properties may also be significant for an association with important New Deal era programs.</p> <p><i>National Register Criteria Consideration A: Religious Properties</i></p> <p>Note that a religious property is eligible for listing in the National Register if it derives its primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance.</p> <p>“A religious property requires justification on architectural, artistic, or historic grounds to avoid any appearance of judgment by government about the validity of any religion or belief. Historic significance for a religious property cannot be established on the merits of a religious doctrine, but rather, for architectural or artistic values or for important historic or cultural forces that the property represents. A religious property's significance under Criterion A, B, C, or D must be judged in purely secular terms. A religious group may, in some cases, be considered a cultural group whose activities are significant in areas broader than religious history.”³⁹⁴</p>
C/3/4,5 (Architecture)	<p>As an excellent or rare example of an architectural style from the period, or as the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect. Additional information about architectural styles from each period and their associated character-defining features are outlined in the Architectural Styles section.</p>

³⁹⁴ *National Register Bulletin 15.*

Integrity Considerations

Each type of property depends on certain aspects of integrity to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects is most important to a particular property type requires an understanding of the property’s significance and its essential physical features. The rarity of the property type should also be considered when assessing its physical integrity. In order to be eligible for listing at the federal, state, or local levels, a property must retain sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance under this theme.

CRITERIA	REQUIRED ASPECTS OF INTEGRITY
A/1/3 (Pattern of Development/Period)	A property that is significant for its historic association is eligible if it retains the essential physical features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with the important event, historical pattern, or person(s). ³⁹⁵ A civic or institutional property from this period eligible under Criteria A/1/3 should retain integrity of location, design, feeling, and association in order to reflect the important association with the city’s civic and institutional development during this period.

³⁹⁵ National Register Bulletin 15.

CRITERIA	REQUIRED ASPECTS OF INTEGRITY
C/3/4,5 (Architecture)	A property important for illustrating a particular property type, architectural style or construction technique; or that represents the work of a master must retain most of the physical features that constitute that type, style, or technique. ³⁹⁶ A civic or institutional property significant under Criterion C/3/4,5 (Architecture) should retain integrity of design, workmanship, materials, and feeling, at a minimum, in order to be eligible for its architectural merit. A property that has lost some historic materials or details can be eligible if it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its style in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials, and ornamentation. The property is not eligible, however, if it retains some basic features conveying massing but has lost the majority of the features that once characterized its style.

Civic & Institutional Development between the Wars (1919-1941): Registration Requirements

To be eligible under this theme, a property must:

- date from the period of significance; and
- reflect important civic or institutional development from the period; and
- display most of the character-defining features of the property type or style; and
- retain the essential aspects of integrity.

³⁹⁶ *National Register Bulletin 15.*

Theme: The Influence of the Entertainment Industry (1919-1941)

This theme explores the influence of the Hollywood film industry on the development and growth of Palm Springs in the 1920s and 1930s. Hollywood first discovered Palm Springs as early as 1915, when author-turned-director Edmund Mitchell filmed a silent adaptation of his 1901 novel *The Lone Star Rush*, the first motion picture to be filmed in Palm Springs.³⁹⁷ Throughout the 1910s and 1920s the desert around Palm Springs was used for location shooting of numerous silent films set in Middle Eastern or North African locales, including *Salome* (1922) starring Theda Bara and, according to some sources, *The Sheik* (1921) with Rudolph Valentino in his most famous role.³⁹⁸

The movie industry brought additional attention to Palm Springs in 1922, when Valentino honeymooned at the Palm Springs Hotel with his second wife, Natacha Rambova, only to be arrested for bigamy because his divorce from his first wife was not yet final.³⁹⁹ Syndicated gossip columnist Louella Parsons dispatched a number of columns from the Desert Inn during a 1926 visit, drawing wider attention to Palm Springs.⁴⁰⁰ By the end of the decade the isolated desert village had become a favored winter weekend retreat for the burgeoning film industry, offering privacy and relaxation, warm winter sunshine and stunning natural beauty, just a few hours' drive from Los Angeles. This allowed actors to get away while complying with the studios' famous "two-hour rule," the contractual obligation to be available on short notice for filming or publicity purposes.

Perhaps the earliest house associated with movie people was the Reginald Pole adobe, which was said to have been visited by Charles Chaplin and exotic Russian silent screen star Nazimova.⁴⁰¹ It was one of the few homes associated with entertainment figures in Palm Springs in the teens and twenties, as almost everyone else congregated at the various hotels.

³⁹⁷ Niemann, 168.

³⁹⁸ Niemann, 169-169 and Starr, 25. Other sources claim that exterior locations of *The Sheik* were filmed in other places including Guadalupe Dunes in Santa Barbara County and the Walking Dunes on Long Island.

