

# Appendix E: Las Palmas Business Historic District

FINAL DRAFT – FOR CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL

City of Palm Springs

Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings

HISTORIC RESOURCES GROUP

To: Ken Lyon

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City of Palm Springs

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From: Christine Lazzaretto; John LoCascio, AIA

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Date: April 7, 2015; Revised November 5, 2015

#### INTRODUCTION

Per your request, Historic Resources Group has evaluated the properties located within the Las Palmas Business Historic District (LPBHD) to identify additional buildings that may contribute to the district. The LPBHD was established in 1986 by City Council Resolution 15858. The designation consisted of:

1. a map delineating the area;
2. a list of "contributing" structures within the district (of which there were approximately 17); and
3. conceptual design guidelines for new development.

In 2009, the City's Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) initiated additional study on the district. Based on several years of work on the part of the HSPB, it became evident that the district needed updating and revising, including:

- The development of a context statement to document the period of significance for the district and what the common theme(s) are that unite the contributing sites within it.
- Re-analysis of all sites within the district to determine eligibility as "contributing" and "non-contributing." There are several buildings from the pre-World War II era that have been altered such that they may no longer possess sufficient integrity to be deemed "contributing;" others from the Modern era, left out of the original designation, may possess characteristics that warrant adding them to the "contributing" list; and still others, such as certain single-family residences within the district boundary that are not relevant to the "business-commercial" related theme of the historic district and may be more appropriate removed from the district and established as individual Class 1 historic sites.

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## City of Palm Springs Las Palmas Business Historic District

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- Revision of the Conceptual Design Guidelines. Given the diversity of architectural styles that exist within the LPBHD, revision of the design guidelines to reflect not only the architectural variety that is present, but also that would convey the qualitative and special form-based character of the district that may be appropriate for new buildings proposed in the district.

In February 2015, City staff requested that HRG, as part of its contract to update the Citywide Historic Resource Inventory, submit preliminary findings from its Citywide reconnaissance survey on individual building condition and significance within the LPBHD. In July 2015, HRG was contracted to complete a historic context statement and more detailed analysis of the buildings within the LPBHD. This report summarizes HRG's work to date and includes:

- A draft historic context statement identifying the common themes and criteria for the basis of the district.
- Findings of the reconnaissance survey of all sites within the district with integrity assessments and recommendations for contributing status.

The methodology for HRG's evaluation included the following:

- Review of existing documentation about properties within the district compiled by the HSPB.
- Additional research regarding the broad trends and significant catalysts for commercial development in Palm Springs, and the area located within the district boundary specifically.
- Field study to verify previously collected data, and any new data, on buildings within the district.
- Property-specific research on all buildings within the district boundary; this included contemporary news articles, historic photographs, phone books, City Directories, Sanborn maps, and building permit records.

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The Las Palmas Business Historic District comprises a portion of Palm Springs' primary commercial thoroughfares along N. Palm Canyon and N. Indian Canyon Drives, and is located immediately north of the city's central business district. The district is bounded by Alejo Road to the south and El Alameda to the north and includes most properties fronting N. Palm Canyon and N. Indian Canyon Drives on both sides (boundary as defined by the City indicated in the map in Figure 1; buildings identified as contributors in 1986 highlighted on the map in Figure 2). The district is composed of a disparate collection of buildings reflecting commercial development from the 1920s through the post-World War II era.

Unlike the central core village which was settled around the hot mineral springs from the 1880s through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Las Palmas Business Historic District is significant because it reflects the northward expansion of the City's commercial core as the City grew in notoriety and popularity as an exclusive resort community with an abundance of sunshine, natural resources, and recreational opportunities – all within close proximity to several major urban centers.

Starting with land speculators who began subdividing the area in the mid-1920s, the Las Palmas Business Historic District's period of significance is roughly a 35 year period - from about 1925 to 1960. It reflects the wide variety and transitional nature of popular architectural styles common during that period of time, from picturesque "revival" styles to the International and Mid-century Modern styles. Several buildings in the district were designed by well-known architects and represent architectural and development trends that influenced how other parts of Palm Springs developed. The district reflects the type, scale, and character of commercial growth in a small resort community in which many individual entrepreneurs and business owners bought land and developed small businesses and hotels that responded to and took advantage of the city's growth and continued tourist appeal. The LPBHD continues to be a changing, vibrant, and popular commercial destination within the City of Palm Springs, drawing residents and tourists alike for its walkable scale, collection of architectural styles, variety of restaurants, retail shops, hotels, and actively programmed public spaces.

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**Overview**

The Las Palmas Business Historic District is not a discreet entity, but instead reflects broader contexts associated with the commercial development in the city. John McCallum was the Valley's first permanent Anglo settler. His efforts ultimately led to the area's transformation into a health resort based on the "dry healing climate." A health spa/hotel was constructed and called the Palm Springs Hotel. Some visitors decided to settle in the area permanently, and soon the small town of Palm Springs began to develop around the hotel and the McCallum ranch. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the town developed as a modest health resort for respiratory patients. After the United States entered World War I in 1917, wealthy Eastern families discovered the exotic spa town set amidst the beauty and solitude of the surrounding desert. Another wave of visitors came during the lethal post-war influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, fleeing the contagion of the big cities for the dry, healthy desert air.<sup>1</sup> Although there are no buildings from this period located within the district boundary, events from Palm Springs' early history influenced the ongoing growth of the city and the way it developed in ensuing decades.

In the 1920s, the town's growing reputation as a premier winter luxury resort was cemented. During that same period, Hollywood discovered Palm Springs when the surrounding desert was used for location shooting of numerous silent films. By the end of the decade Palm Springs was becoming a favored winter weekend retreat for the burgeoning film industry; only a few hours by car from Los Angeles, the isolated desert village offered privacy and relaxation, warm winter sunshine, and stunning natural beauty. In the late 1920s, Dr. Henry Reid established his "Solarium and Clinic," continuing the established tradition of Palm Springs as a health resort. There are three existing structures located within the district that were constructed in the 1920s; however, development in the district did not begin in earnest until the following decade.

