



## **HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD STAFF REPORT**

DATE: June 7, 2022

NEW BUSINESS

SUBJECT: THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS SEEKING A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS TO ALLOW REMOVAL OF THE STONE ARCH AT THE ORCHID TREE INN, (CLASS 1 AND CLASS 2), LOCATED AT 248 SOUTH CAHUILLA ROAD; HSPB 72; CASE 3.0678. (KL)

FROM: Department of Planning Services

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### SUMMARY

The Orchid Tree Inn ("OTI") was designated a historic site by the City Council in 2010 by Resolution 22819. The designation included various parcels and addresses that comprised the Inn including 248 S Cahuilla Road, the parcel on which a stone arch is located. Although the stone arch was included in the historic designation, recent research has revealed that the arch is not historic as originally believed, rather it appears to have been constructed in 1994.

Approval of this Certificate of Appropriateness is requested to allow the arch to be removed, if the property owner wishes to do so.

### RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Certificate of Appropriateness allowing removal of the stone arch. Direct staff to correct the archival file for this site relative to the arch. Direct the HPO, Building Official and Code Enforcement to work with the property owner to improve site security and remove remaining nuisances from the site.

### BACKGROUND AND SETTING:

The Orchid Tree Inn is a small hotel located west of downtown on a block bounded by Belardo Road on the east, Cahuilla Road on the west, and Baristo Road on the south. It is comprised of several parcels and is a conglomeration of several smaller inns and dwellings that were assembled over time and eventually operated under one owner. At the southwest corner of the block is the Community Church (Class 1 historic site #23).

The hotel closed many years ago and the site, including the community church has been the subject of a redevelopment proposal that is still being processed.

In 2009, an application for historic designation was submitted by a private citizen (not the owner). An excerpt of a historic resources report (“HRR”) dated July 2005 authored by Peter Moruzzi and Jan Ostashay was part of the application providing background on the emergence of bungalow courts. Another HRR dated April, 2014 by PCR Services which was part of the environmental assessment for the proposed redevelopment of the block was also referenced in the application bibliography.

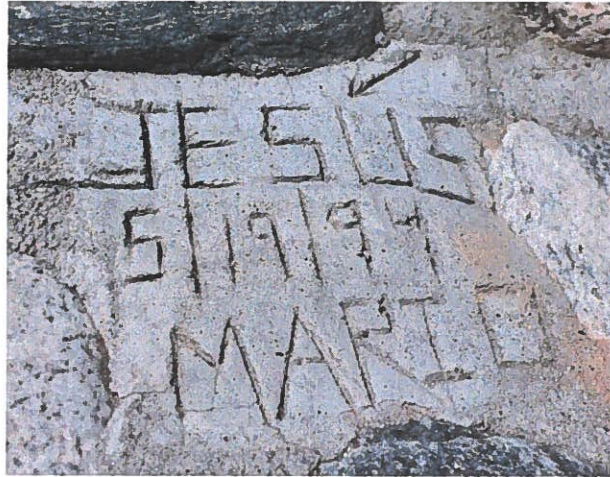
<b><i>Related Relevant City Actions by Planning, Fire, Building, etc...</i></b>	
September 8, 2009	The HSPB initiated investigation and study on the application for historic designation of the Orchid Tree Inn.
January 12, February 9, March 9, April 13, June 8, 2010	<p>On January 12, 2010 the Board conducted a public hearing on the application and continued it for 90 days at the request of the property owner directing staff to provide monthly site condition status reports.</p> <p>At its meeting of April 13, 2010 the Board opened the continued public hearing, at which time the property owner requested and the board approved a further continuance of 60 days.</p> <p>On June 8, 2010 the Board opened the continued public hearing and voted unanimously to recommend Class 1 status to the bungalow court and stone arch, Class 2 to the Craftsman cottage and the Frey apartment building.</p>
November 3, 2010	City Council historic designation of the Orchid Tree Inn.
May 4, 2022	Site visit by Staff HPO, report to HSPB on field inspection findings relating to the stone arch.

Following a recent fire at the adjacent Community Church (the second one in recent years), the City’s HPO went to the site to determine what further actions could be taken to better secure the site and reduce the risk of fire and other nuisance activities that could further damage or threaten the remaining historic resources on the site (i.e. the bungalow court buildings and the Community Church).