³⁹⁹ Gloria Greer, "Bringing Fame to Palm Springs," *Palm Springs Life*, January 2013, <http://www.palmspringslife.com/Palm-Springs-Life/January-2013/Bringing-Fame-to-Palm-Springs/> (accessed January 22, 2015). Valentino was acquitted after Dr. Florilla White testified that the couple had not shared a bed at her hotel.

⁴⁰⁰ Greer, "Bringing Fame to Palm Springs."

⁴⁰¹ Steve Vaught, correspondence with project team, September 29, 2015.

In the 1920s the film stars and studio moguls stayed primarily at the Desert Inn or the Oasis; beginning in 1928 they flocked to the extravagant Hotel El Mirador as well. Irving Berlin and Shirley Temple (with her parents) were Desert Inn regulars; Loretta Young favored the uppermost room in the Oasis' tower, which was recently named in her honor.⁴⁰² Hollywood's patronage saved El Mirador from bankruptcy at the onset of the Great Depression. In just its first two months of operation, the hotel's guest list included such Hollywood luminaries as Lillian Gish, Pola Negri, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, and Gloria Swanson.⁴⁰³

A number of movie people who did not take houses, but wanted a more permanent place to stay while wintering in the desert, rented apartments. There were several high-end apartments catering to well-to-do visitors, beginning with the Casa Palmeras in 1928. Casa Palmeras residents included Clifton Webb; Ann Sothorn; Joe Penner; Bert Wheeler; Oscar-winning cinematographer Karl Struss; Harold Lloyd; and Joan Leslie. The El Encanto (completed in 1929), located across from the Tahquitz Vista and Hotel Del Tahquitz; the Colonial House (1936), and the Key Club (1938; demolished) were also popular apartment rentals for the Hollywood set.



Esther Williams on the cover of the *Palm Springs Villager*, September 1955. Source: Palm Springs Historical Society.

⁴⁰² Niemann, 64 and 68.

⁴⁰³ Niemann, 123.

There was an early influx of significant radio personalities during this period as well, some of whom took their shows on the road and broadcast from Palm Springs. Each winter for several years, radio stars Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll broadcast their popular program *Amos n' Andy* from a small studio in the El Mirador Hotel's iconic tower.⁴⁰⁴ Radio giants Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson both started coming to the Desert Inn in the 1920s and then constructed more permanent winter homes in the 1930s.

Other Hollywood notables associated with Palm Springs during this period include Harold Lloyd; Adolphe Menjou; William Powell; studio chief Joe Schenck; producer Bryan Foy; Richard Arlen; Robert Woolsey; Tarzan author Edgar Rice Burroughs; George Bancroft; Reginald Owen; William Gargan; Chuck Morrison; Charles Butterworth; Paul Lukas; Ralph Bellamy; and Charles Farrell.



L: Photograph of New York Governor Herbert Lehman and Shirley Temple having lunch at the El Mirador, arranged by Frank Bogert and distributed to over 1,200 newspapers. R: Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden broadcasting *Amos n' Andy* from the El Mirador tower. Source for both: *Palm Springs Life*, "Bringing Fame to Palm Springs."

Publicist Tony Burke fostered the hotel's air of Hollywood exclusivity with photos of celebrities lounging and sunning themselves amidst El Mirador's lush grounds – Lucille Ball, Claudette Colbert, Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich, Clark Gable, Paulette Goddard, Olivia de Havilland.⁴⁰⁵ Johnny Weissmuller, surfer Duke Kahanamoku, and Esther Williams – swimming champions turned film stars – swam and posed for photographers in El Mirador's pool. Frank Bogert, manager of the El Mirador Hotel and future Mayor of Palm Springs, also supplied and

⁴⁰⁴ Dennis McDougal and Mike Meenan, "It's Check-Out Time for Palm Springs' El Mirador," *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 1977, P120, <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed July 29, 2012).

⁴⁰⁵ Niemann, 126, and Bob Colacello, "Palm Springs Weekends," *Vanity Fair*, June 1999, 205.

widely distributed images of stars at play in Palm Springs. The fame of these celebrity visitors inevitably made the town itself famous. “Through radio broadcasts, fan magazine layouts, movies and publicity shots,” writes historian Alan Hess, “Palm Springs was defined by the media in the national consciousness to a degree out of proportion with its size or the number of people who had actually visited it.”⁴⁰⁶ On winter weekends in the 1930s the village’s streets were jammed with ordinary day tourists from Los Angeles, hoping to catch a glimpse of a movie star.⁴⁰⁷



Del Tahquitz Hotel, 1928. Photograph c. 1933. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

As Palm Springs grew in popularity with members of the entertainment industry, hotels, sports facilities, restaurants, nightclubs and retail establishments were developed to accommodate the demand for recreation and diversion. Some of these establishments were owned by celebrities. In 1928 silent film actress Fritzi Ridgeway built the Del Tahquitz Hotel at the southeast corner of what is now South Palm Canyon Drive and Baristo Road. Ridgeway’s film career did not

⁴⁰⁶ Alan Hess and Andrew Danish, *Palm Springs Weekend* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 38-39.