Commercial buildings within the district dating from the 1930s represent the northward development of the village's original commercial core. This growth was necessitated by the increasing resident population, along with the area's continued importance as a tourist destination and Hollywood get-away. Post-World War II development continued patterns started in the prewar era, and includes commercial facilities to serve both the tourist and permanent resident populations. Commercial development in Palm Springs during this

<sup>1</sup> Although there is little physical evidence to support this in the way of significant development during this period, news sources indicate that people traveled to the desert as tourists and for health reasons during and immediately following World War I. Ernie Pyle, "Persistence for Eight Years," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1942, 23; and Western Resort Publications, *Palm Springs Area Yearbook* (Palm Springs: Ferris H. Scott, Publisher, 1954), 16.

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period also reflected wider trends in the postwar era, in particular its car-oriented, low-scale, and low-density character.

N. Palm Canyon and N. Indian Canyon differ in development pattern and physical characteristics, with buildings along Palm Canyon representing more traditional downtown commercial development, and the majority of the seasonal/tourist accommodations located along Indian Canyon. Properties along both streets are low in scale and density, and all contributing buildings are one- or two-stories in height.

Significant commercial property types represented in the district include neighborhood commercial buildings such as pharmacies, markets, banks, restaurants, and theaters; commercial retail buildings; mixed use commercial and residential buildings; and commercial office buildings. Due to the importance of the tourism industry in Palm Springs, there are examples of hotels and apartment hotels, many of which represent the courtyard type, along with post-World War II motor courts and motels. Non-commercial property types in the district include multi-family residences (some of which double as apartment hotels), and civic and institutional buildings such as a school and post office. The presence of non-commercial property types within a commercial district is consistent with the way downtown commercial centers typically developed.

The predominant architectural styles in the district are Spanish Colonial Revival and Mid-century Modern, with individual examples of the International Style, Mediterranean Revival, and Late Moderne. Significant architects and architectural firms who designed buildings within the district include John Porter Clark, Clark and Frey, Kocher and Frey, Charles O. Matcham, and Paul R. Williams.<sup>2</sup>

There are approximately 49 properties located within the district boundary; of these approximately 18 were designated as contributors in 1986.<sup>3</sup> An additional eight buildings have been identified as potential contributors as part of this study. Although there is a relatively low percentage of contributing buildings, contributors represent the majority of the acreage within the district boundary.<sup>4</sup> Of the contributing properties, most have had at least some degree of alteration over time; there are several buildings originally identified as contributors in 1986 that may no longer retain significant character-defining features of

<sup>2</sup> In keeping with standard practice, architects are identified by their full names when acting as sole practitioners. Firms and partnerships are identified by the name of the business entity.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers are identified as “approximate,” as the parcel count within the district may have changed over time as commercial buildings were redeveloped or combined. In addition, at least one building that is identified as a single contributor on the City’s designated list appears to be two distinct addresses and is therefore counted as two properties here for clarity.

<sup>4</sup> Land mass percentages pending further research; property data not accessible on the Riverside County Land Information System.

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their style or type, and therefore further review is needed to determine whether they should be re-classified as non-contributors to the district.

### **Las Palmas Business Historic District: 1920s**

Throughout 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), south of the boundary of the Las Palmas Business Historic District. The area that comprises the district remained sparsely developed and almost exclusively residential through the end of the 1920s, as shown in the 1929 Sanborn map (Figure 3). Significant residential tracts were subdivided during this period adjacent to the LPBHD; these include 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). The residential tracts are identified in the map in Figure 4.

During this period, the district was dotted primarily with single-family residences and one notable courtyard apartment building located at the southwest corner of Tamarisk Road and Indian Canyon Drive: the Palmaire Apartments/Casa Palmeras (HSPB-82), designed by Paul R. Williams<sup>5</sup> and completed in 1928.<sup>6</sup> There were a few exceptions to the scattered residential development in the north end of town in the late 1920s. These include the Hotel El Mirador and Garage (outside the district boundary); 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.<sup>7</sup>

The Frances S. Stevens School is a prominent early building within the 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.<sup>8</sup> The first two rooms

<sup>5</sup> Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980) was a Los Angeles-based architect whose career spanned from 1914, when he started working as a draftsman in the office of Pasadena architect Reginald Johnson, until his retirement in 1974. Williams studied at the Los Angeles School of Art and Design, the Los Angeles branch of the New York Beaux Arts Institute of Design, and the University of Southern California, where studied architectural engineering for three years (1916-1919). In 1915, he registered as a building designer and began executing designs for speculative developers. Williams received his architecture license in 1921, becoming the only licensed African-American architect west of the Mississippi. In 1957, Williams became the first African-American member of the American Institute of Architects College of Fellows. Paul R. Williams was one of several Southern California architects, including Wallace Neff, Gordon Kaufmann, Reginald Johnson, and Roland Coate, noted in the 1920s and 1930s for their large custom home designs using traditional styles.

<sup>6</sup> The building is shown in the 1929 Sanborn map which was published in February of that year; an article in the *Desert Sun* confirms that the building was under construction in October 1928.

<sup>7</sup> The Reid Solarium and Clinic is identified as such in the 1929 Sanborn map and in a photograph from the early 1930s. By the late 1930s the facility was called the Reid Clinic and Hospital, as evidenced in a later photograph.

<sup>8</sup> Site history from the HSPB site marker.