During that site inspection it was noticed that there were names and a date – 5/19/94 - written in the mortar of the arch. In 2010, the arch was determined to be a contributing historic element of the site, however this discovery calls into question the assertion from the application that it was an integral part of the construction in 1915 of the Craftsman cottage on this parcel.

The 1994 date corroborates the reference in a 2005 historic resources report that it was merely a “recently added” alteration and is not a historic character-defining part of the site.

**BELOW IS THE DATE “1994” WRITTEN INTO THE MORTAR FOUND ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE ARCH.**



**BELOW THE LOCATION OF THE WRITTEN MARKINGS IN THE MORTAR ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE ARCH.**



Upon discovery of this carving, staff reviewed the other remaining rock walls on the site and the archival OTI file, staff believes the arch is not *“the sole remaining element of the early development of the site”*, as was described in the designating resolution. It is a relatively recent addition to the site and does not contribute to the site’s historic significance.

Staff reviewed the archival record on the OTI to verify the historic authenticity of the stone arch. The following information is presented for the Board’s consideration of this C of A.

1. First mention of the arch appears to be on Page 14 of the April 2005 Historic Resources Report (“HRR”) by PCR Services, which notes, *“The oldest structure on the Orchid Tree Inn property is a Craftsman-influenced bungalow, which is dated from around 1915.”*, *“Since its acquisition, the bungalow has been*

*extensively altered on the exterior and interior. Much of the exterior features, including the stucco siding and river rock cladding **are recent additions.*** (emphasis added).

2. Page 27 of the 2005 report: “**A recently added** river rock skirt wraps around most of the exterior base of the house.” (Emphasis added.)
3. On page 8 (HSPB form – Section 6) of the 2009 Historic Site Designation application submitted by Sheryl Hamlin it states, “One of the properties, the 1915 Craftsman, was an original live-work unit for the practicing Christian Scientist Genevieve Manly. **The hand-built stone archway remains from the Craftsman.**” “Note the buildings (from) 1915 and 1958 respectively were destroyed recently by fire, **although the stone arch from the 1915 Craftsman still remains and should be included as an architectural element.**” (again, emphasis added.) The application provides no information to substantiate the assumption of the date of construction of the arch but implies that it was a surviving original element of the 1915 bungalow. The application report was inconsistent with the statement in the HRR asserting it was a recently added alteration.
4. In the minutes of the HSPB meeting of June 8, 2010, it is noted that the applicant Sheryl Hamlin requested that the stone arch on the “Craftsman” property be designated as Class 1.
5. In the staff report dated January 10, 2010 the only reference to the arch mentioned is that it survived a recent fire of the Craftsman cottage. Under defining historic characteristics the staff report denotes, “**The Craftsman cottage (lost) built in 1915 and the remaining stone archway.**” (emphasis added.) Again, no analysis of the criteria for designation or field observation is noted to substantiate the assumption that the arch was surviving from 1915 or that it met the criteria required for historic designation.
6. The remaining character-defining feature of the Orchid Tree Inn is the 1930’s bungalow court at the southeast corner of the site.

The photos below were taken by the HPO on May 4, 2022.

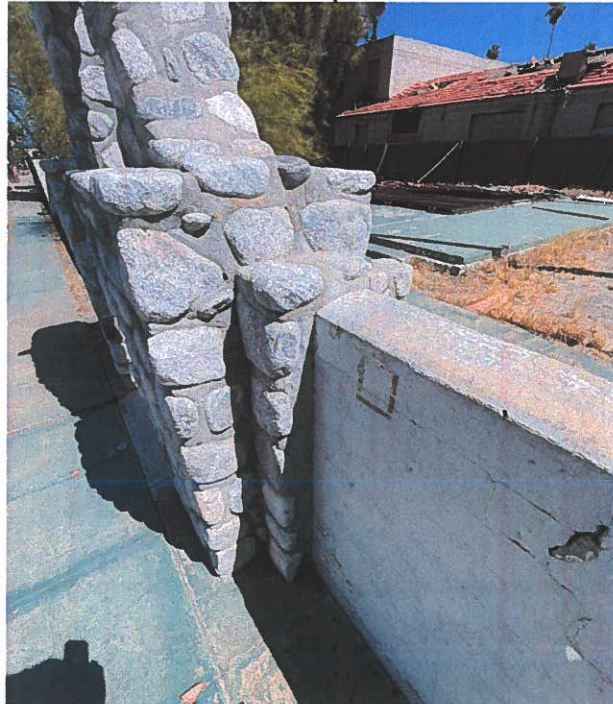
**BELOW PHOTOS SHOW THE RIVER ROCK SKIRT. THE STONE ARCH (FAR RIGHT IN THIS PHOTO) EXHIBITS THE SAME TYPE OF STONE, QUALITY, CONDITION AND WORKMANSHIP AS THE ROCK SKIRT REMAINING FROM THE CRAFTSMAN COTTAGE.**



