



The women who built this City

A glimpse of some of the pioneering - and contemporary women - who contributed to the vibrance and success of the City of Palm Springs

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Nellie Coffman



Nellie Coffman, circa 1909



The Desert Inn

Nellie Coffman turned her sanitorium into the Desert Inn, a first-class hotel, which laid the foundation for the tourism that drives our economy today. When her sons left to serve in the war effort during WWI, she ran the entire Desert Inn operation by herself, including cooking and cleaning for her guests. The businesswoman made a deal with Thomas O'Donnell, whereby an agreement was reached: He would build a house on her land and would lend her the money to renovate and improve her hotel.



Nellie Coffman and architect, Harry Williams at the opening of the Plaza, circa 1936.

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Pearl McManus



Pearl McManus, circa 1948

*Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs
Historical Society*



Pearl & husband Austin McManus opened Pioneer Properties in Palm Springs. She was the president – he was her secretary. In 1924, she hired Lloyd Wright to design the Oasis Hotel. She went on to build the Village's first apartments (Hacienda Apartments).

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Zaddie Bunker

Zaddie Bunker & her husband Ed opened Bunker's Garage in 1914. They studied car repair through a correspondence course. When parcels became available, she purchased property, investing and reinvesting in the village of Palm Springs. Zaddie was the first woman to receive a chauffeur's license in the state of California. She earned her pilot's license at the age of 65.



Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs Historical Society



Zaddie & Ed Bunker and daughter Frances.



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Ruth Hardy



Ruth Hardy purchased an estate, known as the Ingleside Inn, in 1935, which she converted into a 20-room luxury hotel. Later, circa 1948, she became the City's first councilwoman. She took up the campaign to plant the palm trees that would line Palm Canyon Drive. The City's largest park bears her name.



Councilmember Ruth Hardy, second from left, with all-male City Council, circa 1958.



Palm Springs City Councilmembers Charlie Farrell and Ruth Hardy, circa 1958

Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs Historical Society

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Melba Bennett

In 1955, **Melba Bennett** started the Palm Springs Historical Society, while also creating a plan she submitted to City Council to create a historical society as auxiliary unit of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library. She founded the Palm Springs Garden Club and was a founding member of Desert Riders.



Bennett on a Desert Riders excursion, circa 1934.



With Chuck Abbott, circa 1930.



Melba Bennett, left, and aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran at Palm Springs Airport, circa 1950.

Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs Historical Society

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Vyola Ortner

In 1954, **Vyola Ortner** – a member of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians - was elected chairman of the first all-women Tribal Council. She went to Washington to convince Congress the Tribe had the right to long-term leases for their land. In 1980, she was elected to the Palm Springs City Council.



Tribal Council: La Verne Saubel, Elizabeth Monk, Gloria Gillette, Vyola Ortner and Eileen McGill, circa 1955.

Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs Historical Society



Palm Springs Spa lease signing. Sam Banowit and Vyola Ortner, circa 1960. *Photo Courtesy of the Palm Springs Life Archives*



With Rep D.S. Saund (D-Riverside) on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. in the late 1950s with Mayor Frank Bogert.

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Cornelia White

Cornelia White was a prominent pioneer, landowner and philanthropist. She lived in a wooden home constructed in 1893, which she donated to the Palm Springs Historical Society and now sits on the Village Green in downtown Palm Springs.

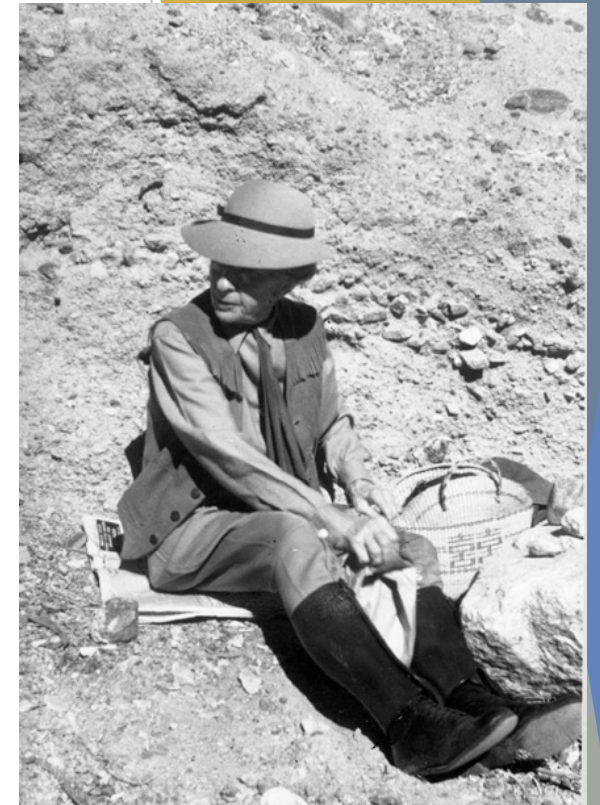


Cornelia White, circa 1950.

Photos courtesy of the Palm Springs Historical Society



Cornelia White & her sister, Dr. Florilla White, circa 1940.



Cornelia White, circa 1948.

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Cora Crawford ... Early leader in childhood education

Cora Crawford moved to Palm Springs from Texas, circa 1950, settling in Section 14 before moving to the new Desert Highland/Gateway Estates around 1960. She was among the first in the new neighborhood called to fill committee positions, coordinate petition drives and volunteer for myriad activities.

Teaching was her true calling, which had a tremendous impact on our community.

She earned her Associate degree in social studies at College of the Desert; bachelor's degree in elementary education at California State University, San Bernardino, and a master's degree in counseling as CSU San Bernardino.



Photographer: Millicent Harvey; courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society

She served as director of the Palm Springs Childhood Development Center for 26 years.

Crawford was inducted into the College of the Desert Hall of Fame in 1987.

She received the Volunteer Terra Award from the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce in 1997.

Her volunteer activities included the Black Historical Society of Coachella Valley, Palm Springs Block Grant Commission; Gateway Community Action Council; Affirmative Action Commission of Riverside County and the Child Help Disability Prevention Advisory Council.

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Early City Council history makers

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1948: Ruth Hardy, the first woman elected to the Palm Springs City Council.



1958: Mary Carlin, 29, the City's youngest elected councilwoman



1980: Vyola Ortner, first and only Tribal member to serve on the Palm Springs City Council.



1990 – 2004: Years Deyna Hodges served on the Palm Springs City Council

Councilwomen with staying power ...

2003 – 2017: Years Ginny Foat served on the Palm Springs City Council



1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, **1948**, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, **1958**,

1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, **1980** ...



Today's "first" women of the Palm Springs City Council



2017: Lisa Middleton, the **first** transgender woman elected to the City Council.



2019: Grace Garner, the **first** Latina elected to the City Council.



2019: Christy Holstege, Grace Garner & Lisa Middleton. The **first** time three elected women have served together on the City Council



2020: Christy Holstege is the **first** woman Mayor to serve in the City's 82-year history!

... 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000,
2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, **2017**, 2018, **2019**, **2020**

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