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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 which served as the city's first theater. The Spanish Colonial Revival-style complex features a traditional layout with rooms arranged around an open courtyard. In the late 1920s local resident Earl Strebe began showing movies in the gymnasium which was eventually converted into the village's first theater. In 1974 the City of Palm Springs purchased the property from the Palm Springs Unified School District and converted it into a Cultural Arts Center; then-Vice President Gerald Ford dedicated the center, dubbed "Everybody's Village."

The Reid Solarium represents Palm Springs as a health resort in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. 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.<sup>9</sup> Reid constructed a "Solarium and Clinic" north of Granvia Valmonte, on a large parcel that fronted both N. Palm Canyon Drive (then Main Avenue) and N. Indian Canyon Drive (then Indian Avenue). The facility consisted of two Spanish Colonial 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.<sup>10</sup> Reid became "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.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Las Palmas Business Historic District 1930-1941**

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.

<sup>9</sup> California State Archives, Sacramento, CA, *Directory, 1933*, D-273, Ancestry.com (accessed March 13, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, 1929 and 1962, and archival photographs. The office and guest buildings remain but have been altered.

<sup>11</sup> "Ultra Violet Rays Measured," Los Angeles Times, December 29, 1932, A5.

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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 that were originally established in the 1920s. Sparsely developed through the 1920s, these neighborhoods experienced a surge of residential construction in the following decade. (Parcel development by decade shown in Figure 5). This was likely due, at least in part, to their proximity to the popular El Mirador Hotel, which opened in 1928.<sup>12</sup> Several of these neighborhoods generally represent high end residential development of custom homes on large lots; Las Hacienditas and Palm Springs Estates became part of what would become known as the Movie Colony. 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.

Broader development patterns represented in the district from the 1930s include the continued emphasis on tourism and tourist-related resources. Although the most prominent examples of hotels and resorts from the pre-World War II period – the Desert Inn, Oasis, and El Mirador - are located outside the district boundary, these developments had a significant impact on the overall commercial development in Palm Springs and represent 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, including within the district boundary. Contributing buildings also reflect retail, office, and entertainment-related development (represented by a variety of commercial property types), and resources that represent the growing influence of the automobile.

One of the most prominent buildings constructed during this period is the El Paseo Building (HSPB-27) designed by architect Jonathan Ring and constructed in 1930 at the northeast corner of N. Palm Canyon Drive and E. Tamarisk Road.<sup>13</sup> 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 Earl Strebe's El Paseo Theater.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Burton L. Smith, "Miracle Hotel Graces Desert," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1928, A9.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

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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 (766 N. Palm Canyon Drive). The two-story mixed-use building, with medical offices on the ground floor and an apartment above, was designed by the firm Kocher and Frey, which was composed of New York architect A. Lawrence Kocher and his Swiss-born business partner, Albert Frey. The building was designed for Kocher's brother, Dr. J.J. Kocher.<sup>15</sup> In the late 1920s Frey worked briefly in Paris for Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887-1965), one of the leading modernist architects in Europe, who espoused formal, proportional compositions and declared the house "a machine for living."<sup>16</sup> Frey immigrated to the United States in 1930 and soon afterward began working with Kocher.<sup>17</sup> 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,<sup>18</sup> which was to last for nearly 20 years.<sup>19</sup> Clark and Frey are known as two of the founders of the "Desert Modern" style of architecture.<sup>20</sup>

A large mixed-use building, the Mediterranean Revival-style Pacific Building (784 N. Palm Canyon), 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.<sup>21</sup> It was built by local contractor Charles Chamberlin, who also constructed the Welwood Murray Memorial Library.<sup>22</sup> The building, with its central courtyard and four-story tiered corner tower, contained retail spaces and offices on the ground floor with

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Rosa, *Albert Frey, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990), 35.

<sup>16</sup> Spiro Kostoff, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 700-701.

<sup>17</sup> Rosa, 26.

<sup>18</sup> John Porter Clark (1905-1991) was born in Iowa, but relocated to Pasadena with his family in 1920. He worked for the firm of Marston, Van Pelt and Maybury before enrolling in the architecture program at Cornell University, from which he graduated with a Bachelor of Architecture in 1928. After graduating, Clark returned to Pasadena where he apprenticed with Garrett Van Pelt, in the architectural firm of Van Pelt and Lind. While working in Pasadena, Clark met Sally and Culver Nichols, a Pasadena realtor who invited him to relocate to Palm Springs. Clark was unlicensed at that time, but produced drawings under the firm name Van Pelt and Lind. In 1935, Clark met Albert Frey, who was in Palm Springs supervising the construction of the Kocher-Samson office building. After the completion of the office building, Clark and Frey formed a partnership that lasted from 1935 to 1937 when Frey returned to New York to work on the Museum of Modern Art. Frey returned to Palm Springs in 1939, and the two resumed a partnership that would last until 1957.

<sup>19</sup> Rosa, *Albert Frey*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> "Albert Frey," PS Modcom, [http://psmodcom.org/?page\\_id=205](http://psmodcom.org/?page_id=205) (accessed March 2015).

<sup>21</sup> *Palm Springs News*, April 8, 1937. "Just completed and now ready for occupancy is the attractive Pacific Commercial building..."

<sup>22</sup> "Pioneer Village Builder, Charles Chamberlin Dies," *The Desert Sun*, XXVII, 77, May 16, 1955, 1a.

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apartments above. The Pacific Building is distinctive for its size and its strong Italian Renaissance Revival 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, architect Charles O. Matcham),<sup>23</sup> built around a central courtyard; and the modest, one-story Clifton Dental Building (1936) at 700 N. Palm Canyon Drive and designed by Brewster & Benedict.<sup>24</sup> The Clifton building is a hybrid of Spanish Colonial Revival and Modern or Moderne elements, with a clay tile roof, plaster walls, and steel sash casement windows that wrap the building's corners.