**BELOW: THE ARCH. TO THE LEFT BEYOND THE ARCH CAN BE SEEN THE REMAINING FLOORBOARDS OF THE CRAFTSMAN COTTAGE.**



**BELOW: OBSERVE THE STONEMASONRY OF THE ARCH IS BUILT OVER THE TOP OF AN ADJACENT STANDARD CONCRETE MASONRY BLOCK WALL WHICH DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE FROM THE 1915 PERIOD ASSOCIATED WITH THE COTTAGE'S CONSTRUCTION (REMNANT FLOORBOARDS SEEN BEYOND).**



**BELOW, A STONE COLUMN AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE ORCHID TREE SITE DISPLAYING THE SAME STONE MATERIAL, CRAFTSMANSHIP, AND CONDITION AS THE ARCH; SUGGESTING THE STONEMWORK ACROSS THE ORCHID TREE SITE INCLUDING THE ARCH WAS NOT BUILT AS PART OF THE 1915 CONSTRUCTION OF THE COTTAGE, BUT RATHER WAS A LATER ADDITION ATTEMPTING TO VISUALLY TIE THE DISPARATE PARTS OF THE INN TOGETHER.**



**BELOW LEFT: MORE OF THE ROCK VENEER SKIRT ON REMNANT SLAB OF AN OUTBUILDING BEHIND THE LOCATION OF THE FORMER CRAFTSMAN COTTAGE. BELOW RIGHT A CONTEMPORARY ERA ELECTRICAL CONDUIT AND OUTLET CAST INTO THE GROUT AT THE BASE OF THE STONE ARCH.**



### **ANALYSIS:**

Applications for alterations to Class 1 or 2 historic sites are processed pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.110 (“Demolition or Alteration of Class 1 and Class 2 historic resources”).

**Evaluation of the Application.** Pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.110 (E) the HSPB shall evaluate the application for demolition or alteration of a Class 1 site and make findings in conformance with the following criteria:

1. *That the proposed alteration does not significantly impact or materially impair the character-defining features of the historic resource as listed in the resolution for historic designation, or, where a character-defining feature may be impacted, the proposed alteration minimizes that impact as much as possible;*

From review of the archival file and inspection on site of the arch and adjacent stone wall remnants, the stone arch does not appear to be an original part of the 1915 cottage, but rather was installed in recent times. The HRR's denote that the rock skirt walls and arch were "recently added" to the site. Furthering this assertion staff notes evidence in the construction of the stone arch that it was built over an adjacent concrete masonry wall which appears to have been built later as part of the 1940's elements on the Orchid Tree Inn site, again suggesting it was not part of the construction in 1915 of the Craftsman cottage. In addition, the observance of contemporary electrical conduit and an outlet that can be seen as integrally grouted into the mortar of the rock arch further raises doubt as to the assertion implied in the 2009 application that it is an integral part of the construction of the Craftsman cottage around 1915.

There are other remnant fieldstone walls and piers found in many places across the Orchid Tree Inn site that have the same stone, workmanship and generally good condition which suggests that all the fieldstone elements including the stone arch were likely built in recent times and not concurrent with the construction of the Craftsman cottage in 1915.

Staff found no evidence in the record from 2010 that members of the HSPB or staff visited the site prior to making their recommendation to include the rock arch as a Class 1 resource. Thus there was no due diligence done to verify that the stone arch was a remnant of the 1915 construction of the Craftsman cottage.

The arch was built in recent times; probably in 1994 as the date written into the mortar of the arch suggests. Based on the archival record and field observations, the arch was mistakenly assumed by past boards and staff to have been built around 1915. The 2005 report and on-site inspection conclude that the arch is not historic and its removal would not materially impair the character-defining features of the site, nor would its removal materially impair the historic significance of the site. This finding has been met.