⁴⁰⁷ Starr, 27.

survive the advent of talking pictures, and she sold the Del Tahquitz in 1931. The Pueblo Revival-style hotel featured wide balconies, a courtyard swimming pool, and the Saddle Bar Cocktail Lounge, with saddles as barstools. The Del Tahquitz was demolished in 1960 to make way for the Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loan building.⁴⁰⁸

In 1933 actors Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy built two tennis courts at the north end of town, on a plot of land that they had purchased from Alvah Hicks.⁴⁰⁹ The courts proved so popular with their Hollywood friends that the following year Farrell and Bellamy built additional courts, a swimming pool, dining room, and guest bungalows and offered memberships in the new Palm Springs Racquet Club (2743 N. Indian Canyon Drive; HSPB-83). The club's Bamboo Bar became the social center of Palm Springs, with four seats permanently reserved for Farrell and his friends Clark Gable, William Powell, and Spencer Tracy.⁴¹⁰



Racquet Club built by Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy. Photographed in 1955. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

⁴⁰⁸ Niemann, 248-249. See also IMDb, "Fritzi Ridgeway Biography," *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0725904/bio?ref_=nm_of_bio_sm (accessed January 26, 2015).

⁴⁰⁹ Niemann, 132.

⁴¹⁰ Colacello, 205.

Pearl McManus opened her competing Tennis Club (Ormsby and Steffgren, 701 W. Baristo Road) at the south end of town in February 1938, on a boulder-strewn hillside at the west end of Baristo Road. Charter members included actors Ray Milland, Frank Morgan, Reginald Owen, and MGM musical star Jeanette MacDonald.⁴¹¹ Pearl was heavily involved in the design of the Tennis Club, which was originally modeled after the Hotel Cappuccini, a former Capuchin monastery on the Amalfi coast from which she drew the inspiration for the stone-walled terraces above the club's elegant oval swimming pool.⁴¹²



Photograph of the world-famous Palm Springs Tennis Club pool, as it appeared in the 1950s. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

The village's most popular and most famous nightclub, the Chi Chi, opened in 1935 on Palm Canyon Drive, just north of the Desert Inn, on land leased from Zaddie Bunker. Beginning as a waffle house, it was converted by its owner, Irwin S. Schuman, first into a restaurant called the Desert Grille, and then into a full-fledged nightclub with dining, dancing, and live entertainment. It was expanded in 1938 and again in 1950 with the addition of the 750-seat Starlight Room. The Chi Chi was the premier nightspot of the Hollywood crowd into the 1960s, and its headliners were frequently interchangeable with its clientele – Louis Armstrong,

⁴¹¹ Greer.

⁴¹² Steve Vaught, *Sentinels in Stone: Palm Springs' Historic Tennis Club Neighborhood and its Iconic Walls* (Palm Springs, CA: Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, 2015), 13.

Desi Arnaz, Pearl Bailey, Milton Berle, Nat “King” Cole, Vic Damone, Sammy Davis, Jr., Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt, Gypsy Rose Lee, Peggy Lee, Liberace, Jerry Lewis, Tony Martin, the Mills Brothers, Patti Page, Louie Prima and Keeley Smith, Sophie Tucker, and Mae West.⁴¹³

Many of the Hollywood celebrities and executives who vacationed in Palm Springs eventually rented or bought seasonal homes there. So many of them settled in the area south of the Hotel El Mirador that the neighborhood became known as the Movie Colony.⁴¹⁴ Old Las Palmas (Las Palmas Estates) was another popular Hollywood enclave in Palm Springs.⁴¹⁵



L: The Chi Chi nightclub, opened in 1935 on Palm Canyon Drive. Source: *Palm Springs Life*, “In the Swing.” R: Designed in 1927 by architect John Byers, this was the longtime residence of Cary Grant, who purchased it in 1954. Source: Los Angeles Public Library.

⁴¹³ Niemann, 255-258. The Chi Chi closed in 1966 and, after a decade of failed attempts at a revival, the building was demolished in 1977.

⁴¹⁴ The “Movie Colony” was not a tract development, rather a neighborhood name that developed later to describe the high concentration of Hollywood personages residing in the area around the El Mirador Hotel. Although a wider area is sometimes claimed, the boundaries of the Movie Colony as recognized by the City of Palm Springs, the Palm Springs Board of Realtors, and the Movie Colony Neighborhood Association are: Tachevah Road on the north, Alejo Road on the south, Avenida Caballeros on the east, and Indian Canyon Drive on the west (source: The Movie Colony Neighborhood Association, <http://www.themoviecolony.org/history.php>). For purposes of this report, tract names are used to discuss development patterns and “Movie Colony” is used when referring to the broader social history of the area.