A number of small hotels, apartment hotels, and bungalow courts were constructed in the Las Palmas Business Historic District in the 1930s along N. 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. Representative examples include the bungalow court of Los Arboles (later the Indian Manor Hotel) at 784 N. Indian Canyon Drive (1935), the Ambassador Apartment Hotel (later the Spanish Inn and now the Triada Hotel) at 640 N. Indian Canyon Drive (1936), and the Colonial House Hotel, later Howard Manor and now the Colony Palms Hotel, at 572 N. Indian Canyon Drive (1936). The Colonial House occupies the entire block bounded by N. Indian Canyon Drive, E. Granvia Valmonte, Via Chica, and E. Via Colusa. It was built for casino owner Al Wertheimer.<sup>25</sup> The San Jacinto Hotel, now the Movie Colony Hotel, at 726 N. Indian Canyon drive (1935) was designed by Clark and Frey.<sup>26</sup> The distinctive building features clusters of minimalist, plaster-clad

<sup>23</sup> The Pennsylvania-born Charles O. Matcham (1903-1980) earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Yale University. Upon graduation he moved to Los Angeles here he worked in the offices of Roy Seldon Price in Beverly Hills and Earl Heitschmidt in Los Angeles from 1932-1936. He was a frequent visitor to the Palm Springs area and opened an office there from 1934-1938 where he did mostly residential work. In 1940 he established a ten-year partnership with Earl Heitschmidt. In his application for Fellowship to the AIA in 1956, he described his prewar work as "gaining prominence in the trends towards 'outdoor-indoor' living by use of larger glass areas, shaded terraces, patios, pools etc., in contemporary adaptations of traditional styles." Matcham was also active in promoting the use of proper reinforcement of hollow cement block construction in Palm Springs, the establishment of the City's first Building and Safety Department, and the local adoption of the Uniform Building Code (1937-40). Matcham was active in the Southern California chapter of the AIA, serving in multiple posts annually beginning in the 1930s. In 1956, he was awarded the title of Fellow in recognition of his service to the Institute.

<sup>24</sup> This was attributed to John Porter Clark per the Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories," undated, 22. That attribution is incorrect, and it has been confirmed as the work of Brewster & Benedict by Steve Vaught. It appears that John Porter Clark added the covered drive.

<sup>25</sup> Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories," (undated), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Due to alterations, the Movie Colony Hotel was identified as part of this study as a non-contributor to the district; however, additional photograph evidence is needed in order to confirm the extent of alterations.

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cubist volumes that later had to be altered with the addition of covered porches and awnings to block the desert sun.<sup>27</sup>

### **Las Palmas Business Historic District: World War II & Post-World War II**

No new buildings were constructed in the Las Palmas Business Historic District during World War II. Palm Springs and the surrounding desert played an important role in the war effort: what would become Palm Springs International Airport was established as an Air Corps landing field;<sup>28</sup> General George S. Patton established the Desert Training Center at Fort Young, an hour east of Palm Springs, to train his troops for the North African campaign; and the El Mirador Hotel was temporarily converted into Torney General Hospital, a 1,600 bed military hospital. But following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, significant material resources and labor were dedicated to the war effort, and nearly all private construction ceased for the duration of the conflict.

In the post-World War II era, the area that is now the Las Palmas Business Historic District continued the northward expansion of the main commercial center that started in the 1930s; however, development during this period consisted primarily of infill construction on undeveloped lots. Some simplified Spanish Colonial Revival buildings were constructed during this period, but the predominant architectural style in the district in the postwar years, as throughout Palm Springs, was Modern. The city's post-war boom of tourists and seasonal residents coincided with the rise in popularity of Modernism across the United States. This created, in Palm Springs, a perfect storm – an unusually high proportion of young architects, trained in the tenets of Modernism, who settled and practiced in Palm Springs after the war, combined with clients and developers willing to experiment with adventurous, unconventional designs. Architecture in Palm Springs from this period reflected this fortuitous convergence and expressed a wide range of Modern interpretations in the designs of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings, leaving the city with an unusually large and fine concentration of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Modern design.

Commercial architecture in Palm Springs from this period increasingly served two purposes: the need for tourist-oriented buildings for seasonal residents and visitors, and the need for practical daily services, such as offices, banks, shops, and gas stations, for the growing population of permanent residents. In the Las Palmas Business Historic District, as throughout the city, buildings continued to be low in scale, predominantly one but occasionally two stories in height. Setbacks along N. Palm Canyon Drive are relatively

<sup>27</sup> Rosa, 36-37.

<sup>28</sup> This would be the city's second municipal airport. The first, founded in 1934, was located on leased land in Section 14, on a parcel bounded by Alejo Road, Sunrise Way, Tahquitz Canyon Way, and Avenida Caballeros.

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consistent, with most buildings having only a minimal setback from the sidewalk. Setbacks are more varied along N. Indian Canyon Drive. The updated Sanborn map from 1962 illustrates development in the district during this period (Figure 6).

The postwar tourism boom prompted the development of a number of hotels, motels, apartment hotels, and inns to accommodate the growing demand. Most lodgings for visitors remained relatively small in scale and were often oriented around a central landscaped area or pool; outdoor spaces to enjoy the sun, air, and scenery were key elements shaping these designs. Examples within the district include the Crawford Apartments, an early motor court at 855 N. Indian Canyon Drive (1945; now the Village Inn);<sup>29</sup> and the Del Hai Mo Lodge at 641 N. Palm Canyon Drive (1952).

Clark and Frey designed a number of commercial buildings in the district in the late 1940s and early 1950s. These include their own office building (1947) at 875-879 N. Palm Canyon Drive, a two-story mixed-use building with retail on the ground floor and the architects' offices above; the Late Moderne-style Dollard Building (1947) at 687 N. Palm Canyon Drive; the Turonnet Building (1949) at 707-749 N. Indian Canyon Drive; and the one-story, minimalist Nichols Building (1953) at 891-895 N. Palm Canyon Drive.