2. *That the proposed alteration will assist in restoring the historic resource to its original appearance where applicable, or will substantially aid its preservation or enhancement as a historic resource;*

The Orchid Tree Inn site has languished for years. It has suffered several devastating fires including one recently in the classroom wing of the Community Church (an adjacent Class 1 site). The only surviving built features on the OTI site comprise the 1930's bungalow court at the southeast portion of the site. Recent City-approved removal of

non-historic buildings was completed by the property owner, however remnant walls, wood fences, dead vegetation, and the recently-installed fieldstone rock walls and foundation skirts, including the rock arch are havens for vagrant to hide and provide readily available combustible materials that can potentially contribute to more arson-related fires of the surviving historic structures on the site. Staff would assert that removal of the stone arch, all other existing remnant walls and all dead plants and wood fences and structures on the site would aid in protecting and preserving the remaining historic elements on both the Orchid Tree Inn site and the adjacent historic Community Church and enhance City Code Enforcement efforts in reducing any illegal or improper activity or access onto the site.

3. *That any additions to the historic resource are consistent with the massing, proportions, materials, and finishes of the existing historic resource, and: (i) can be distinguished from the existing historic resource as may be appropriate; or (ii) are indistinguishable from the historic resource as may be appropriate, and where such alterations are clearly documented in the City's archival file for the historic resource as being non-original to the historic resource;*

The stone arch has been erroneously assumed in the past to be part of the construction of the Craftsman cottage in 1915. The removal of the stone arch and other recently installed fieldstone walls and posts will improve the historic integrity of the remaining bungalow court on the OTI site and will correct the erroneous assumption about the historicity of this element.

4. *That, in cases where Federal funds are to be utilized in financing the proposed alterations, the alterations are consistent with the Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, as put forth by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.*

There are no federal funds utilized in the proposed alteration.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The proposed certificate of appropriateness is a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"). The City has evaluated the project relative to the CEQA guidelines and determined that it is Categorical Exempt from further analysis under CEQA based on Section 15301 ("Existing Facilities") which under subsection (l) allows for exemption of projects involving the demolition and removal of small structures.

The project was also evaluated under CEQA Section 15331 ("Historical Resources"). This section allows for a Categorical Exemption for projects consistent with the Secretary of the Interior Standards. The standards recommend "removing non-significant site features which detract from the historic character of the site and setting." In this case, sufficient evidence exists both in the original historic resources report and recent site visits



to conclude that the stone arch that was previously assumed to be character-defining is not historically significant and was part of a series of alterations to the site that occurred in recent times. The C of A requires the archival file to be corrected as a condition of approval. This will properly record the correct non-significant status of the stone arch.

Regarding Restoration or Reconstruction, the Standards state that “...in Restoration the goal is to depict the building as it appeared at the most significant time in its history.” The historic resources report and recent site observation document that the rock arch and rock skirt work around the foundation of the Craftsman cottage were installed in recent times, while the most significant time in history for the site was around 1915, when it is reported that the cottage was built. The cottage was completely destroyed several years ago by fire. The rock arch and remaining rock skirt wall on the Craftsman cottage parcel were not constructed during the period of significance (i.e. around 1915) and thus if any future reconstruction of the Craftsman cottage were to be contemplated, removal of the arch and the rock skirtwall is consistent with the Standards under such a theoretical scenario.

#### CONCLUSION:

The 2005 historic resource report asserts that the stone arch at the Orchid Tree Inn site was a recent alteration, and was not built around 1915 when the Craftsman cottage was built.

The recent observance of a date (1994) written into the mortar of the stone arch strengthens the assertion that it was not constructed in the early historic period of development of the site.

The 2005 historic resource report did not identify the arch as character-defining or historically significant.

The physical condition of the stone arch and other stone skirt walls and posts – all of which are in very good condition – does not support the assertion that the arch and stone skirt walls were built in or around 1915. Most stone walls found in and around the City from the turn of the past century exhibit a greater degree of deterioration and weathering.

Lastly, Staff asserts that the arch was constructed in recent times along with several other stone elements on the Orchid Tree Inn site. They were added in the 1990’s to visually tie together the disparate buildings that comprise the Inn. The stone arch is not from the historic period of the site (i.e. c. 1915).