⁴¹⁵ The development of these neighborhoods is discussed in the theme Single-Family Residential Development between the Wars (1919-1941). Specific properties associated with the entertainment industry are identified in the survey findings.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY (1919-1941): ELIGIBILITY

Property Types: Single-family Residence, Multi-family Residence, Commercial Building, Film Location, Historic District

Starting in the early 20th century, Palm Springs was a get-away for members of the entertainment industry, including movie stars, directors, composers, and other members of the upper echelon of the industry. Members of the entertainment industry became part of the fabric of the city. Properties significant under this theme include residents and commercial establishments with specific associations with the entertainment community. Commercial establishments may be eligible for a known association with the Hollywood social scene in Palm Springs. There are also identified concentrations of residential properties that are associated with famous residents, including the “Movie Colony” potential historic district.

Applicable Eligibility Criteria

A property or district may be eligible for historic designation under one or more of the following criteria:

CRITERIA	REASON
A/1/1,3 (Pattern of Development/Event/Period) ⁴¹⁶	Commercial properties may be eligible under this theme for representing a known association with the Hollywood social scene. Film locations may be eligible as the site of an early or iconic motion picture production (Criterion A/1/1). Individual residential properties significant under this theme will be eligible under Criterion B/2/2.

⁴¹⁶ Note that eligibility criteria are listed in the standard format National Register/California Register/Local. Note that National Register/California Register Criterion A/1 can be applied to a single event important in history, or to an overall trend or pattern of development. The City of Palm Springs local ordinance distinguishes these into separate criteria – Criterion 1 applies to properties that are associated with a singular event; Criterion 3 applies to properties that “reflect or exemplify a particular period” in history.

CRITERIA	REASON
B/2/2 (Person)	<p>For its association with an important person(s) in the entertainment industry. Properties eligible under this criterion are those associated with a person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance. Properties associated with living persons are usually not eligible for landmark designation. Sufficient time must have elapsed to assess both the person's field of endeavor and his or her contribution to that field.</p> <p>Eligibility under Criterion B for listing in the National Register of Historic Places requires that:</p> <p>"Each property associated with an important individual should be compared to other associated properties to identify those that best represent the person's historic contributions. The best representatives usually are properties associated with the person's adult or productive life. Properties associated with an individual's formative or later years may also qualify if it can be demonstrated that the person's activities during this period were historically significant or if no properties from the person's productive years survives. Length of association is an important factor when assessing several properties with similar associations. A community or State may contain several properties eligible for associations with the same important person, if each represents a different aspect of the person's productive life."⁴¹⁷</p> <p>Note that some of these properties may not be visible from the public right-of-way. For survey purposes, these properties have been flagged and assigned a status code indicating that additional evaluation is needed due to lack of visibility.</p>

⁴¹⁷ *National Register Bulletin 15*, Section VI: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation."

CRITERIA	REASON
A/1/6 (District)	A collection of residences associated with members of the entertainment industry that are linked geographically may be eligible as a historic district. Residences eligible under this theme will likely contribute to historic districts that are significant under other contexts and themes; an association with members of the entertainment industry represents one layer of an area's history.

Integrity Considerations

Each type of property depends on certain aspects of integrity to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects is most important to a particular property type requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The rarity of the property type should also be considered when assessing its physical integrity. In order to be eligible for listing at the federal, state, or local levels, a property must retain sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance under this theme.

CRITERIA	REQUIRED ASPECTS OF INTEGRITY
A/1/3 (Pattern of Development/Period)	A property under this theme eligible under Criteria A/1/3 should retain integrity of location, design, feeling, and association.
B/2/2 (Person)	A residential property significant under Criterion B/2/2 (Person) should retain integrity of location, design, workmanship, and feeling in order to convey the historic association with a significant person.
A/1/6 (District)	In order for a historic district to be eligible for designation, the majority of the components that add to the district's historic character must possess integrity, as must the district as a whole. A contributing property must retain integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association to adequately convey the significance of the historic district. Eligible historic districts may span several periods of development.

The Influence of the Entertainment Industry (1919-1941): Registration Requirements

To be eligible under this theme, a property must:

- date from the period of significance; and
- represent a known association with an important person or persons in the entertainment industry; for commercial properties, represent a known association with the Hollywood social scene in Palm Springs; a film location must represent an early or iconic location; and
- display most of the character-defining features of the property type or style; and
- retain the essential aspects of integrity.

To be eligible under this theme, a historic district must:

- retain a majority of the contributors dating from the period of significance; and
- retain a majority of the contributors with a known association with members of the entertainment industry; and
- retain the essential aspects of integrity.

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