A noteworthy medical office building from this period is the Backstrom-Reid Building at 666 N. Palm Canyon Drive. Local developer and designer Howard Lapham constructed the two-story medical office building for Dr. Henry Reid and his business partner, Robert G. Backstrom.<sup>30</sup> The building is framed by its flat roof and end wall panels that form a continuous folded plane over the building and a *porte-cochère* that leads to the parking lot at the rear. The façade is articulated with stone veneer, decorative metal screens, and an exterior staircase leading to the second story.

Infill development continued in the district in the ensuing decades, continuing the pattern of sporadic development and varied architectural styles established in the 1930s.

<sup>29</sup> Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories," (undated), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Historic Site Preservation Board, "Las Palmas Business Historic District Building Histories," (undated), 19. Although some sources attribute the design of this building to Haralamb Georgescu, with whom Lapham was associated, Georgescu's biographical information indicates that he did not begin working with Lapham until 1959, after the Backstrom-Reid building was constructed.

## MEMO

# City of Palm Springs Las Palmas Business Historic District

## HISTORIC RESOURCES GROUP

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The Las Palmas Business Historic District was evaluated using local eligibility criteria established in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, section 8.05.010 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code. The district meets local Criterion 6, which defines a historic district as “a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” The district and the contributing buildings further represent local Criteria 3, 4, and 5, which are defined as:

- (3) That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history.
- (4) That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.
- (5) That presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value.

The district as a whole is eligible under Criterion 3 as a contiguous geographic area within the city’s larger commercial center that reflects significant trends in commercial development from both the pre- and post-World War II eras. It is eligible under Criteria 4 and 5 for its collection of architecturally significant properties, property types, and/or works by master architects.

In order to be considered a contributor to the Las Palmas Business Historic District, an individual property cannot simply date to the period of significance. It must reflect an important development pattern associated with the district, and it must retain the physical integrity required to convey that significance. Contributing properties represent the following eligibility criteria:

**Criterion 3 (Period of History)**

- Buildings from the 1920s may be eligible as early and rare commercial development in the area; or for reflecting the influence of important early pioneers or merchants on commercial development; or for reflecting the importance of the health and wellness or tourism industries.
- Buildings from the 1930s may be eligible as early, good, or prominent examples of commercial development representing the northward expansion of the commercial district during this period, in response to increased tourism and residential development in neighboring tracts.
- Buildings from the post-World War II era may be eligible for reflecting the continued growth of the city and the importance of the tourism industry.

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**Criterion 4 (Distinctive Characteristics of a Type of Style)**

- As a good, prominent, or noteworthy example of a particular architectural style, reflecting quality of design and distinctive design details. Early examples represent period revival and early modernist styles; post-World War II examples reflect the importance of Modernism in Palm Springs and the influence of the modern era on architecture.
- As a good or rare example of a property type that is significant within the context of the district.

**Criterion 5 (Work of a Master)**

- As the work of a master architect.

**Integrity Considerations**

In addition to meeting the applicable eligibility criteria, a historic district and the individual contributors must retain historic integrity in order to convey that significance. 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.<sup>31</sup> Some alteration to individual buildings may be acceptable provided that the building retains its ability to convey its historic significance. A greater degree of alteration may be acceptable for buildings that represent an important commercial development trend or pattern (Criterion 3), or for buildings that represent a rare building type; however, buildings that are eligible as good examples of a property type, architectural style, or work of a master architect (Criteria 4 or 5) must retain most of the physical features that constitute the type or style. 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.

**Building Evaluations**

An evaluation of each building within the district has been conducted as part of this study. Evaluations include alterations (both confirmed through permit research and visible in the field), an assessment of each building's historic integrity, and a justification for contributing or non-contributing status. The current evaluations and recommendations are illustrated in the map in Figure 7. Additional information about each property is included in the data

<sup>31</sup> Integrity thresholds follow guidance established by the National Park Service. *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service), 1995.

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sheets that accompany this memo. A summary table is included for reference on pages 16-18. Note that buildings are identified as potential contributors based on available information and physical integrity at the time of the evaluation; should additional information be obtained, or should a building be rehabilitated in the future to more accurately reflect its historic appearance, its status could be re-considered at that time.

There are four single-family residences that were identified as contributing buildings in 1986; these properties do not reflect significant trends and patterns in the business district and do not contribute to the significance of the district as an expansion of Palm Springs' commercial center. Therefore, it is recommended that the district boundaries be redefined to exclude those properties from the district, and that they be re-classified as individual Class 1 structures.

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Address	1986 Evaluation	2015 Recommendation
175 E El Alameda	Contributor	Contributor
265 E Via Altamira	Contributor	Class 1
500-552 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
572 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Contributor
640 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Non-contributor
700-726 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
701-729 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
783 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Contributor
784 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Non-contributor
805 N Indian Canyon Dr / 149 E Tamarisk Rd	Contributor	Contributor
814 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Class 1
840 N Indian Canyon Dr	Contributor	Class 1
855 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
860 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
888 N Indian Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
538-550 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Contributor
600 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
621 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary

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Address	1986 Evaluation	2015 Recommendation
622 N Palm Canyon Dr (Reid Clinic/Alcazar)	Contributor	Non-Contributor
622 N Palm Canyon Dr (Cheeky's)	--	Non-contributor
639-647 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
648-650 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Non-contributor
655 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
664 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
666 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
675 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor; remove from boundary
687 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
700 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Contributor
707-749 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
750 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
756 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
766 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
768-796 N Palm Canyon Dr / 139 E Tamarisk Rd	Contributor	Contributor
777 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
787 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
800 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Contributor
803 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor

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<b>Address</b>	<b>1986 Evaluation</b>	<b>2015 Recommendation</b>
830 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
844 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Non-contributor
849 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
850 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
861-867 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
865 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
875-879 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
882 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Non-contributor
891-899 N Palm Canyon Dr	--	Contributor
894 N Palm Canyon Dr	Contributor	Non-contributor
276 E Granvia Valmonte	--	Class 1
275 E Tamarisk Rd	--	Contributor

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**FIGURE 1: LAS PALMAS BUSINESS HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOUNDARY AS DEFINED BY THE CITY (SOURCE: CITY OF PALM SPRINGS)**

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**Las Palmas Business Historic District**

**LEGEND**

- Las Palmas Business Historic District Boundary
- 1986 District Contributor

- 894 N Palm Canyon Dr - Palm Springs Florist
- 844 N Palm Canyon Dr - Whitewater Mutual Water Company  
Palm Springs Water Company
- 800 N Palm Canyon Dr - El Paseo Building
- 766-768 N Palm Canyon Dr - Kocher-Samson Building
- 700 N Palm Canyon Dr - Clifton Dental Building
- 650 N Palm Canyon Dr - Reid Solarium and Clinic
- 622 N Palm Canyon Dr - Reid Solarium and Clinic
- 550 N Palm Canyon - Frances S. Stevens School and Park
- 840 N Indian Canyon Dr - Steven M. Cushman Residence
- 814 N Indian Canyon Dr - William Schwartz Residence
- 784 N Indian Canyon Dr - Los Arboles
- 726 N Indian Canyon Dr - Lorenzo Apartments
- 640 N Indian Canyon Dr - Ambassador Apartment Hotel
- 572 N Indian Canyon Dr - Colonial House Hotel
- 265 E Via Altamira - Frank Conklin Residence



**FIGURE 2: LAS PALMAS BUSINESS HISTORIC DISTRICT: CONTRIBUTING BUILDINGS (1986)**

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# Las Palmas Business Historic District - 1929

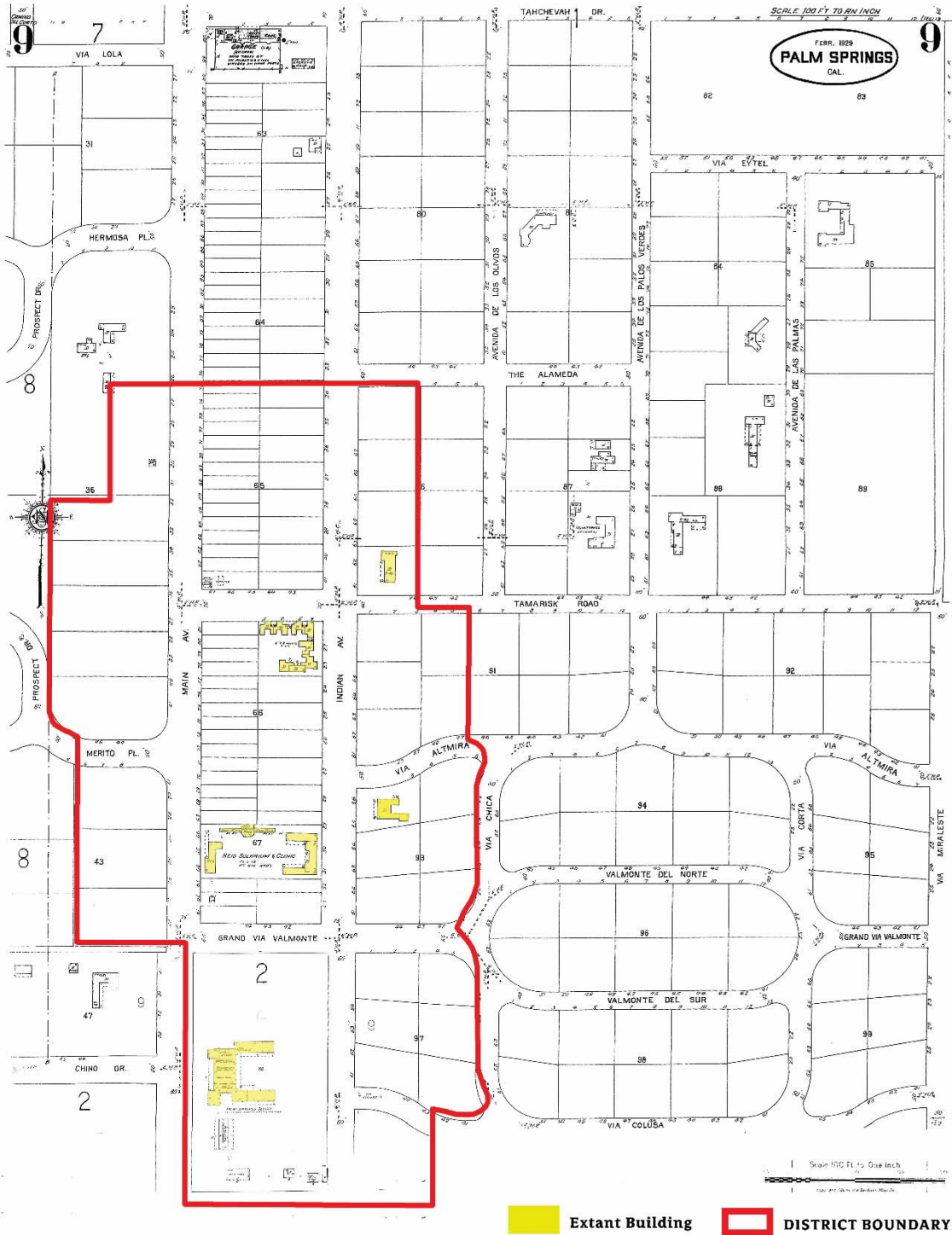


FIGURE 3: 1929 SANBORN MAP

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# Las Palmas Business Historic District Study Map with Tract Development