Staff recommends that the Certificate of Appropriateness be approved, allowing removal of the stone arch as a non-historic element. Correcting the archival record is critically important in maintaining accuracy and preserving the legitimacy and objectivity of the City’s Historic Preservation program. This action, along with requiring the owner to clear all remaining site walls, dead vegetation and combustible materials from the site under

administrative order will improve the integrity of the remaining historic resources on the site, improve the appearance and reduce fire risk and other nuisance conditions.<sup>1</sup>



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Ken Lyon, RA  
Principal Planner,  
Historic Preservation Officer



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David Newell, AICP  
Assistant Director of Planning Services

Attachments:

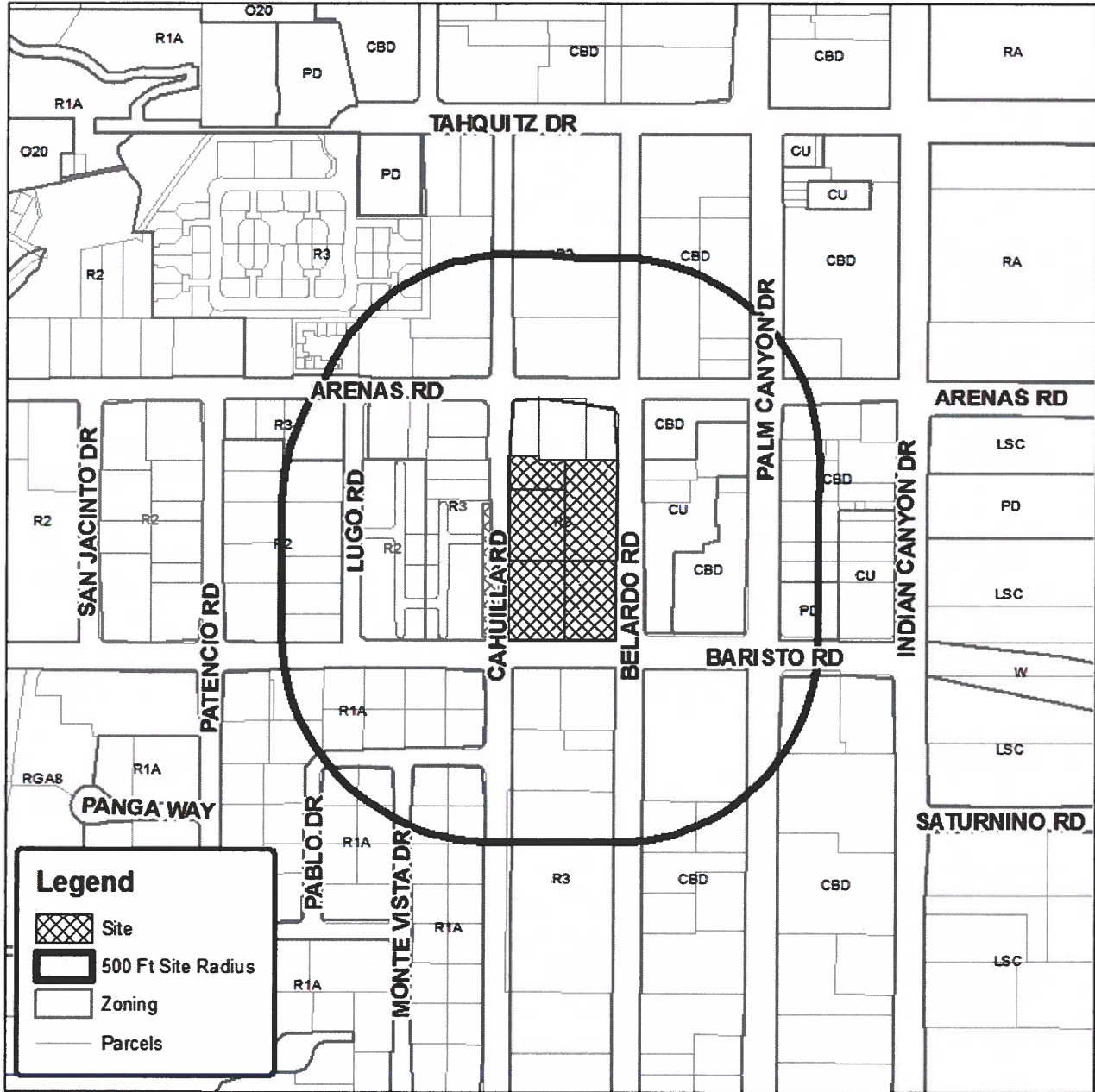
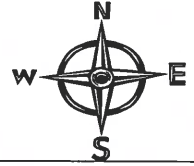
1. Vicinity Map.
2. Related excerpts and site photo.