LEGEND	
	Las Palmas Business Historic District Boundary
	Tract boundaries
	El Mirador Hotel Boundary

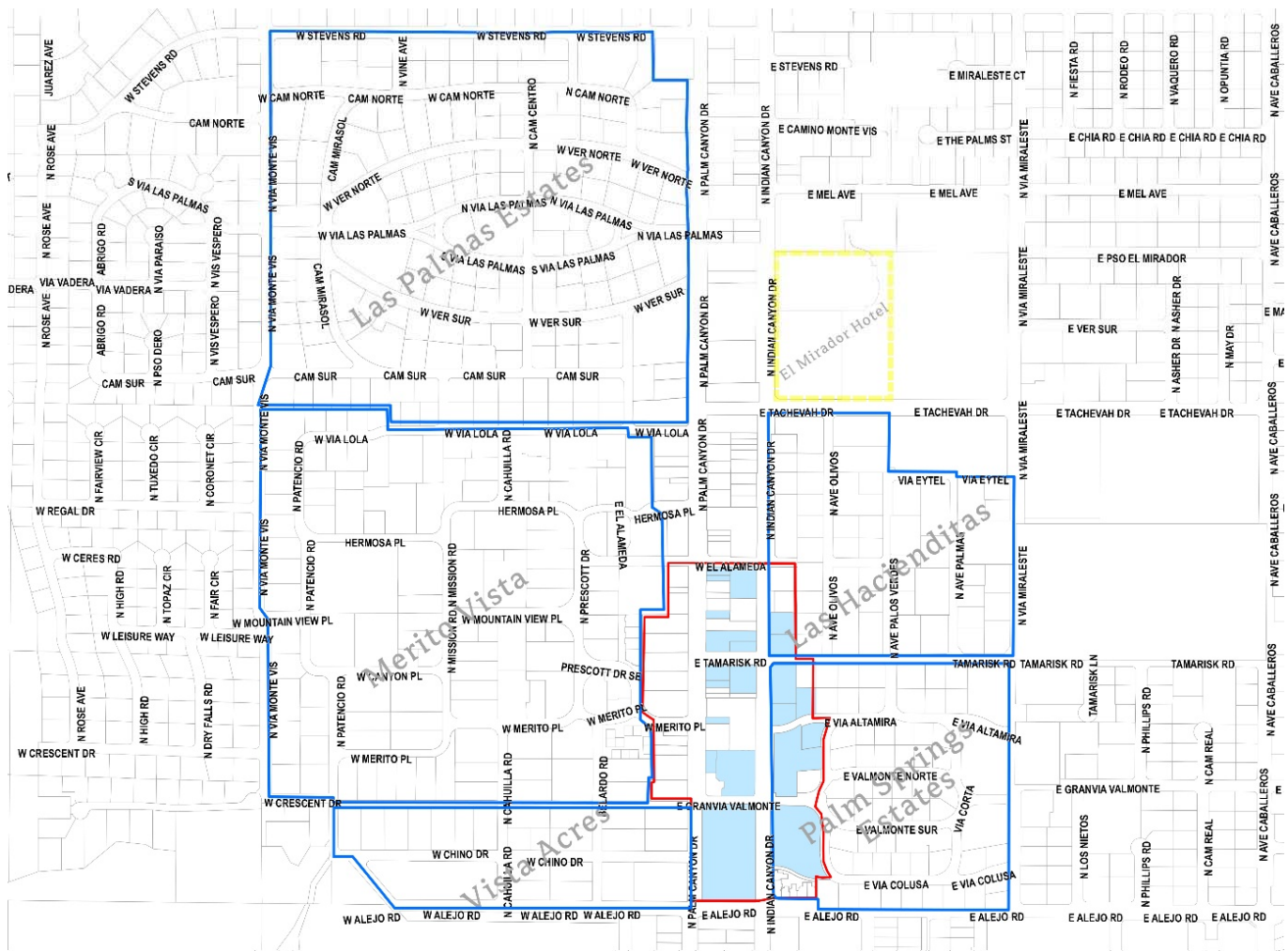


FIGURE 4: RESIDENTIAL TRACTS ADJACENT TO THE LAS PALMAS BUSINESS HISTORIC DISTRICT

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### Las Palmas Business Historic District Decade Map