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<sup>1</sup> Municipal Code Section 8.05.110 (B,5) states that demolition or alteration (removal) of a historic resource's or contributing resources features by administrative order (i.e. ordered by the Building Official to abate a nuisance) may be deemed exempt from requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness.



# Department of Planning Services Vicinity Map



## CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

HSPB 72 (3.0678) – Stone Arch.  
248 S Cahuilla Road



# CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

### EXCERPTS

Date: June 7, 2022

Subject: HSPB #72 – Certificate of Appropriateness – Stone Arch

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Following are excerpts referenced in the attached staff report.

1. Excerpt from 2005 historic resources report by PCR Services page 14:

At the time, most of the hotels, motels, and resorts, including the Winter Garden Hotel, Desert Inn, Oasis Hotel, El Mirador Hotel, and others were north of the Orchid Tree Inn site. The oldest structure on the Orchid Tree Inn property is a Craftsman influenced bungalow, which is dated from around 1915. Situated along the east side of Cahuilla Road within the Orchid Tree Inn grounds, this dwelling once had its own address as 248 South Cahuilla Road (later changed to 262 South Cahuilla Road). For over 45 years it was owned and occupied by Genevieve Reilly, a Christian Science practitioner. It was later acquired and incorporated as part of the Orchid Tree Inn property and converted to transient lodging as part of the motel. Since its acquisition, the bungalow has been extensively altered on the exterior and interior. Much of the exterior features, including the stucco siding and river rock cladding are recent additions.

2. Excerpt from 2005 report page 27:

**Craftsman Bungalow, South Cahuilla Road (Map ID A).** Setback from the Cahuilla Road, this one-story, single-family bungalow is of wood-frame construction and is clad in non-original stucco. A complex gable roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails caps the dwelling. An open porch area sheltered by a shed roof is supported by square wood posts. Within the porch area is a centrally located entry door that is flanked by two wood-framed, multi-pane casements windows. A recently added river rock skirt wraps around most of the exterior base of the house. A massive river rock chimney (original) of note is located along the building's south elevation. An enclosed porch screen sitting area is located at the northwest end of the bungalow, though originally it extended along the entire north elevation. A wood-slatted attic vent punctuates the front (west) gable end. An enclosed porch screen area was also located at the rear of the building; however, at some unspecified date it was permanently enclosed as part of the house. At the rear of the Craftsman bungalow is a small vernacular dwelling that has been severely altered over the years. Crowned by a low-pitched gable roof, the minute single-family cottage is square in plan, sheathed in stucco, and punctuated by a single tripartite window along its front (west) elevation. Both buildings have been converted into the motel units as part of the Orchid Tree Inn property.

3. Excerpt from Historic Designation application dated 8-6-2009, page 8, (HSPB form – Section 6):

**Nellie Coffman's Desert Inn began in 1915 as a sanatorium. The grand houses of the Movie Colony began in the late 1920's. Concomitant to this development, the city of Palm Springs needed workers and moderate housing close to town. Six of the seven properties of the Orchid Tree (5 extant) were built as housing stock for this market. One of the properties, the 1915 Craftsman, was an original live-work unit for the practicing Christian Scientist Genevieve Manley. The hand-built stone archway remains from the Craftsman.**

4. Excerpt from HSPB meeting minutes dated June 8, 2010:

Sheryl Hamlin, 565 W. Santa Rosa Dr., asked that the stone arch on the "Craftsman" property be designated as Class 1.