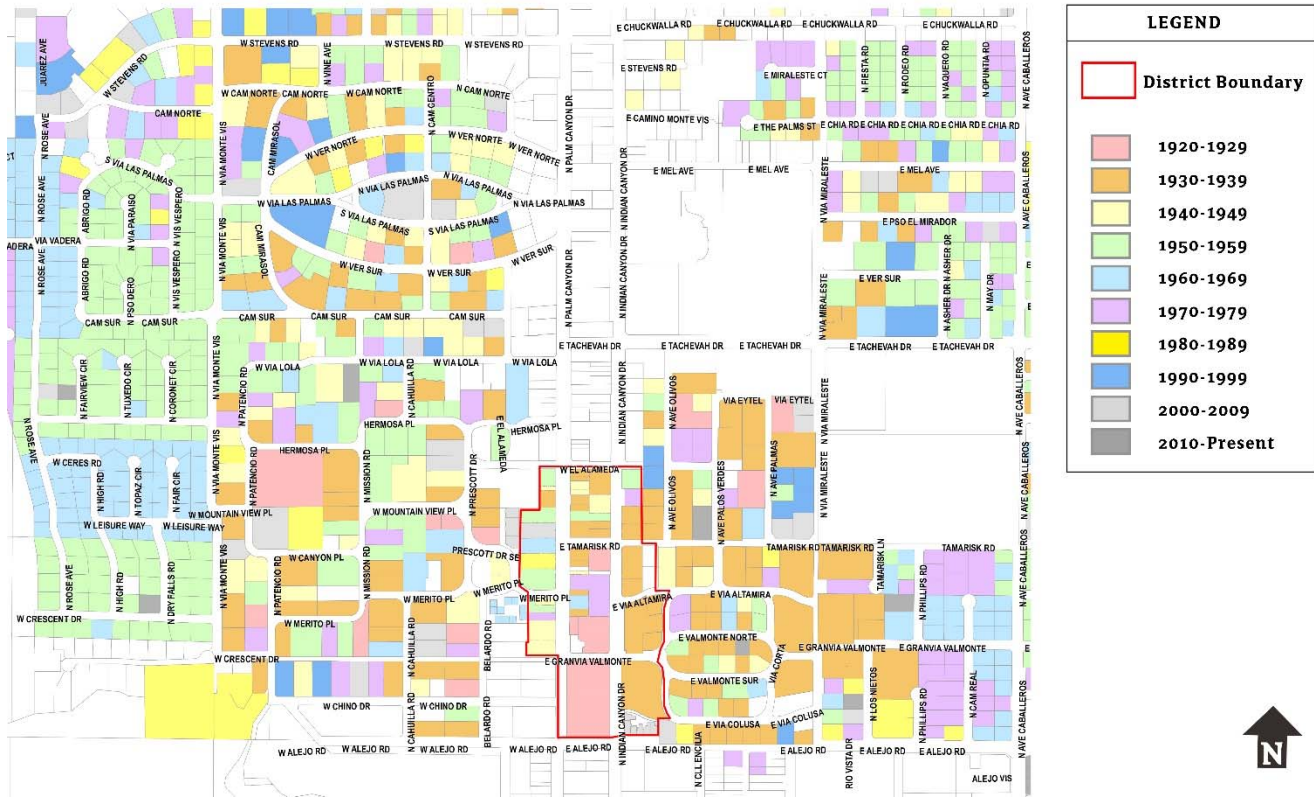


FIGURE 5: PARCEL DEVELOPMENT BY DECADE

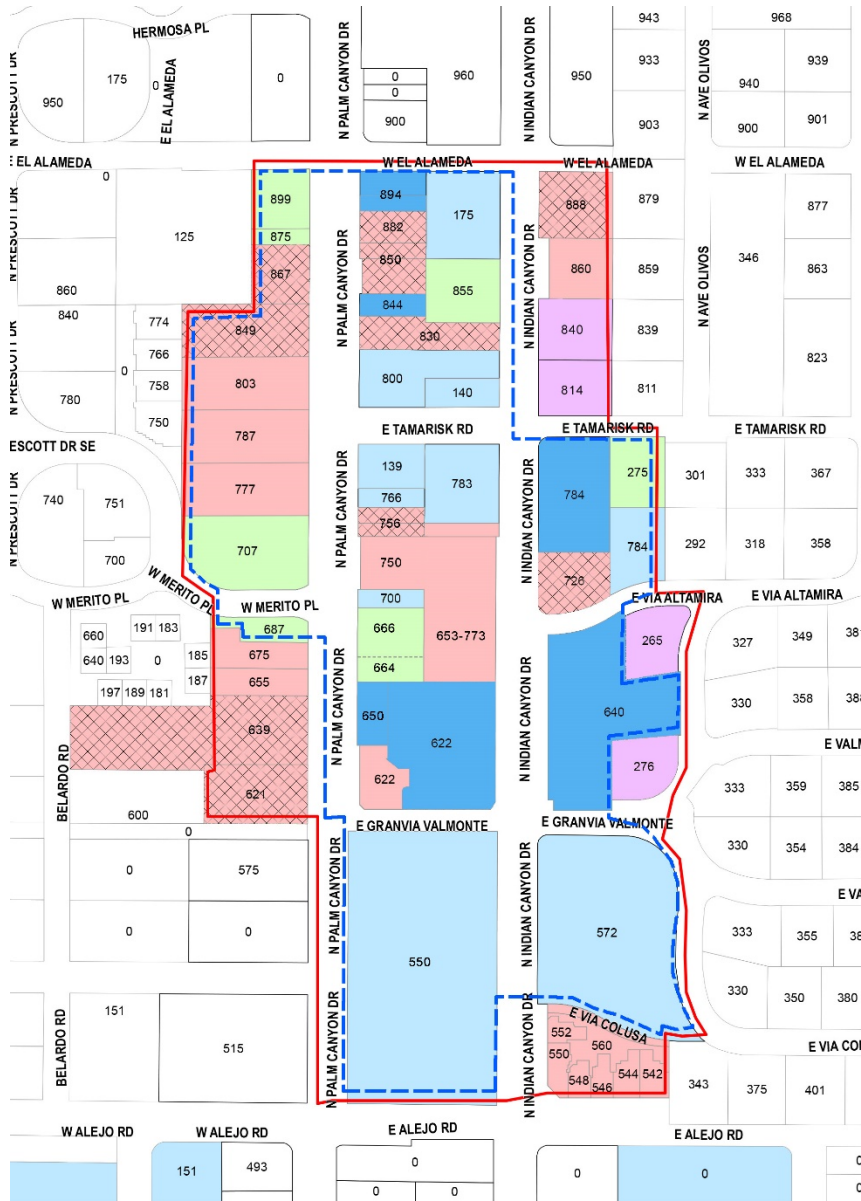
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Las Palmas Business Historic District - 2015 Study Map

**LEGEND**

- Las Palmas Business Historic District Boundary
- 2015 Proposed Las Palmas Business Historic District Boundary Revision
- 1986 Contributor
- 1986 Contributor Recommend Reclassify as Non-contributor
- 2015 HRG & HSPB Recommended Contributor
- 2015 HSPB Recommended Contributor
- 2015 Recommended Non-Contributor
- Single-family Residence



FIGURE 6: 2015 SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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# City of Palm Springs

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