5. Excerpt from January 10, 2010 Staff report page 6:

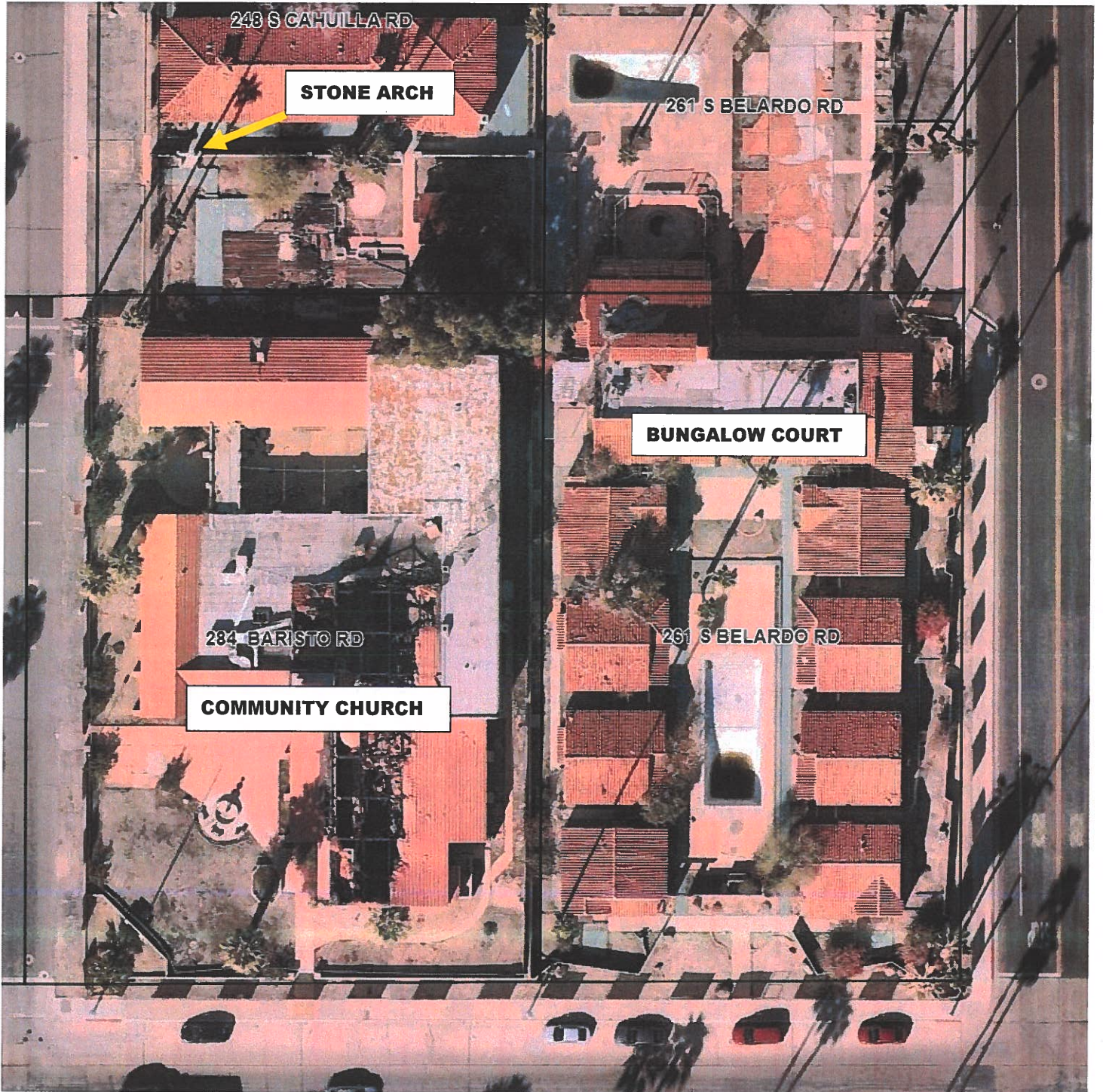
**Craftsman Cottage (Building A)**

The oldest structure in the complex was a Craftsman influenced bungalow (building A), which dated from around 1915. For over 45 years the bungalow was owned and occupied by Genevieve Reilly, a Christian Science practitioner. It was later acquired and incorporated as part of the Orchid Tree Inn Property and converted to transient lodging as part of the motel. The one-story bungalow was of wood-frame construction and was clad in stucco. A complex gable roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails capped the dwelling. An open porch area sheltered by a shed roof was supported by square wood posts. The center entry door was flanked by two wood-framed, multi-pane casement windows. A massive river rock chimney was located along the buildings south elevation. An enclosed porch screen sitting area was located at the northwest end of the bungalow along with an enclosed porch at the rear of the building. This structure was destroyed by a recent fire. Only a stone archway survived.

And from page 8 under "Defining Historic Characteristics":

- The Craftsman Cottage (lost) built in 1915 and the remaining stone archway. This specific property to be designated as a Class 2 historic site.

Below is an aerial photo showing the location of the stone arch on the site.



248 S CAHUILLA RD

**STONE ARCH**

261 S BELARDO RD

**BUNGALOW COURT**

284 BARISTO RD

**COMMUNITY CHURCH**

261 S BELARDO RD